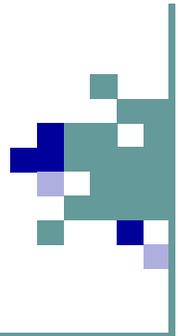


# Tompkins County Planning Department

## 2005 Annual Report



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### From the Commissioner

After two and a half years of working on the development and adoption of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan, Planning Department staff were anxious in 2005 to get on with the action steps to implement the plan's recommendations. It was a big task just to develop a framework for addressing all of the plan's 61 actions within the five-year implementation time horizon. A tremendous amount of progress was made in organizing this major undertaking and substantive initiatives were launched on some of the plan's most far-reaching and most immediate priorities. The County Planning Advisory Board (PAB) played key roles in providing feedback on this effort and established committees of four or five members to guide major efforts on the Affordable Housing Needs Assessment, the Natural Features Focus Area program, and the Scenic Resources Inventory. The PAB also assisted in the development of committees to support the Federally funded Transportation, Community and Systems Preservation Program grant projects for the State Route 13 Corridor Management Plan, Pilot Walkability Studies, and Northside Waterfront Circulation Plan. All of these projects are continuing into 2006.

In addition to the ambitious agenda to implement the plan, the Department was also called on to support other major initiatives in the community. Our assistance was requested by County Administration to manage the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the Public Safety Communication System Project. This came up on short notice (due to the resignation of the County staff person with primary responsibility) at a crucial time. Joan Jurkovich and Katie Borgella stepped in and guided the complex EIS and SEQR Findings process to a successful completion on schedule.

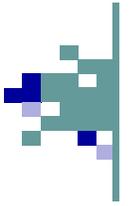
We were also called on to play a much more active role than anticipated in implementation of an Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights grant project, the first of its kind in Tompkins County. This turned out to be a complex process as well, with State and Federal agencies, the landowner, and the County striving together to draft an easement document that met all program rules and guidelines, and stakeholder objectives.

We also supported the County Highway Division in consideration of appropriate pedestrian and bicycle facilities on major highway reconstruction projects planned for Hanshaw Road, Warren Road and Coddington Road. This provided an opportunity to bring the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations for walkable and bikeable communities into the County highway design process. Work continued with the Towns of Caroline and Danby on local planning assistance contracts and we entered into an agreement to begin work with the Village of Trumansburg in 2006.

Other notable successes in 2005 were the award to the County of \$600,000 in competitive Small Cities Community Development Block Grant funding for the First-time Homeownership program and the approval by FEMA of the Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan developed cooperatively by the County and seven other municipalities. The CDBG grant marked the seventh successful grant application to support this program since its inception in 1993. The Hazard Mitigation Plan is a prerequisite to community eligibility to apply for pre-disaster mitigation grant funds. As a result we were able to submit an application for funding to mitigate flooding problems in Ludlowville. We are still awaiting word on that grant.

In many ways 2005 was a transition year as we moved from a focus on Comprehensive Plan development to implementation and from identifying issues to developing strategies to address them. 2006 promises to be an exciting year of progress on many of the issues of greatest concern to this community.

*Edward C. Marx, AICP*  
*Commissioner of Planning and Public Works*



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The Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the County Legislature on December 21, 2004. The plan provides:

*The Planning Commissioner will report annually to the County Legislature on progress in implementing the Plan. This will include identification of action items that have been initiated and the results of those actions. The Commissioner's report will include measures of success by which to monitor the Plan's progress and any barriers to implementation that have been encountered. The appropriate measurement tools will be developed during the implementation process.*

This first annual report shows significant progress on a wide range of actions identified in the plan. It also includes a discussion of the efforts undertaken to date to identify appropriate measures of success. It is anticipated that data for those measures will be included in next year's report.

### ■ Housing Choices

■ **Action:** *Produce a three- to five-year affordable-housing needs assessment to use as a basis to guide development of appropriate subsidized rental and ownership housing to meet local needs.*

A subcommittee of the County's Planning Advisory Board was appointed in 2005 to oversee development of the countywide housing needs assessment. A Request for Proposals was distributed and a dozen responses were received. Consultants were ranked and interviews completed by Planning Department staff. Economic and Policy Resources from Burlington, Vermont was selected to complete the assessment. A scope of work was finalized and data collection completed. Demographic and economic profiles and an inventory of existing housing conditions were completed along with a preliminary needs assessment and analysis of opportunities and constraints to affordable housing production. The preliminary results were then presented and potential recommendations discussed at a well-attended meeting of local stakeholders in December. The final report should be completed in the first half of 2006

■ **Action:** *Conduct a survey of in-commuters to determine the reasons they live outside the county.*

We worked with the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council to insert questions into the park and ride surveys being conducted with Cornell and Downtown Ithaca employees. This allowed us to ask questions that will help us learn the factors that contribute to the decision to live outside Tompkins County and the role that housing costs and availability play. Data was provided to the consultant conducting the housing needs assessment. Further data analysis is anticipated in 2006.

### Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

■ **Action:** *Provide education and training programs for elected officials, board members, community leaders, developers and builders, and the general public on the need for and benefits of affordable housing development.*

Better Housing for Tompkins County initiated an outreach effort to better educate local officials regarding the need for and issues surrounding affordable housing development.

