

# TOWN OF MURRAY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Town of Murray Comprehensive Plan Update is to present the overall vision and goals for the Town and to guide Town boards and officials in making decisions that will affect the future of the community. Future Town actions to implement the policies and recommendations in the Plan may include land use local laws and regulations, capital budgeting, and providing services to the community. The Plan will also support applications for grant funding.

A Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) appointed by the Town Board met regularly during 2020 to coordinate the preparation of the Plan. LaBella Associates provided professional planning assistance.

## LAND USE OVERVIEW

The Town is predominantly agricultural. Large areas north of Route 104 are wooded. New York State owns the Erie Canal and adjoining land, including some former quarries.

Residences are clustered around the historic hamlets, along roadways, and in rural areas of the Town.

Many of the businesses in the Town are located along Route 104 and in and around the historic hamlets. Businesses along Route 104 include a manufacturer of educational software development. Other businesses include, agricultural storage facilities, stables and a racetrack. Industries are located along the railroad. Several privately-owned campgrounds and recreation-oriented businesses leverage the Town's natural resources. Stone quarries continue to be active.

Over the past 10 years, the Town has issued building permits for only 15 new homes. However, recent market trends such as increased interest in rural living and the ability to work remotely may lead to additional residential development in the Town.

The Town of Murray has enacted zoning regulations which govern development and land use. The zoning law is administered by an appointed Code Enforcement Officer. The Town also administers the Codes of New York, which establishes standards for buildings, fire prevention, property maintenance and energy efficiency.

Recommended actions for land use aim to encourage new development that builds on the Town's natural, agricultural, historic and recreational resources, support appropriate housing development for current and future populations, maintain the historic character of the hamlets, and accommodate business development consistent with the Town's character.

The Land Use Plan Map delineates areas recommended for:

- residential development consistent with the Town's rural and agricultural character
- hamlet areas where a mix of business and residential uses are encouraged consistent with the traditional form and character of these historic hamlets
- Route 104 corridor overlay, where zoning and other regulations will help to maintain the scenic and historic character of the roadway while accommodating suitable business development in appropriate areas.
- Erie Canal Overlay, to encourage Canal-related tourism within 500 feet of the Canal.
- Stream Corridor overlay, to acknowledge the conservation value of land adjoining streams

The Town's Land Use Plan encourages continued use of land for farming and agriculture-related businesses. Businesses and regional attractions that build on the Town's natural, historic and agricultural assets are encouraged, provided that they are properly designed to minimize impacts on these assets.

The Land Use Plan Map recommends:

- Conservation of natural resources, including streams, wetlands, flood hazard areas and forests
- Continued farming in areas with high quality agricultural soils
- Residential development consistent with the Town's rural and agricultural character
- Business and industrial development along designated corridors and where consistent with the Town's rural and agricultural character
- A mix of business and residences in the historic hamlets consistent with the traditional form and character of the hamlets
- Protection of the scenic and historic character along the Route 104 corridor. Zoning and other regulations will help to maintain the function of thoroughfare while accommodating suitable business development in appropriate areas. Intensive and unsightly uses will be excluded.

### Land Use Goal

- ❖ ***Retain the rural and agricultural character of the Town while maintaining a high quality of life for residents.***
- ❖ ***Retain and attract businesses and facilities that leverage the Town's agricultural, natural and historic resources.***

### Land Use Recommendations

- LU-1 Revise zoning to improve clarity, remove ambiguities, retain the character of the community and advance the vision of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. Revise the zoning map to incorporate the recommendations of the Land Use Plan. Incorporate design standards or guidelines into zoning for new development and renovations in highly visible areas of the town, such as along Route 104, in hamlet areas and other places with historic significance.
- LU-2 Prepare and adopt subdivision regulations.
- LU-3 Support efforts by landowners and land trusts to preserve contiguous areas of undeveloped and/or protected land. (See also Natural Resources recommendation)
- LU-4 Promote a mix of residential and business development and redevelopment within the Hamlets. [See also Population & Housing section].
- LU-5 Encourage residential development and redevelopment in and near the Hamlet centers. [See also Population & Housing section]
- LU-6 Encourage residential development and redevelopment in and near the Hamlet centers. [See also Population & Housing section]
- LU-7 Encourage new development along the Erie Canal that makes use of the Canal for recreational, transportation and/or water-dependent uses.

