

foreword

THE TOMPKINS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN presents a vision for the future of the community. It is based on a set of principles that reflect the values of the community as expressed by the County Legislature they have elected. The Plan seeks to foster a place where individual rights are protected while recognizing the benefits that can accrue to community members from common actions. It largely focuses on voluntary collaboration between the public and private sectors, but also supports the role that local regulation can play in addressing key issues impacting the entire community and helping people to live together in harmony. Where regulation is required, it should balance the burdens placed on individuals and businesses with the restrictions needed to protect or otherwise benefit the larger community. In most cases the Plan seeks to expand individual choice in terms of where and how people live their lives.

The Plan includes policies that, when considered together, can help create both rural and urban communities with opportunities for people to live meaningful and rewarding lives. The Plan seeks to encourage management and preservation of our resources to the equitable benefit of current and future generations, and to provide opportunities for everyone to participate in community life.

In rural areas the Plan envisions a working landscape of farms and forests providing products and jobs that support a strong rural economy, while providing for management and protection of these resources to maintain their ability to sustain the community into the future. Rural economic activities may include businesses processing agricultural and forest products, and other small businesses appropriate to a rural setting. Opportunities will continue to emerge for a renewable energy economy that takes advantage of wind, sun, geothermal, biomass, and water resources at appropriate sites for production of energy for both on-site use and remote use. This working landscape will continue to be intertwined with a protected, and increasingly connected, network of natural areas that provide multiple benefits including clean water, outdoor recreation, and habitat for wildlife. This network includes State parks, forests, and wildlife management areas. These open lands will also include private land protected by voluntary easement and natural areas protected as privately owned and managed nature preserves. The Plan also advocates local regulations to protect stream corridors, floodplains, and aquifer recharge areas that are critical both to maintaining public and private water supplies and to protecting the public from the increasing threat of major flood events.

Employment choices for those interested in living and working in rural areas will include full- and part-time farming, independent “homestead” lifestyles, entrepreneurship in agricultural and forest product processing, and at-home workers who want to live close to nature. Rural populations will continue to be served by traditional rural centers in villages and hamlets scattered around the county. These centers will provide opportunities to live in small close-knit communities with nearby, walkable schools, commercial, and governmental services, as well as offer transit connections to the urban center of the county.

In the urban area of the county, the Plan sees an increasing population largely resulting from infill and redevelopment projects providing housing choices and locations for businesses to start and grow. New housing will allow people to live closer to employment and serve the preferences of changing demographics including an increased senior population as well as the younger workers needed to fill the jobs

provided by both an expanding economy and the retirement of baby boomers. The urban area will be walkable and well-served by a number of transportation options including transit, bike routes, trails, and car- and bike-share programs. Jobs and housing will be proximate to one another, making transportation less of a financial burden, and energy will increasingly be provided by a combination of local and regional renewable resources.

The urban area will include the lively, active downtown and vibrant waterfront district of Ithaca, neighborhood centers serving nearby residents, and regional commercial centers that serve the needs of both urban and rural populations. Many cultural amenities and entertainment options will continue to make Tompkins County a place to find big city experiences in a place with a small town feel. Job growth will be concentrated in areas with nearby housing and transportation options, and located in areas with adequate energy, water, and sewer infrastructure. Infrastructure investment will be focused in these areas to sustain a strong economy, high quality of life, and fiscally sound government. Centers of entrepreneurship and business support services will be available to spur the creation and growth of new businesses.

Many residents of the county also enjoy living in the space between rural and urban, the suburban neighborhoods that make up much of the land developed over the last 50 years. In these areas opportunities will continue for limited new development through infill and a few new higher density neighborhoods that may emerge in accordance with town plans. It will be important that these new areas develop in locations and at densities that take advantage of and support existing or easily extended infrastructure, as well as transit routes and/or trail corridors that provide transportation options. New park and rides may be instituted to provide better access to existing transit routes that serve these areas and trails may be extended to provide better connections to the urban center. Such areas should incorporate mixed uses to allow the provision of some goods and services within neighborhoods.

Rural, urban, and suburban areas will develop in ways that dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will include new and renovated housing, commercial, and industrial buildings that are much more energy efficient and incorporate both on-site and off-site renewable energy production. The transportation system will offer more choices that are less energy intensive, including modes utilizing renewable energy, whether it be human powered, electric, bio-diesel fueled, or other technologies. Renewable energy will be generated in rural, suburban, and urban areas at appropriate sites and scales that can together provide a secure energy supply for community needs.

While doing all we can to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the Plan also calls for the community to prepare for the unavoidable impacts already built in to the increased heat-trapping gases in our atmosphere. It will be increasingly important to address public health and safety, anticipated impacts on our economy and infrastructure, and particularly the potential impacts on the most vulnerable populations.

Altogether, the Plan envisions a community where rural, suburban, and urban areas not only coexist but are mutually supporting. Rural areas will gain economically from urban markets for food, wood products, and energy while having access to the amenities and services that can only be supported by a larger population. Urban areas will have access to the natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and local food and energy provided by our rural landscape. Suburban areas will be enhanced by improved transit access, trail connections, and availability of some neighborhood services while absorbing some residential growth to limit inappropriate development of rural areas. Together urban, rural, and suburban communities will offer a broad range of living and working choices to county residents. ♦