■ **Action:** *Build a new Community Residence – Single Room Occupancy mental health facility.*

Tompkins County Department of Mental Health worked with New York State and a not-for-profit service provider to develop a plan for a single room occupancy facility in the City of Ithaca.

### ■ Transportation Choices

■ **Action:** *Work with municipalities to assess transportation infrastructure needs, including roadways, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians, to support local planning efforts.*

County Planning staff worked closely with Public Works staff on pedestrian and bicycle issues in road design and public outreach for three County highway projects being designed in 2005: Coddington Road, Hanshaw Road, and Warren Road. As part of that work, Planning staff prepared an application for grant funds to create public materials on complete streets and context-sensitive design guidelines for County roads that safely accommodate drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Although this grant application was unsuccessful, staff hopes that County design guidelines will be developed in the near future.

(See page 8 for a description of walkability studies under Strong Communities.)

■ **Action:** *Develop a Countywide State Route 13 Corridor Management Plan.*

Staff completed necessary paperwork and project description, tasks, and timelines to receive NYSDOT authorization to begin tapping federal Transportation, Community and Systems Preservation Program (TCSP) grant funds originally allocated in 2002 to conduct a Corridor Management Plan for Route 13 from the Cortland County line to the intersection with Route 366 and continuing along Route 366 through Varna to the Town of Ithaca line. A Request for Proposals was issued and proposals were under review as the year ended.



## **Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:**

- **Action:** *Develop a countywide comprehensive park and ride plan.*

Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council worked with Cornell and other community partners to survey commuters to the Cornell campus and downtown Ithaca regarding their interest in public transit generally and park and ride facilities specifically.

## ■ **Jobs and Business**

### **Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:**

- **Action:** *Continue to lobby for State Empire Zone status and explore regional partnerships to share underutilized economic development resources.*

Tompkins County Area Development submitted an updated application for Empire Zone designation for Tompkins County.

- **Action:** *Continue to explore ways to improve the cost and convenience of air service for County employers, visitors and local residents.*

Ithaca-Tompkins Regional Airport entered into an agreement for new non-stop service by Northwest Airlines to their Detroit hub.

- **Action:** *Utilize Cornell University's resources to greater advantage, including work with Cornell to improve technology transfer, and study feasibility of a business attraction initiative using specific Cornell research and development programs as the key element.*

Tompkins County Area Development worked with Cornell University to initiate a new program to attract targeted high tech businesses that could benefit by proximity to Cornell research programs.

## ■ **Rural Resources**

- **Action:** *Determine the feasibility of a rural micro-enterprise program, including adding a component to the County's Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund.*

A Rural Microenterprise Pilot Program was initiated in the last quarter of 2004. The pilot includes microenterprise training, technical assistance and lending to rural small businesses with five or fewer employees. \$100,000 was set aside to fund the program: \$75,000 for loans and \$25,000 for training and technical assistance. Alternatives Federal Credit Union (AFCU) partnered with the County to assist with implementation. In 2005, two loans were completed. The first loan was a working capital loan to Wildflowers, a flower shop located on Main Street in Dryden. The second loan was to Remembrance Farm to fund three new greenhouses that will extend the farm's organic lettuce growing season. There has been considerable interest in the program and it was extended through year-end 2006.

- **Action:** *Update the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan with a particular focus on promoting the viability and profitability of agriculture within the county.*

Much of the work for completing the updated Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan was completed in 2005, and a full draft should be completed early in 2006. A subcommittee of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, including a Planning Department staff member, did the majority of work on this project. Input was sought from the full AFPB, as well as from farmers and Farm Bureau members.

- **Action:** *Establish a program to protect and manage land for agricultural and forestry use in the focus areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan using tools appropriate to the functions of those resources.*

Early in 2004, Tompkins County was awarded a New York State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Implementation Grant for the purchase of development rights on Mr. Donald Howser's 439-acre dairy farm in the Town of Lansing. Once completed, this will be the first agricultural conservation easement funded through this program in Tompkins County. In 2005, the County, in conjunction with the Finger Lakes Land Trust, secured grant funds for this project from the highly competitive federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. While the state program covers 75% of the value of the agricultural conservation easement, the federal program is designed to pay for the remaining 25% of the easement's value. After the Land Trust determined that it could better serve the project in a supporting role, the County Planning Department took over administration of the project with plans for the County being the sole holder of the easement. Administrative duties in 2005 included negotiating easement language to the satisfaction of the landowner, the County, the State and USDA; contracting



## ■ **Preserving rural character in Newfield**



with an appraiser, surveyor, and title insurance company to prepare the necessary documents; and creating timelines and a project schedule to move the easement toward closing. It is the goal of all involved to close on the agricultural easement in the spring of 2006.

In 2005, County Planning engaged several organizations, municipalities, and individuals in discussions regarding the most appropriate and cost effective role County Planning could take in future agricultural purchase of development rights projects. While these talks continue, it was determined that the County and the Town of Dryden would partner in preparing a grant application for the 2006 round of New York State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Implementation Grant funding. The Town and County worked collaboratively to prepare the application and work with two farmers to create a well-crafted and documented application. As part of the application, a memorandum of understanding was prepared, outlining roles and responsibilities each organization would assume if the grant is awarded.