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

Once covered by hemlock forest, the land that is now the Town of Murray was used by Native American tribes for hunting and fishing. It was occupied by the Algonquins followed by the Neutral tribe and then the Seneca Nation, which is part of the Iroquois confederacy also known as the Six Nations or Haudenosaunee. The ridge was a transportation route for Native Americans and early settlers before it was developed as Ridge Road.

The first Europeans to settle in the area used Sandy Creek to power mills. The development of the Erie Canal in 1825 led to an economic boom that lasted until the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stone quarrying, agriculture and the storage and distribution of agricultural products have been key industries in the Town since the early 1800s. The Town's hamlets – Murray (originally called Sandy Creek), Hulberton, Hindsburg, Brockville, Fancher and Balcom Mills – retain connection to the Town's historic development.

The Erie Canal, including bridges and other Canal structures, is the only site in the Town that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Many buildings and sites, including several historic cemeteries, have local significance and several may be eligible for listing in the National Register.

Recommended actions relating to historic resources aim to leverage the Town's historic resources for tourism and economic development, encourage owners to maintain and restore historic buildings and sites.

### Historic Resources Goal

- ❖ **Preserve historic resources and encourage recreation and tourism that leverages these resources.**

### Historic Resources Recommendations

- HR-1: Consider designating local historic landmarks and adopting a local historic preservation law.
- HR-2: Establish a program to recognize local historic buildings and owners who have maintained or restored buildings consistent with their historic character.
- HR-3: Develop a walking, bicycling and/or driving tours of historic sites in the Town.
- HR-4: Publicize the Town's historic resources in conjunction with tourism promotion. [See also Economic Vitality section]



## AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND

Agriculture is the Town's largest industry and employer as well as the predominant land use. Farms in the Town of Murray produce fruit, dairy products, field crops, livestock and vegetables.

More than 85% of the Town's land area consist of high quality agricultural soils, including 8,000 acres classified by the US Department of Agriculture as "prime" soils.

Several farms sell vegetables and fruit directly to the public. Some of these operations attract customers from more populated Counties and contribute to the regional tourism economy.

The recommended actions aim to build on the strong agricultural economy and protect the land base for continued agricultural production.

### Agriculture & Farmland Goal

- ❖ **Maintain a diverse base of farm operations and retain high quality soils for agricultural use.**

### Agriculture & Farmland Recommendations

- AG-1 Promote agricultural economic development, including farming, agricultural support and processing businesses, to support the region's economic development. [See also Agriculture section]
- AG-2 Encourage farms to begin or expand agri-tourism initiatives and promote agri-tourism as part of a regional tourism promotion strategy
- AG-3 Provide information to residents about how the NYS Agricultural Districts Program and the Town's Right to Farm law establishes policy in support of agriculture and limits the ability of Towns to enforce local laws that restrict standard agricultural practices.
- AG-4 Develop a town Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan to engage farmers and farmland owners and to identify specific land use, economic development and public awareness activities.
- AG-5 Support programs and public events to promote public awareness and appreciation of the Town's agricultural resources and heritage. For example, encourage gardening and flower planting at public and private facilities and encourage participation in youth programs such as 4-H.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The Town's natural resources support ecology and wildlife, maintain drainage systems and contribute to the economy and community character.

Streams include Sandy Creek and its east and west branches. All of the surface water in the Town drain toward Lake Ontario. Several lakes and ponds, including those at former stone quarries, support fish. Wetlands provide unique habitats for plants and animals and are critical components of regional hydrology.

State and Federal regulations limit development within certain wetlands. The Town's Flood Hazard Protection law limits development within areas prone to flooding. The Town requires a Streambank Development Permit for most non-agricultural activities within 150 feet of Sandy Creek.

