

One of the greatest values of the Plan is that it provides a framework for voluntary partnerships and collaboration.

# introduction

## THE VALUE OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

When we think of places we have visited or lived, some stand out as models of natural beauty and human comfort, supported by thriving local economies. These communities do not grow by accident or without public debate and agreed-upon guidelines. Collaborative planning processes and comprehensive plans are the building blocks of such great communities.

Planning helps maintain and promote livable, vital communities. Local municipalities play a key role by developing and implementing comprehensive plans to reflect their own goals and support their own land use regulations. The County Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity to look beyond municipal borders and create a shared community vision.

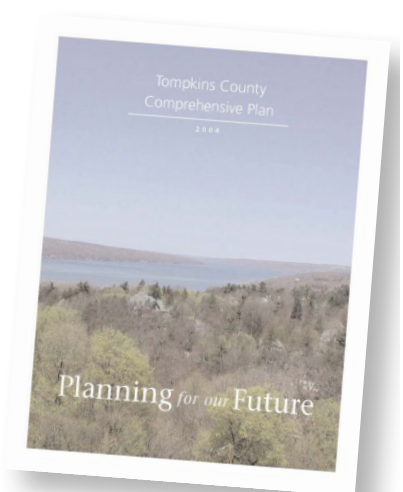
One of the duties of the Planning Department, according to the County Charter, is to prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of the county, including those topics authorized by New York State Law, which deal with “the protection, enhancement, orderly growth and development of the county.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the Plan focuses on the physical and natural environment and not on human-services concerns. The Comprehensive Plan was initiated using a 20-year horizon to determine what issues need to be addressed, and will be monitored annually, updated as necessary, and formally reviewed every five years in accordance with the County Charter.

The content of the Plan was developed from issues citizens identified as critical. It describes existing conditions and identifies issues and opportunities that can inform decision-makers at all levels of government, as well as individuals, businesses, educational institutions, and not-for-profit organizations as they plan for the future of Tompkins County.

The Plan recognizes that in many instances County government has a limited role to play in addressing a particular issue. Regulation of land use in New York State lies with cities, towns and villages. In some cases such local regulation is key to solving county-wide problems and in those instances the County may encourage local action. More often the plan suggests voluntary actions often involving public-private partnerships and collaboration between levels of government. One of the greatest values of the Plan is that it provides a framework for encouraging such partnerships and collaboration.

## THE 2004 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Tompkins County Legislature first adopted a comprehensive plan in 2004. Entitled *Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan: Planning for our Future*, that Plan contains principles, policies, and actions to guide the County and other community members as they make decisions that influence regional development, involve inter-governmental cooperation, and affect the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities. It provides a framework to address community goals in a proactive and coordinated manner. On December 16, 2008, the Tompkins County Legislature approved an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan to address the issue of energy and greenhouse gas emissions.



When the Plan was adopted in 2004, it was envisioned to be a dynamic document with review every five years and full updates every ten. This first full update of that Comprehensive Plan adds climate adaptation, a completely new element, restructures the strong communities section by also addressing healthy communities, adds the two overarching principles of fiscal responsibility and sustainability, and updates policy statements to make them more direct. Specific action items to be initiated by County government within two years are identified in each chapter.

## TOPIC AREA STRATEGIES

Since 2004, the County has developed five strategies to supplement and expand upon the work in the Plan. Relevant chapters in this Plan incorporate many of the recommendations found in those strategies, as well as the results of projects and programs implemented in response to the strategies. The five strategies are:

**HOUSING STRATEGY.** The Tompkins County Legislature endorsed the *Housing Strategy for Tompkins County* in 2007. This strategy includes recommendations on how to achieve the housing growth identified in the *Affordable Housing Needs Assessment* (2006). The Needs Assessment analyzed the local housing market and population trends and found

a need for 4,000 additional rental and owner-occupied units across all income levels by 2014.

**CONSERVATION STRATEGY.** The Tompkins County Legislature endorsed the *Tompkins County Conservation Strategy* in 2012. The strategy is based on the recommendations of the *Tompkins County Conservation Plan, Part I: A Strategic Approach to Natural Resource Stewardship* (2007) and of the *Tompkins County Conservation Plan, Part II: A Strategic Approach to Agricultural Resource Stewardship* (2010).