After staff consideration of how to measure the health of the forests and forest economy in Tompkins County, it was determined that one way to measure active and beneficial management of forest lands would be to track the number of acres enrolled in the various forest management certification programs that are gaining popularity in our region. In late 2005, the County entered into a contract with Bevan Forestry, a Forest Stewardship Council-certified forestry consultant, to prepare a forest management plan that would allow the County to join Bevan's FSC-certified pool of forest lands. It is expected that in 2006, Bevan Forestry will prepare maps, conduct timber and forest inventories and growth studies and analyses, review property boundary lines, and perform all other requirements necessary to develop a plan that conforms to FSC guidelines. On behalf of Tompkins County, the consultant will then complete necessary professional and administrative tasks required to obtain FSC Certification, including researching deeds and conducting field work necessary to identify and paint property boundaries. By the end of the year, Bevan Forestry will present the Forest Management Plan to elected officials, members of the Planning Advisory Board, and forest landowners.

### ■ **Water Resources**

■ **Action: Complete watershed assessments for the Fall Creek and Six Mile Creek drinking water sources.**

Milone and MacBroom, Inc. completed the watershed assessments for the Fall Creek, Six Mile Creek, Salmon Creek, and Cayuga Inlet watersheds. Preliminary findings of the report were integrated into a synthesis of technical data about Six Mile Creek (that will eventually be used as the foundation for the development of a management strategy for Six Mile Creek) and into the recommended mitigation strategies for the Tompkins County Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan. Now that all the watershed as-



### ■ **Taughannock Creek Natural Features Focus Area in Ulysses**

sessments are complete, they will be used as the basis for revising the Tompkins County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program. Recommendations from the assessments will also be integrated into the protection and management plans for the Natural Features Focus Areas, the development of a water quality and water quantity monitoring plan for Cayuga Lake, emerging watershed management efforts in the Fall Creek watershed, and volunteer monitoring efforts in the Fall Creek and Six Mile Creek watersheds.

This effort was funded by Tompkins County, Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance, and New York State Environmental Protection Funds.

■ **Action: Continue to conduct aquifer studies.**

The United States Geological Survey (USGS), Tompkins County, and the Towns of Dryden and Caroline furthered the study of three surficial aquifers in Tompkins County: the Virgil Creek surficial aquifer, the Upper Six Mile Creek surficial aquifer, and the Willseyville Creek surficial aquifer. Findings from the aquifer studies underway include the location of a potential water supply in the Village of Dryden that has four times the capacity of the existing Village of Dryden water supply; delineation of the boundaries for a recharge area to the Virgil Creek surficial aquifer (near the Virgil Creek dam); and location of a confined aquifer beneath the Upper Six Mile Creek surficial aquifer that would be a suitable drinking water supply for Town of Caroline residents (and better protected from contamination by geological features than the Upper Six Mile Creek surficial aquifer currently used as a water supply by many Town residents).

In addition, USGS, Tompkins County, and the Town of Danby signed contracts to initiate a similar study for the Upper Buttermilk/Danby Creek aquifer.



■ **Action: Update the County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program to incorporate watershed-based approaches to reducing the risk of flood damages.**

Using the watershed assessments recently completed by Milone and MacBroom, Inc., the Tompkins County Planning Department and Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District began work to revise the Tompkins County Flood Hazard Mitigation Program (TCFHMP). Changes to the TCFHMP are expected to include the development of a list of critical flood mitigation and watershed management projects prioritized by geographic area and problem type, revised list of criteria for project selection, and ability to fund multi-year projects. The revised program will be launched in 2006 with the goal that funding for projects will be reinstated in 2007. The outcomes of this effort are expected to bolster the effectiveness of projects funded by the TCFHMP, increase the efficiency of TCFHMP funding, and ultimately enhance flood protection and watershed management throughout the County.

■ **Action: Redevelop the NYS Department of Transportation Maintenance Facility site with water-dependent and/or water-enhanced projects to provide economic benefits to the City and the County and provide public access to the water's edge.**

After many years of the County working diligently to move this relocation project forward, in the spring of 2005, the County withdrew its financial participation in the project and assigned its option to NYSDOT on the site in the Village of Dryden which NYSDOT had chosen for the relocation of its current facility in the City of Ithaca. In late 2005, NYSDOT announced their intention to acquire the Dryden site and move the project forward.

### *Background on the Project*

Located between the highly popular Ithaca Farmer's Market and the soon-to-be renovated Cornell Rowing Center, and directly across the Cayuga Inlet from the City of Ithaca's Cass Park and the newly constructed Cayuga Waterfront Trail, the existing NYSDOT maintenance facility is strategically sited to play a key role in the community. The fact that the NYSDOT facility currently occupies prime waterfront property was identified as an issue of concern in the County's 1997 Waterfront Plan. The Plan recommended that NYSDOT be approached to consider relocating the facility to allow the parcel to be used for a purpose more in keeping with community goals for waterfront development, and discussions began in early 1997 on how to facilitate that relocation.

