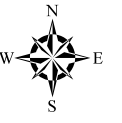


Legend

- Town of Waterloo
- Village of Waterloo
- State Route
- County Road
- Town Road
- City/Village Street
- Railroad
- Elevation: 675 Ft
- Elevation: 415 Ft

TOWN OF WATERLOO
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
USGS ELEVATIONS



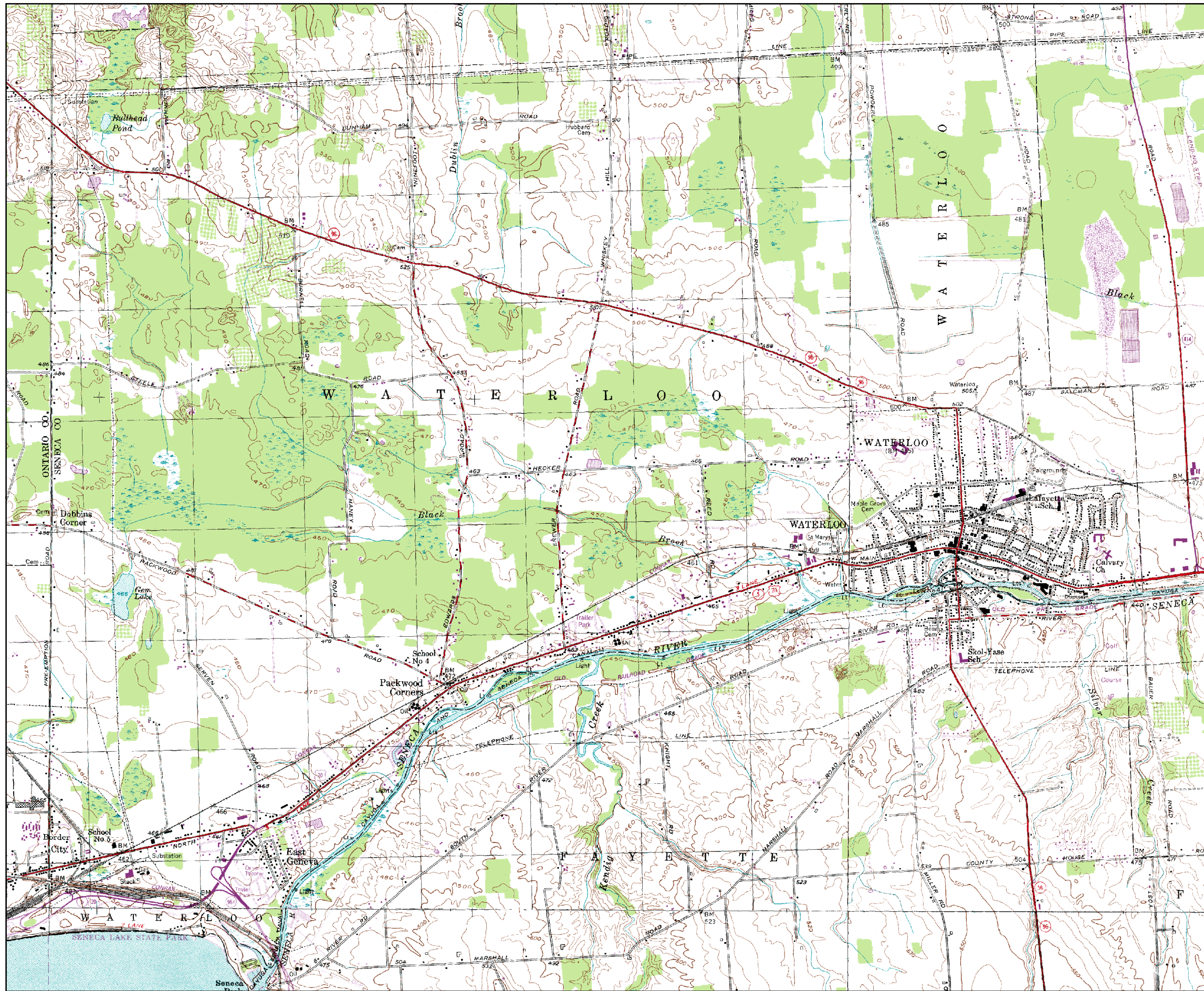
Drawn By: MRB
Scale: 1" = 3,000'
Date: APRIL 2014

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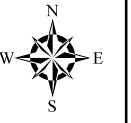
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www.mrbgroup.com

SHEET NO.
1 of 1
PROJECT NO.
2307.14002

Source: USGS National Elevation Data



TOWN OF WATERLOO
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
USGS MAP

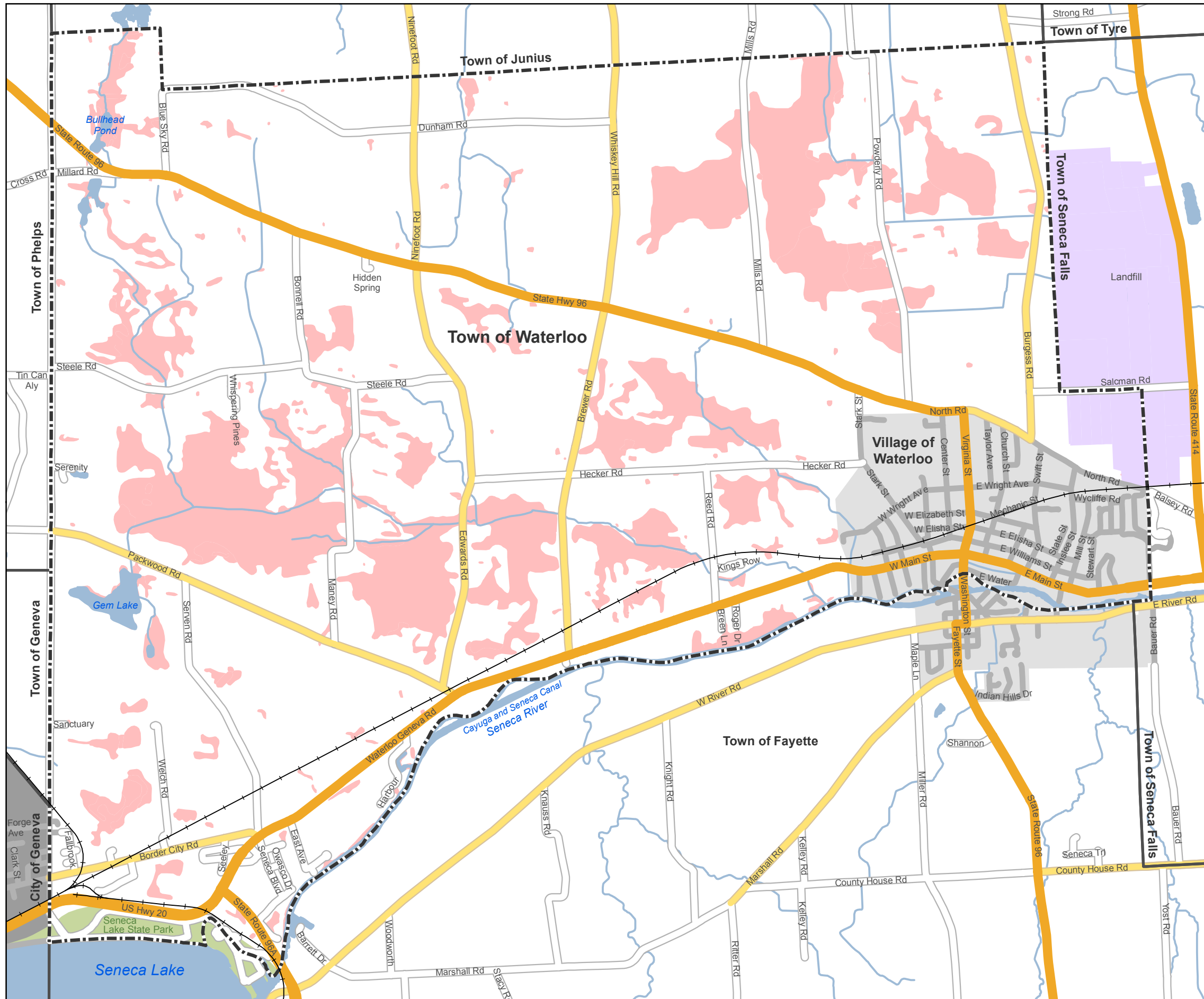


Drawn By: MRB
Scale: 1" = 3,000'
Date: APRIL 2014

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SHEET NO.
1 of 1
PROJECT NO.
2307.14002



Legend

- Town of Waterloo
- Village of Waterloo
- City of Geneva
- State Route
- County Road
- Town Road
- City/Village Street
- Railroad
- National Wetlands Inventory



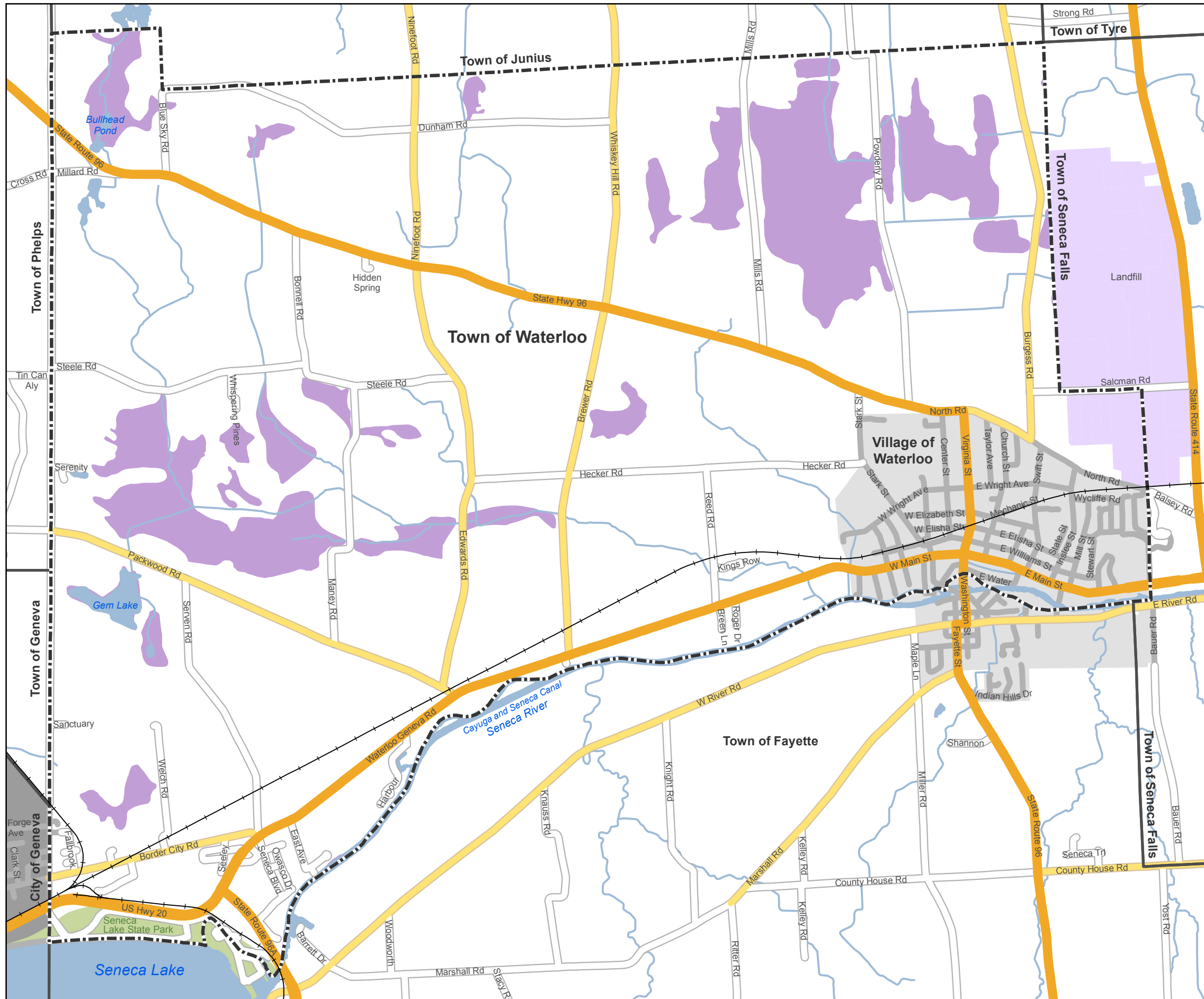
TOWN OF WATERLOO
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
NATIONAL WETLANDS INVENTORY

Drawn By: MRB
Scale: 1" = 3,000'
Date: APRIL 2014

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SHEET NO.
1 of 1
PROJECT NO.
2307.14002

Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service



- ### Legend
- Town of Waterloo
 - Village of Waterloo
 - City of Geneva
 - State Route
 - County Road
 - Town Road
 - City/Village Street
 - Railroad
 - NYS DEC Wetlands



TOWN OF WATERLOO
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
NYS DEC WETLANDS INVENTORY

Drawn By:	MIRB
Scale:	1" = 3,000'
Date:	APRIL 2014

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SHEET NO.	1 of 1
PROJECT NO.	2307.14002

Source: NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Seneca County

2011 Comprehensive Plan: Housing Plan

Adopted January 2011

SENECA COUNTY, NEW YORK

2011 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

HOUSING PLAN

Version 1.0, adopted 11 January 2011



Contents

Data Collection	p. 2
Existing Housing Stock	p. 4
Housing Affordability	p. 6
Special Needs Populations	p. 8
Policies	p. 10
Action Items	p. 11
Revision History	p. 16
Housing Data Appendix	p. 17

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Data Collection

This chapter has been developed through analysis of three sources: available public records such as the US Census 2000 and the Seneca County Office of Real Property Tax Services; from 2009 interviews and surveys with the human service and economic development agencies that serve Seneca County; and from the 2010 Seneca County Comprehensive Plan Survey that generated 267 responses from the residents of the County.

The data available to Seneca County agencies and non-profit organizations is fairly limited. US Census information is now eleven years old, and the 2006-2008 Census estimates are generally regarded as inaccurate. Real Property data is useful, is updated annually, and housing condition criteria mirrors that of the State and Federal program housing condition criteria. However, it tells of very little of the actual use of the property, and without a GIS system to help create spatial maps of the data, we are unable to easily tease out the rental properties, seasonal properties, and what – if any – housing burden exists on those living in the housing unit.

Agency Surveys. In 2009, the Seneca County Department of Planning and Community Development sent out surveys to the over thirty human services and economic development agencies serving Seneca County that had an interest in housing issues, encouraging them to describe what they perceived as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to housing in Seneca County. Eighteen agencies responded, clearly saying that all Seneca County residents needed access to safe, decent, and affordable housing, and that more financial assistance from State and Federal agencies was necessary to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

Most Important Housing Issues

Agencies	Issue
14	Opportunity To Live In Safe Decent Affordable Housing
12	Sufficient Emergency/Transitional/Permanent Housing

Source: 2009 Seneca County Housing Coalition Agency Survey

Top Weaknesses in Seneca County's Housing Situation

Agencies	Issue
5	Affordability
5	Lack of public understanding of Special Needs & LMI household housing problems
5	Lack of safe, affordable, decent housing
4	Lack of Emergency & Transitional Housing - Single/Single Family
4	Lack of multi-family Low-Moderate Income rental properties
3	Housing Maintenance/Repair needs
3	Lack of recognition that housing issues are integral to community/economic development
3	Lack of broad public support for housing plan and housing agenda

Source: 2009 Seneca County Housing Coalition Agency Survey

These responses reflect the most important issues by the responding agencies. The full list of survey responses is shown in the Appendix, Tables 13 and 14. The list of responding agencies is included as Table 15.

