

## Existing Conditions: Relevant Plans & Strategies

The North Shore Council of Governments (NorCOG), in partnership with the NYS Tug Hill Commission, engaged MRB Group to complete an Economic Resiliency and Recovery Plan. To ensure that future strategy aligns with the community and builds on current and past goals, MRB Group first analyzed the conditions within the region based on existing Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Laws, and Land Use Plans.

This section provides an overview of local, county, and regional community plans and strategies. The review of these documents paid special attention to economic revitalization and resilience, with the knowledge that this report will inform strategies around leveraging opportunities and assets like the Micron plant development and Oneida Lake recreation.

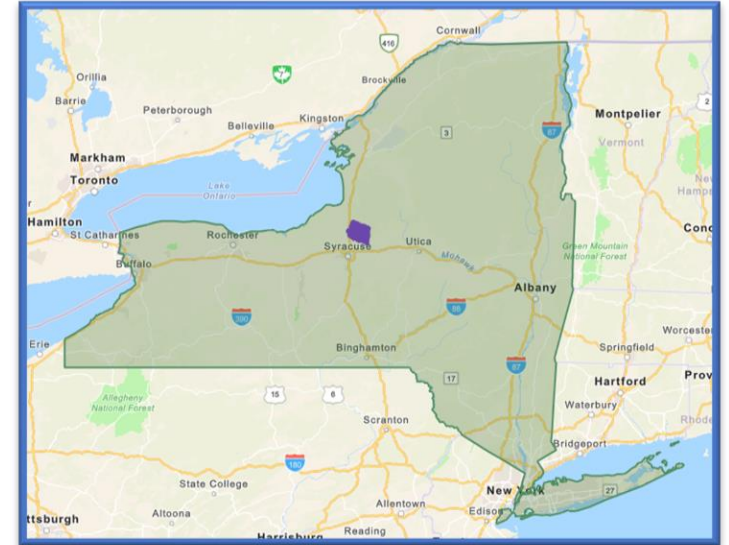
### Regional Plans

The Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNYRPDB) provides two key reports for understanding the regional context within which NorCOG communities must situate themselves: the Regional Recreation and Heritage Plan (2017) and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was last updated in June 2020. Additionally, the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council (CNY REDC) published their 2022 Annual Report, which details basic areas of concern and the state of Regional goals and ambitions.

NorCOG sits on the idyllic northern shore of Oneida Lake, and the communities in the area strive to maintain and improve the natural environment that attracts people to the region. The CNYRPDB Regional Recreation and Heritage Plan from 2017 highlights the region's interest in developing regional recreation opportunities, deepening their heritage identity, and growing the tourism industry in a sustainable way. To achieve these goals, protecting and promoting the rich history and environment emerge as common themes, achievable through brownfield restoration, redevelopment of abandoned railroads, rehabilitation of historic and cultural resources and settlements, improving access to public waterfront lands, and increasing carbon storage, biodiversity, and renewable energy efforts.

The CNYRPDB CEDS emphasizes interest in the following industries: manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, Internet of Things (IoT), semiconductor manufacturing, and clean energy – all of which are components of the larger industry clusters of biomedical and life sciences, distribution and transportation, technology and electronics, and materials processing. The region's strategy identifies short-term goals to strengthen these industries by:

- Maintaining a strong foundation for the management and efficient delivery of government services at all levels; and
- Supporting the development and maintenance of a modern infrastructure network.



The long-term goals identified in the 2020 CEDS decidedly focus on industry and employment concerns, specifically working towards the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” in the IoT industry cluster in CNY. The CNYRPDB hopes that the development of a strong entrepreneurial culture in CNY - along with business retention and expansion programs, better alignment of workforce supply and demand, and increased capital funding, infrastructure, and shovel-ready sites - will create an economy well-poised to adapt to coming changes driven by climate change and technological advancement.