**ENERGY STRATEGY.** The Tompkins County Legislature endorsed the *Tompkins County 2020 Energy Strategy* in 2010. The Strategy outlines how the community can achieve a 20 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2008 levels by 2020, as the first step along the path to achieving the Legislature’s adopted a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80 percent by 2050.

**TOURISM STRATEGY.** In 2012, the Tompkins County Legislature accepted the *2020 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan: Inspiring Action to Support Tourism Development*, prepared by the Strategic Tourism Planning Board. This strategy advances tourism as a means of promoting economic development and enhancing quality of life.

**DEVELOPMENT FOCUS AREAS STRATEGY.** The Tompkins County Legislature endorsed *Building Vibrant Communities in Tompkins County ... a Development Focus Areas Strategy* in 2012. This strategy identifies an urban center, five established nodes, two emerging nodes, and eight rural centers as the Development Focus Areas. These areas are deemed to be well-suited to be the focal points of new development due to the existence of public services, transit, and existing development. The objective of the strategy is to have at least two-thirds of new development occur in the identified focus areas.



## LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES

The Tompkins County Charter calls for the preparation of “a comprehensive plan for the development of the County, which shall include those topics authorized by New York State General Municipal Law and determined to be important to the County.” The first step in preparing this update to the Comprehensive Plan was to determine the topics important to the community.

## Kickoff Survey

The Tompkins County Planning Advisory Board and the Tompkins County Planning Department early on identified two new elements to include in the 2014 version of the Comprehensive Plan: Community Sustainability, which considers social equity, economic vitality, and ecological stewardship in making decisions; and Climate Change Adaptation to help the community prepare for climate change impacts including increased flooding and droughts, changes to ecosystems, and impacts on agricultural crops.

In order to determine whether additional topics should be considered in the update a community survey was developed. The survey was conducted in September and October of 2013 and asked about a number of potential issues to address in the Plan:

- healthy communities
- food security
- public safety
- education economy
- creative economy
- localization
- affordable living
- community character
- planning for an aging population
- green infrastructure
- air quality
- traditional infrastructure
- recreation
- communications technology

Survey participants were also able to identify additional issues. Detailed survey results and methodologies can be found in Appendix A.

A total of 915 responses were received either on-line or via written survey. A large number of written surveys were received as part of an outreach effort to Participation in Government classes at Ithaca High School, Lansing High School, Newfield High School, and New Roots Charter School.

The Planning Advisory Board identified the issues to include in the Plan using the results of the survey and considering both the County's role in the identified issues as well the economic impacts, number of individuals impacted, and long-range vs. short-range impacts of the issues. Additional considerations included the availability of staff and other resources to address the issues.



As a result, two additional topic areas were identified for inclusion in the Plan update: affordable living and healthy and safe communities. Affordable living is addressed in several areas of the plan, including housing, transportation, and the economy. Healthy and safe communities have been addressed primarily in the Healthy Communities chapter. The proposed scope for the Plan was presented at a public meeting on November 18, 2013. The meeting provided an opportunity for Planning Department staff to ask participants for additional input on these two topics to better understand community concerns related to them.

As a result of the survey, the topics of affordable living and healthy and safe communities were included in the Plan.

## Principles and Policies

Another major public outreach effort was made in the spring of 2014 to receive input on the draft principles and policies for the Comprehensive Plan. Six meetings were held throughout the county: two in the City of Ithaca, and one each in the Village of Groton, and the hamlets of Newfield, Jacksonville, and Slaterville. The meetings focused on proposed policies, asking the public to suggest specific actions the community might take to implement those policies. Over 70 individuals attended the public meetings and additional comments were received via mail and email. Over 400 ideas and suggestions were garnered, most during the public discussions at the meetings.

## Draft Plan Review

During October 2014, the Planning Department conducted public outreach on the Draft Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan. This outreach effort included conducting six open houses around the County (Enfield, Danby, Dryden, Lansing, and two in the City of Ithaca). In addition, the

Department sent information and requests for input to a wide variety of email addresses, including those of local government officials, advisory board members, and previous commenters on the Comprehensive Plan. Information about the public meetings and the Plan was also posted to the Department's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

In addition, staff attended meetings of various groups soliciting comments and questions. These included:

- **County advisory boards:** the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the Environmental Management Council, the Planning Advisory Board, and the Water Resources Council;
- **Business and economic development groups:** the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, the TCAD Planning Committee, and the Economic Development Collaborative;
- **Groups the Department has worked with over the years on specific aspects of the plan:** Housing Strategy partners and Conservation partners;
- **Local government groups:** the Tompkins County Council of Governments and a meeting of municipal planning staffs; and
- The Department was also a featured presenter at one of the County Office for the Aging's public hearings on their annual report and strategy.