Resident Surveys. During the Spring of 2010, the Seneca County Department of Planning and Community Development conducted a survey of residents to understand what they thought was important for the future of the County. The Department received 267 responses from a wide range of residents from across the entire county and across the income levels. Among the questions asked in the survey, respondents were asked to rate what they felt were the key priority issues related to housing. Results were collated and analyzed to produce a priority ranking of the answers for the County as a whole, but also subdivided by region: North County (Fayette and north to Junius and Tyre), South County (Varick south to Lodi and Covert), Villages (Interlaken, Lodi, Ovid, Waterloo and Seneca Falls Villages) and Rural (all towns, excluding village responses).

2010 Comp Plan Survey Question: What is most important to our Neighborhoods

Top Four Results (of 9 Choices)	Countywide	North County	South County	Rural County	Villagers
Protecting Property Investment	1	1	1	1	3
High Neighborhood Quality Of Life	2	2	3	2	1
Properties Well Maintained	3	3	2	3	2
Opportunity To Live In Safe, Decent, Affordable Housing	4	5	5	5	4
Reducing Property Taxes	5	6	4	4	7
<i>Total Number of Responses</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Notes: Number is the ranking of that issue, based upon the respondent's selection, and the number of responses for that selection. 1,2,3... means that the #1 issue had more "most importants" than any other issue.</i>					
<i>Source: Appendix, Table 4.</i>					

Top Five Housing Issues that Government Should Concentrate On in Your Community

(18 Choices)	Countywide	North County	South County	Rural County	Villagers
Main Street Incentive Programs	1	1	2	2	1
Reducing Property Taxes	2	2	1	1	5
Ensuring Safe Decent Affordable Housing	3	3	7	3	4
Energy Efficiency Programs	4	4	3	4	2
Expand Utility Access	5	6	5	5	10
Home Repairs For Low-Moderate Income	6	8	4	6	6
Home Repair Programs for All	7	5	11	8	3
<i>Total Number of Responses</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Notes: Number is the ranking of that issue, based upon the respondent's selection, and the number of responses for that selection. 1,2,3... means that the #1 issue had more "most importants" than any other issue.</i>					
<i>Source: Appendix, Table 5.</i>					

Top Four Housing Development Strategies

	Countywide	North County	South County	Rural County	Villagers
Energy Efficiency Programs	1	1	1	1	1
Increasing Code Enforcement	2	2	2	2	3
Improve Quality and Attract Middle Income Families	3	3	4	3	2
Targeting Eyesores	4	4	3	4	4
<i>Total Number of Responses</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Notes: Number is the ranking of that issue, based upon the respondent's selection, and the number of responses for that selection. 1,2,3... means that the #1 issue had more "most important" than any other issue.</i>					
<i>Source: Appendix, Table 6.</i>					

Again, the number represents the ranking of importance of each issue, based upon the survey responses collected.

Existing Housing Stock

According to data from the Seneca County Real Property Tax Office and the 2000 U.S. Census, Seneca County has 14,262 housing units; 9,322 (65.4%) owner-occupied homes, 2,956 rental units (20.7%), and 1,984 manufactured homes (13.9%). 27.3% of Mobile Homes are located in the County's eight Manufactured Home parks, the remaining 1,443 are on their own land. Roughly 17.3% of all Seneca County housing stock is either vacant or seasonal.

Like many communities throughout Upstate New York, a large portion of Seneca County's housing stock is aging. 57% of the County's housing is over 50 years old, and 41% is over 70 years old, with the 1953 as the median year built (Table 1). Older homes require more maintenance and upkeep, usually requiring complete replacements of vital systems (roof, electrical, and furnace) every twenty-five years to keep up with Building Codes and remain safe. Older homes interiors usually used lead-based paint, which creates a hazard especially for young children, and can be very expensive to fully remove. Villages tend to have even older median age homes, particularly with rental properties.

Community	Number of Housing Units	Median Age (2010)	Median Year Built
Interlaken Village	184	108	1902
Lodi Village	112	122	1888
Ovid Village	165	99	1911
Seneca Falls Village	1884	89	1921
Waterloo Village	1440	92	1918

The degree of deferred maintenance by homeowners and landlords is difficult to measure accurately, but there is some indirect evidence that homeowners are having difficulty keeping up with repairs.

One method to "ball-park" the condition of housing stock within the County is through the visual inspections conducted by Town Assessors. Town Assessors rate homes as

"Poor", "Fair", "Good", "Very Good", and "Excellent," with Poor and Fair classifications indicating definite signs of deferred maintenance. As of Spring 2010, Town Assessors classified 15.7% of occupied homes of any type as in "Poor" or "Fair" condition. Table 3 shows the breakdown by each community.

Building Condition by Property Class

BUILDING CONDITION BY PROPERTY CLASS						Total		
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent		Poor/Fair	Good +
Single Family	91	1,099	6,945	455	9	8,599	14%	86%
Two-Family	6	101	274	12	-	393	27%	73%
Three-Family	-	16	47	2	-	65	25%	75%
Farmstead w/ 10+ Acres	18	94	421	26	1	560	20%	80%
Seasonal	12	162	579	9	-	762	23%	77%
Multiple residences	8	61	212	4	-	285	24%	76%

Source: Seneca County Real Property Tax Office, 2010

Median Age of Property Class, by Building Condition

MEDIAN AGE BY PROPERTY CLASS	Poor	Fair	Good	VG	Excl	Average
Single Family	109.0	109.0	58.0	38.0	21.0	67.0
Two-Family	109.0	113.0	109.0	89.0	0.0	105.0
Three-Family	0.0	131.5	129.0	149.0	0.0	136.5
Farmstead w/ 10+ Acres	149.0	129.0	87.0	29.5	17.0	82.3
Seasonal	63.5	69.0	59.0	48.0	0.0	59.9
Multiple residences	109.0	89.0	62.0	19.5	0.0	69.9

Source: Seneca County Real Property Tax Office, 2010

Data on the full extent of the need for home repair programs is almost non-existent. Many counties have one or more housing authorities and/or home rehabilitation/repair programs with home rehabilitation assistance waiting lists documenting the repair needs of very low and low income households. In Seneca County, the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation periodically runs New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal repair programs, and Seneca County Weatherization performs minor home repairs for senior citizens. Overall, however, the County lacks local resources to assist homeowners with home rehabilitation.

The problems associated with deferred maintenance extend beyond the homeowner. As homes decline, both the cost of repair and the likelihood of further deferral increases sharply. When housing becomes visibly dilapidated, the desirability of neighborhoods and local character is negatively impacted, and property values suffer. Severely dilapidated properties encourage further blight, perhaps ultimately ending in demolition and fragmentation of neighborhood appearance. In many communities, this exacerbates housing shortage conditions, but in Seneca County the deterioration of housing leads to unsafe conditions for their occupants as well as negatively affecting the neighborhood and character.

These issues have been clearly articulated by both the agencies of the Seneca County Housing Coalition, and by the residents who participated in the Seneca County Comprehensive Plan Survey.

Housing Affordability

In addition to the cost of deferred maintenance, housing affordability in Seneca County has two other principal dimensions – Homes Sales and Property Value, and the housing cost of living. These factors are further complicated by the three general types of housing consumer – manufactured homes, stick-built homes, rental properties, and high-end lakeshore homes.

In general, the sale prices of manufactured and stick built homes, whether existing or new is comparable to surrounding counties.

Comparative Home Values (Median Home Values).

	Seneca	Cayuga	Ontario	Wayne	Tompkins	Schuyler	Yates
2000	72,400	75,300	94,100	85,700	101,000	68,400	75,600
2008	88,800	97,300	129,300	105,300	158,500		112,900

Monthly Housing Costs for Homeowners (Incl. utilities).

	Seneca	Cayuga	Ontario	Wayne	Tompkins	Schuyler	Yates
2000 w/ Mortgage	892	921	1,076	1,020	1,094	850	831
w/ No mortgage	367	375	393	378	434	316	344
2008 w/ Mortgage	1,179	1,146	1,345	1,275	1,466	no data	1,155
w/ No mortgage	481	495	533	513	579	no data	476

Monthly Housing Costs for Renters.

	Seneca	Cayuga	Ontario	Wayne	Tompkins	Schuyler	Yates
2000	521	482	564	527	611	466	467
2008	659	623	6878	652	844		578

Comparative Housing Unit Vacancy rates (2008)

	Seneca	Cayuga	Ontario	Wayne	Tompkins	Schuyler	Yates
Home-owner vacancy	3.9%	1.9%	1.5%	1.9%	0.3%		2.7%
Rental unit vacancy	8.4%	7.2%	3.8%	4.7%	2.5%		6.3%

Home-ownership has been traditionally regarded as an effective way for Americans to build wealth. Despite the recent collapse of the national housing market, Seneca County still has one of the higher home-ownership rates in the region. While the increase in home values acts as investment for families, it inadvertently encourages property tax inflation, which places an increased burden on households with lower or fixed incomes.

Affordable Housing. Affordable housing is commonly defined as the situation where the cost of living in a home or apartment (rent, mortgage, taxes, and utilities) does not exceed 30% of the household's gross annual income. In Seneca County in 2010, roughly one-quarter of households that own their house fail to meet this condition, and roughly half of renters fail to meet this condition. The number of home-owners no longer for which home-ownership is no longer "affordable" has nearly doubled to 35% since 2000. This appears to be primarily because of the sharp increase value of homes above the median home value.

Number of Homes within Home Value Ranges 2000-2008

Home Values	2000	2008	% Change
Less than \$50,000	1,226 (18.8%)	1,375 (14.8%)	- 4.0 %
\$50,000 - \$ 99,999	3,897 (59.8%)	3,996 (42.9%)	- 16.9%
\$ 100,000 - \$ 149,999	962 (14.8%)	1,885 (20.2%)	+5.4 %
\$ 150,000	428 (6.6%)	2,066 (22.1%)	-15.5 %
<i>Median Home Value</i>	<i>\$ 72,400</i>	<i>\$ 88,880</i>	<i>+ 18.5 %</i>

Source: U.S. Census

Median Household Income (inflation-adjusted dollars)

County	2000	2008	% Change
Cayuga	\$ 37,487	\$ 48,991	+ 30.7 %
Ontario	\$ 44,579	\$ 55, 692	+ 24.9 %
Seneca	\$ 37,140	\$ 45,018	+ 21.2 %
Wayne	\$ 44,157	\$ 53,517	+ 21.2 %

Source: U.S. Census

Monthly Housing Cost for Homeowners with a Mortgage

Housing Cost Range	2000	2008	% Change
Less than \$ 700	879 (21.0%)	553 (10.2%)	- 10.8 %
\$ 700 - \$ 999	1,788 (42.9%)	1,335 (24.5%)	- 16.9 %
\$ 1,000 - \$ 1,499	1,189 (25.5%)	2,049 (37.5%)	+ 12.0 %
\$ 1,500	315 (7.6%)	1,520 (28.8%)	+ 21.2 %
<i>Median Monthly Housing Cost</i>	<i>\$ 892</i>	<i>\$ 1,179</i>	<i>+ 32.2 %</i>

Source: U.S. Census

Number of Household spending more than 35% of Income on Housing

Housing Cost Range	2000	2008	% Change
Household w/ mortgage	846 (13%)	1,442 (26.4%)	+13.4%
Household, no mortgage	no data	529 (13.7%)	
Rental Household	1,045 (32.8%)	942 (35.5%)	+ 2.7%

Source: U.S. Census

In general the impact on the renters, traditionally filling the low-moderate income population, has been unchanged. Roughly one-third experience significant housing burden. The important trend is the homeowners are shouldering a larger and larger housing burden, as home values – and thus property taxes – increase at a higher rate than income.

While these trends may force some homeowners to reassess their situations and make decisions about their housing choices, one thing that is likely to continue is deferred maintenance by the homeowner as income that would have traditionally been saved for upkeep is shifted toward housing costs.

Special Needs Populations

Special Needs is a catch-all for various subgroups within Seneca County that have special housing needs. In general, these can be grouped into individuals and families needing assisted living aid (seniors, for example), emergency housing (homeless victims of domestic violence, catastrophic events such as fires or natural disasters, and other events), transitional and supportive housing for individuals returning to independent living arrangements, and permanent supportive housing for individuals who are capable of semi-dependent living but still need supportive services (assisted senior living, or single-room occupancy (SRO) community residence for mental illness clients).

Seniors. A large portion of the County's Low-to-Moderate Income population is comprised of Seniors living on fixed incomes. Many of them no longer have a mortgage and want to stay in their homes as long as they can. While their housing costs are generally lower, health care costs consume a substantial portion of their incomes, and they are generally less mobile and less capable of maintaining their homes, either physically or financially. As a result, this deferred maintenance adds to the declining housing stock condition problem. In 2009-2010, Seneca Housing, Inc. assisted 19 seniors with home repairs funded by a New York State Housing and Community Renewal (NYS HCR) RESTORE grant, and the Seneca County Weatherization assisted 30 senior households with energy efficiency repairs. Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation also provides senior-targeted home repair programs in Seneca County, also funded by NYS HCR.

One issue looming on the horizon is the "graying of Seneca County." Survey results and anecdotal evidence asserts that there will be boom in the number the seniors living in Seneca County on fixed incomes. The Census data since 1970 certainly supports this contention as the median age has steadily increase since 1980, and following the Baby Boomer cohort, it is clear that the number of seniors will increase over the next two decades. This boom will necessarily put additional pressure not only on human services for the elderly, but also on the condition of Seneca County housing stock as senior homeowners have less resources to maintain their homes.

**Seneca County Population by Age Cohort by Decade,
including projections for 2010-2030**

Cohort Trends	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010*	2020**	2030**
Under 20	12,627	10,637	9,674	8,955	6,635	4,609	3,530
20 to 34	6,198	7,823	7,319	6,118	5,662	5,344	3,446
35 to 54	8,113	7,293	8,521	10,027	9,598	8,287	8,096
55 to 64	3,723	3,582	3,172	3,192	4,465	4,998	4,426
65 and over	4,422	4,445	4,997	5,050	5,497	7,330	9,657
Total Population	35,083	33,780	33,683	33,342	31,857	30,569	29,155

Source: U.S. Census

* *U.S. Census estimates, updated December 2010.*

** *2020 and 2030 Projections based upon cohort attrition trends over time.*

Comparative Sizes of Age Cohorts by Decade, including projections for 2010-2030

Cohort Trends	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010*	2020**	2030**
Under 20	36.0%	31.5%	28.7%	26.9%	20.8%	15.1%	12.1%
20 to 34	17.7%	23.2%	21.7%	18.3%	17.8%	17.5%	11.8%
35 to 54	23.1%	21.6%	25.3%	30.1%	30.1%	27.1%	27.8%
55 to 64	10.6%	10.6%	9.4%	9.6%	14.0%	16.4%	15.2%
65 and over	12.6%	13.2%	14.8%	15.1%	17.3%	24.0%	33.1%

Source: U.S. Census

* U.S. Census estimates, updated December 2010.

** 2020 and 2030 Projections based upon cohort attrition trends over time.

Homeless. Since 2005, Seneca County Housing Coalition has been conducting annual "point in time" homeless surveys to quantify the degree of homelessness. These surveys are conducted during the month of January, from a dozen agencies that place low income families in emergency shelter, and are done for the purpose of informing grant applications to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. These surveys show that on average, 18 individuals and 14 families are homeless each year, most of them families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number is much higher, particularly in the rural South County area where services are not accessible, and it is easier to not be counted. In many cases, Seneca County's homeless tend to move around from location to location, sometimes at a friend's home, other times at a relative's home, and often at campgrounds during the summer.