Most recently, the 2022 Annual Report from the CNY REDC explains three strategic goals set by the Region:

1. Strengthen targeted industry concentrations [agribusiness, high tech manufacturing, smart systems cluster, and research and development at institutions of higher education] that leverage unique economic assets.
2. Improve competitiveness in and connections to regional, national and global economies.
3. Revitalize the regions’ urban cores, main streets, and neighborhoods.

Multiple challenges stand in the way of reaching those goals, primarily an aging labor force and an inability to attract and retain a workforce base that fits the needs of Regional employers. To improve the quality of the workforce (therefore making the region more attractive for businesses), the CNY REDC places emphasis on upskilling individuals in low-wage jobs so they can advance to higher-wage employment, achievable through outreach and mentoring, the advancement of employer practices in upskilling, retention, and advancement; and improving employer diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training. Additionally, the Region must meet the needs of workers, including better transportation infrastructure, childcare (especially infant care), and affordable housing. Fulfillment of these Regional goals, completed in alignment with the strategic initiatives outlined by the State—placemaking, workforce, tradeable sectors, and innovation—will improve the position of the Region as a destination for both industry and workforce.

## County Plans

The boundaries of NorCOG double as the southeastern border of Oswego County, which has two reports that further illuminate the environment NorCOG navigates: the Oswego County Comprehensive Plan (2008), and the Oswego County Economic Advancement Plan (2017). The former identifies a number of challenges the County was facing at the time, as well as a series of goals, strategies and actions to address those challenges. As the Comprehensive Plan authors note, “development of the local Oswego County economy is not a question of manufacturing vs. tourism or agriculture vs downtown redevelopment, but rather a challenge of maximizing the economic potential of all of our resources, human, natural, and man-made,” thus summarizing the overarching themes of both challenges and their solutions. Like the regional goals and plans for the future, the County Comprehensive Plan emphasizes protecting the historic character of the area, preserving the natural environment to the benefit of current and future generations, improvement of transportation and public utility infrastructure, and the development of a comprehensive recreational system of major parks, recreation sites, and open space areas that are linked to one another and population centers by a greenway and trail system.

The Oswego County Economic Advancement Plan echoes the challenges and goals laid out in the CYRPDB CEDS, prioritizing workforce development and retention, quality of place, and economic development infrastructure. To meet these goals, the County plans to build momentum around the

following targeted industries: craft beer, nuclear energy, tourism, and recreation. The County also highlights in this report the importance of regularly publishing and publicizing performance metrics for economic advancement and diversification.

## NorCOG Plans

Three documents specifically examine NorCOG economic development and planning: *Managing Change: A Pilot Study in Rural Design and Planning* (1990), *North Shore Growth Trends* (1988), and the *North Shore Cooperative Planning Board Regional Land Use Plan* (1982). While these documents may be helpful in establishing historic focuses and goals of the NorCOG area, they naturally illuminate little of recent challenges faced by the area.

Tackling these reports in chronological order, the 1982 Land Use Plan reveals goals and objectives for natural resource conservation and residential, commercial, and industrial growth in the North Shore region, which are remarkably similar to more recent goals established at the regional and County levels. The Plan emphasizes the maintenance of the rural character and cultural heritage of the region, the provision of adequate housing and community facilities and services, the encouragement of local employment opportunities, and improvement of transportation and community awareness of the value of planning. The repetition and evolution of these goals into the modern targets of regional, County, and local comprehensive and strategic plans underlines their continued relevance despite today's vastly changed social and economic landscape. In 1988, the *North Shore Growth Trends* highlight the dramatic population and housing growth that characterized many small communities in the 1980s, which were used to create straight-line projections into the future, incorrectly assuming that the regions would continue to experience population growth.