After Senator James Seward secured \$3.0 million for this project and NYSDOT committed to fund the additional monies needed for the development, work began to identify a suitable site. Many potential sites were evaluated, and in 2003, there was agreement that a site located on Enterprise and Ellis Drives in the Town of Dryden would meet the needs of the project. While public sewer service was

already available, annexation of the property from the Town to the Village was deemed necessary in order to facilitate the delivery of public water service to the area. In 2004, the annexation was completed by the Town and Village.

The project offers an exciting opportunity for intermunicipal cooperation, bringing together State, County, Town, Village and City interests in a combined effort to improve services and achieve important economic development and waterfront planning goals. NYSDOT will benefit from an improved facility while reducing the number of maintenance facilities in the region; the addition of public water service will allow commercial development at the northern edge of the Village of Dryden; and the property in the City will be developed in a way that is consistent with waterfront plans.

### **Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:**

■ **Action: Prepare a Cayuga Lake water quality and quantity monitoring plan.**

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network (Network), in collaboration with the Network's Issues Committee and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization's Technical Advisory Committee, is leading the development of a monitoring plan for Cayuga Lake. To better understand the timeframe for completion, who are the critical partners, and what resources will be necessary to achieve this action item, the Network has initiated the development of a pilot monitoring plan for pathogens in the southern basin of Cayuga Lake. Once this pilot plan is completed, the process of developing the plan, parameters included in the plan, and geographic area of the plan will be expanded.

The intended outcomes of this effort are to foster greater collaboration among agencies and organizations with active monitoring programs, increase the efficiency of resources expended on monitoring efforts and the effectiveness of existing monitoring efforts, shape future monitoring efforts, assist local governments in their efforts to comply with relevant regulations and, ultimately, help water resources managers, regulators, agencies, and organizations better assess the health of Cayuga Lake.

### ■ **Natural Features**

■ **Action: Establish an open-space program to protect or preserve natural resources and recreational amenities in the focus areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan using tools appropriate to the functions of those resources.**

Every three years, the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan is updated. In 2005, the revised Plan was drafted and disseminated for public review. Tompkins County Planning staff participates on the Region 7 Open Space Committee, and was successful in adding several important natural features focus areas identified in the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan to the Open Space

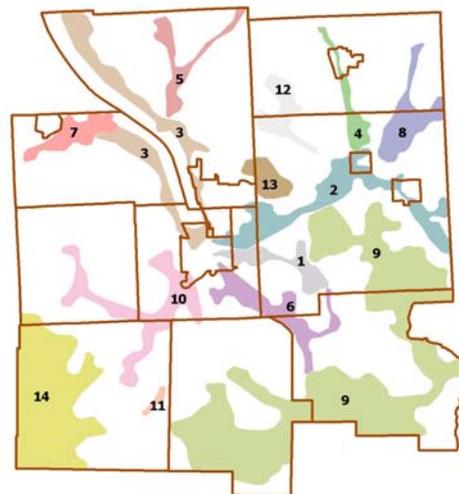


Conservation Plan. The 2005 Plan includes a variety of recommendations to enhance NYS's open space program as well as revised Priority and Supplemental Project Lists, which serve as a guide to State agencies on use of State funds for open space protection. Listing in the Plan makes it easier for State agencies to acquire easements or title to land, assuming there is a willing seller and the municipality in which it is located does not oppose the State protecting the land.

In fall of 2005, Planning Department staff met with representatives from eleven agencies. These discussions focused primarily on current protection efforts, conservation and management issues in the focus areas, and ways that the County could participate in conservation and management. (See comments below from the Finger Lakes Trail News.)

Following these meetings with agencies, staff worked to more specifically define the unique functions of the respective Focus Areas and determine what will be necessary to sustain those functions in the context of land management and protection. We identified twelve functions: Sustainable Timber Harvesting and Agro-forestry, Sustainable Agriculture, Subsistence and Recreational Hunting, Subsistence and Recreational Fishing, Water Quality, Flood Mitigation, Education and Research, Recreation, Scenic Views, Biodiversity, Habitat Connections and Migration, and Habitat for Species of Greatest Conservation Need. For each of these functions, staff researched potential management and conservation issues, and identified available data sources. Input was sought from researchers and extension agents at Cornell, and from the State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Not all functions apply to all focus areas. As a result, we identified "key areas" that we will look for in each focus area to help us to identify the presence of various functions.



■ **Natural Features Focus Areas**

Maps for each of these key areas were created using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Tracking the preservation of natural features will be accomplished through an annual update of the Protected Land GIS data. This update was completed for 2005.

■ **Action: Define stream corridor buffers for the major tributaries to Cayuga Lake and encourage use of appropriate measures to preserve the designated stream corridors.**

The Tompkins County Planning Department initiated a thorough review of research and literature about the buffer widths necessary to sustain the many vital functions of stream buffers (including water quality improvement, flood mitigation and stormwater control, and provision of habitat). This review will be augmented by Cornell University data developed for Tompkins County that identifies the land areas within the County that generate the most overland runoff to streams and thus have a particularly significant im-

From the Finger Lakes Trail News, Winter 2005:

### **Tompkins County Planning Department leads by example**

The FLTC and members of local Cayuga Trails Club were invited by Tompkins County Planning to a September meeting in Ithaca to discuss what areas of our trail route were in need of protection. As the planning process unfolds, they are trying to garner input from many kinds of local land-use advocates to map where sensitive natural areas should be the focus of any potential future county efforts at protection or special status.