### Natural Resources Goal

- ❖ **Protect significant natural resources and water quality and leverage these resources for recreational and economic development.**

### Natural Resources Recommendations

- NR-1: Maintain and enforce protections for natural resources in zoning, including zoning regulations that limit vegetation removal within stream corridors.
- NR-2: Consider impacts of development and Town actions on natural resources as part of the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process.
- NR-3: Encourage tourism and recreation within the Town's natural areas.
- NR-4: Form a Tree Committee to inventory significant trees and establish a plan and program to protect them.
- NR-5: Consider adopting a Tree protection local law.

## HOUSING & RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Interest in small town, rural living may result in an influx of residents into the Town of Murray. This trend is enhanced more workers are able to work remotely and do not need to live near their places of employment. As increasing numbers of senior downsize, there will be an increase in available housing stock to accommodate new demand.

Regional population projections indicate that the overall population of Orleans County will decrease by 10% by 2040 while the number of people age 65 and older will increase by 57%. Housing options for seniors are most likely to be available in nearby municipalities such as the Village of Holley, where services are within walking distance.

Programs to assist homeowners with repairs and update existing homes within the Town of Murray, can help to maintain the existing housing stock and support homeowners with limited incomes. Existing

housing – some of which seniors will likely downsize from – can be equally promoted to attract younger generations, especially young families.

The recommendations outlined in the Population and Housing section are intended to support those goals and strategies outlined in the other various chapters of this Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use map.

## **Housing & Neighborhoods Goal**

- ❖ **Maintain and enhance the Town’s high quality of life for residents and encourage development and redevelopment consistent with the Town’s rural character.**

## **Housing & Neighborhoods Recommendations**

### Partnership

- HN-1: Partner with neighboring municipalities, the County, and non-profits to secure funding for home improvements.
- HN-2: Support regional economic development initiatives that create or retain jobs to reduce unemployment rates and increase household incomes while protecting and promoting the Towns rural character.
- HN-3: Publicize Home Improvement and Aging in Place Programs. For example, provide brochures at the Town Hall or add a link to Town website with information about available resources or invite representatives from Pathstone, Rural Development and other organizations to conduct a workshop in the Town to publicize programs that assist homeowners with the cost of repairs.

### Codes and Standards

- HN 4: Incorporate design guidelines into zoning for residences in hamlet districts and those with historic character. [See also Land Use and Historic Resources sections]
- HN 5: Maintain and revise zoning as needed to encourage a diversity of housing choices including homes for young families, accessory units for seniors, and empty-nester housing.
- HN 6: Encourage a mix of residential and business development and redevelopment within the Hamlets. [See also Land Use section].
- HN 7: Promote housing opportunities in adjacent communities as well as in the Town to meet the changing need of residents, such as senior housing in the Village of Holley, homes in rural areas and hamlets for families, and accessory apartments to accommodate smaller households.
- HN 8: Work with Orleans County to complete a countywide housing assessment.
- PH-9: Support efforts for a countywide housing assessment
- HN 9: Review and revise property maintenance laws, standards and enforcement procedures to reduce duplication and ambiguity and to ensure fair and reasonable enforcement.

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

Murray's rural charm will be the cornerstone to its economic future, with hospitality and tourism being a major focus for the community. Preserving the natural landscape; expanding tourism activities, especially those that build on agricultural and natural resources; and promotion of the local history will be central in this process. While tourism and hospitality will be a focus, the Town must additionally allow for the retention and expansion of current businesses as well as the establishment of compatible new businesses in suitable areas.

The retention and expansion of existing businesses is critical to maintaining Murray's existing revenue and employment bases. The Town, in partnership with regional organizations, should expand and improve its outreach and promotion efforts to ensure that businesses receive the recognition they deserve, and at-risk companies are identified prior to their leaving the area or going out of business. The Economic Development goals and strategies outlined in this comprehensive plan use existing resources as a key component to realizing economic success in the Town of Murray.