Homeless in Seneca County are overwhelmingly younger people, in the 20-44 age range with children, and some are unaccompanied youth in the late teens. Most are not continuously homeless, and a third are on some sort of public assistance, or have part-time employment. The most common causes of homelessness in Seneca County are from evictions from rental properties or from their friends and families, often accompanied by job loss. Since many rental locations require an upfront cost equivalent to two months rent (median ~ \$1,300) it is very difficult for families with children surviving only on public assistance or part-time employment to find an apartment they can afford. Most Seneca County homeless need emergency housing assistance, or assistance with the damage deposits to lease an apartment permanently.

Other Groups. Hard data on needs and uses of housing units by these groups is non-existent at this time, but anecdotal evidence from the regional and local non-profit service organizations indicate that safe, decent, and affordable housing options in emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing categories are lacking within Seneca County. Lakeview Mental Health is finishing construction of a 26-unit supportive and community apartment building on Balsley Road in Seneca Falls to replace the units they lease on Kingdom Road, and at the Mews in Seneca Falls.

In addition, anecdotal information from Seneca County Division of Human Services, Cayuga-Seneca Community Action Agency, and Catholic Charities stress the lack of safe and decent large family and moderate family apartments for very low income households.

Fair Housing. The 1968 Civil Rights Act, as amended, prohibits discriminating against any person because of his race, color, religion, gender, disability, national origin, or if the family has children in the sale of a home or rental or an apartment. With regard to State and Federal programs for that provide subsidies and grants for housing rehabilitation, renovation, or construction, strict adherence to this law is an absolute requirement.

The Seneca County Policy Manual Section 403.100 commits the County to non-discrimination and equal housing opportunities in accordance with the Fair Housing provisions within the 1968 Federal Civil Rights Act. Any housing renovation subsidy program administered by Seneca County must comply with State and Federal equal opportunity and fair housing requirements, including provisions regarding age discrimination and equal employment opportunity in accordance with 24 CFR §92.350 and 24 CFR §5.105 (a). To this end, all Seneca County housing program advertising and marketing materials must prominently display the Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity logos, all printed materials and paid advertising promoting a subsidized program must contain appropriate wording to encourage inquiries and applications from individuals regardless of race, religion, color, national origin or ethnic identification, gender, age, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or any other consideration prohibited by law or regulation.

Policies

It is the policy of Seneca County to:

- *Promote and encourage involvement in State, Federal, and local programs aimed at improving housing quality for all Seneca County residents;*
- *Promote and encourage opportunities for Seneca County residents to participate in energy efficiency improvement programs;*
- *Promote and encourage safe, decent, and affordable housing options for all Seneca County residents;*
- *Promote and encourage a wide variety of housing options and quality living experiences for all Seneca County residents.*

Action Items

Short-term activities that Seneca County government, local governments, and community partnerships can take to implement the long-term policies:

- *Develop local and/or countywide income eligible housing rehabilitation needs assessments.*

Most State and Federal housing rehabilitation programs require in-depth surveys of housing conditions within the proposed program area. In order for municipal and community non-profit organizations to compete successfully for housing rehabilitation and homeownership grant programs, detailed housing rehabilitation needs assessments are critical. Among other things, this may include parcel-level analysis of current housing stock condition, occupancy, resident income level, and local interest in participating in a project. In addition, successful projects will need to blend a variety of funding sources and leverage considerable public interest and private business support in order to be competitive. Needs assessments will need to be a variety of formal reports, generated by existing resources, and utilizing professional specialists where appropriate and practical.

In addition to housing stock assessments, local capacity assessments are also needed, not only to determine the local capacity to administrate a program, but also the capacity of local construction businesses to implement the program, as well as local capacity to provide services to disadvantaged populations that may be assisted, in order to ensure success of the program over the long term. Research and consulting with regional housing agencies for help developing "best practices" and to utilize innovative strategies is also assumed as part of the needs assessments.

- *Develop local and/or countywide energy efficiency needs assessments.*

Housing rehabilitation projects for lower income families are often followed by the unintended consequence of increased property value and therefore increased tax burden, making continued maintenance less likely. One strategy to deal with this dynamic is to find ways to make older homes more energy efficient, thereby offsetting increases in property taxes with a decrease in energy costs. In many cases, this is a net reduction in total housing costs for the property owner.

As in housing rehabilitation programs, most State and Federal energy efficiency programs require in-depth surveys of energy usage and cost within the proposed program area. In order for municipal and community non-profit organizations to compete successfully for these types of grant programs, detailed energy needs assessments are critical. Energy needs assessments will entail many of the same factors as housing needs assessments, and will also include energy usage, cost, and the development of the capacity to local businesses to provide energy efficiency products,

and in turn create the environment that will allow program success with an even greater local benefit.

- *Ensure that when Seneca County agencies provide housing subsidy assistance or place families into emergency housing, only housing units that pass the Seneca County Building Code Enforcement safety inspection are eligible for use.*

The most vulnerable segments of Seneca County's population are often low income renters being assisted by state or federal subsidies being placed into, or being provided assistance in the oldest, lowest quality apartments. Steps should be taken to improve the quality of this housing stock through a combination of housing renovation programs, and Building Code Enforcement safety inspections.

By requiring apartments to pass safety inspections prior to placement of housing subsidy assisted families, the County can ensure that these families are in safe, decent affordable housing, and quality housing stock that will continue to be maintained and available for decades to come. Code Enforcement is a vital tool in ensuring a quality community, especially when combined with local zoning enforcement and rental renovation assistance programs.

- *Develop plans to meet the housing needs of segments of the population that require supportive services, including seniors, independent (or at-risk) youth, and those at risk of homelessness, or who are homeless.*

In order to maximize the impact of the limited funds available to Seneca County Division of Human Services and the human service non-profits that serve Seneca County's special needs populations, these agencies need assistance to be more competitive in securing funding. One very helpful strategy for them will be to develop the special needs housing plans to assist them in obtaining funding, and developing projects that meet the needs of Seneca County residents and communities. Programs that balance the service needs of these populations with the needs of the communities in which they are located need to be explored, developed, and leveraged with community development programs to provide a holistic approach to this issue.

In addition, a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) should be investigated in order for the County to share information with local and regional HUD-funded service providers. In addition to providing clear and up-to-date information of this population and its use of resources, New York State will be requiring the use of State-approved HMIS systems as an eligibility requirement for future housing-related grant and subsidy programs.

- * *Develop plans and programs to meet the housing needs of people interested in higher end homes and rental units.*

In order to ensure maximum housing choice to current and future Seneca County residents, some effort must be made to determine the extent of demand for high quality, above-market-rate homes and apartments. Healthy communities have a wide range of property types, from low cost urban housing stock to high quality housing stock for residents interested in higher quality services. This issue should be investigated to determine the demand, the impact, and what strategies can be developed to promote higher end housing stock in appropriate areas of the county, from suburban-rural single family homes to high end village apartments.

- *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 and income-eligible housing programs.*

Housing issues are intricate and overlap with many facets of the private and public sectors. In many cases, government and non-profit agencies work at cross purposes when trying to solve their housing issues, and funding for community development and human services is extremely limited. The general public in particular has limited access to information on housing choices, home ownership, home renovation, rent-to-own, housing development projects, and other housing related programs. In order to better inform the public, and to inform and advise municipal and community leaders on the options and strategies available to them, as well as to provide innovative "best practices" opportunities, educational materials should be developed to help the public and community leaders more easily understand local housing issues.

These materials may be developed inhouse or with consultants. However, the Seneca County Housing Coalition represents a wealth of housing knowledge across the entire private-non-profit-public housing spectrum, and should be encouraged to assist in this project.

- * *Encourage county and regional housing coalitions to promote collaboration by all community, municipal, private business, and private non-profit actors on housing issues.*

With the limited funding available, solutions to housing issues must be holistic, cutting across many disciplines and agencies. Federal and State grant funding is becoming so competitive that regional partnerships are necessary components of successful projects. Partnerships between non-profit, private business, community groups, and municipal agencies can often mitigate unintended consequences caused by single programs.

Seneca County should continue to encourage regional partnerships such as the Seneca County Housing Coalition and Finger Lakes Housing

Consortium in order to promote healthy collaboration between the coalition members that provide services benefiting Seneca County residents and businesses. In addition, the membership of these coalitions should be analyzed for community gaps, such as lack of representation by private business, geographic location, and the faith community, and the coalitions encouraged to solicit membership from those groups.

- *Gather additional parcel-level data to fill gaps, particularly those relevant to State and Federal housing funding agencies.*

Seneca County should be proactive in collecting parcel-level data on housing and community development needs, being sensitive to individual privacy concerns, in order to best position the County, its member Towns and Villages, and non-profit agencies for competitive grants. While many of these grants are released annually, some grants are one-time opportunities that the County must be ready for in advance in order to have any chance of winning them.

This data gathering should be conducted in concert with the housing needs assessments, and can be done piecemeal, with interested municipalities or geographic focused on first. Data gathered should be collated, filtered and aggregated to preserve individual homeowner and renter privacy, and made available to the public, municipalities, agencies, and non-profits via the Seneca County website.

- ** Encourage the Seneca County Housing Coalition to develop working relationships with Cayuga, Tompkins, and Schuyler County Housing Coalitions.*

Traditionally, Seneca County agencies have not looked beyond the County line for collaborative partnerships, or for innovative programs that can be replicated locally to benefit Seneca County communities. When Seneca County agencies have looked outside for partners, they have tended to focus on Ontario, Wayne, and Yates Counties organizations. However, Seneca County communities share similar characteristics with Cayuga, Schuyler, and Tompkins Counties, and efforts should be made to develop relationships in these counties as well.

- ** Investigate use of Three Bears for potential use as local non-profit organization satellite office and community coalition meeting space.*

By the same token Seneca County municipal and not-for-profit agencies have traditionally focused their efforts on the more populous northern end of Seneca County. These agencies should be encouraged to find ways to improve their services in the southern end of Seneca County, and one strategy to do this is the development of South County satellite offices. This possibility and its feasibility should be investigated, perhaps at the Three Bears complex, or in other available space in the southern half of the County.

- * *Develop income-eligible housing fund clearinghouse to better connect the public with State and Federal subsidy programs administered by the County and by local and regional non-profit organizations.*

State and Federal housing programs in Seneca County currently are provided by several different agencies, and it's often confusing for the public and for agency staff to know which agency has funds for what type of project, and who is eligible for assistance, especially when funding is not available on a regular annual basis. This has made it very difficult for agencies to utilize grant funding efficiently and effectively, and reduces their chances for future funding. It is also very difficult for eligible residents to apply to these programs, or to be referred to them, despite the great improvements in inter-agency communication facilitated by the Seneca County Housing Coalition.

The development of an income-eligible public assistance clearinghouse connecting the public to available services, and informing the agencies with resources or referrals of what programs are operating within Seneca County and relative available funding would go a long way toward improving service to the public. In addition, such a system would be able to collate the data needed for grant-writing, and make Seneca County agencies and non-profit organizations more competitive in the future.

- * *Develop procedures to implement and update Seneca County's Fair Housing Policy.*

Seneca County complies with the Fair Housing standards of the 1968 Civil Rights Act as required by the Act and by its previous participation in Community Development Block Grant and New York State HOME grant programs, but has as yet not fully implemented its Fair Housing policy. With recent lawsuits against New York counties (Westchester County, 2008) operating HUD-funded housing programs, it would be prudent to update the Seneca County Fair Housing Policy, and develop the implementation procedures in the event Seneca County administers its own HUD-funded housing program in the future.

* Action items suggested by organizations, planning board members, agencies at the 2010 Finger Lakes Housing Summit, or that meet specific grant requirements of New York State and Federal agencies. These were not included in the original 11 October 2010 draft.

Revision History

REV	DATE	NOTES
1.00	11 JAN 2011	Adopted by resolution by the Seneca County Board of Supervisors.
0.03	5-JAN 2011	Final Draft presented to Board for adoption on January 11, 2011. Changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Added County Population Data in Seniors Section, Pg. 8-9 ○ Added Fair Housing Statements, Pg. 10 ○ Added Narratives to Action items, Pg. 13- ○ Additional Action Items marked with asterisk (*). These items suggested by comments from public, as well as from agencies from the 2010 Finger Lakes Housing Summit Break-out Session.
0.02	9-NOV 2010	Corrected minor grammar and typographical errors only.
0.01	11-OCT 2010	First Draft presented to Board of Supervisors.

Seneca County

Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan

Draft December 2021



Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan

Draft December 2021

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Contents

Acknowledgements and Funding	1
Executive Summary	3
Seneca County’s Agricultural Economy	1
Challenges Facing Agriculture in Seneca County.....	2
Vision and Goals	3
Priority Strategies	3
Introduction	5
Why This Plan?	5
The Planning Process	5
How Can This Plan be Used?.....	6
Part I Agriculture in Seneca County Today.....	7
Agricultural Activity, Farms, and Farmland.....	9
The Agricultural Economy.....	9
Agricultural Uses, Districts and Resource Maps.....	11
Conversion Pressure	14
Climate Change and Agriculture in Seneca County	17
Important Farmlands.....	19
Local Land Use Policies	22
Farm-Friendly Audit.....	22
Part II Issues and Trends Facing Agriculture	40
Issues and Trends Affecting Agriculture	42
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis	42
What Does This SWOT Tell Us?	45
Part III Vision, Goals and Strategies.....	46
Vision	47
Goals.....	48
Recommended Strategies.....	49
Implementation Plan.....	71
First Implementation Steps.....	71
Priority Actions.....	72
Part IV Appendices - Additional Information and Details of Studies.....	75
Appendices.....	79
A. Agricultural Economic Analysis	79
B. Farm Friendly Audit	93

C. Identification of Important Farmland	111
D. Local, County, State, and Federal Resources	117
E. Public Participation Details.....	127
Survey	127
Focus Groups	134
Interviews.....	140
F. Model Right to Farm Law, Disclosure Notice, Data Statement, Modified Site Plan Review.....	144
Model Right to Farm Law	144
Model Disclosure Notice.....	147
Model Agricultural Data Statement.....	147
Model Modified Site Plan Review Law.....	149
G. Analysis of Agricultural Districts in Seneca County	151
H. Strategies for Climate Resilient Farming	156

List of Tables

Table 1. Agricultural Parcels	12
Table 2. Distribution of Land Cover Type in Seneca County (2020).....	13
Table 3. Distribution of Farmland Soils in Seneca County.....	14
Table 4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in Seneca County.....	42
Table 5. Priority Strategies and Action Steps to Implement Plan.....	73

Appendix Tables

Table 1. Distribution of Seneca County Farms by Principal Product.....	81
Table 2. Livestock Operations and Inventory, Seneca County.....	82
Table 3. Selected Crops Harvested in Seneca County.....	84
Table 4. Sales by Commodity Group in Seneca County in Constant 2017 Dollars....	87
Table 5. Farm Production Expenses, Seneca County in Constant 2017 Dollars.....	89
Table 6. Net Cash Farm Income, Seneca County Farm Operations.....	89
Table 7. Characteristics of Principal Operators/Producers in Seneca County.....	90
Table 8. Economic Impact of Wine and Grape Industries in Seneca County.....	92

List of Figures

Figure 1. Farms and Farmland in Seneca County	79
Figure 2. Farms by Size Class, Seneca County	80
Figure 3. Milk Production in Seneca County	83
Figure 4. Grape Production, Seneca County	85
Figure 5. Farm Sales by Commodity Group, Seneca County, 2017	86

List of Maps (Pages 25 – 40)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Orthophoto | 10. Development Trends | 14. Water and Sewer Locations |
| 2. Agricultural Parcels | 11. Development in New York State Agricultural District #6 | 15. Priority Farmlands (General by Priority Area) |
| 3. Agricultural Assessments | 12. Development in New York State Agricultural District #8 | 16. Electrical Infrastructure and Priority Farmlands |
| 4. Land Cover | 13. Development in New York State Agricultural District #12 | 17. Priority Farmlands (By Parcel) |
| 5. New York State Agricultural Districts | | |
| 6. Farmland Soils | | |
| 7. Watersheds | | |
| 8. Steep Slopes | | |
| 9. Conservation Areas | | |

Note – Hyperlinks to various organization websites are included in the text of this Plan. That hyperlink is identified the first time the organization is referred to in the text. Website hyperlinks for partners identified in this plan to aid in implementation are also included in Part III, Implementation Plan.

