

Community Overview and Plan Summary

Location and Regional Orientation

The Town of Owasco, Cayuga County, New York, is located along the east shore of Owasco Lake, immediately southeast of the City of Auburn. Route 38A runs north-south along the lakeshore, and east across the southern portion of the Town. The Hamlet of Owasco is located in the southeastern portion of the Town.

The population of the Town in 2000 was 3,775, according to the U.S. Census. This represents an increase of 8.3% since 1990. Between 1970 and 1990, the population had declined by 3.6%.

Table 1
Population 1970-2000 - Town of Owasco

Year	Total Population	Percent Change
1970	3,619	
1980	3,612	-0.2%
1990	3,487	-3.5%
2000	3,775	8.3%

SOURCE: US Census of Population and Housing

The western portion of the Town, and most of the Town's households, are within the Auburn School District. The eastern portion, including the Hamlet of Owasco, is within the Skaneateles School District.

Approximately [80%] of the Town's land area drains into Owasco Lake. A portion in the northeast corner is within the Skaneateles Lake Watershed. The northwest corner drains into the Owasco River (Outlet.)

Overview of Existing Land Use

The Existing Land Use Map (Map 1) depicts the use of parcels in the Town based on classifications assigned for tax assessment purposes. Table 2 shows the total acres in each category.

More than one half (57%) of the Town's land area is used for agricultural production. Commercial farms in the Town of Owasco are generally located in the eastern portion of the Town, where the soils are highly productive. A description of the Town's farmland and an analysis of the issues facing the agricultural industry are included in the Agriculture and Farmland section.

Sensitive environmental features, including wetlands, floodplains occupy a total of 3,346 acres. Major streams include Dutch Hollow Creek and Sucker Brook. Wooded areas and steep slopes have also been designated as sensitive features in the Comprehensive Plan. A description of the Town's natural

resources and analysis of environmental protection issues and opportunities is included in the Watershed Protection and Environmental Quality section.

Table 2
Land Use by Assessor's Classification

Land Use	Acres	Percent of Total
Single Family Residence	789.54	5.8%
Large Lot (5+ acres) Residential	1,990.33	14.6%
2-Family Residence	100.40	0.7%
Apartment	6.79	0.0%
Seasonal Residence	48.47	0.4%
Commercial	32.74	0.2%
Recreation	667.63	4.9%
Agriculture	7,695.72	56.6%
Vacant	2,207.77	16.2%
Public/ Community Service	63.56	0.5%
Total:	13,602.95	

SOURCE: Real Property Tax Data, Cayuga County Planning Department

A residential neighborhood in the northwestern portion of the Town, adjoining the City of Auburn, contains a majority of the Town's housing and consists primarily of dwellings constructed in the 1920's and 1930's. Newer subdivisions have been constructed south of Melrose Road and east of Owasco Road during the 1980's and 1990's.

Seasonal dwellings and an increasing number of year-round homes are located along the lakeshore. The Hamlet of Owasco consists of approximately 75 residences.

The Housing and Residential Neighborhoods section of the Plan includes a description of the Town's housing and neighborhoods, as well as an analysis of the issues and a discussion of the opportunities for future residential development in the Town.

Business development in the Town is limited to a small number of sites that had been developed for business purposes prior to 1988, when the Town's zoning ordinance was updated. These include a plaza, florist, liquor store, restaurants, and other small businesses.

Public parks and recreational facilities include Cayuga Counties Emerson Park, located at the north end of Owasco Lake, and Town playgrounds. Private recreational facilities include the Owasco Yacht Club, Cayuga County Sportsman's Club, Camp Columbus, and three golf courses. Descriptions of these facilities and discussion of the issues relating to parks and recreation are included in the Parks and Recreation section of the Comprehensive Plan.

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Government and community service facilities include the Town Hall, Town Highway Barn, water plant, recycling center, and fire stations. A description of these facilities and the services provided to Town residents by the Town, other governments, and community organizations, are included in the Government and Community Services section of the Plan.

Summary of Issues, Opportunities and Recommendations

Watershed Protection and Environmental Quality

A significant goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to protect the water quality of Owasco Lake and the streams that contribute to the Lake, including Dutch Hollow Brook and Sucker Brook. Owasco Lake provides recreational opportunities such as fishing, swimming and boating. It is also the source of drinking water for the Town as well as for the City of Auburn and other neighboring communities. Lakeshore residences form a distinct community within the Town.