We regard this effort by the county to learn the protection needs of our trail, and which portions are especially vulnerable to loss of permission, as a pioneering project. While every one of the twenty-some counties our trail crosses is also in the midst of land management planning, Tompkins is the first one which has sought to include input from trail advocates.

We applaud their first steps, and hope their vision will start a trend wherein other counties will recognize the same need. For instance, echoing the example of Steuben County's original highway signs that mark FLT crossings so helpfully, both Schuyler and Cortland Counties now are following suit with signs of their own, so let us hope that other counties will see fit to include this grand recreational resource in their landscape planning.

*Irene Szabo, President of the Board*



impact on water quality. These findings, and recommendations for protection of critical areas, will be integrated into the protection and management plans for the Natural Features Focus Areas and will also be presented to the Towns of Ithaca and Dryden, both of which are drafting laws to regulate activities adjacent to streams and development in areas that have the greatest impacts on water quality and flood control.

Appropriate measures to preserve these areas will be incorporated into the strategies developed for the Natural Features Focus Areas protection and management plans.

■ **Action: Conduct a Scenic Resources Inventory and prepare a Scenic Resources Preservation Plan.**

The Planning Advisory Board established a Scenic Resources Committee (composed of 5 PAB members) to review possible approaches and examples of scenic resources inventories and plans. We issued an RFP and consultant Peter J Smith & Co. was chosen to perform the inventory. Due to the high cost of conducting a scenic resources inventory and preservation plan, it was decided to move forward with the inventory at this time, and prepare the preservation plan at some point in the future as opportunities and interest from local municipalities arise. The consultants began work in November, 2005, and should be completed with the final report and public presentation of results in November 2006.

The scope of work includes identifying potential scenic resources (using a GPS unit and digital camera) by driving all public roads outside of the City of Ithaca and the main streets in the City, boating along Cayuga Lakeshore, visiting all state parks and other locally significant public lands, and walking public trails within the state parks and other high-use public trails. The public will be solicited for nominations of scenic resources, as well. The consultant will provide the County with a final database of all nominated and inventoried scenic resources with basic information, including digital photographs, mapped location in GIS, scenic character, scenic category, and scenic sub-category.

The consultant, TCPD staff and the Committee will develop two sets of rating criteria to apply to the list of potential scenic resources. The first criteria will be used to determine whether a scenic resource qualifies as Distinctive or Noteworthy (D/N Criteria), and the second will be used to determine whether a scenic resource qualifies as Characteristic of the area. After additional public outreach and rating of the nominated sites, the project will identify the Top 20 – 50 Distinctive, the Top 20 – 50 Noteworthy, and approximately 25 Characteristic Scenic Resources in Tompkins County.

■ **Action: Develop or obtain a system to track land use changes and preservation efforts.**

Staff developed a list of specific property attributes to track over time to identify trends and issues emerging in local

land use and subdivision. County employees at Assessment, County Clerk, and ITS were interviewed to explore the availability and use of various existing Tompkins County databases. Based on these meetings, it was determined that land use change could be tracked through existing Assessment data. The specific process for obtaining and analyzing this data is still being worked out. Barriers to this work came from the methods used to enter documents into the County Clerk's database, and from lack of readily accessible data from the Assessment Department in the form needed for this process.

■ **Strong Communities**

■ **Action: Advance implementation of a Countywide multiuse trail network.**

In 2005, two TCPD staff members served on advisory committees of the Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative. Katie Borgella is on the Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative Advisory Board and Joan Jurkowich is on the Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative Client Committee.

■ **Action: Conduct pedestrian level-of-service and walkability studies in neighborhoods, villages, and hamlets throughout the County.**

We completed the necessary project descriptions, tasks, and timelines to receive NYSDOT authorization to begin tapping federal Transportation, Community and Systems Preservation Program (TCSP) grant funds originally allocated in 2002 to conduct walkability pilot studies in two differing pedestrian environments in the County. Also, we began preliminary conversations with the Town of Ithaca and the Village of Trumansburg to identify interest in participating in the studies.

Plans for 2006 include defining the project boundaries in Northeast Ithaca and the Village of Trumansburg, hiring a consultant to perform much of the work, and forming local steering committees for each study area. It is anticipated that the Northeast Ithaca Walkability Study would provide recommendations for pedestrian access to important desti-



■ **Cayuga Waterfront Trail and future Black Diamond Trail in Ithaca**



nations, such as schools, shopping, employment, and health centers, and that the Trumansburg Walkability Study would review pedestrian connections from surrounding neighborhoods to the central business district, and connections between the central business district and the proposed Black Diamond Trail.

A key component of the project is developing a survey tool to evaluate the walkability of an area. The goal is that the survey will be easy to use by individuals, community associations, and groups of residents, and that it will be designed for use along specific routes to identify barriers to pedestrian use and opportunities to enhance the pedestrian experience. Another task is to utilize the County's GIS system to evaluate the pedestrian environment in the study areas. Data needed to support the survey tool will be identified and, as appropriate, developed. A methodology for recording and analyzing the results of the survey tool will also be developed. In the fall, both of these tools will be used by local residents to conduct pedestrian walkability studies in each study area. Finally, in early 2007, the project results will be reviewed with elected officials, transportation specialists, municipal employees, and people who completed the survey, to develop recommendations for changes to the pedestrian network and environment.