Executive Summary

Plan Mission



The mission of this Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan is to provide information and strategies that can be used short and long-term to enhance the economic success of agriculture in Seneca County and preserve the land upon which it depends.

Seneca County's Agricultural Economy

Agriculture has been and continues to be a mainstay of the Seneca County economy. It is a dominant land use, covering nearly 119,000 acres – about 57% of the County's total land area. The 516 farms identified in the Census of Agriculture generate \$90.8 million per year in sales, a figure that increased 47%, adjusted for inflation, between 2002 and 2017. These revenues, in turn, support an extensive array of local suppliers and service providers, including, but not limited to machinery dealers, crop and nutrient management specialists, meat processors, veterinarians, and animal feed distributors. Additionally, about a third of the farms in Seneca County have on farm hired workers, including paid family members, who contribute to farm operations. These farms directly employ 760 people, paying \$8.1 million in annual wages.

Although the County has a variety of agricultural operations and activities, two-thirds of its farms are classified as grain and soybean producers, beef cattle farms, fruit (grapes) growers, and dairy operations. In 2017, Seneca County ranked second of all counties in New York State in the value of hogs and pigs sold; third in the sales of sheep, goats, and their products; and fifth in the sales of grains, oilseeds, and dry beans. It also ranked third in the state, after Chautauqua and Yates counties, in grape production.

Since 2002, the County has experienced an increase in the number of farms raising beef cattle, growing fruit (primarily grapes), and cultivating vegetables. In addition, more farms are selling directly to consumers. The value of agricultural products sold at such venues as farm stands and farmers' markets, in fact, increased \$1.2 million in 2012 to \$14.2 million a mere five years later.

As of August 2021, there were 52 licensed wineries, breweries, cideries, and distilleries in Seneca County, 43 of them farm-based. These businesses generate revenues through value-added production and tourism. Overall, approximately 8% of all farms in the County produce and sell value-added products, with average earnings well above statewide figures, while 5% earn income through agritourism.

A 2019 study conducted for the [New York Wine and Grape Foundation](#) estimated that the wine and grape industries in Seneca County (including wineries and vineyards, wholesalers, retail stores,

restaurants that sell wine and grape juice to consumers, and so on) directly employ nearly 3,000 people and generate more than \$271.4 million economic activity in Seneca County.

Challenges Facing Agriculture in Seneca County

Although agriculture in Seneca County remains strong, some challenges do exist. The purpose of this Plan is to identify those challenges and find ways to address them. Some challenges facing the County are grounded in state and national agricultural policy and will be difficult for one county alone to overcome. Others are local issues that can be addressed by programs, projects, and policies at the county-level. Challenges facing agriculture in Seneca County include:

- Aging of farmers and lack of succession planning for farm transition. There is difficulty in attracting young and new farmers. Competition for farmland raises property prices, and also makes it harder for the next generation to farm in the County. Lack of conserved farmlands increases risk for increased development should conditions for agriculture change.
- Development pressure in the form of widespread, low-density development, lakefront property development, as well as solar development, mining, and expansion of infrastructure into farmed areas can reduce farmland and make it harder to farm.
- Loss of farmland to non-farm uses.
- High cost of farming, especially due to high property taxes and land prices coupled with low profitability is an economic challenge. In constant 2017 dollars, farm production expenses increased by 13.4% between 2002 and 2017. Significant increases occurred in both the total and the average (per-farm) cost of custom work and custom hauling; gasoline, fuels, and oils; seed, plants, vines, and trees; and agricultural chemicals.
- A shortage of skilled labor, due to federal policies and the limited availability of young people interested in farming.
- Lack of cold storage facilities and processing capacity. Seneca County is primarily a net exporter of ag products; most processing is done elsewhere.
- Regulatory challenges, land use regulations that are not farm-friendly or don't adequately address agricultural needs, and other constraints placed on farms at the local, State and Federal levels.
- Limited awareness of agriculture and agricultural practices among the general public, and the need for more effective communication networks and connections among farmers.
- Lack of public water and sewer, which limits the potential for new agri-businesses and farm opportunities, though the expansion of infrastructure can also induce non-farm growth.
- Lack of shoulder season venues and events to enhance agritourism opportunities and increase tourism in general.
- Limited marketing of agricultural products in Seneca County.
- Increasing competition among agritourism venues, especially wineries.
- Nuisance complaints about farming from non-farmers.
- Concerns about farm runoff impacting lake water quality.

Vision and Goals

This Plan establishes a vision for Seneca County agriculture as an industry that will continue to play a critical role as the predominant economic driver and land use contributing to Seneca’s rural character and quality of life. There will be a vibrant mix of small, medium, and large farms and a new generation of farmers. More opportunities for value-added production, increased direct sales to consumers, year-round agritourism, and more effective marketing of products to residents and visitors will help realize that vision. In the future, Seneca County farms will have efficient access to farm supplies, equipment, technical expertise, training, and support services as well as expanded processing and distribution facilities.

Members of the farm community will effectively collaborate with each other and with wineries, restaurants, retail stores, and schools to increase sales of agricultural products. Our farm-related agencies and organizations will work together to implement priority agricultural enhancement and farmland protection programs. We will use agricultural practices that promote environmental sustainability, address climate change and water quality issues and continue to demonstrate that Seneca County farmers are exemplary stewards of the land and water resources.

In order to realize this vision, the following goals are established:

1. Expand opportunities for agritourism and agriculture-related events.
2. Enhance the viability and diversity of agriculture, focusing on both niche and traditional farms, new crop opportunities, direct and wholesale sales, and value-added processing.
3. Increase processing and distribution capacity to add value to local agricultural products.
4. Increase markets for, and visibility of, local food and agricultural products.
5. Promote recognition, awareness, and support of the critical role that agriculture plays in the County with the non-farm community.
6. Expand funding opportunities for agencies and organizations that support agriculture allowing for the implementation of necessary farm and farmland enhancement strategies.
7. Expand economic and educational opportunities to engage skilled labor and new and young farmers in the County.
8. Protect farmland utilizing local, state, and national programs as applicable and become available.
9. Reduce adverse farm/non-farm interactions.
10. Promote environmental sustainability of farms, especially related to solar development, climate change and water quality.
11. Promote farm-friendly local regulations and smart growth initiatives.

Priority Strategies

The agricultural enhancement ‘toolbox’ for Seneca County includes over 40 different strategies identified through the planning process for this Plan. Some are long-term actions that will take time and funding to implement. Others are able to be implemented in the short-term. Based on data analysis, public input, and feedback from the Seneca County Agricultural Enhancement Board, 12 strategies were

determined to be priorities and should be among the first to be implemented. This Plan is itself evidence of Seneca County's commitment to ensure for the continuation of the critical economic, social, and environmental roles that agriculture plays in our County. These actions will, when implemented, increase the viability of agriculture as a key economic contributor in the County. In doing so, we will also enhance our communities, improve our quality of life, celebrate the abundance of Seneca County's natural resources, and ensure that this legacy is passed down to future generations.

Priority strategies, in no particular order, are:

Agricultural Processing and Distribution

- Consider developing needed agricultural processing facilities including a cold storage facility with freezer/locker space (or shared use facility for cold storage, freezer, and flash freeze equipment) and additional meat processing facility.

Marketing and Promotion

- Continue to build connections between farms and wineries, and farms and restaurants, to improve marketing of local agricultural products.
- Develop more agriculture-related events to increase farm produce sales and ag-awareness.
- Create an online map and guide of local farms offering direct sales, wineries, and agritourism opportunities.

Local Regulations and Smart Growth

- Establish a Seneca County policy on large-scale commercial solar development and agriculture.
- Address development pressure on farms through infrastructure planning.
- Address development pressure on farms through land use planning.
- Enhance knowledge about the importance of agriculture during local zoning and land use project review processes to minimize adverse impacts of development on farms.

Support for Farmers/Producers

- Attract new and young farmers and support efforts to develop the next generation of farmers in Seneca County.
- Support and expand agricultural education in local school districts and with local youth.

Public Awareness

- Enhance the public's perception and understanding of the role agriculture plays in Seneca County.

Farmland Protection and Environmental Sustainability

- Continue to promote sustainable agricultural techniques designed to address climate resiliency of County farms.

In addition to these priorities, there are many other strategies recommended to address short and long-term needs to enhance agriculture in Seneca County.

Introduction

Why This Plan?

Seneca County has a long history of agriculture. It has shaped and continues to shape the local economy, landscape, environment, and quality of life. Farms and vineyards cover 119,000 acres of land, or about 57% of the County’s land base. Due to its location between Cayuga and Seneca Lakes, its natural resources, and high-quality soils, agriculture in the County is vital and strong, contributing nearly \$91 million annually to the local economy through the sale of grains and soybeans, milk from cows, fruits and vegetables, beef, and other products. Moreover, farm sales have been increasing; in constant 2017 dollars (i.e., adjusted for inflation), the sale of agricultural products grew 47% between 2002 and 2017. The wine and grape industries in Seneca County also have a significant impact, generating an estimated \$271.4 million in economic activity, much of it through tourism.

While many of these indicators are positive, the agricultural sector is also under pressure from both internal and external factors. The County continues to lose farmland, has had increased and dispersed housing development, and has an aging farmer population. Farmers face a number of challenges, especially those related to labor, production costs, climate change impacts, and non-farm development activities.

The goal of this plan is to identify short and long-term actions that can be taken over the next decade to address those challenges and to ensure agriculture remains both economically vital and a primary land use in the County that contributes the unique nature and quality of life in the “Land Between the Lakes.”

This Plan offers a variety of actions that can be taken over the next five to ten years to position the County in the best possible way to ensure a continued vibrant agricultural economy. It is important to note that this Plan is not regulatory in nature. Rather, it offers recommendations on how to promote more economic development, promote protection of farmland, minimize adverse effects of non-farm uses on farms, and ensure that collaboration and coordination provides for the most efficient agricultural programming.

The Planning Process

This Plan, developed between June 2020 and December 2021, was led by the Seneca County Agricultural Enhancement Board (AEB) and by county agency staff from the [County Planning Office](#), [Seneca County SWCD](#), [Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension](#), and project consultants. It is based on input from the AEB and from almost 250 people who participated in three focus groups, four surveys, and eleven interviews (see Appendix G for details). Funded by Seneca County and a grant from the [New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets](#), the planning process included the following steps:

- Regular meetings between the Steering Committee and consultants
- Quarterly meetings with the AEB

- Collection of federal Agricultural Census Data and other economic information
- Collection of data and mapping of all major ag-related resource data.
- Implementation and analysis of a survey of farmers, farmland owners, agri-businesses, and the general public
- Completion of 11 interviews of AEB identified stakeholders
- Completion of six Farm Friendly Audits to evaluate local land use regulations
- Carried out three Focus Groups (agricultural marketing, agri-tourism, and local challenges)
- Identified Important Farmland in Seneca County
- Evaluated all information to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing agriculture in Seneca County
- Completed a data analysis to assist the County in their NYS Agricultural District Review process (see Appendix G for details on this effort)
- Developed vision and goal statements
- Defined strategies and actions designed to enhance agriculture in the County over time
- Presented Draft Plan to the Seneca County Board of Supervisors for their adoption
- Held a public hearing
- Developed this Final Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan

How Can This Plan be Used?

The actions recommended in this Plan aim to solidify and grow the agricultural economy and to articulate priority projects. Needed programs are identified and should be implemented through the coordination of the farm community, agricultural service agencies, other organizations, and the towns, County and New York State governments. While much of the agricultural story in Seneca County remains extremely vital and strong, it will take all parties to work together to ensure it stays that way.

This Plan includes many pieces that will be useful to many individuals and organizations. For example:

- Detailed maps can be used by County staff along with Seneca County Soil and Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, [Farm Bureau](#), watershed organizations, farmers, and towns to understand where farming is taking place and how it relates to other land use activities going on in the County. Towns can use the maps in their own comprehensive planning and development of local policies.
- The Farm Friendly Audit can be used by towns to help enhance their plans, zoning, and subdivision laws to ensure barriers to agricultural land uses are minimized. Towns currently without zoning can use both the maps and the farm friendly audit to help learn about regulatory techniques that can allow for both development and strong agriculture.
- The Vision and Goals can be used by all as guideposts in decision-making.
- Strategies outline actions that should be implemented and offer details on what, how, and who should be involved to successfully launch or expand a program.

- The agricultural economic data and analysis presented can be used for business planning, grant writing, and economic development.
- Important farmlands are identified and can be used in town and county planning decision-making to help minimize conversion of critical farmland. Farmers who wish to protect their land through conservation easements through the [New York State Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program](#) can use this Plan in support of their grant application.
- Local, State, and federal resources including up-to-date website links can help all navigate through the many organizations, agencies, programs, and other resources available to farmers. This resource guide can be an important tool for existing agencies and organizations to refer to.
- A model right to farm law is presented to help those communities who wish to adopt such a local law to enhance agriculture.

Moving forward, the Seneca County Agricultural Enhancement Board will take primary leadership to coordinate and implement the Plan. Agencies, especially the Seneca County SWCD, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and County Planning will use it as a guidepost to develop new projects, trainings, and programs, and to seek funding needed to support those actions. Ongoing support through staff, funding, and volunteer involvement are all going to be necessary components.



Part I

Agriculture in Seneca County Today

Agricultural Activity, Farms, and Farmland

The Agricultural Economy

This section provides a bulleted summary of the agricultural sector in Seneca County based on the detailed agricultural profile presented as Appendix A. Overall, the agricultural economy is strong; Seneca County ranks among the top counties in New York State in the production or sales of some commodities. In large part, commodity crops (e.g., grains, corn, soybeans) dominate the landscape, but there is a diversity of activities including grape growing and wine production, beef and livestock farming, vegetable growing, dairy operations, and smaller niche operations.