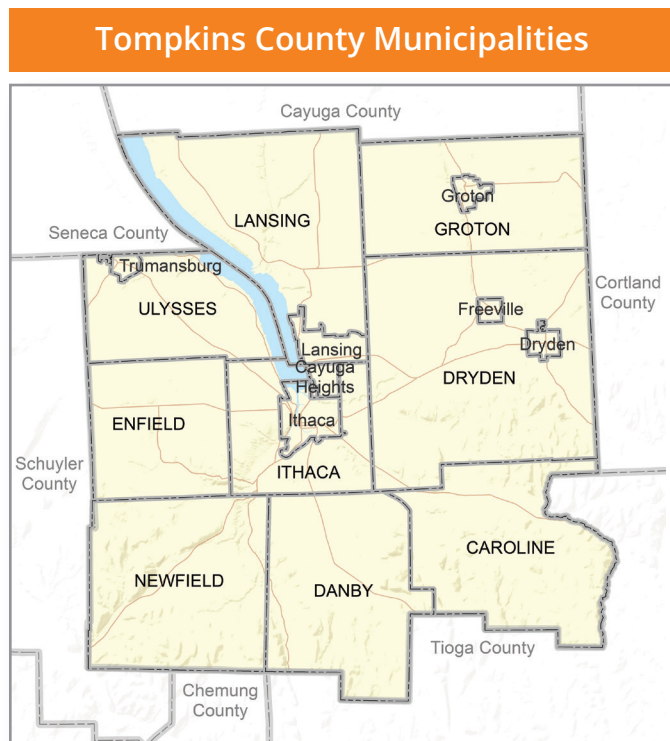
In all, the Department received over 300 comments from approximately 40 individuals and several groups. These comments addressed every individual chapter in the draft plan and, while there was some duplication among the comments, there was a great variety of suggestions made.

A copy of all the comments received, indicating the source of the comment, is included in Appendix B. This appendix includes a response to all comments. The responses include approximately 20 substantive changes to the Plan and countless clarifications, grammatical corrections, and other minor changes to the text.

## COORDINATING WITH OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

Developing the Comprehensive Plan included review of plans prepared since 2004 by local municipalities, regional planning agencies, and State agencies.

All local municipalities in Tompkins County have also prepared and adopted comprehensive plans. These plans serve multiple purposes, but among them are to act as the basis for adopting local land use regulations, including zoning, site plan review, and subdivision regulations. The authority for



Source: Tompkins County GIS, NYS Information Technology Services

Local Comprehensive Plans	
VILLAGE OF CAYUGA HEIGHTS	2014
VILLAGE OF DRYDEN	2006
VILLAGE OF FREEVILLE	2013
VILLAGE OF GROTON	2005
VILLAGE OF LANSING	2005
VILLAGE OF TRUMANSBURG	2009
TOWN OF CAROLINE	2006
TOWN OF DANBY	2011
TOWN OF DRYDEN	2005
TOWN OF ENFIELD	2001
TOWN OF GROTON	2005
TOWN OF ITHACA	2014
TOWN OF LANSING	2006
TOWN OF NEWFIELD	2013
TOWN OF ULYSSES	2009
CITY OF ITHACA	1971

Source: Tompkins County



such land use regulation in New York State lies at the town, village, and city level, and not at the County level.

Two local plans in particular, the *Tompkins County Economic Development Strategy*, prepared by Tompkins County Area Development, and the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council's *Long-Range Transportation Plan*, were actively being updated during the drafting of this Plan. Information and goals from these plans were incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan where appropriate. Other planning efforts are also reflected within the topical chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, such as the Tompkins County Workforce Strategy.