## ■ Centers of Development

■ **Action:** *Work with municipalities to identify and map areas appropriate for infill development.*

A preliminary step toward this work was undertaken in support of the Housing Needs Assessment. (See Housing Actions, page 3.) Vacant land with infrastructure was identified through a GIS analysis to determine availability of land to meet housing demand. This work will be built upon in 2006 to develop a baseline for discussion with municipalities.

## ■ Efficient Use of Public Funds

■ **Action:** *Determine the location of future Health Department facility and the future use of the Biggs B Building.*

■ **Action:** *Evaluate a downtown office plan for future County facility needs.*

In 2005, the Tompkins County Legislature's Space Needs and Location Committee hired LaBella Associates to provide architectural and space planning assistance for the evaluation of various space alternatives. The Planning Department and the Facilities Division provided oversight for the consultant, and general project management. The Committee completed their work in 2005, and prepared a final report to the Legislature recommending that a new Health Department building be built on County-owned land adjacent to the existing Health Department building at Biggs B. For downtown office space, the Committee recommended that a new Center of Government Building be built on the Old Library site. The Legislature reviewed and

accepted this report as a guide for short- and long-term County office space decisions. The actual project development and timing of the proposed projects will be weighed against other budget needs, and will be determined through the normal budget and capital program decisionmaking processes.

■ **Action:** *Implement the Countywide Public Safety Communications System project.*

After staff changes in County Administration, TCPD was called upon to provide leadership for the development of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Public Safety Communications System. The EIS was considered to be an integral part of the project and the draft document's completion in a thorough and timely manner was key to allowing the project to move toward construction in 2006. Two TCPD staff members spent considerable time and effort acting as liaisons to the EIS consulting team, ensuring effective public participation in the document's review, and shepherding the project to completion.

## Actions undertaken by other agencies/partners:

■ **Action:** *Review responsibility for highway management and maintenance based on the function of the highways.*

Tompkins County Highway Division began meeting with town highway superintendents to discuss potential highway trades to better align County jurisdictional responsibility with the arterial and collector system and town responsibility with local roads.

## ■ Measures of Success

*The Commissioner's report will include measures of success by which to monitor the Plan's progress ... The appropriate measurement tools will be developed during the implementation process.*

County staff worked with principal local agencies to develop a list of 44 indicators to measure progress on achieving the goals stated in the Comprehensive Plan. Of those indicators, 2004/2005 data were collected for 24 indicators. Information collected included the latest data, year of that data, data source, interesting comparisons with earlier years, and the process for updating the data in the future. Work still needs to be done to identify data sources for some of the indicators, or find another measure of success for that aspect of the Plan, especially in the area of water resources. Barriers to this project came from the difficulty in utilizing some types of Assessment data and coordination and consistency among water resource samplers and monitoring efforts. In 2006, the intent is to finalize the list of indicators, gather 2004/2005 data for indicators that don't have those data points yet, collect 2005/2006 data for all indicators, and report to the Legislature and public on the indicators and any emerging trends of interest or concern.

### ■ Land Policy Administration

The Planning Department assists the County in managing its lands in several ways: by maintaining a current inventory of all County landholdings and identifying surplus properties that should be sold or transferred to another entity; by evaluating all properties that are subject to foreclosure each year and identifying any properties which pose liability issues to the County, or which could serve a higher public good if protected in some way; by working with State agencies and other land protection organizations to determine best protection options; and by assisting County departments in evaluating land prior to acquisition or disposition. Since the County land policy was first adopted in 1995, the Department has facilitated the sale and protection of 173 acres of important natural areas to groups including the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; NYS Department of Environmental Conservation; Finger Lakes Land Trust; and Cornell Natural Areas Program.

In February of 2005, Planning, Assessment and Finance Department staff visited twelve tax parcels subject to foreclosure for non-payment of taxes. Each parcel was evaluated for potential liability issues and natural or cultural resources of significance, and each occupied residence was visited to personally communicate the foreclosure situation with the people living there. One wooded parcel, located on Morrell Road in the Town of Newfield, was identified in several studies and reports as providing important bird and plant habitat, as well as the potential for public access to Cliffside State Forest. It was not included in the spring auction so that the County could negotiate its sale to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, which had expressed interest in its acquisition. During the summer, it was discovered that the former landowner was still living on the land in a makeshift structure and the Town of Newfield voiced opposition to the use of State Environmental Protection Funds for acquisition of the property. The parcel was added to the tax rolls after back taxes were paid by relatives of the property owner.