- Agriculture is the dominant land use in the County. Based on the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Seneca County has 516 farms covering nearly 119,000 acres of land, or about 57% of the County's land base.
- Commodity farming is the major agricultural activity. Although the County has a variety of agricultural operations and activities, two-thirds of the farms are classified as grain and soybean producers, beef cattle farms, fruit growers, and dairy operations.
- Approximately 24,000 acres of soybeans were harvested in Seneca County in 2017; this was the third-largest soybean harvest in the state after Cayuga and Ontario counties. Since 2002, the production of corn for grain and soybeans in Seneca County has increased dramatically in response to growing demand, while wheat, oat, and hay production has declined.
- According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, farms in Seneca County are bigger, on average, than the typical New York farm. The average farm in Seneca County is 230 acres in size, larger than the New York State average of 205 acres. A closer look at the distribution of farms by size, however, reveals that 55% of the farms in the County are less than 100 acres. In contrast, only 18 farms (3.5%) are at least 1,000 acres.
- Moreover, the number of small farms in the County has increased. Over the last fifteen years, Seneca County has experienced a 38% rise in the number of farms with less than 100 acres, coupled with an 18% *decrease* in the number of farms comprised of 500 acres or more. Some of this increase can be attributed to expansion of Amish and Mennonite farmers in the area.
- Beef farming has increased. Seneca County has seen an increase in the number of farms raising beef cattle. Beef cows, at roughly 2,200 head, are up 40% from 2002, but beef production in the County is generally small in scale. Aside from one beef farm with over 500 head of cattle and three farms with 100 to 199, the majority of beef producers have fewer than 50 cows.
- Most dairy farms in Seneca County are small: 51% milk fewer than 50 cows, while 32% milk 50 to 99 cows. The average dairy farm in Seneca County has half as many animals (64) as the

average dairy farm statewide (135). Only four dairy producers have between 200 and 499 cows (classified as Concentrated Agricultural Feed Operation or CAFO); there are no larger dairy operations like those in Cayuga County.

- Dairy production per cow and per farm is increasing. Based on data from the Federal Milk Marketing administrator, average milk production per farm in Seneca County increased from 1.2 million pounds in 2008 to 1.6 million pounds in 2019. Nationally, annual milk yields per cow have been steadily increasing due to improvements in genetics, nutrition, and herd management, as well as the adoption of new technologies. Milk production per farm is not as high in Seneca County, however, as in other counties in the Finger Lakes region and upstate New York.
- Vegetable production has increased. Between 2002 and 2017, the number of farms growing vegetables for harvest doubled, from 28 to 57. Nearly all of the vegetables grown in Seneca County are for fresh markets as opposed to processing.
- Seneca County ranks third in the state in grape production after Chautauqua and Yates counties. Grapes are an important agricultural product given the large number of wineries in the Finger Lakes region. More than 70% of Seneca County farms that identify fruit as their principal product grow grapes.
- Agricultural sales contribute greatly to the local economy. The sale of Seneca County agricultural products generates nearly \$91 million annually. Three commodity groups – grains, oilseeds, and dry beans; milk from cows; and fruits and berries – are responsible for more than three-quarters of total sales.
- Seneca County was second in the state, after Allegany County, in the value of hogs and pigs sold; third in the sales of sheep, goats, and their products; and fifth in the sales of grain, oilseeds, and dry beans.
- Seneca County ranked #23 of all New York counties in terms of total farm sales in 2017, but this is down from #19 in 2012.
- Farms in Seneca County use various methods to market and sell their products. In 2017:
 - 18% of farms sold directly to consumers at farm stands and farmers’ markets, with sales reaching \$14.2 million;
 - 8% produced and sold value-added products, earning \$31.8 million;
 - 8% produced and sold organic products, with \$4.6 million in sales;
 - 7% sold directly to retail markets and institutions, earning \$6.4 million; and
 - 5% earned income through agri-tourism, with total sales of nearly \$8 million.

Sales generated by each of these activities have increased dramatically since 2012.

- Nearly 60% of principal farm producers/operators in Seneca County identify themselves as full-time farmers. This proportion is higher than in neighboring counties, including Cayuga and Tompkins. 45, or 6.5% of the principal farm operators in Seneca County have served (or currently serve) on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- Farmers are aging. The average age of principal producers/operators in Seneca County has increased over the last fifteen years, from 50.9 to 54.2. Nevertheless, the County has experienced an increase in both the number and share of principal farm operators who are under age 35. This may reflect the presence of young Amish and Mennonite farmers.
- Farms contribute to employment levels in the County and have a large multiplier effect. About a third of all farms in Seneca County have hired workers who contribute to farm operations. These 173 farms provided employment for 760 workers in 2017, with an annual payroll of \$8.1 million.
- In Seneca County, 157 farms covering 14,812 acres were identified in the Census as having principal operators who were new and beginning producers. This represents about 12% of farmland. New and beginning producers are defined as producers operating a farm for 10 years or less.
- Unfortunately, since 2002, the County has experienced a net loss of approximately 8,700 acres (a 6.8% decline) of farmland. The data does not indicate what accounts for this decline.

Agricultural Uses, Districts and Resource Maps

The breadth of agricultural activities in Seneca County is illustrated on a series of maps described in this section. These maps were created to identify the location and type of agricultural uses, the three New York State Agricultural Districts found in the County, and several natural resources such as farmland soils, water features, and steep slopes that farms depend on or are affected by. See pages 24-39 for these maps.

Ortho Photo (Map 1) – This map shows the entire county from 2019 information. It offers a ‘birds-eye’ view of the County along with showing the lakes, major roads, and the overall landscape pattern. It clearly shows woodland patches (darkest green color), and the broad expanse of farm fields found throughout the County.

Agricultural Parcels (Map 2) – This map also shows where agriculture is taking place but is based on information collected from real property tax data. It clearly shows the broad extent and types of agriculture in Seneca County. Field crops and “agricultural vacant land” parcels, as identified by local assessors, dominate the landscape and account for 87% of parcels classified as agricultural use. While the assessor classifies parcels as vacant, they are in active agricultural use. There are, however, parcels classified as abandoned agricultural parcels, which are no longer in production and are often now scrubland. The map shows a concentration of parcels coded as residential parcels with agricultural

activities in the southern portion of the County in the towns of Covert and Interlaken. In the southern portion of the county there are several parcels owned by the federal government and used for grazing. There are also many parcels, spread throughout the county, which are not coded as having an agricultural use, but were determined to have secondary (or primary in the case of unclassified parcels) agricultural use(s) as identified by imagery analysis. The following table provides additional detail on the distribution of agricultural parcels in the county.

Table 1. Agricultural Parcels		
	Number of Parcels	Acres
Active Parcels (100 class codes)	1,747	115,181
Residential with Agricultural Use	72	2,983
Agricultural Related Business	10	274
Abandoned Agriculture	65	1,419
Unclassified Agriculture or Other Primary Use with Secondary Agriculture	692	23,728
Federal Grazing Lands	30	3,636
Total	2,616	147,221
<i>Source: Seneca County Real Property 2020 and Imagery Analysis 2019</i>		

Agricultural Assessments (Map 3) - New York State Agriculture and Markets Law 25-aa allows for reduced property taxes for land in agricultural production. It does so by limiting the property assessment of certain farmlands to its prescribed agricultural assessment use. Land must meet eligibility requirements and owners must apply for this program. Lands both inside and outside a certified NYS Agricultural District may qualify for an agricultural assessment. Land that is rented to a farmer is also eligible, and therefore parcels that are not classified as agricultural as primary use may still receive an agricultural assessment as can be seen on the map.

Agricultural assessments are limited to land used in agricultural production, defined to include cropland, pasture, orchards, vineyards, sugarbush, support land, and crop acreage either set aside or retired under Federal supply management or soil conservation programs. Up to 50 acres of farm woodland is eligible for an agricultural assessment per eligible tax parcel. Land and water used for aquacultural production are eligible, as is land under a structure within which crops, livestock or livestock products are produced. Land visibly associated with the owner's residence is ineligible. Map 3 is useful to show this degree of commitment to agriculture on the part of the landowner.

Land Cover (Map 4) – Land cover information comes from satellite imagery. This map is a useful tool to help identify different kinds of vegetation categories (woodland, crops, etc.) and helps illustrate areas of development. Like Maps 1 and 2, this map further reinforces the wide extent of agriculture that is taking

place in the County. Most of the County is shown having crops, with a minimal amount of forest land in Seneca County, mostly along steep slopes along Seneca and Cayuga Lakes or wetland areas. Forests and development dominate the lake shores in the county.

Table 2. Distribution of Land Cover Type in Seneca County (2020)		
	Acres	Percent of County
Crops	118,338	47%
Trees	61,500	25%
Water	42,140	17%
Built Areas	16,637	7%
Grass	7,672	3%
Scrub/Shrub	2,503	1%
Flooded Vegetation	1,009	<1%
Bare Ground	31	<1%
<i>Source: Impact Observatory for Esri 2021</i>		

New York State Agricultural Districts 6, 8 and 12 (Map 5) – There are three New York State Certified Agricultural Districts in Seneca County. These districts are formed under the authority of New York State Agriculture and Markets Law 25-aa and offer farmland owners a variety of benefits including protection from restrictive local land use regulations.

The largest NYS Agricultural District is District 12, located in the southern portion of the County, followed by District 8 in the mid-section (Varick to just south of Waterloo and Seneca Falls) and agricultural District 6 is found north of Route 414.

There are 94 parcels (10,540 acres) of farmland that are not in any of the three districts (approximately half of the acreage is part of the former Seneca Army Depot). And within each district, a number of parcels are not farmed as follows:

- 1,111 in District 6 are not farmed
- 1,103 in District 8 are not farmed
- 2,235 in District 12 are not farmed

For the purpose of this map, Agricultural Parcels refers to both primary active agricultural parcels as identified by the local assessor as being fully used for farm activities as well as secondary agricultural parcels which are those identified by the local assessor as having other uses (usually residential) as the

primary use, but also have agriculture on part of the land. See Map 2 for a detailed breakdown of the parcel types.

Farmland Soils (Map 6) – Prime farmland soils and soils of statewide importance are shown on Map 6 and are critical to farming. The extensive number of prime soil acres found in the County contributes to the ongoing success of farming here and Map 6 illustrates that the majority of land in Seneca County is identified as being prime farmland soils. Soils of statewide importance are numerous, but less dominant than prime soils and are shown interspersed throughout the County.

Table 3. Distribution of Farmland Soils in Seneca County		
	Acres	Percent of County
Prime Farmland Soil	92,695	36%
Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance	37,129	15%
Prime Farmland if Drained	50,243	20%
<i>Source: USDA NRCS</i>		

Watersheds (Map 7) – There are three watersheds in Seneca County. About one-third of the County drains to Seneca Lake, one-third to Cayuga Lake, and one-third drains to the Seneca River. This map also shows the location of agricultural parcels within each watershed.

Steep Slopes (Map 8) – A good portion of Seneca County is mostly flat to having minor slopes (<5%). From the area around the Thruway north to the County line, and also in the southern portion, the topography does vary more with slopes 15-25%. Ovid, Interlaken, Covert, and Lodi have a much more varied terrain and shorelines along both Seneca and Cayuga Lakes here are among the steepest lands in the County.

Conservation Areas (Map 9) – There are approximately 23,000 acres of land permanently conserved in Seneca County as shown on Map 9. Almost all are government held lands or easements. The three largest areas include the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Sampson State Park, and the Finger Lakes National Forest. There are approximately 1,000 acres of land protected via 30 easements.

Conversion Pressure

Agricultural success is dependent on the availability of land, processors, suppliers, and agricultural services, among other features. When there is a concentration of farmers near each other, it generates an economy of scale that allows them to share and access services more economically than isolated producers. As an agricultural community shrinks, there is potential that there will not be enough production to support the related services that currently exist, and benefits from economies of scale

may be lost. Without that supportive infrastructure, the agricultural industry in an area may not be able to sustain itself.

This raises the concept of ‘critical mass’ in agriculture – meaning that a certain concentration of farms is needed to make them all sustainable. As farms are converted to non-farm uses, the critical mass of farms is diminished. Economic success of our farms will not be realized if the County loses its critical mass of farms.

Seneca County has an abundance of highly productive farmland that largely has maintained a high level of agricultural use. However, some farmland has been lost over the years as it has been converted to residential and commercial uses in places. In Seneca County, there is not a lot of vacant agricultural land and there is competition among farmers or farmland when any become available on the market.

Unfortunately, even Seneca County has lost farmland over the years, and non-farm residential uses are widespread and mixed in with agricultural land uses. Compared to 2002, the County has lost 8,700 acres farmland even though the number of farms has increased. While there are many reasons why this loss occurred, it has long-term implications especially in light of statistics showing that the number of housing units built in the County has exceeded population growth. There remains a need to prevent a further decline in farmland and this is an important piece of this Plan.

Conversion pressure on farmland can be measured in several direct and indirect ways:

- Population Change – Where and what level of change? In Seneca County, population has actually decreased over the past two decades.
- Housing Change – Where and how much additional housing is being built? In Seneca County, housing has increased above the rate of population growth; moreover, it is not concentrated in traditional village and hamlet locations but is spread out along all roads.
- Critical Mass of Farmland – Where is the critical mass of priority farmland in Seneca County and are these areas under conversion pressure? Maps 10-13 illustrate where conversion has taken place.

According to U.S. Census data, Seneca County’s population has actually declined since 2010 and it is projected to continue declining through 2040 by about 8%¹. In 2000, there were 34,167 people living in the County. In 2010, the county population was up to 35,251, and in 2019, it was estimated to be down back to levels seen in 2000 (34,016). Preliminary results from the 2020 U.S. Census shows a further decline in the population to 33,824 residents, a decrease of about 343(1%) and it is now below the level seen in 2000.

At the same time that population has decreased, the number of housing units in the County has increased. In 2000 there were 14,794 housing units, in 2010 there were 16,043 units, and in 2019, 16,361 units were estimated. This is an increase of 1,567 units, or about a 10.5% increase. This reflects a common trend found throughout many parts of upstate New York.

These statistics convey a message that could influence agriculture in the future: Increases in housing without population growth is often called ‘rural sprawl’ and can be an indirect measure of conversion

¹ See Seneca County Profile, 2017: A Collection of Recent Demographic, Social and Economic Data, compiled by Jan Vink, Cornell Program on Applied Demographics.

pressure as farmlands or other open spaces are converted to housing. As shown on Maps 10 – 13 (Development Trends), those housing units are widely dispersed and can be found throughout the County.

Development Trends (Map 10) – One challenge facing agriculture is when land is converted to non-farm uses. When this happens, farms often find themselves facing neighbors who don't understand, and in some cases, do not like various agricultural activities. The more non-farm uses are mixed in with farm uses, the more conflicts can arise and the harder it becomes to maintain farm activities.

Map 10 shows development trends in Seneca County by mapping where and when new residential uses are built. It uses data derived from County real property data. The land development pattern that emerges is one of widespread, low-density, and scattered residential development that has taken place throughout the County.

It appears as if residential development has not taken large areas of land for development for big projects such as major subdivisions but is a pattern of expanding development where almost all road frontages of farm fields are increasingly being developed throughout the County. Additionally, there is a concentration of more recent development along the lake shorelines. This widespread land development pattern could have long-term consequences for agriculture.

Development in NYS Agricultural Districts (Maps 11, 12 and 13) – These maps allow a closer look at non-farm development in each of the three agricultural districts. They further emphasize the widespread mixing of farm and non-farm uses.

Water and Sewer Locations (Map 14) – Water and sewer infrastructure is a feature that also influences agriculture and development patterns. Public water and sewer lines and districts are both beneficial and potentially detrimental to farms in Seneca County. Farms need water, and often agri-businesses such as food processing plants, need both water and sewer systems.

On the other hand, water and sewer infrastructure also can promote non-farm development and hasten the conversion of farmland to other uses. Placement of water and sewer infrastructure therefore is vital to farms but must be done very carefully to prevent unintended consequences that may ultimately challenge farming activities.

Water infrastructure is more widespread in the County than sewer. Water lines are concentrated around Waterloo, Seneca Falls, Varick, the former Army Depot in Romulus, Ovid, and Interlaken. However long distances of water lines extend from these centers, especially north and south of Waterloo and Seneca Falls.