Particular attention was also paid to the recently completed *Cleaner Greener Southern Tier Regional Sustainability Plan* (2013) that addresses many of the same topics as this Comprehensive Plan. The primary focus of the *Cleaner Greener Plan* is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. That Plan envisions the Southern Tier Region of the future as a

*"...place with revitalized cities, villages and hamlets that anchor a reinvigorated urban and rural economy based on good paying jobs. A place where energy needs are increasingly supplied or reduced by conservation, efficiency, renewable technologies and smart development; where new transportation and housing options meet the needs of the region's changing population and contribute to an enhanced quality of life; and where natural systems are protected and greenhouse gas emissions substantially reduced."*

## PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is organized around twelve basic interlocking principles. These principles are in line with those found in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, adhere to the values expressed in Tompkins County's mission and vision statements (which can be found inside the back cover), and reflect the wisdom gathered from many community opinions. Policies corresponding to each of these principles are provided in each section of the Plan.

The principles include three that are overarching and reflected throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The remaining nine principles are more topical and are covered in more detail in individual chapters of the Plan. The principles are aspirational and could be considered vision statements.

## OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Tompkins County should be a place where:

- the needs of current and future generations are met without compromising the ecosystems upon which they depend.
- all levels of government work cooperatively to address regional issues.
- taxpayer dollars are invested in public infrastructure and facilities in the most efficient manner possible.

## THE ECONOMY, HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

Tompkins County should be a place where:

- economic prosperity is accessible to all.
- housing is affordable, safe, energy efficient, and appealing.
- transportation choices are efficient, affordable, and healthy for people and the environment.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

Tompkins County should be a place where:

- natural features and working rural landscapes are preserved and enhanced.
- water resources are clean, safe, and protected.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Tompkins County should be a place where:

- the energy system meets community needs without contributing additional greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.
- the entire community is prepared for the economic, environmental, and social impacts of climate change.

## NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES

Tompkins County should be a place where:

- the built environment promotes healthy, safe, and active lifestyles.
- new development is focused in compact, walkable, mixed-use communities.

# TOMPKINS COUNTY OVERVIEW

Located in the Finger Lakes Region of Upstate New York, Tompkins County contains an uncommon mixture of spectacular natural features, a vibrant urban center, internationally renowned academic institutions, and a productive and attractive working landscape. With its mixture of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes, Tompkins County offers a diverse living environment.

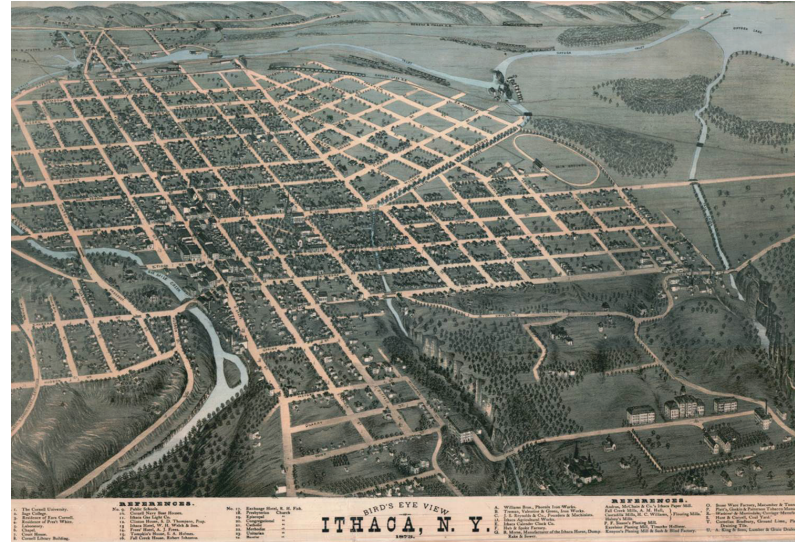
## History of Settlement

While detailed records of the community's history began with the first settlers to arrive in the wake of the American Revolution, the generations of previous residents stretch back to the Stone Age. Archeological evidence suggests the first humans to set foot in Upstate New York were nomadic hunters who thousands of years ago roamed the forests in search of game.

More recently, this area was home to the Cayuga Indians, one of the five – and later six – tribes that made up the Iroquois Confederation. The Cayugas built settlements near the sources of fresh water and cultivated produce and orchards. In 1779, General George Washington, concerned that the Iroquois nations would ally with the British, sent troops to drive the Indians west and out of the conflict raging between the colonies and Britain. Two of Washington's generals took their forces down either side of Cayuga Lake and systematically destroyed the Native American villages. The devastation was complete and, in 1789, the Cayugas were forced to give up their land.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Revolutionary War, Simeon DeWitt, the State Surveyor General and later founder of Ithaca, placed the northern portion of what became Tompkins County in the "New Military Tract," lands to be given to veterans in payment for their military service. The southern portion of what became Tompkins County was owned by a private land development company.