### ■ Pedestrian-friendly environment in the Village of Groton

In the fall of 2005, the County Legislature approved, and the County Administrator signed the purchase agreement for, the sale to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation of three parcels of land for addition to the Buttermilk Falls State Park and trail system. The sales will enhance one of the County's premier tourist attractions, while increasing recreational opportunities for residents of the County and protecting significant natural areas in the County. Two of the parcels, located in the Town of Danby, are adjacent and were acquired through the foreclosure process in 2003. They lie in the Lick Brook and Inlet Valley Slopes Unique Natural Area, and contain a portion of the Finger Lakes Trail, which connects to the Buttermilk Falls State Park land across West King Road. One parcel, located in the Town of Ithaca, was acquired in 1942 and identified as surplus land in the first County-Owned Land Inventory in 1998. The parcel lies in the Fleming Meadow Unique Natural Area, and serves as an important floodplain for Cayuga Inlet floodwaters.

### ■ Snowmobile Trail Grant Program Administration

New York State's Snowmobile Trail Grant Program is meant to encourage local snowmobile club stewardship and development of snowmobile trails in the state. Permissible uses of the funds include trail development and the maintenance of existing trails and trail facilities. The Tompkins County Planning Department has sponsored the application and administered the program on behalf of local snowmobile clubs since 1998. Program funding in the amount of \$35,300 was approved on behalf of five snowmobile clubs, maintaining 107 miles of trails for snowmobile use in Tompkins County.

### ■ Sustainable Tompkins

In 2004, a local, grassroots initiative was launched to foster sustainability in individuals, businesses, and community and government leaders in order to ensure the long-term wellbeing of local communities and the broader region. Planning Department staff contributed time and energy to this endeavor, as it dovetailed nicely with public outreach work being done by the Department to generate community discussion about the draft County Comprehensive Plan. In 2004 and 2005, Planning staff helped to coordinate a group of business, educational, and governmental leaders who were interested in planning for land use sustainability. The Department saw an opportunity to engage a diverse and extremely knowledgeable group of individuals in local planning issues, and was pleased to be able to offer administrative and logistical support as the group educated themselves and community leaders on the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System, the Smartcode Form-Based Planning Ordinance, the Scorecard for Sustainable Land Use Planning, and issues for the City of Ithaca to consider in the development of its Southwest Area.



### ■ **Planning Department Website**

Staff reviewed the function, clarity and appeal of the TCPD website and, with assistance from County ITS, created a new design and layout of the website. Though this work has not yet been completed, it is a work in progress and one that will reflect the Department's professionalism and creativity.

### ■ **Agricultural Districts Annual Update**

November is the designated annual review period when landowners of viable agricultural land can request to be included in an existing agricultural district. In March of 2005, the County Legislature approved the requests submitted by ten landowners in November 2004. Nine of these landowners, with land totaling 409.53 acres, were added to Agricultural District 1, and one landowner, with land totaling 5.63 acres, was added to Agricultural District 2. These farms have diverse operations, including dairy, grain, hay, small-fruit, flowers, beef, caprine, equine, poultry, and greenhouse activities. Most properties are owner-farmed, but some are rented to neighboring farm operations. In Lansing, the properties are in an area experiencing development, but are sandwiched between remaining agricultural district land, resulting in a concentration of about 400 contiguous acres of agricultural land. Other parcels are in rural, agricultural areas of the County.

This year, two landowners from the Town of Dryden submitted requests for inclusion of parcels totaling 71.36 acres to Tompkins County Agricultural District 1. Both parcels are in predominantly rural and agricultural areas, although they do not adjoin existing agricultural district land. The agricultural activities on these parcels are rented farmland, and small-scale equine and diversified operations. These requests were reviewed and recommended for approval by the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board and the Planning Advisory Board, and are scheduled for review by the County Legislature in March of 2006.

### ■ **Local Government Assistance/Circuit Rider**

The Planning Department continued to work with the Towns of Danby and Caroline in accordance with their three-year General Planning Services contracts, and Danby's Code Revision Services Contract and Mapping Contract. Work with the Town of Caroline has focused on completing the vision and goals section of their comprehensive plan. The Planning Department assisted the Town Planning Board with drafting goals, identifying potential strategies, and creating a future vision map. In the spring and early summer, staff facilitated a series of public workshops in Caroline to solicit feedback on the draft vision and goals, and to begin a dialogue on potential strategies. TCPD staff also facilitated a follow-up community meeting in the fall that focused more specifically on implementation strategies. Throughout the process, the Planning Department has provided information and advice, and helped to support community leaders in preparing their comprehensive plan.

Work with the Town of Danby in 2004 had focused on revising their Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances, and applying for grant funding for their proposed hamlet planning project. The purpose of the subdivision and zoning ordinance revisions is to bring the Town regulations in line with their recently adopted Comprehensive Plan, particularly in regard to open space preservation. The Town Board adopted these revisions in May of 2005. During the summer and fall of 2005, the Planning Department provided additional information and assistance with further ordinance revisions currently underway. In support of the adopted revisions, the Planning Department also assisted the Town in addressing their GIS mapping needs for subdivision review.

### ■ **Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund**

The Tompkins County Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund is made possible from previous repaid federal Community Development Block Grants. Economic Development Loans are available for local business development and expansion projects that create or retain employment opportunities in the County. The first loan was made from the fund in 1999. Since that time a total of \$695,000 has been loaned to five businesses.

Planning Department staff provides coordination and support to the Revolving Loan Fund Oversight Committee, and works with local entrepreneurs to identify appropriate financing opportunities and guide applicants through the two-part loan application process.