Sewer infrastructure is more concentrated in the Waterloo and Seneca Falls areas, but also is available along Seneca Lake from Varick to Romulus, and south from Ovid to Lodi. A small sewer district is in Interlaken.

Given the widespread nature of new building in the County, non-farm growth is taking place on and near farms. Further, this growth is within areas located in the NYS Certified Agricultural District, and on prime farmland soils and farmland soils of statewide importance.

The increased housing growth absent a population increase together with development in and around areas that are farmed, in the long-term, carries the risk of reducing the critical mass of farms in Seneca

County. Although this conversion has not appeared to minimize agricultural activities, it is a pattern that should be evaluated and addressed. Techniques can be put into place to prevent farmland fragmentation and conflicting farm and non-farm uses, and to ensure prime farmland soils remain available for food and agricultural crop production.

Other kinds of non-farm development also pressure farms in the County. These include solar development, commercial/industrial development, and mining.

Climate Change and Agriculture in Seneca County

Loss of farmland, conversion to non-farm uses, soil erosion, and climate change all can impact farming in Seneca County. The climate has already been documented to show changes (see box below). Overall, insufficient soil management, decreased crop and landscape diversity, and heavy reliance on fertilizers and pesticides have been identified as contributing to making farms everywhere susceptible to climate change impacts. In addition, conventional tillage techniques also can allow soil to become less productive and add more carbon to the atmosphere.

Tools are available, however, to help to buffer farmers from such adverse impacts and to assist their operations to become more resilient and sustainable for the long-term including no-till and regenerative agricultural methods. This chapter discusses the issues and impacts of climate change and identifies factors that could make a farm climate resilient. See also Appendix H for more details on climate smart farming.

“A resilient agricultural operation is one that is diverse, healthy, flexible, and self-reliant. When confronted with changing weather patterns or an extreme weather event, a resilient farm has more capacity to avoid or reduce physical and financial damage than comparable farms using conventional management practices, and it can recover from damage more quickly. A resilient farm can also change more easily to meet the future challenges and opportunities created by changing climate conditions. The characteristics of climate-resilient operations also serve to buffer many other risks that make farming a day-to-day challenge.”² The list of potential changes facing agriculture from climate change include floods, droughts, changes in crop and livestock viability, and new pests and weed problems. Certain conditions and practices can amplify the adverse impacts of changing weather patterns including degraded soils, simplified landscapes, and intensive inputs.

Climate Resilience has been defined as the ability to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from climate change in a timely and efficient manner. Being ‘resilient’ generally means that there is capacity to absorb certain changes while still retaining function and structure, learning, and adjusting, and creating new systems when the original is not functioning. Resilient agricultural principles that have

² Cultivating Climate Resilience on Farms and Ranches (Bulletin) by Laura Lengnick, adapted from her 2015 book Resilient Agriculture: Cultivating Food Systems for a Changing Climate; USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education.

proven to be useful to combat weather variability include an emphasis on soil health, diversified production systems, paying attention to ecological systems and having diversified, high-value marketing.

According to [Cornell's Climate Smart Farming](#), there are six key strategies that farmers can take to reduce risks and increase sustainability of their farm. These are:

- Focus on Soil Health
- Efficiently Manage Water Resources and Risks
- Utilize Integrated Pest Management
- Diversify Farm Enterprises, Species, Crop Varieties, and Breeds
- Reduce Livestock Stress from Extreme Temperatures
- Engage in Farm Planning and Adaptive Management

The Changing Climate in Seneca County

According to the Cornell Climate Smart Farming website (climatesmartfarming.org), the following information characterizes how the climate has changed (1980-2013) in Seneca County:

Climate Trends in Seneca County:

- Annual Average Temperature: +0.42 degrees Fahrenheit per decade
- Annual Average High Temperature: +0.27 degrees Fahrenheit per decade
- Low Temperature: + 0.57 degrees Fahrenheit per decade
- Number of Days with High Temperature > 90 degrees: +0.24 days per decade
- Growing Season Length (Consecutive days > 32 degrees Fahrenheit): +2.91 days per decade
- Annual Growing Degree Days, base of 50 degrees Fahrenheit: 62.32 growing degree days per decade
- Total Annual Precipitation: +2.15 inches per decade
- Number of days with Heavy Precipitation > 1 inch: +0.22 days per decade

Climate Change Projections for Our Region (Seneca County is included in the Mid-Atlantic Region in the USDA Climate Hub):

Temperatures in the Mid-Atlantic region are projected to increase on average by 5.27 to 9.11 °F by the end of the century.

- The growing season in the Mid-Atlantic is generally expected to increase by 21 days or more by the end of the century, due to fewer days with a minimum temperature below 32°F.
- The winter season will be shorter and milder across the Mid-Atlantic region, with less precipitation falling as snow and reduced snow cover and depth.
- Precipitation patterns will be altered, with projected increases in total annual precipitation distributed unevenly among colder months (more) and warmer months (less).
- Intense precipitation events will continue to become more frequent in the Mid-Atlantic.
- Soil moisture patterns will change in the Mid-Atlantic with the potential for drier soil conditions later in the growing season.
- Many invasive species, insect pests, and pathogens in the Mid-Atlantic will increase or become more damaging.
- Surface water temperatures are expected to rise due to warming air temperatures. Inland lakes are warming, and continued warming will decrease seasonal mixing of stratified lakes and reduce available dissolved oxygen.

Important Farmlands

This section of the Plan outlines Seneca County’s effort to define and locate priority farmlands that are key to the long-term agricultural viability here. Prioritizing important farmlands is not only required in agricultural and farmland protection plans funded by New York State but is critical to those landowners who wish to participate in New York’s Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program.

Landowners who voluntarily desire to use a conservation easement to protect their farmlands from future development through the State program will need to show their land is identified in this County plan as being ‘important’.

The State Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program funds purchase of development rights to preserve farmland to:

1. Preserve “viable agricultural land” as defined in §301 of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law;
2. Protect farmland in areas facing significant development pressure; and
3. Protect lands that serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics.

The specific state-level criteria for farmland preservation revolve five components:

1. Will preserve “viable agricultural land.”
2. Are in areas facing significant development pressure.
3. Will serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics.
4. Will protect prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance soils.
5. Will protect land used in agricultural production.

Farms cannot be successful without land resources. While having financially successful and sustainable farms is the best way to preserve farmland, we recognize that communities in Seneca County will change and grow over time, and farmland will remain at risk for development. Given the current strong agricultural economy, it is not likely that agricultural lands will be abandoned. Rather, conversion pressure will be more influential.

Priority Farmlands (Map 15) - To identify important farmlands, and Seneca County undertook an analysis to define and map priority farmlands (Map 15). A more detailed description of the analysis that was used to develop this map can be found in Appendix C. The Priority Farmlands Map shows the results of this analysis.

Important farmlands in Seneca County have been defined as those lands that:

- Are used primarily for agriculture or identified as vacant but receive an agricultural tax exemption.
- Are larger in size.

- Have more land available for active farming.
- Are within an agricultural district.
- Are receiving an agricultural value assessment.
- Have high-quality soils (prime or statewide importance).
- Are adjacent to lands already conserved.
- Contain over 10 acres of water buffer.
- Are located in a building ‘hot spot’ - areas having more than 3.76 buildings per square mile (the average density in the county) built in the past 20 years and potentially subject to more development pressure.
- Are within ½-mile buffer from each of the villages in the county and more at risk for development.
- Have longer road frontages that would promote easier subdivision activity.
- Are close to existing water and sewer infrastructure, resulting in a higher chance of the land becoming more valuable for other types of development.
- Near three-phase electrical service infrastructure that may promote large-scale solar development.

This map shows clusters of farmland within the County that are considered Priority, High Priority and Highest Priority for conservation. All farmed parcels in the County are included in the prioritization analysis, and those that ranked above and far above average were included in the Highest Priority category, farms that ranked average or just above average were included in the High Priority category, and farms that scored below or just below average were included in the Priority category. Farms that scored far below average were not included in the areas depicted on the map. Each parcel was analyzed and scored using the criteria established by the AEB (see Appendix C for details). For this analysis, the focus was on “farms” where possible, rather than individual parcels, so adjacent parcels under common ownership were considered one “farm.” A total of 1,651 farm properties were included in the analysis.

Much of the county contains High or Highest Priority Farmland Areas. Approximately 31% of the county, excluding the lakes, falls within the Highest Priority areas, while an additional 45% falls within the High Priority areas. The areas are distributed across the county, with the largest contiguous areas being in the center of the county, primarily in the Town of Varick and in the southeast portion of the county, surrounding the Village of Interlaken. Each of these large areas contain just over 10,000 acres.

Electrical Infrastructure and Priority Farms (Map 16) - Not all conversion pressure in Seneca County comes from residential development. Solar farms’ have been identified by many farmers and other stakeholders in the County as another concern. To address this, an analysis was conducted to evaluate solar farm development potential on important agricultural parcels in the County. Map 16 shows the location of solar-promoting infrastructure of 3-phase power lines and high voltage transmission lines and compares their location to important farmlands.

This map also shows lands within ¼ mile on either side of these electric transmission lines as these locations are generally known to have more potential for solar development than lands far away from such lines. The map does not show where solar facilities will develop – only those farmlands defined as important lands in Seneca County that may be more at risk for conversion to solar development. Given that both 3-phase and high voltage lines are prevalent throughout Seneca County, there will be continued risk of conversion for farmlands to accommodate solar energy production.

This analysis shows that there are many locations in the County that are both important agricultural lands and that have high solar potential. Map 16 can be used by the County and municipalities in the development of further solar development policy. Development of such policy is a recommendation in this Plan to ensure that such development is done carefully to minimize adverse impacts on prime soils and important farmlands.

Large-scale solar development is already taking place, most notably the 1,000+ acre, 80-megawatt Trelina solar farm in the Town of Waterloo. This solar farm, located along a high voltage electrical line will be reviewed and permitted by New York State (not the Town of Waterloo) and is proposed on lands identified in this analysis as being above average and far above average farmland. It is an example of the potential for the very real conversion of important farmland to non-farm uses other than residential use.

Local Land Use Policies

Farm-Friendly Audit

Why an Audit? An audit of several Seneca County town comprehensive plans and land use laws was completed to help identify opportunities where local land use policies could be improved to enhance agricultural uses in the future. This audit recognizes that both a comprehensive plan and its associated land use regulations (subdivision and zoning) can influence agricultural operations in many ways. The survey conducted as part of this Plan identified that farmers have a keen interest to identify ways that local policies and laws can be more farm friendly.

Role of Comprehensive Plan. A comprehensive plan is an important community document because it is the foundation for local land use regulations. Land use regulations need to be consistent with a community's plan. Regulations should be designed to meet community needs and objectives – which are usually outlined in a comprehensive plan. The plan establishes the vision a community has for itself, which is then translated into land use regulations, such as zoning and subdivision.

Role of Zoning Laws. Zoning can create opportunities for agriculture but also can place barriers to farming or certain farming practices. Zoning identifies whether a farm use is permitted, whether a municipal review process such as a site plan or special use permit approval is required, or whether setbacks, height, or acreage requirements are needed. All these potentially pose barriers or challenges to agriculture – especially when the local regulations are not clear or do not address agricultural businesses.

Zoning laws sometimes regulate where and how farms can operate, and what review processes a farmer may be required to undertake. New York Certified Agricultural Districts are set up to prevent restrictive local land uses regulations. But sometimes land use regulations introduce confusion when certain uses are not adequately defined or addressed and vague zoning introduces uncertainty for farmers, which can also lead to unnecessary or lengthy permit reviews. So even when a local law is not restrictive, it can still present difficulties for farmers. This is especially poignant given trends of farm diversification, addition of value-added processing on the farm, and modern farming techniques.

Role of Subdivision Laws. Subdivision laws regulate how land is divided. Although subdivision laws do not regulate the use of land like a zoning law does, they have a great deal of influence on how non-farm development gets done, and whether it is done in a manner compatible with farm neighbors.

Consequences of Local Plans and Laws that are not Farm-friendly. Choices made by local communities in their local land use regulations can have many consequences including affecting land values, making farm expansion or start-ups difficult, contributing to land use conflicts, and even hastening conversion of farmland to other uses.

When local laws restrict agricultural uses, a sense of impermanence for farming can develop as farmers begin to feel that non-farm uses will ultimately take over in the area. That feeling of impermanence can in turn, foster disinvestment in farm operations and ultimately lead to furthering the sale of land for non-farm development. With low profitability, selling land for non-farm development may be a necessity or at least very appealing to some farms or farmland owners.

Understanding the local regulatory climate is the first step towards improving an area’s farm-friendliness. This is also an important aspect considering New York State Agriculture and Markets Law 25-AA which establishes agricultural districts where farmers receive protection against local laws that unreasonably restrict farm operations.

25-AA also offers right-to-farm protection from private nuisance claims. New York State Agricultural Districts are designed to support a favorable operating environment for farms.

The Audit

Appendix B contains detailed results of the Audit. General observations related to the state of farm-friendliness in Seneca County and recommendations to improve conditions for farming are also offered below³. The audit included a review of comprehensive plans, subdivision laws, and zoning regulations in six towns (Varick, Tyre, Romulus, Waterloo, Seneca Falls, and Fayette). These towns were chosen because they are the only ones in Seneca County having established zoning laws.

Comprehensive plans, zoning and subdivision laws were evaluated against a series of questions designed to explore the level of farm-friendliness in each town. These questions are based on similar farm-friendly audits done throughout the State and region. The audit is not a criticism of any local law or plan but simply points out ways local land use regulations work with, or present challenges that farmers may face.

Summary. The Seneca County Farm Friendly Audit reveals that:

- a. Most of the comprehensive plans were more than 5 years old and would benefit from being updated.
- b. Some comprehensive plans did not include data, maps, or other information that characterizes agricultural land uses. Data, maps, and other information included in this County-level plan can be provided to Towns to enhance their local agricultural planning. The maps especially should be used for local planning purposes.
- c. Agriculture is generally identified as an important land use, and the towns desire farms to be maintained and farmlands protected.
- d. Some plans, but not all, offered recommendations on how to protect or maintain farms in the future. Those recommendations were not always specific. No future land use maps were offered that specifically plan for agriculture in the future.
- e. No subdivision law reviewed addressed agriculture. All would benefit from updating in a way that includes agriculture in application submissions, subdivision design, and evaluation of impacts to help ensure non-farm and farmland uses can co-exist.

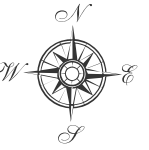
³ The recommendations in this Plan are also informed by guidance offered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets through their “Guidelines for Review of Local Zoning and Planning Laws” (<http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/AP/agsservices/guidancedocuments/305-aZoningGuidelines.pdf>) and “Local Laws and Agricultural Districts: Guidance for Local Governments and Farmers” (<http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/AP/agsservices/new305/guidance.pdf>).

- f. Zoning laws, in general, were not farm-unfriendly, with the exception of those laws that require a certain number of acres in order to be considered a farm in the eyes of zoning. A significant issue in most of the zoning laws were that they do not have adequate definitions, use tables, or standards to allow for farms and the diversity of farm operations that take place without some level of over-regulation. Most were vague about agriculture and left critical questions about whether certain ag operations would be allowed unanswered. This could lead to lengthy and unnecessary review processes. There is little recognition in most laws that agriculture is a priority land use in the NYS Agricultural District or that NYS AML 25-AA protects farms from restrictive zoning practices.