### Economic Vitality Goals

- ❖ **Retain existing businesses and encourage additional investment in the Town.**
- ❖ **Encourage agricultural, recreational and tourism businesses that leverage the town's natural, historic and agricultural resources.**

### Economic Vitality Recommendations:

- EV-1: Maintain zoning regulations to accommodate suitable business development
- EV-2: Encourage agricultural economic development, including farming, agricultural processing, storage and support services, as well as agri-tourism as part of a regional tourism promotion strategy. [See also Agriculture section]
- EV-3: Encourage a mix of residential and business development and redevelopment within the Hamlets [See also Land Use and Population & Housing section]
- EV-4: Continue to support Holley Industrial Park
- EV-5: Develop and maintain a directory and use the Town's website to list/ promote local businesses. Work with the Village of Holley.
- EV-6: Support existing and encourage new tourism and recreation businesses and other activities that capitalize on the Town's natural resources, cultural heritage and the Erie Canal, such as: camping; boat or bicycle rentals; fishing, hunting or birdwatching tours; and re-use of historic buildings. [See also Recreation section]
- EV-7: Support regional economic development initiatives that create or retain jobs to reduce unemployment and increase household incomes while protecting and promoting the Town's rural character.



# TRANSPORTATION

As part of the comprehensive plan an inventory of the existing transportation conditions and draft of proposed transportation recommendations were created. These recommendations must be cohesive with the rest of the comprehensive plans goals and strategies, especially the land uses proposed.

All modes of transportation need to be treated with equal regard in order to best serve all of the community's residents. The Town of Murray is fortunate to not only benefit from the presence of the Erie Canal and road network, but also has a designated bicycle route; snow mobile trails; multi-use trails; and rail line at its disposal.

To best serve both residents and visitors of the Town of Murray it is recommended that high speeds along Rt. 104 be addressed to create a safer and more inviting environment; trails and alternative modes of transit be expanded; and that the community capitalize on the existing transportations assets to fulfill the goals listed throughout the comprehensive plan.

## Transportation Goal

- ❖ **Maintain infrastructure and mobility options for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors.**

## Transportation Recommendations:

- T-1: Incorporate access management regulations into zoning to manage the number and design of curb cuts along major highways through the Town
- T-2: Expand bicycle infrastructure and signage. [See also Recreation section]
- T-3: Improve bicycle, pedestrian and waterway connections between parks, private recreation areas, Erie Canal, natural areas, other waterways, historic sites, tourism destinations and trails. [See also Recreation section]TN-4: Incorporate gateway features or signage along Ridge Road to highlight its history and geological significance.
- T-4: Incorporate gateway features or signage along Ridge Road to highlight its history and geological significance.
- T-5: Communicate and collaborate with the NYS Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) to maintain and improve safety along State highways

# UTILITIES

## Water

Nearly all areas of the Town are served by public water. The Town maintains 13 Water Districts. Property owners within each Water District share the cost of operating the system as well as interest and principal payments on loans secured to construct the water system in each area.

The Town's water districts purchase water from various sources. Most of the Town's water districts purchase their supply from the Monroe County Water Authority, which draws water from Lake Ontario and processes it at the Shoremont Treatment Plant in the Town of Greece.

A study of the Town's water rates and review of its financial management system, underway in 2020, will recommend measures to improve the management of the Town's water system.

## Internet

Portions of the Town have inadequate high speed internet.

## Wastewater

No public wastewater collection and treatment services are available to the Town of Murray. Residents and businesses rely on on-site wastewater disposal systems.

## Electricity

National Grid provides electric service throughout the Town. Many areas of the Town lack 3-phase power, which is needed to support certain types of electric equipment and machinery.

## Natural Gas

NYSEG supplies natural gas to limited areas of the Town.

## Internet

Most areas of the Town have access to high speed broadband service.

## Street Lighting

The Town administers Lighting Districts for properties in the hamlets of Fancher, Hulberton and Brockville and manages street lighting elsewhere. The Town recently converted its lighting fixtures to LED resulting in significantly lower electricity costs.

## Utilities Goal

- ❖ Provide, maintain and manage infrastructure as needed to meet the needs of residents and businesses.
- ❖ Accommodate renewable energy in appropriate locations in the Town.