The Committee reviewed three applications and approved one loan in 2005. Ithaca Produce was awarded \$160,000 to purchase freezer and refrigeration equipment for a new warehouse distribution facility in Dryden. The project will bring 16 new jobs to the company.

At year end, five loans were in repayment, which creates a steady stream of income into the fund for future economic development projects.

### ■ **Tompkins County Homeownership Program**

The Tompkins County Homeownership Program continued its eleventh year of success providing financial assistance to help 16 low- to moderate-income families purchase homes in 2005. In addition to down payment assistance, the program provides an educational workshop and overview of the home-buying process, and one-on-one financial counseling. Maintenance workshops were also added in 2005 to assist clients with ongoing maintenance and upkeep.

Over \$4.6 million in grant funds have been awarded as low interest loans to first-time homebuyers in Tompkins County, leveraging nearly \$12.4 million in private mortgage funds and helping 227 families become homeowners since the program began in 1993. As clients repay their loans, the



County capitalizes its own loan fund to assist additional clients. A total of \$1.6 million has been collected to date. Better Housing for Tompkins County delivers the program. Planning Department staff provides program and administrative support. The County was awarded its seventh Community Development Block Grant in 2005, in the amount of \$600,000, to continue funding this program.

### ■ **General Municipal Law Development Reviews**

One hundred and eighty-one projects were reviewed under New York State General Municipal Law section 239 l, m, and n. Referrals were made from 13 of the 16 municipalities in the County. Projects included amendments to zoning ordinances and local laws, approval of site plans and subdivisions, issuances of special permits, and requests for use and area variances. Of these projects, eleven were found to have potentially significant negative intercommunity or countywide impacts, and recommendations were made to modify the projects to mitigate those impacts.

### ■ **Tompkins County Environmental Management Council Highlights**

The Planning Department continued to provide coordination and support to the Environmental Management Council, an advisory body to the County Legislature. Presentations and discussions included an economic analysis of petroleum and military security in the Persian Gulf, an overview of the health effects of open burning, a review of the Cornell Wind Study, and a presentation highlighting local solar homes. EMC members were also active at local festivals this year staffing informational tables at Earth Day, Ithaca Festival, and America Recycles Day. EMC municipal representatives continue to provide a valuable link between local and County issues and initiatives. Major accomplishments in 2005 included:

- **Model Wind Tower Ordinance:** In recognition of the need to encourage the development of clean renewable energy sources and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, the EMC developed a model ordinance to help guide the siting of utility-scale wind energy facilities. The ordinance can be used as a resource by municipalities in Tompkins County to adopt their own ordinances for large-scale wind energy projects. Specific environmental issues such as aesthetics and visual impacts, noise, and safety are addressed by the model ordinance.
- **Paper or Plastic, No Thank You:** The EMC launched a bag-less shopping campaign in 2005 to reduce natural resource consumption and promote environmental awareness. The EMC sold re-usable plastic shopping baskets and sturdy canvas bags with the tag line "Paper or Plastic, No Thank You!" The EMC does not profit from the sale of these items.
- **If you're Smellin' it, you're Breathin' it! Backyard Burning is a Serious Health Hazard:** After ten years of failed legislation at the State level, the EMC launched a cam-

campaign to ban open burning of household trash in Tompkins County in 2005. Backyard burning, commonly in burn barrels, was the number one known source of dioxin emissions in the U.S. in 2004, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Dioxins are highly toxic even at extremely low levels, and have been linked to serious health problems in humans that include cancer and adverse development and reproductive effects. Members provided background information on the health impacts of open burning and facilitated public debate on this issue. In October 2005 the Tompkins County Board of Health amended the County Sanitary Code to prohibit the open burning of household waste. The EMC received the 2005 first place award for outstanding project by the New York State Association of Environmental Management Councils for their campaign.

- **EMC Website:** The EMC launched a new website in 2005 to serve as a central location for Tompkins County legislators, EMC members, and the public to learn about EMC accomplishments and current projects. Visit them at [www.tompkins-co.org/emc](http://www.tompkins-co.org/emc).

### ■ **Hazard Mitigation**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and New York State Emergency Management Office awarded conditional approval of the Tompkins County Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan (Plan), pending local adoption of the Plan by the eight participating jurisdictions. Addressing repetitive flood losses is one of the high-priority hazard mitigation strategies included in the Plan, and the Tompkins County Planning Department submitted to FEMA a request for grant funds to address this issue in Ludlowville (in the Town of Lansing).

### ■ **Tompkins County Water Resources Council**

The Tompkins County Planning Department provides staff support to the Tompkins County Water Resources Council (WRC), the water quality coordinating committee for Tompkins County. Select accomplishments of the WRC in 2005 include:

- Award of grant funds to construct two stormwater management demonstration projects, complete a gap analysis of municipal stormwater and erosion control regulations, and pilot the use of infrared aerial imagery to detect illicit discharges.
- Development of an interactive database of water quality data collected by volunteer water quality monitoring groups in Tompkins County.
- Distribution of a survey to water purveyors to identify what they need to better protect drinking water supplies in Tompkins County.
- Publication and distribution of two pamphlets: one that highlights the differences between municipal watercraft laws and one that identifies recreational paddling opportunities in the southern end of Cayuga Lake.