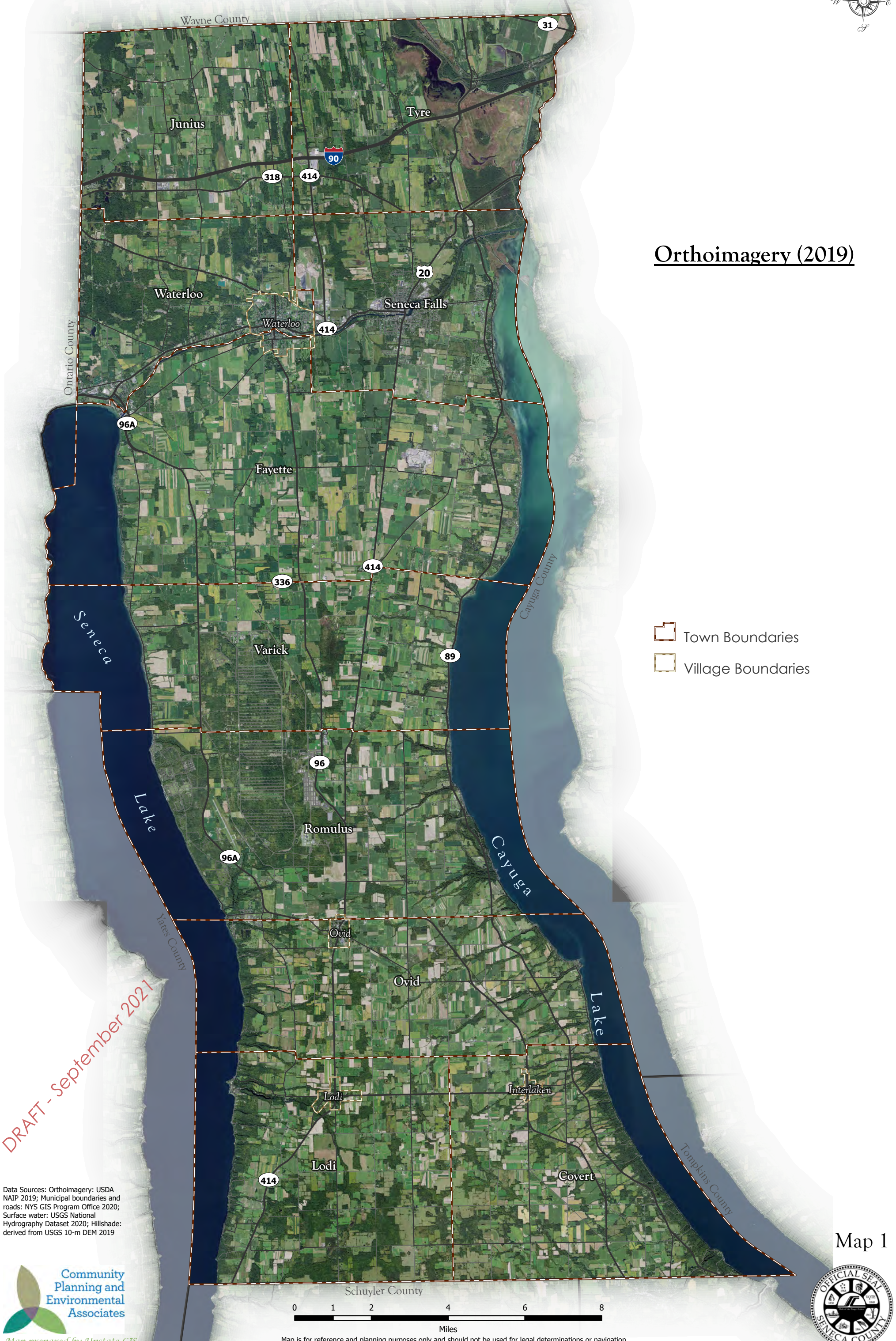
- g. Zoning laws, in general, did not include many of the recommended land use techniques that allow for non-farm growth to occur in a way that doesn't adversely impact farming. Conservation subdivision, use of buffers between farm and non-farm uses (provided by the non-farm user), changes in density to ensure compatibility of uses, siting of non-farm uses off of prime farmland soils, and other methods were generally not used in these communities. There are many zoning options available that could improve the farm-friendliness of these local laws. This Plan includes many recommendations that could be considered by the towns. Ultimately, the goal is to provide a high degree of clarity as to what agricultural operations need some sort of town review, to limit restrictive zoning rules, and to promote a diversity of farm operations. The audit matrix (in Appendix B) itself can be used to identify a wide range of farm-friendly policies that could be considered locally.

Techniques that could be included in local zoning laws are conservation subdivision design, non-farm buffers, agricultural overlay districts, use of a residential density measured as dwellings per acre or average lot size instead of strict adherence to a minimum lot size, and use of incentives such as density bonuses.

Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



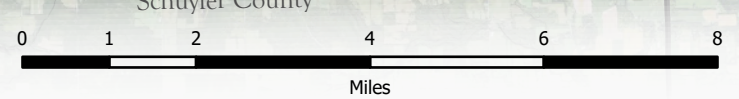
Orthoimagery (2019)



- Town Boundaries
- Village Boundaries

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Data Sources: Orthoimagery: USDA NAIP 2019; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019

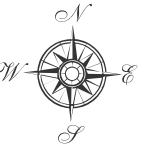


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Map 1

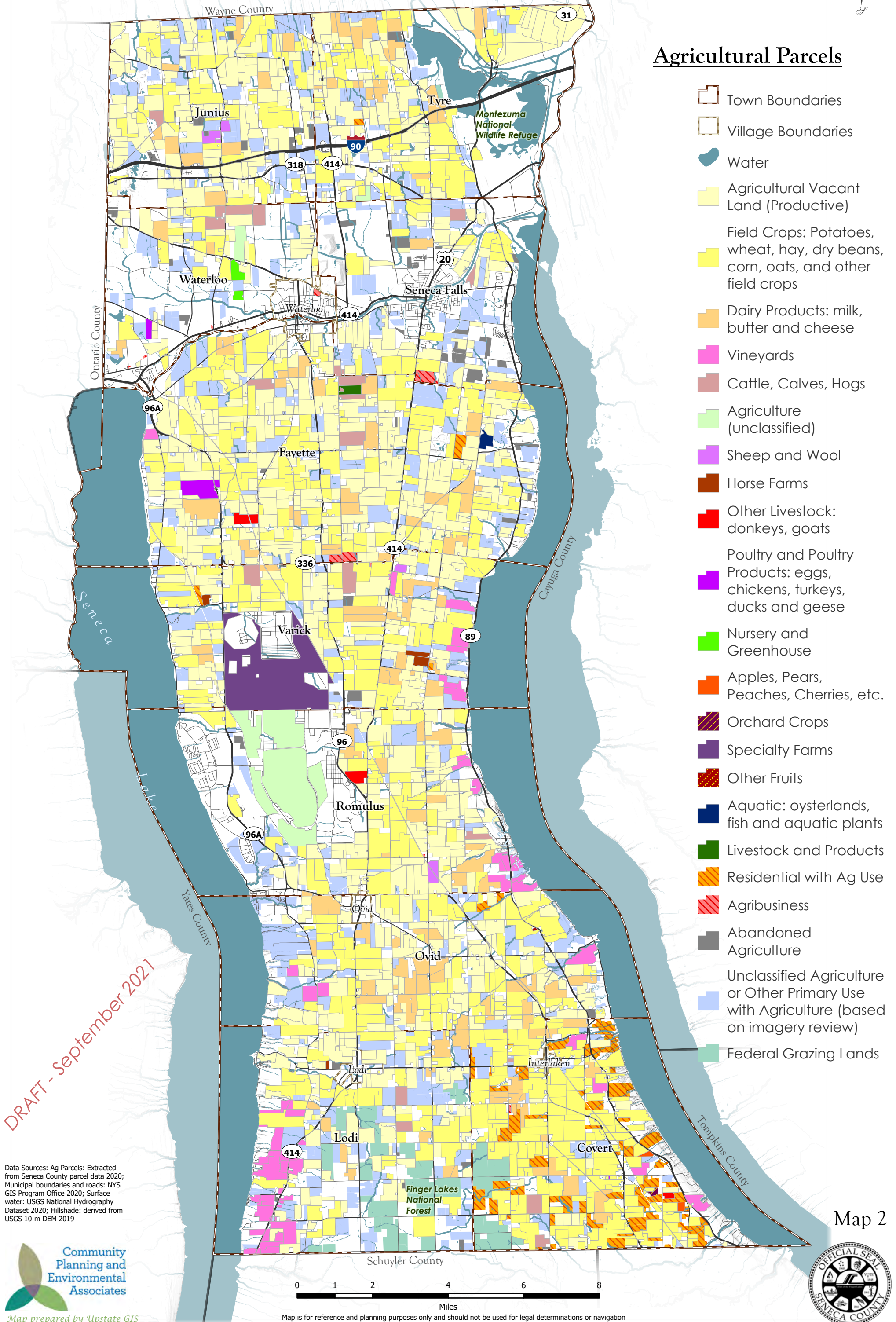


Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Agricultural Parcels

- Town Boundaries
- Village Boundaries
- Water
- Agricultural Vacant Land (Productive)
- Field Crops: Potatoes, wheat, hay, dry beans, corn, oats, and other field crops
- Dairy Products: milk, butter and cheese
- Vineyards
- Cattle, Calves, Hogs
- Agriculture (unclassified)
- Sheep and Wool
- Horse Farms
- Other Livestock: donkeys, goats
- Poultry and Poultry Products: eggs, chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese
- Nursery and Greenhouse
- Apples, Pears, Peaches, Cherries, etc.
- Orchard Crops
- Specialty Farms
- Other Fruits
- Aquatic: oysterlands, fish and aquatic plants
- Livestock and Products
- Residential with Ag Use
- Agribusiness
- Abandoned Agriculture
- Unclassified Agriculture or Other Primary Use with Agriculture (based on imagery review)
- Federal Grazing Lands



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Data Sources: Ag Parcels: Extracted from Seneca County parcel data 2020; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019

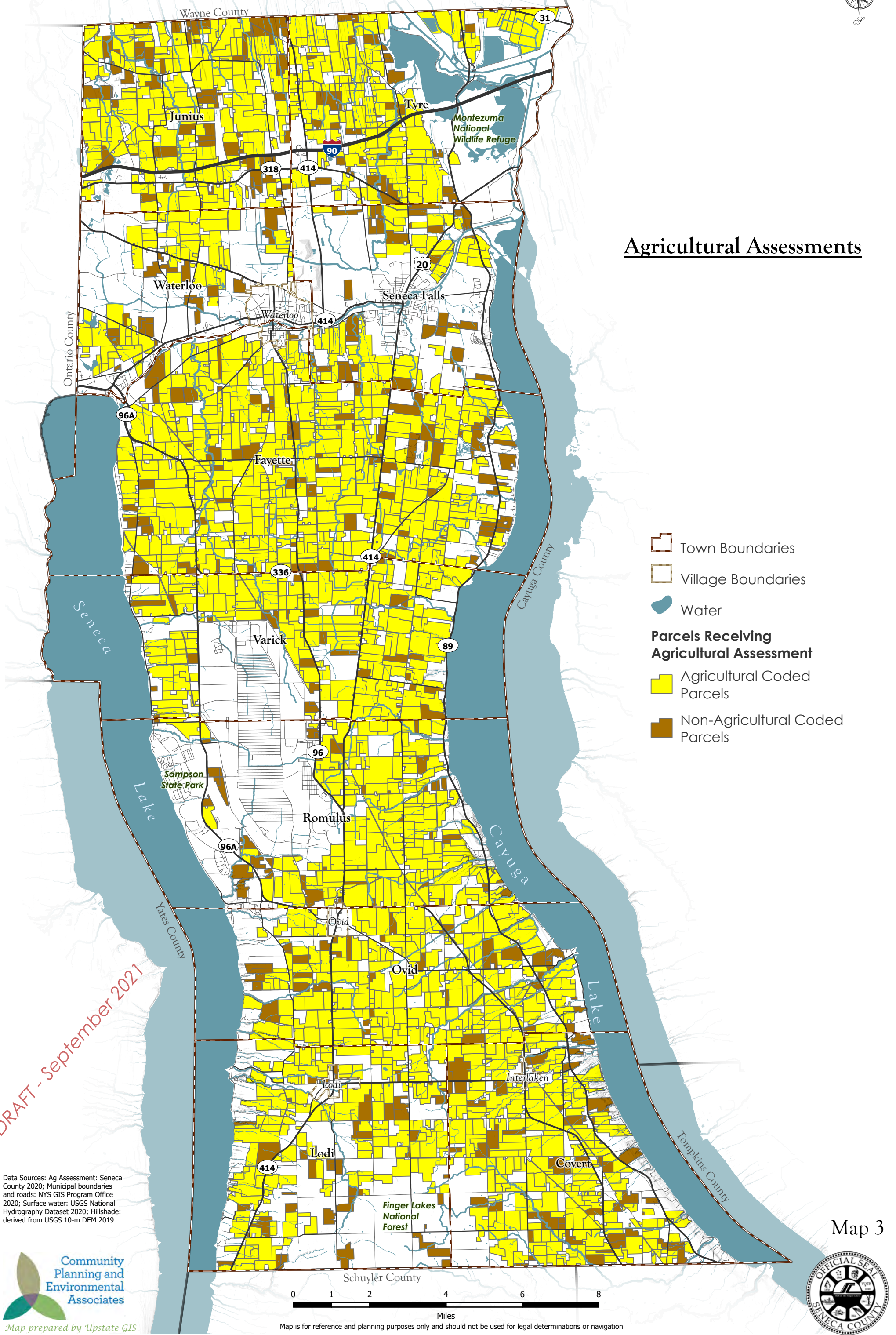
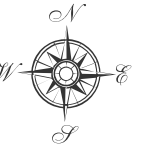


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Map 2



Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Agricultural Assessments

-  Town Boundaries
-  Village Boundaries
-  Water
- Parcels Receiving Agricultural Assessment**
-  Agricultural Coded Parcels
-  Non-Agricultural Coded Parcels

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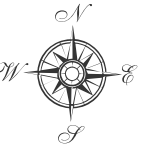
Data Sources: Ag Assessment: Seneca County 2020; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019












