

# Housing Development and Residential Neighborhoods



## GOALS:

1. Maintain a high quality of life in existing residential neighborhoods.
2. Maintain low residential densities in the rural, agricultural areas of the Town.
3. Encourage the protection of natural features and the retention of large open spaces in conjunction with the development of residential subdivisions.
4. Encourage a variety of housing types in appropriate locations in the Town.
5. Ensure that access remains available to undeveloped interior land in the future.
6. Ensure that subdivisions are designed and constructed in accord with specific design standards that reflect the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

## Background Information

### Existing neighborhoods

A majority of the housing units in the Town are concentrated in the northwest corner. This area includes the neighborhood referred to as "The Avenues," adjoining the City of Auburn, as well as newer subdivisions such as Oakridge Heights and Brookside Trace. "The Avenues" area is an older, established neighborhood, where most of the housing was constructed before 1940.

New subdivisions have been constructed south of Melrose Road and East of Owasco Road during the 1980's and 1990's.



Many residents in the northwestern portion of the Town are within walking or bicycling distance from the elementary school, playgrounds, and Emerson Park.

Approximately 75 houses are located within the Hamlet of Owasco, located in the southeastern portion of the Town. The Hamlet offers a unique residential environment, with houses generally closer together than they are in the countryside, and a small town atmosphere.

The lakeshore provides a distinctive residential environment. Many of the homes are used seasonally, although an increasing number have been converted to year-round use. Houses are located on relatively small lots. Access is often provided by private roads. Most of the households along the lake use private docks for swimming or boating.



In the rural areas of the town, several new houses have been constructed on large lots (5 or more acres.) Several farming families have been living in the rural areas of Owasco for generations. The residential environment in these areas is characterized by open spaces, views, woodlands and proximity to working agriculture.

### **Types of housing and households**

The 2000 Census reported 1,608 housing units, of which 1,425 were occupied. Of the 183 “vacant” housing units, 139 were characterized as “for seasonal, recreational or occasional use.”

Households in Owasco consist primarily of predominantly families (78%.) A total of 30% of the households are married couples with children under 18 years of age; this amount is higher than the County rate of 23%.

Housing is predominantly owner-occupied (92%).

## **Trends in Residential Development**

During the past 10 years, approximately 14 new homes have been built each year. Between 1985 and 1995, 276 new lots were created in the Town, representing an increase of 16%.

### Total Lots in Owasco

1985: 1752

1990: 1831 (increase of 4.5%)

1995: 2028 (increase of 10.8%)

During the past 20 years, several major subdivisions have been built in the Town of Owasco. The Oakridge Heights subdivisions, located along Oakridge Road in the northwestern portion of the Town, has 70 lots developed, and has the potential to develop a total of 90 lots. The Brookside Trace subdivision is designed for a total of 80 lots. Currently, 42 lots have been approved and 38 are currently under review by the Planning Board (as of April 2001).

The residential subdivision at Martins Point includes 29 single family homes and 24 townhouses on approximately 50 acres.

As of March 2001, two new residential subdivisions were under review by the Planning Board: Brookside Trace Phase III (38 lots); and Woodlands (59 lots). The Galor subdivision anticipates a total of 99 lots. Phase I has been approved for 23 lots; development of the subdivision requires the installation of Sewer District #2.

### Lakeshore development trends

The following observations were included in the State of the Watershed report:

- Property taxes have increased; properties are assessed at 100% of full value, even if seasonally occupied.
- Many seasonal dwellings have been converted into year-round dwellings
- Sales are much slower than they were 4 years ago.
- Costs to build are comparable to a house with a pool

- Most demand is for seasonal cottages priced from \$99,000 to \$125,000
- Development of Martin Point has not yet reached potential.



## Residents Survey Highlights

### Opinions on New Development

- ◇ More than 50% of the respondents think that the residential growth of the Town over the past ten years is just the right rate of growth for the next ten years; about 25% say that such a growth rate would be too great.
- ◇ Respondents had no clear preference about which locations in the Town are most appropriate for future residential development .
- ◇ About 70% of the respondents are opposed to the Town encouraging residential development similar to the "Avenues" (small houses on small lots), and townhouses and apartments.
- ◇ Nearly 50% of the respondents favor encouraging residential development on 1/2 acre and 1 acre lots in designated areas of the Town.
- ◇ Most respondents indicate that there is no pressing need for housing for senior citizens at this time.
- ◇ 54% of respondents believe that existing zoning regulations are "just right."

## Issues and Opportunities

### Quality of Life in Existing Neighborhoods

Factors that affect the quality of life in residential neighborhoods include maintenance of infrastructure such as streets, drainage and sidewalks, housing conditions, impacts of neighboring land uses, traffic and access to recreational resources.

### Lakeshore

Seasonal private roads are not maintained by the Town, as they have not been constructed to Town standards. There is some concern about access for emergency vehicles. Views of the lake are important to residents.

### Hamlet

A majority of Hamlet residents who responded to the Residents' Survey indicated that the Hamlet should remain as it is, as a residential neighborhood. A total of 39% of respondents who reside in the Hamlet stated that sanitary sewer service is "much needed;" 34% rated it "somewhat needed;" and 24% indicated that it is "not needed."

Residents are split on the degree of need for additional playground/ recreation area ( "much needed: 39%; "somewhat needed": 30%; "not needed:" 24%), and are less enthusiastic about the need for a community center ("much needed": 19%; "somewhat needed": 39%; "not needed:" 40%).

### Rural areas

According the Residents' Survey, residents of the more rural areas of the Town are concerned about protecting open spaces and views, and are moderately concerned about potential conflicts between farms and adjoining residents.

## New development

New development is influenced by the availability of utilities such as sewer and water service, as well as zoning regulations, natural constraints, and market factors.