Post-Revolutionary War settlement began around 1792. Some new arrivals were squatters willing to take a chance on finding land; others came seeking their military allotments. By 1810, the village of Ithaca had a few houses, a sprinkling of stores and taverns, and several mills powered by the fast-moving streams. With the opening of the Ithaca-Owego Turnpike, Ithaca became a trans-shipment point for goods flowing south. Tompkins County was officially formed by



*City of Ithaca. 1873.*

Source: DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County

New York State in 1817 and named for Daniel D. Tompkins, a former New York governor and at that time Vice President of the United States.

Early settlers were predominantly American-born farmers seeking new land. Some from the east and south brought slaves with them, although their numbers were small. Slavery was abolished in New York State in 1827. Many, but not all, of the people of the county supported emancipation and some helped fugitive slaves make their way to freedom.

The opening of the Erie and Seneca Canals in the early nineteenth century kept local goods flowing to the eastern markets. Railroad development linked Tompkins County with even more destinations beginning in 1832 with the Ithaca-Owego Railroad. By 1870, the county was served by four railroads.

The establishment of Cornell University in 1865 brought stability to the county's economy. The university attracted students, faculty, and many new residents. The Ithaca Conservatory of Music (now Ithaca College) formed in downtown Ithaca in 1892. The village of Ithaca had a steady increase in population while most of the towns reached a peak population around 1850 and then dipped to half that level in the early years of the twentieth century.

From a collection of farms and mills, Tompkins County grew into an area of pleasant towns and villages connected by roads and turnpikes, ferries, and railroads. In 1900, with a population of nearly 34,000, the county entered the age of the automobile, electrification, industrialization, and world

wars. For six years, beginning in 1914, motion pictures were made in Ithaca. Significant industries established in the next few decades included the Ithaca Gun Company, the Thomas-Morse airplane company, and the Groton Iron Bridge Company. By 1960, the population had doubled to 66,164, and the local economy was booming.<sup>3</sup>

In 1959, the *Ithaca Urban Area Plan* was prepared through a joint undertaking of the City of Ithaca, Towns of Ithaca and Lansing, and the Village of Cayuga Heights. The 1959 Plan expressed deep anxiety over the increasing dispersion of the population into the more rural areas and away from the urban core. Despite raising alarms, the proposed ideas and recommendations in the 1959 Plan were not translated into concrete actions.

The population of Tompkins County grew by 13 percent in the 1960s and by a similar amount the following decade. Much of this growth was concentrated in the northeast of the Town of Ithaca and the adjacent southern border area of the Town of Lansing. State Route 13 was opened in 1963, providing rapid access to southern Lansing. The interchange of Route 13 and Triphammer Road quickly became a magnet for commercial development. Within a year after completion of the highway, three of the four corners of this interchange were occupied, by the county's first large-scale apartment complex, a shopping mall, and a motel/restaurant; other businesses and apartment complexes followed. But not all changes were happening to the

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northeast. The hospital moved to West Hill in 1958 and Ithaca College moved to South Hill in the mid-60s.

The 1970s saw substantial changes in the location of retail and consumer services. The Ithaca Commons, a pedestrian mall with shops, galleries, and restaurants, was built in 1974. East Hill Plaza and Pyramid Mall were established. In response to plans that would provide sewer service to the southern portion of the Town of Lansing, the Village of Lan-

sing was brought into being in 1974 by public demand for land use regulations. By this time, two additional large malls and apartment complexes had already been built.

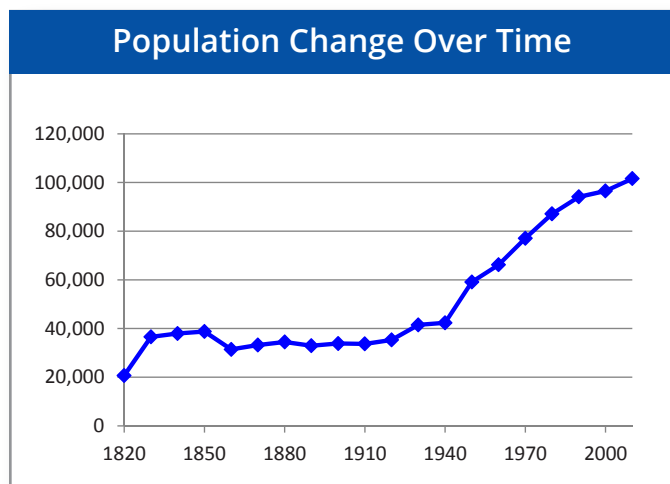
In the 1980s and 1990s, all three campuses made major investments in new buildings, new campus residential halls, and in new programs. Collegetown development increased with more retail stores and rental student housing located close to the Cornell campus. Tops and Wegmans located in Southwest Ithaca. This period of time also saw the location of the new U.S. Post Office on Warren