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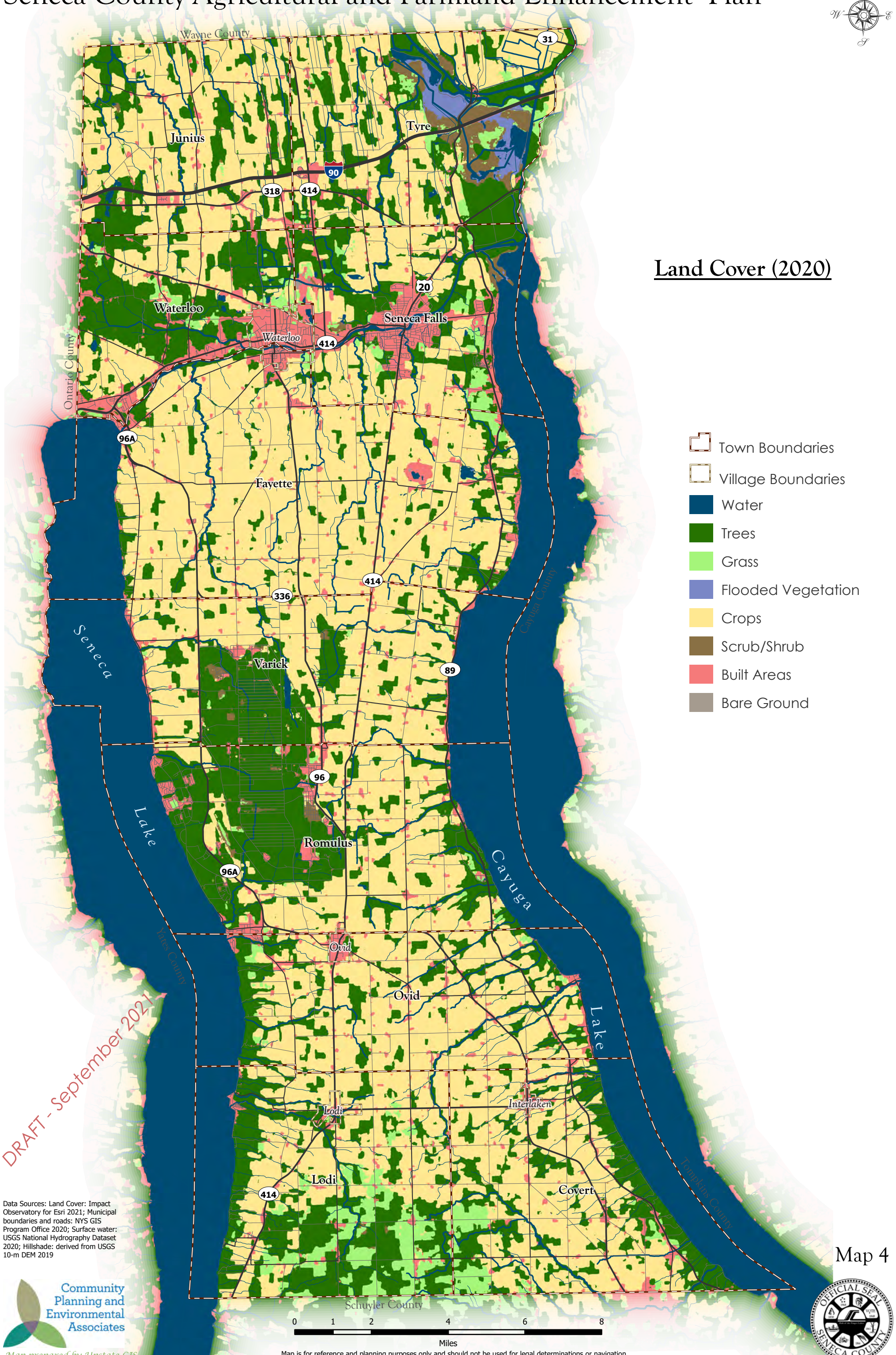


Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Land Cover (2020)

-  Town Boundaries
-  Village Boundaries
-  Water
-  Trees
-  Grass
-  Flooded Vegetation
-  Crops
-  Scrub/Shrub
-  Built Areas
-  Bare Ground



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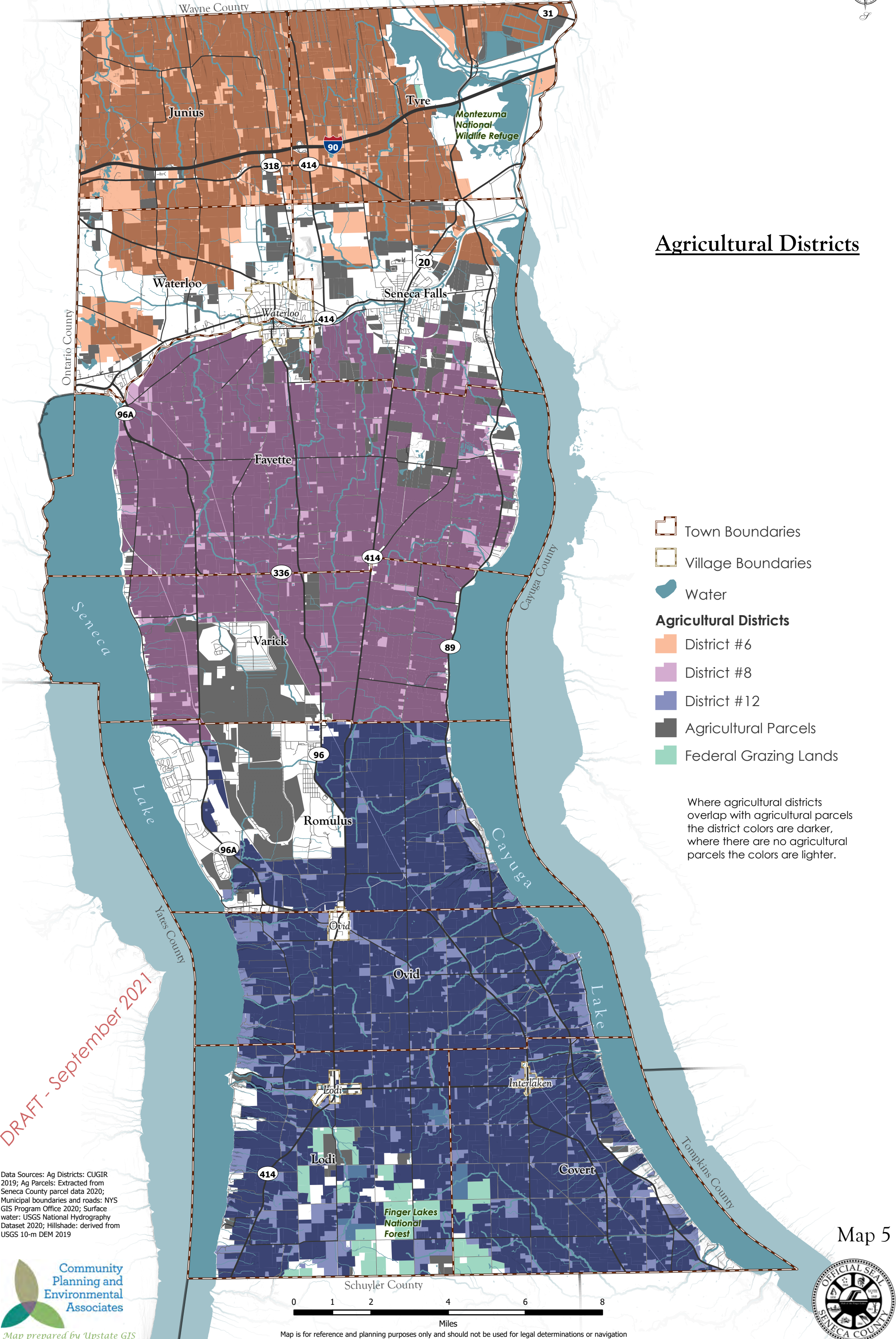
Data Sources: Land Cover: Impact Observatory for Esri 2021; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019



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Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Agricultural Districts

- Town Boundaries
- Village Boundaries
- Water
- Agricultural Districts**
 - District #6
 - District #8
 - District #12
- Agricultural Parcels
- Federal Grazing Lands

Where agricultural districts overlap with agricultural parcels the district colors are darker, where there are no agricultural parcels the colors are lighter.

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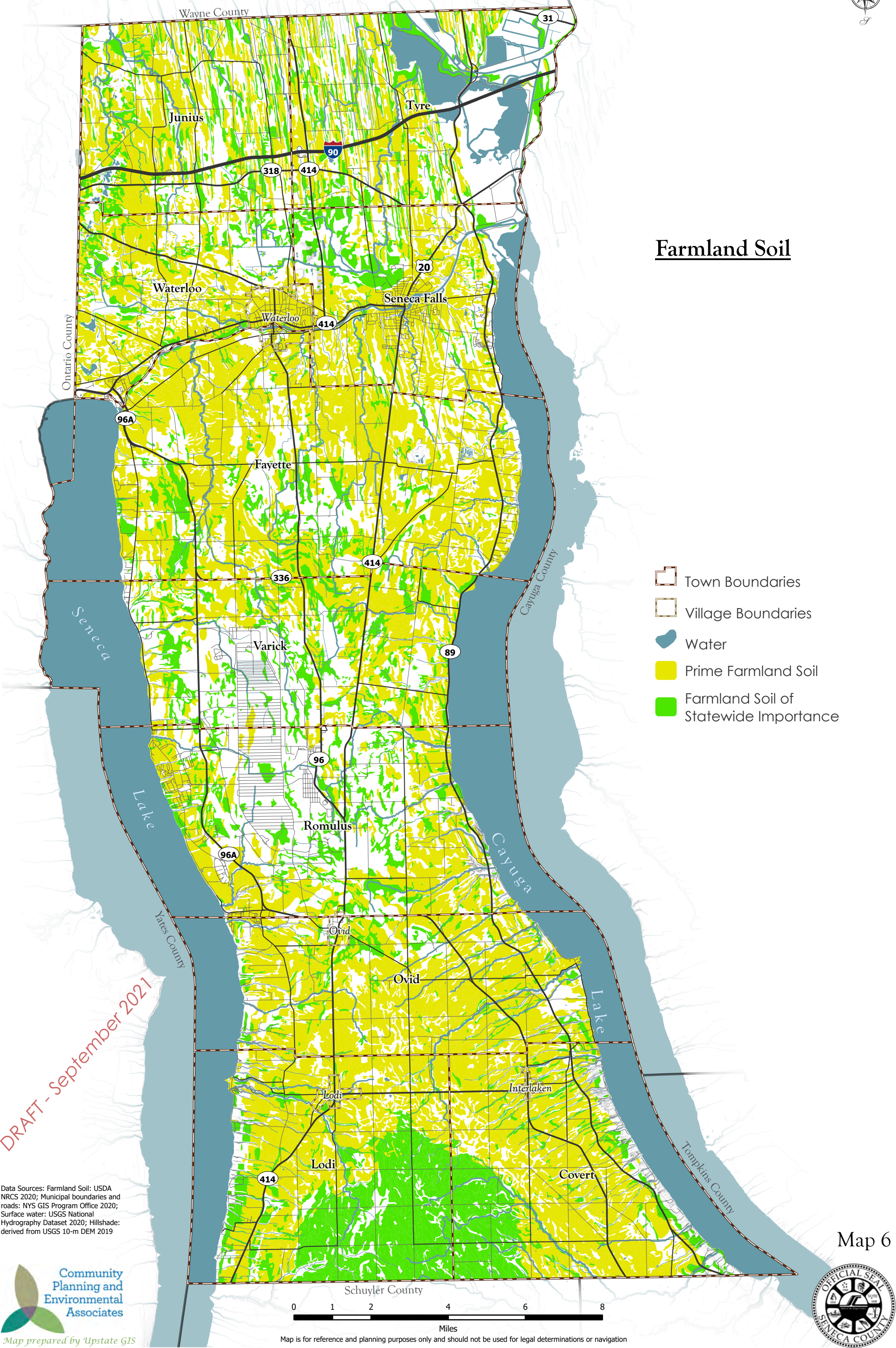
Data Sources: Ag Districts: CUGIR 2019; Ag Parcels: Extracted from Seneca County parcel data 2020; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019



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Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Farmland Soil

- Town Boundaries
- Village Boundaries
- Water
- Prime Farmland Soil
- Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance

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Data Sources: Farmland Soil: USDA NRCS 2020; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019

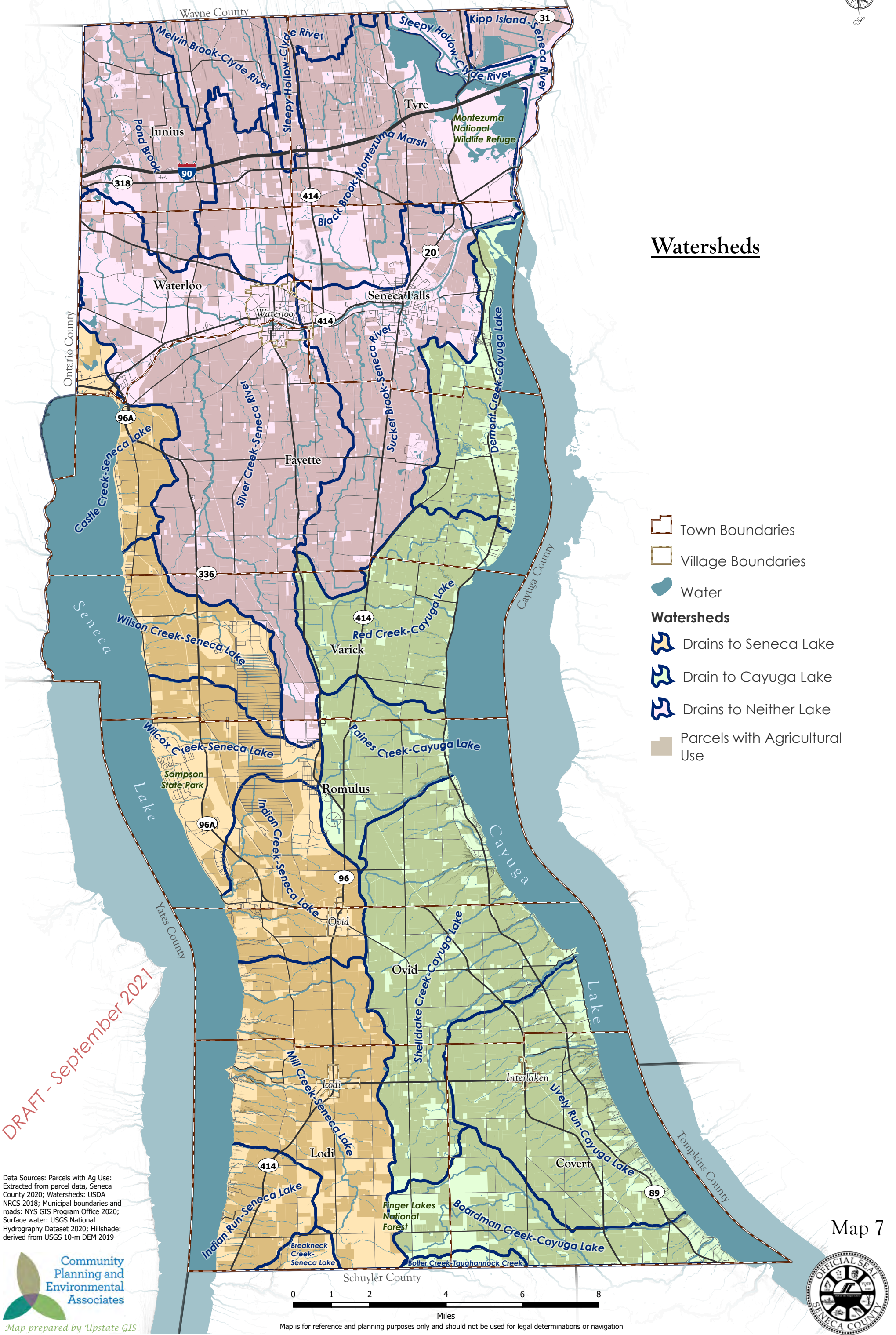
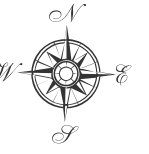


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Map 6



Seneca County Agricultural and Farmland Enhancement Plan



Watersheds

- Town Boundaries
- Village Boundaries
- Water
- Watersheds**
- Drains to Seneca Lake
- Drain to Cayuga Lake
- Drains to Neither Lake
- Parcels with Agricultural Use

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Data Sources: Parcels with Ag Use: Extracted from parcel data, Seneca County 2020; Watersheds: USDA NRCS 2018; Municipal boundaries and roads: NYS GIS Program Office 2020; Surface water: USGS National Hydrography Dataset 2020; Hillshade: derived from USGS 10-m DEM 2019



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Map 7