## Utilities Recommendations

- U-1: Continue to maintain existing water infrastructure.

- U-2: Improve the management structure of the Town's water system. Consider pros and cons of turning over ownership, maintenance and operations to the Monroe County Water Authority (MCWA).
- U-3: Work with NYS and Federal representatives and agencies to extend high speed internet to additional areas in the Town. Address this when Spectrum franchise agreement comes up for renewal.
- U-4: Work with National Grid to extend 3-phase power to areas where it would support agricultural and other business development.
- U-5: Revise local laws to facilitate the development of renewable energy generation facilities for use on-site by farms, industries, business and residences in the Town.
- U-6: Prepare laws and/or regulations to guide the development of large scale renewable energy facilities to areas where they would pose minimal conflicts with agricultural operations and natural resources, and that minimize visual and other impacts on existing residents and businesses.

## RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Significant recreational assets located in the Town include streams and ponds used for fishing, open woodlands for hunting, the Erie Canal and Canalway Trail; camping, RV Parks and golf courses. These may be leverage through local tourism programming, as well as enjoyed by all of Murray's residents. Additionally, there are several areas where new recreational opportunities may be created, such as with the conversion of the former quarry lands and ponds into recreational space as well as the establishment of water amenities along the Erie Canal and Sandy Creek.

### Recreation Goal

- ❖ ***Build on the Town's natural and cultural resources to create recreation opportunities for Town residents and destinations for visitors.***

### Recreation Recommendations:

- REC-1: Work with the NYS Canal Corporation to redevelop former quarry sites for public recreation, potentially as a Town Park.
- REC-2: Identify and acquire suitable land to develop a Town park. May be a small passive park with plantings, natural area with trails and fishing, or active recreation with athletic fields.
- REC-3: Leverage the Town's natural resources to develop facilities, programs and activities for recreation and tourism, including birdwatching, fishing, hunting, boating, hiking and nature observation.
  - Develop small-boat launch sites along the Erie Canal and streams
  - Enhance public fishing access along Sandy Creek and the West Branch and East Branch of Sandy Creek.

- REC-4: Encourage public, community and private gardens to celebrate the Town’s agricultural heritage and make use of its high quality agricultural soils.
- REC-5: Support community events that celebrate the Erie Canal and its history, such as public art, interpretive signage and other activities. Consider a memorial to quarry workers.
- REC-6: Develop trails that improve connections between the Erie Canal and the Town’s waterways, natural areas, campgrounds, RV parks and private recreation areas.
- REC-7: Improve roadways to more safely accommodate bicycle transportation and encourage bicycle tourism in the Town.

## PUBLIC & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Community facilities located in the Town include the Town Hall and Highway Garage, Fancher Hulberton Murray Fire Company, Town government offices, and several cemeteries. Town residents also receive service from several facilities located in the Village of Holley, including the Holley Fire Company, the Post Office at 5 Wright Street.

Residents in the northern section of the Town of Murray are served by the Kendall Central School District while those generally located south of Ridge Road are served by the Holley Central School District.

The Town of Murray and Village of Holley frequently cooperate to deliver public services, including shared use agreements between the Town Highway Department and Village Department of Public Works, Town support for the Holley Industrial Park. Opportunities for additional cooperation could benefit residents by reducing costs and improving efficiencies.

Additionally, those assets possessed by the Town of Murray, such as the historic rural cemeteries, should be promoted and leveraged throughout other programming and services provided.

The Town maintains a website that communicates basic information about meetings and government activities. With improvements to the design, the Town’s website could also promote local businesses and celebrate the unique character of the Town of Murray.

### Public/ Community Services Goal:

- ❖ Provide and maintain services that benefit Town residents in collaboration with other governments and community organizations.

### Recommendations:

- PCS-1: Continue to communicate and collaborate with the Village of Holley, Orleans County and neighboring Towns to share services and information and to work together to achieve common goals.
- PCS-2: Expand the Town’s website use of social media to publicize services offered to residents
- PCS-3: Continue to maintain and improve Town government facilities.