Road and a new airport terminal building, both in the Village of Lansing. The Cornell Business and Technology Park, while established in 1951, has grown significantly since the mid-80s. The groundbreaking EcoVillage at Ithaca on West Hill and new light industrial development on South Hill were other significant developments in these decades.

### County Demographic Profile

In 1910, the county had nearly 34,000 residents. Increases were slight through the 1940s, however over the next ten years the overall population jumped by more than 16,000 residents to 59,000, with the major gain occurring in Ithaca, reflecting the growth of Cornell University following World War II. An additional jump by 10,000 residents between 1960 and 1970 brought the population to 77,000. That decade's figures reveal a shift in living patterns with a major increase in the Town of Ithaca, especially in the northeast portion and in the areas adjacent to Cornell. From 1970 to 2010, the population of Tompkins County grew to 101,564 residents.

Nearly 30 percent of the total population is enrolled in college or graduate school, with that number increasing to 60 percent in the City of Ithaca. Approximately one in three residents of the county is under 21 years of age. On the other end of the scale, one in ten residents is at least 65 years old.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



About half the adults have at least a bachelor's degree. The census also shows that residents of Tompkins County move their households frequently. In 2012, only one-third of households lived in the same residence they inhabited in 1999. This reflects, in part, the nature of a transient university community as well as national trends.

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In the past few decades, the population of Tompkins County has grown at a modest rate of between five and ten percent, in contrast to most other Upstate New York counties, many of which have seen declining population.

Tompkins County Population Characteristics, 2010	
ALL RESIDENTS _____	101,564
GENDER:	
MALE _____	50,065 (49%)
FEMALE _____	51,533 (51%)
AGE:	
0-19 _____	25,881 (25%)
20 - 64 _____	64,754 (64%)
65 OR OLDER _____	10,929 (11%)
RACE:	
ONE RACE	
WHITE _____	83,941 (83%)
ASIAN _____	8,737 (9%)
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN _____	4,020 (4%)
OTHER _____	1,680 (2%)
TWO OR MORE RACES _____	3,286 (3%)

Source: U.S. Census, Decennial Census, 2010

## Geology and Natural Surroundings

Tompkins County is made up of approximately 305,000 acres of land. The southern area is dominated by rugged hills with the highest, Connecticut Hill, reaching over 2,000 feet. The northern portion has a more gentle terrain and generally more fertile soils. Approximately one-quarter of the land in Tompkins County is covered by high quality agricultural soils, concentrated in Ulysses, northwestern Enfield, northern Lansing, eastern Groton, and northeastern Dryden, although smaller pockets are located throughout the county.

The most dominant natural feature in Tompkins County is Cayuga Lake. Cayuga Lake is the second-largest Finger Lake and the longest, widest, and one of the deepest of the eleven Finger Lakes. Tompkins County has approximately 26 miles of shoreline on Cayuga Lake and is located in a glacial valley with steep slopes along the lakeshore punctuated by many picturesque gorges. Elevations along the gorge walls can reach 400 feet. The higher elevations of the lake's tributaries, combined with the steep gorges, produce numerous waterfalls.

The lake divides the northern portion of the county in two. Nearly four-fifths of the county's land area drains into Cayuga Lake before moving northward, ultimately to Lake Ontario. The southern fifth of the county drains southward into the Upper Susquehanna River and ultimately, Chesapeake Bay.

Cayuga Lake has served an important economic role in Tompkins County. In the nineteenth century, the lake was an important link in the transportation route connecting central and southern New York to Buffalo and points west. Today, it serves as a supply for public drinking water, a major regional recreational and tourism resource, and an important link in the waterfowl flyway of the Atlantic Coast. Two major energy facilities utilize the lake for cooling, the Cayuga Power Plant and the Cornell Lake Source Cooling heat exchange facility.