Water quality may be affected by stormwater runoff from construction sites, agricultural land, residential lawns, and eroded streambanks. Tools and techniques that are used to prevent contaminated runoff include agricultural management techniques to contain animal waste, nutrients, and agricultural chemicals, erosion and sedimentation control measures during construction, public education of homeowners, and stabilization of streambanks.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- enact "conservation overlay" regulations as part of the Town zoning code to protect stream corridors, significant woodlots, and to prevent erosion in areas of steep slopes.
- continue to require and enforce strict erosion and sedimentation controls at construction sites;
- educate property owners about ways to prevent contamination of groundwater, streams and Owasco Lake; and
- work with the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District to encourage agricultural environmental management techniques and to restore streambanks.

In addition, the Comprehensive Plan recommendations for future land use would

- maintain low densities of development in the rural areas of the Town, and enlarge the areas that would require densities of no more than one dwelling per three acres;
- require a minimum of one acre per dwelling in areas where public sanitary sewer service is not available; and
- ensure that protection of open space and natural features are incorporated into the design of new residential development and subdivisions.

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Housing Development and Residential Neighborhoods

Maintaining a high quality of life for residents of the Town of Owasco is one of the primary reasons for preparing a Comprehensive Plan. The Plan's goals include improving existing neighborhoods and ensuring that new residential development is constructed in appropriate locations, with good design and in balance with the environmental resources and community character.

Quality of life in existing neighborhoods depends on: continued maintenance of existing infrastructure such as roads, sewer and water lines, and sidewalks; minimizing conflicts between neighboring land uses; and managing other factors such as traffic. New residential subdivisions are most appropriate in those areas that are close to existing neighborhoods, served by water and sewer service, and have good access to roads. Proper design of new developments can ensure that the natural environment is protected, existing infrastructure is used efficiently, and land use conflicts are minimized. Residential development in the more rural areas of the Town must also co-exist with working agriculture.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- Provide for open space conservation when lots are created in the rural areas of the Town;
- Ensure that subdivision design is sensitive to the natural environment and protects natural features such as streams;
- Ensure that new development and additions along the lakeshore are sensitive to neighbors' views; and
- Continue to maintain infrastructure and Town services within established residential neighborhoods.

Agriculture and Farmland

Agriculture is a major industry in Cayuga County, generating more than \$125 million in sales in 2000. Agriculture contributes to the rural character of the Town, by maintaining open spaces and vistas. The continuation of farming in the Town depends upon minimizing conflicts with neighboring residences and ensuring that sufficient good quality land is available for farming.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- encourage individual farmland owners to consider private land protection techniques such as conservation easements, in conjunction with local land trusts;
- evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Purchase of Development Rights program for high quality farmland, possibly in conjunction with Cayuga County, and
- use zoning and subdivision reviews to ensure that new residential development is consistent with continued farming in the eastern, rural areas of the Town.

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Business Development

The Town's existing zoning regulations permit existing businesses to continue at the same location, but expansion is limited and any changes to the existing business must be approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals. New business development may be permitted by the Town Board as part of a Planned Development District. Farm stands are permitted in the existing Agricultural/ Residential zoning district.

A total of 66% of the respondents to the Residents' Survey indicated that the Town's policy should be to "permit existing businesses to continue and to expand where they now exist."

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town continue the existing policies, as represented in the zoning regulations, regarding businesses.

Parks and Recreation

Recreational facilities, including Emerson Park, Town playgrounds, and private facilities, contribute to the quality of life in Owasco.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- continue to maintain existing playgrounds;
- continue to work with Cayuga County to ensure that improvements to Emerson Park take into account the concerns of Town residents; and
- obtain a "right of first refusal" for large, privately owned lakefront properties such as Camp Columbus, if the property were for sale in the future.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Streets and highways provide vehicular access to land in the Town of Owasco, and allow for regional through traffic. Traffic speeds must be managed to protect the quality of life in residential neighborhoods and to ensure safety. Sidewalks and bicycle paths encourage walking and offer youth better access to schools and recreational facilities.

Public water service provides safe drinking water to Town residents. Sanitary sewer service eliminates the need for on-site septic systems and helps to protect water quality. Sanitary sewers also allow for higher density development in certain areas of the Town. Stormwater must be managed to prevent flooding and run-off of sediments into streams and Owasco Lake.