Infrastructure

The availability of utilities makes land more attractive for residential development. As shown in the Water Service Area Map, public water service is available to homes in the northwest portion of the Town, along the lakeshore, along East Lake Road and in the Hamlet of Owasco.

Sewer District No. 1 serves properties in the northwest portion of the Town, and along the lakeshore south to Willowbrook Drive. Sewer District No. 2 will serve properties along the lakeshore south to Burtis Point.

In addition to subdivision development, several homes have been built on individual lots along existing roads. This type of development, known as "strip" residential development, does not require the expense of constructing roads. However, extensive strip development can result in landlocking large areas of interior land, and disrupting drainage patterns on adjoining farmland.

**Concerns Raised During Planning Process**

Residential development has been associated with the following issues and concerns in the Town of Owasco:

- quality and quantity of stormwater runoff,
- impact on streams, woodland and other natural features,
- impact on agricultural land,
- loss of rural character,
- increased need for services such as schools, ambulance service and fire protection, and
- increases in traffic.

One of the objectives of this Plan is to accommodate new development in such a manner that these concerns are addressed. Tools and techniques to assist in meeting this objective are presented in the following section.

**Highlights of Roundtable Discussion with Developers**

*On March 15, 2001, the CPC conducted a roundtable discussion with local developers. The following summarizes the points made by the developers.*

- ◇ *The housing market is for "full size" single family lots (1/2 to 3/4 acre). Townhouses and smaller lots do not sell as quickly.*
- ◇ *The Skaneateles school district is a "draw" for residential development.*
- ◇ *As the County's sales tax revenue is distributed based on total assessment, Additional residential development leads to increased sales tax revenue.*
- ◇ *All of the major developers in the Town are local residents.*
- ◇ *The Town adheres to strict guidelines regarding the design of residential subdivisions.*
- ◇ *The average value of new homes in Owasco is \$190,000*

**Policies in Cayuga  
County Land Use Plan**

Rural Development Guidelines

- *Where possible, retain and reuse old farm roads instead of constructing new roads or driveways to access development, except where reuse required widening and associated loss of hedgerows or land marks. Preserve hedgerows and landmarks; these define outdoor areas in a natural way and preserve important wildlife areas.*
- *Avoid placing buildings in the middle of open fields.*
- *Use existing topography and vegetation to screen buildings.*
- *Place buildings so that they do not protrude above trees and hill crests as seen from roads and public spaces.*
- *Minimize crossing steep slopes with driveways and roads. When building on slopes incorporate the natural topography into the architecture rather than grade the entire site flat. Use the flattest parts of the site for septic leach fields and parking areas. Control erosion and sedimentation.*

## **Tools and Techniques**

### **Zoning**

Local zoning regulations specify the types and density of development permitted in designated districts within the Town. Zoning regulations and amendments are adopted by the Town Board as a Local Law and are subject to a public hearing.

As shown in the Zoning Districts Map, the existing zoning in the Town of Owasco divides the Town into three districts. Land along west of Route 38A and Rockefeller Road is in the Lakeshore District. This district permits one- and two-family dwellings with a maximum density of 20,000 square feet per unit.

The Residential zoning district includes land west of Town Hall Road, Martin Road, and the southern portion of the Town, including the Hamlet of Owasco. This district also permits one- and two-family dwellings with a maximum density of 20,000 square feet (just under one-half acre) per unit.

The remainder of the Town is in the Agricultural District. The maximum residential density in this district is three (3) acres per dwelling.

### **Subdivision Regulations**

The Town of Owasco has enacted Subdivision Regulations to oversee the division of land into two or more parcels. Every time a new lot is created from a “parent” parcel, the proposed plan must be reviewed and approved by the Town Planning Board. The creation of four or fewer lots is considered a “minor” subdivision; the creation of five or more lots is a “major” subdivision and requires more extensive review.

### **Innovative Use of Zoning and Subdivision Techniques to Retain Rural Character**

New development in rural areas can be managed in order to retain the rural character of the community. Zoning regulations determine the density of development in specified districts; subdivision regulations can influence the design of new development. Many of the concerns raised during the process of preparing this Comprehensive Plan can be addressed through revisions to zoning and subdivision regulations and their administration and enforcement.

Excerpts from the publication Rural By Design, by Randall Arndt, (included in the Appendix) describe how these techniques

may be applied to minimize potentially negative impacts of new residential development.

### **Design Standards**

The Town of Owasco has accepted a set of design standards prepared by its consulting engineers, Barton & Loguidice, P.C. These standards specify the procedures and materials to be used in constructing new subdivisions, roads, waterlines and sanitary sewers.

Revisions to the design standards are needed to make them easier to use.

## **Recommended Actions**

1. Continue to maintain infrastructure and Town services in existing residential neighborhoods.
2. Re-establish the pedestrian/bicycle path along Owasco Road between the City limit and Emerson Park.
3. Establish a walking/ bicycling trail from existing subdivisions to the Owasco Elementary School
4. Establish zoning regulations and procedures for redevelopment to protect lakeshore views. Require site plan review for all new construction and additions along the lake shore.
5. Continue to ensure that the provisions of the Town's Subdivision Design Standards are adhered to during plan review and construction.
6. Revise zoning regulations to require "density averaging" in the rural areas and ecologically sensitive areas of the Town, and in other areas where lot sizes are large enough to incorporate significant open space.
7. Continue to maintain low residential densities in the rural areas of the Town.
8. Use zoning and subdivision regulations and/or design guidelines to encourage new residential development in and around the Hamlet of Owasco to be consistent with that of a traditional Hamlet.
9. Revise zoning regulations to establish a minimum of five (5) acres for the keeping of large animals such as horses.