The topography of the watershed was formed as the land began uplifting approximately 200 million years ago. At that time, drainage flowed to the south, through the Susquehanna River system. During the Ice Age, two glacial events produced the deep gorges that became the Finger Lakes. The retreat of the second glacial ice sheet resulted in the reversal of drainage in the watershed from the south to the north. This glacial action resulted in the creation of the relatively flat lands in the northern portion of the county (in Ulysses, Lansing, and Groton) and the steep hills and valleys of the south (in Newfield, Danby, and Caroline).

With its varied topography and landforms, the county contains a number of interesting ecological communities, including streams, lakes, ponds, marshes, meadows, fens, forests, swamps, and cliffs. Many important natural areas have been identified with the help of Cornell University's strong natural resource programs, and a local community of outdoor enthusiasts and environmental activists. Nearly 200 such areas have been identified by the County's Envi-



Photo by TCPD

*Cayuga Lake Waterfront, Town of Ulysses*

ronmental Management Council in the *Unique Natural Areas Inventory of Tompkins County*. Tompkins County is also home to a National Natural Landmark, McLean Bog, located in the Town of Dryden.

In addition, the county has one Recreational River (a portion of Fall Creek), one Critical Environmental Area (Coy Glen), four State Parks, all or part of eight State Forests, several Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas, and a variety of lands protected by the local Finger Lakes Land Trust, Cornell University, and The Nature Conservancy.

### The Quintessential College Town

Tompkins County is home to three institutions of higher education: Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College. Total enrollment at all three colleges is nearly 30,000 students. Students account for 30 percent of the county’s total population and 60 percent of the City of Ithaca’s population.

While Tompkins County is not unique, it is dominated by higher education more than most of the country. Of the more than 3,000 counties in the U.S., only 19 have populations where college enrollees are more than one-fourth of residents. Of these 19, Tompkins is one of only six with a population greater than 100,000. The other five are:

- Clarke County, Georgia, home of The University of Georgia,
- Monroe County, Indiana, home of Indiana University,
- Douglas County, Kansas, home of the University of Kansas,
- Centre County, Pennsylvania, home of Pennsylvania State University, and
- Brazos County, Texas, home of Texas A&M University.

The colleges are a major economic sector in Tompkins County. According to the Department of Labor, “Higher education accounts for more than 30% of all jobs in Tompkins County. A recent Department of Labor analysis found that Cornell is one of the 10 largest private sector employers



in the state. The university's statutory units are also a significant source of public sector jobs in the Tompkins County.<sup>49</sup> Colleges and universities in the Southern Tier Region have an average wage of more than 20 percent above that of all industries.

The colleges play a particularly important role in maintaining the economy during hard times. When much of the U.S. and virtually all of Upstate New York were struggling through recessions in the 1980s and 2000s, Tompkins County was somewhat cushioned from these forces due to the continued employment and construction activities at all three campuses.

The colleges provide many other opportunities and benefits to the community. The rhythm and character of the county are highly influenced by their presence. Community festivals and activities are often scheduled around major campus events and breaks. Over half of the racial diversity in the county can be attributed to the student population. Students and faculty account for much of the community's diversity and influence the

The colleges define the community and help to create the dynamic environment many enjoy.

presence of cultural amenities. For a small county in rural Upstate New York, Tompkins is fortunate to have several art museums and galleries, multiple live theater companies, a variety of movie theaters, and a mix of high-quality restaurants.

The presence of the educational institutions also provides challenges to the community. For example, Tompkins County has more untaxed property value than most other upstate counties with colleges. Also, much of the student population for each of the three colleges is housed off-campus, greatly influencing the private housing market, particularly in the City and Town of Ithaca.

All in all, the colleges define the community and help to create the dynamic environment many enjoy. The colleges help to set Tompkins County apart from other upstate counties and significantly contribute to a growing and stable economy that retains younger people and keeps new people, new ideas, and new energy coming into the county. ♦

<sup>1</sup> New York State General Municipal Law, Section 239-d(o).

<sup>2</sup> Jane March Dieckmann, *A Short History of Tompkins County*

<sup>3</sup> Highlights, Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan, 1975

<sup>4</sup> NYS Department of Labor, *Labor Statistics for the Southern Tier Region*.