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The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- Establish walking/ biking trails along Owasco Road and between the Oakridge Heights subdivision and the Owasco Elementary School
- Ensure that the streets in adjoining subdivisions interconnect
- Reduce speeding and improve traffic conditions, particularly along Owasco Road and Oakridge Road
- Continue to maintain and extend, as appropriate, public water and sanitary sewer systems
- Ensure that stormwater runoff is effectively managed

Government and Community Services

Services such as schools, libraries, fire protection, ambulance and police, as well as basic government operations, also contribute to the quality of life in Owasco. The Town is committed to maintaining ambulance and fire protection services to Town residents, and providing efficient and effective Town services.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Town:

- encourage improvements to private lake access roads to ensure adequate access for emergency vehicles;
- encourage Town residents to volunteer their services to the Fire Department;
- appeal to the Cayuga County Sheriff and NYS Police to enforce speed limits on Owasco and Oakridge Roads, and
- request that the NYS Department of Transportation reduce the speed limit on Owasco Road between Oakridge Road and the City of Auburn to 30 miles per hour.

Overview of Zoning, Subdivision and Design Standards

The primary tools available to the Town to implement the Comprehensive Plan are zoning regulations, subdivision regulations and design and construction standards. These tools encourage new development in appropriate locations, and help to protect water quality and sensitive environmental features, preserve open space and rural character, maintain quality of life in existing neighborhoods and ensure that new development is consistent with the character of the community.

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Zoning Regulations

The Town Board has the authority to enact and amend zoning regulations, by local law or ordinance, following a public hearing. Zoning regulations specify the location, type and density of development within designated zoning districts. The boundaries of these zoning districts are delineated on the Town's Official Zoning Map (see Map 2). For each district, the zoning regulations identify those uses that are permitted and specify the requirements for lot dimensions and building setbacks. Zoning regulations also include requirements for signs, parking, and fences. Any use or structure existing at the time the zoning was adopted may be continued, but may not be extended or enlarged without a variance issued by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Zoning Board of Appeals may grant "variances" to the requirements of the zoning regulations, subject to guidelines set by State law.

The Town's zoning regulations do not currently include provisions for Site Plan Review. Such provisions would allow the planning board to review the site design and layout of certain development proposals. (The Town's subdivision regulations apply similar standards and procedures to residential subdivisions.) Development is required to meet specified standards regarding drainage, parking, traffic, lighting and other design criteria. When applied consistently, Site Plan Review is effective in ensuring that development is of high quality and has minimal impacts on the surrounding neighborhood and environment.

Many of the recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan suggest changes to the zoning regulations, as well as improvements to the enforcement and monitoring of development plans. The Future Land Use Map provides guidance for modifications to the Zoning Map. The Implementation Strategy contains a summary of the recommended changes to the Town's zoning regulations. Following the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan by the Town Board, the zoning regulations should be revised so that they are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Subdivision Regulations

The Town's existing subdivision regulations set standards for the division of a parcel of land into two or more lots. The Planning Board is responsible for reviewing and approving applications for subdivision approval. If the subdivision would create fewer than five parcels (minor subdivision), the Planning Board may approve the subdivision plat following a public hearing. Approval of a subdivision that would create five or more lots (major subdivision) is a three-step process, requiring submission and approval of a sketch plat, a preliminary plat and a final plat. A public hearing is required on the preliminary plat.

The Town of Owasco's subdivision regulations specify the requirements for preservation of natural features, provision of sewer and water service, erosion control and landscaping. The Planning Board may approve "clustered" projects, in which open space or natural features are incorporated into the design. A cluster subdivision has the same number of lots as a traditional subdivision, but some or all of the lots are smaller than the zoning would ordinarily allow in order to allow for some of the land to remain open.

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The Comprehensive Plan encourages the continued use of cluster subdivisions to preserve open space and protect sensitive natural features. The Plan also calls for improved monitoring of erosion control measures during the construction of subdivisions.

The Town's Subdivision Design Standards for Drainage and Storm Sewers, Highways, Waterline and Sanitary Sewers provide guidance to developers for improvements within subdivisions. The standards include detailed specifications for the construction of improvements and outline the procedures required to obtain approval for these improvements.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Design Standards be updated to clarify the procedures and the roles and responsibilities of Town officials and Boards. The format of the document should also be improved to make it easier to use.