The 1990 Pilot Study's goals overwhelmingly focus on involving the community in the planning process, evidently something the region has long struggled to do because of the "long history of apathy toward planning initiatives and strong resistance in some towns to zoning proposals." As the title suggests, the report explains the area's current design (e.g. layout of agricultural areas vs towns vs roads and highways) and ways to improve the layout and effectively adapt to change. Each NorCOG area (Village of Cleveland, Village of Central Square, Town of Constantia, and Town of West Monroe) are included as case studies, each with its own set of design goals, though they mostly align with the following:

- Improving visual appearance and identity of the town/village/hamlet,
- Establishing or improving public waterfront access, and
- Providing pedestrian amenities and improving pedestrian safety.

## Local Plans

Comprehensive plans for each of the two villages and two towns that constitute NorCOG blend the more recent regional plans and the older NorCOG plans. Because these communities exist in close proximity to one another, their comprehensive plans often have overlapping goals and focus areas. Following population increases in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Villages of Central Square and Cleveland, and the Towns of Constantia and West Monroe currently (as of Plan writing, the most recent of which is from 2012) struggle with population and downtown economic decline. The comprehensive plans for each community mostly follow the same layout, split into the following sections that can serve as goal areas: natural resources, historic resources, transportation, infrastructure and community facilities, housing, economic development, and parks, recreation, and open space.

All of the comprehensive plans detail the importance of protecting the environment, particularly Oneida Lake. The lake is on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's priority water body list, a list that identifies surface waters at risk to have their uses precluded, impaired, stressed, or threatened. To preserve Oneida Lake, the NorCOG communities agreed to monitor and maintain specific water and phosphorous levels. Reduction of invasive wildlife in Oneida Lake is also a common theme across comprehensive plans, which communities intend to accomplish through educating the public (residents and tourists) about invasive species along with careful monitoring of the lake by the proper governing agencies.

Local plans also emphasize preservation of the cultural heritage, historic resources, and landmarks. To do so, most communities set action items of taking inventory of historic resources, acting as the clearinghouse for historic preservation, linking property owners to preservation resources, and potentially establishing grant programs to help property owners complete historic renovations.

Transportation is also a key issue for the region. The Central Square Comprehensive Plan (2012) specifically notes the challenges faced by their community related to transportation, citing high levels of congestion and frequent traffic accidents, which too often involve pedestrians as a result of lacking sufficient sidewalks. Solutions for this include establishing sidewalks on all new and existing streets and roads, improving traffic signals and signs, undertaking a study of particular traffic challenges to make parking in and traveling through the Village less problematic. The Village of Cleveland and the Towns of Constantia and West Monroe also list sidewalk and road improvement as goals, aiming to maintain the integrity of Highway 49 as an interregional connector. Transportation issues go hand-in-hand with infrastructure improvements the communities would like to make, primarily expansion or improvement of the sewer and water systems, which are recognized as requirements to attract the commercial and industrial growth that the communities seek.

The comprehensive plans note that any new development (or redevelopment) that occurs must positively impact current Village or Town life and future growth, demonstrating understanding of the need for sustainable development over uncontrolled economic growth. The area encourages environmentally friendly and innovative manufacturing and industry, with a specific focus on tourism and affiliated industries. Recreation on and around Oneida Lake is the highlight of the area's tourism and offers opportunities for expansion and growth. The Villages and Towns all include goals of expanding recreation through better public access points to the lake for fishing and docking, and the creation of connections to population centers via trails and pathways.

## Conclusion

The NorCOG communities (Village of Cleveland, Village of Central Square, Town of Constantia, Town of West Monroe) suffer from many of the same challenges as the entire region of CNY: population decline, workforce and business attraction and retention, and insufficient infrastructure to support current and future needs of communities. However, it's clear that Oneida Lake, and the recreation and tourism that accompany such beautiful natural scenery, is an asset to the entirety of CNY on which many communities wish to capitalize. Since the 1980s, the areas around Oneida Lake increasingly take the protection of the natural environment into consideration for new developments and the improvement of quality of life for residents and tourists alike. Tourism and recreation alone are not enough to sustain these communities. Attracting and maintaining both businesses and a well-matched workforce are key to the future of the area, which necessitates updating and expanding water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure.