

Village of Whitesboro Comprehensive Plan

Executive Summary

Communities that plan — grow by choice, not by chance.

A plan makes growth thoughtful, understandable, and predictable. A plan shows that a community is managing its future, and knows where it is going. A plan attracts investment and wins support for community projects.

In New York State, the comprehensive plan is the policy foundation upon which communities are built. It is a long-term “roadmap” for growth—a guide for decisions and actions by local government officials in shaping the future of their municipality. A comprehensive plan identifies needs and recommends goals, objectives, and strategies to improve the community for the health, safety, and general welfare of its residents.

The Village of Whitesboro is authorized to develop and adopt a comprehensive plan by New York State Village Law Section 7-722. Although the comprehensive plan, itself, is not local law, the plan will be implemented through local laws and through local government initiatives. State statutes also require that all land-use laws in a municipality be consistent with its comprehensive plan.

Advantages of a comprehensive plan—

- Promotes consensus and broad support for common goals.
- Provides the basis for logically consistent regulatory programs.
- All government agencies involved in planning capital projects within the Village must first take the comprehensive plan into consideration.
- Protects community resources, and advances desired growth and development.

What is in the plan?

Part I describes the planning process and presents detailed results.

- The Planning Process
- A Vision For Whitesboro
- Community Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats / Challenges
- Long Term Goals for Whitesboro
- Strategies and Recommendations
- Implementation
- Potential Funding Sources

Part II presents supplementary information.

- Community Input
- Demography
- Community Facilities
- Transportation
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Resources
- Glossary

The Village of Whitesboro Comprehensive Plan was developed by the Planning Board for adoption by the Village of Whitesboro Board of Trustees. The planning process included broad public participation and dialogue through a community visioning workshop, visual preferences survey and community image workshop, a public forum, several questionnaires, a newsletter, background studies, mapping, meetings, and extensive news coverage.

The comprehensive plan presents a vision of Whitesboro, as its residents want it to become. The vision sets the tone and points the direction for future growth.

A Vision for Whitesboro

The Village of Whitesboro will strengthen its character as a clean, attractive, residential community with pleasant neighborhoods, safe streets, excellent schools, exemplary public services, user-friendly transportation infrastructure, a vibrant business climate, and enlightened zoning. It will have well-maintained public spaces and will offer diverse recreational activities for youth and senior citizens.

Whitesboro's distinctive heritage and character will continue to be great assets. Architecture style, commercial development, public spaces and community events will reflect and celebrate Erie Canal heritage. Main Street will be a commercial and cultural destination with buildings preserved and adapted for a flexible variety of business and residential purposes. Oriskany Boulevard will offer a mix of commercial, professional, and high-density residential services in a visually appealing and pedestrian friendly atmosphere. Smooth traffic flow, adequate parking, ample walkways, and easy access for pedestrians as well as vehicles will enhance economic growth.

Civic pride and citizen participation will permeate all aspects of community life. Government and public services will be streamlined to provide model police protection, public transportation, and water and sewage systems. Residents will actively support and engage in a rich array of lifelong public education and quality of life opportunities.

Community Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats / Challenges

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats / challenges facing the Village of Whitesboro were identified through public discussion, surveys, and a detailed analysis of its demographic, economic, environmental, and cultural profile.

These influences, both positive and negative, have a powerful impact on community development. Recommendations in the comprehensive plan are designed to bolster strengths, reduce weaknesses, respond to opportunities, and overcome threats / challenges.

Strengths

(Strengths are resources or capabilities that will help the Village of Whitesboro fulfill its vision.)

- Sense of community
- Low crime rate
- Quality Village services including library, telecommunications, snow removal, police protection, utilities, bagged garbage pick-up, emergency services, road maintenance
- Quality schools
- Proximity to friends and relatives
- Building enforcement and zoning
- Existing Village and historic character (local style architecture and traditional style architecture)
- Village green
- Location of Village (accessible location)
- Small town atmosphere
- Not overly commercialized
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Metro bus system
- Erie Canal heritage

Weaknesses

(Weaknesses are deficiencies in resources and capabilities that will hinder the Village of Whitesboro in fulfilling its vision.)

- Delinquent properties
- Lack of youth activities / lack of senior programs
- Whitestown Plaza
- Too many rental residential properties – there has been an increase in number of rental units while number of families and households have both decreased
- Poor appearance and lack of street trees
- Some Village services need improvement (sidewalks and bulk trash pick-up)
- Building enforcement and zoning
- Poor aesthetic appearance along Oriskany Boulevard and other locations
- Poor pedestrian networks
- Heavy traffic and speeds
- Fair housing stock
- Taxes
- Vacant, unoccupied properties
- Lack of parking on Main Street, and other locations

- Use of neon lights and poor lighting along streets
- Train and traffic noise pollution
- Need to restructure the fire department

Opportunities

(Opportunities are factors or situations that can affect Whitesboro favorably and can help the Village reach its goals.)

- Public desire for additional commercial growth exists
- There is an intact Village structure with Main Street and green as centerpieces
- People favor preservation of historic character and there is distinctive character remaining to preserve.
- People desire an increase in commercial development and wish to enhance the quality around Whitestown Plaza
- There is a desire for enhanced streetscapes, especially on Oriskany Boulevard
- There is a high degree of support for preservation or creation of parks and green spaces or open spaces
- The Village can take advantage of its Erie Canal heritage

Threats / Challenges

(Threats / Challenges are factors or situations that can affect Whitesboro negatively and prevent the Village from reaching its goals.)

- Flooding
- Lack of shared services – is inefficient and adds to tax burden
- Proliferation of modern architecture and strip style development threatens distinctive character
- Loss of population and general economic depression of region
- Lack of local employment opportunities...most of those who are employed work outside of the community, not locally
- Certain types of households may need more assistance in the future than currently exists. For example, the number of female-headed households increased 23% and this type of household may need additional day care, transportation, or other public services.
- High level of vacant housing (increased by 81%)
- Number of people living below the poverty level is increasing, although Whitesboro still has a lower poverty rate than other communities in the region
- Need to reconstruct the Village sewer lines especially along Main Street
- Absentee landlords

Long-Range Goals

From an analysis of public opinion and other data, the Planning Board drafted a set of long-range goals to realize the proposed vision for the Village of Whitesboro. Initial draft goals were amended based on responses to a written survey and public forum comments, and were re-ordered to reflect the priorities of residents as follows:

Goal 1: PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Improve Delinquent and Poorly Maintained Properties.

Recommendations to improve the condition of properties in the Village include strong enforcement of building codes, an annual inventory of deteriorating structures, creation of a Village property maintenance committee, active communication with absentee landlords, and the possible introduction of an absentee landlord tax. This would entail updating all local laws relating to property, enhancing the Code Enforcement Officer's ability to enforce those laws, increasing penalties for violations, and publishing a booklet to inform residents about property code requirements and enforcement procedures.

Goal 2: ORISKANY BOULEVARD

Develop Oriskany Boulevard as a visually pleasing, safe, and pedestrian friendly location that offers expanded commercial and residential opportunities in a manner that complements and supports activities on Main Street.

Adoption of a formal plan is recommended to improve traffic flow, speed, and safety along Oriskany Boulevard. The plan should address traffic signals, curb cuts, internal circulation in retail areas, peak hour turn control, expanded use of parallel streets, and intersection changes at Westmoreland Street, Clinton Street, Curran Road, Whitestown Plaza, and Harts Hill Parkway.

Improvements in the visual character, pedestrian network, commercial and residential development of Oriskany Boulevard are also proposed to complement Main Street commercial activities. This includes reducing lane widths, providing sidewalks along both sides of Oriskany Boulevard, aligning curb cuts and center medians, planting street trees and landscaping, clearly defining crosswalks and adding pedestrian controls, a 1:1 or 2:1 proportion of street width to new building height, period style lighting, and adoption of the New York State Design Manual, Chapter 18, as a guideline for facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Goal 3: FLOOD CONTROL

Minimize Flooding Episodes Along the Sauquoit Creek.

Active leadership and participation on the Sauquoit Creek Basin Commission, fulfillment of FEMA requirements and adhering to best practices for floodplain management are recommended to minimize annual flooding along Sauquoit Creek. This would entail more

clearly identifying the Sauquoit Creek watershed, taking inventory and analyzing land-use and environmental concerns, conducting a problem and needs assessment, defining corridor management boundaries, and developing, implementing, and monitoring a flood management plan. Other recommendations include reserving land along the creek for recreation development, and implementing a flood hazard overlay zone. The plan also outlines ways zoning, subdivision and site plan laws can better address flooding through controlling density, requiring greenways and buffers, maintaining the planned development district option in local zoning, and requiring placement of floodway boundaries on site plans.

Goal 4: VILLAGE CHARACTER

Preserve the Distinctive “Small Town” Character, Historic Architecture, Street Trees, and Streetscapes of the Village.

The aesthetic and historic character of the Village of Whitesboro can be preserved by careful management of street width, traffic flow, streetscape features, design of new buildings, and signage. Avoid “big box” style development, and incorporate an illustrated design guideline into the site plan review law and process. Design guidelines should require interconnected grid patterns for new streets, measures to prevent over-building, reducing front setbacks, a street tree program, and use of glare shielded commercial signs and lighting fixtures. The Village should also establish a beautification committee, emphasize the importance of historic buildings to education and the character of the community, and introduce a loan program for façade and streetscape improvements. Further, the Village should consult state and federal historic preservation agencies for assistance with publicly funded projects, become more familiar with laws that will protect Whitesboro historic resources, consider creating financial, tax, and zoning incentives for rehab projects, and encourage listings on state and federal registers of historic places.

Goal 5: PUBLIC SERVICES

Provide Efficient Public Services to Village Residents and Businesses.

Recommendations to enhance public services and reduce costs include sharing services with nearby municipalities, working closely with town, school district and county officials, relocating Village Hall to Main Street, developing a capital improvement plan, continuing support for emergency and ambulance services, building fiber optics telecommunications infrastructure, strengthening mosquito control, and increasing the capacity to pursue grants and funding opportunities.

Goal 6: MAIN STREET

Develop Main Street as a Distinctive, Attractive Area that Offers Diverse Business, Office, and Residential Opportunities to Strengthen the Economy and Cultural Life of the Village.

Enhance the appeal, vibrance, and vitality of Main Street and link it to Oriskany Boulevard to expand and diversify the economy of the entire Village. Following the

“Main Street” approach of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, develop downtown through design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring. Stress the importance of quality, public-private partnerships, and emotional as well as financial investment. Other suggestions for Whitesboro include mobilizing formal economic development initiatives, better understanding of economic assets, supporting commercial diversity through zoning codes, concentrating on small visible improvements, and obtaining professional management for the business district.

Goal 7: PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

Create a Quality Pedestrian Network in the Village by Providing Crosswalks, Sidewalks, Walking and Bike Trails, and by Minimizing Nuisances, Including Noise Pollution, Poor Lighting and Glare.

Recommendations include establishing a capital improvement fund and annual budgets to maintain sidewalks and improve the pedestrian network. The Village should inventory and prioritize sidewalks for repair, mark crosswalks, introduce curb ramps and extensions at intersection crossings, add trees and street furniture, bury utility wires when possible, and create pocket parks linked to walkways, bike trails, Sauquoit Creek, and popular Village destinations. Other suggestions include amending zoning and site plan review laws to eliminate disabling and nuisance glare from unshielded lighting and working to reduce railroad noise.

Goal 8: RECREATION

Provide Diverse Recreational Activities and Facilities for Youth and Senior Citizens; Enhance Recreational Opportunities along the Sauquoit Creek.

Formation of a Village-sanctioned recreation committee is recommended to strengthen recreation assets. The plan also suggests that the Village identify, acquire, and develop at least 13.9 acres of land with park, open space, or public access value for picnic areas, green space, community gardens, pocket parks on both sides of Oriskany Boulevard, and other recreation purposes. Enhance existing parklands with playground equipment and facilities for skating, tennis, swimming, and basketball. Preserve forested open spaces, and in cooperation with school authorities develop public access to Sauquoit Creek as a nature trail / learning lab. Promote “heart healthy” activities. Support construction of the proposed Whitestown YMCA and public transportation to access it. Create a self-supporting community center for all ages, catering especially to youth and senior citizens. Construct a fenced skateboard park for youth. Explore annexation of Mohawk River “flats” for recreation development.

Goal 9: HOUSING

Enhance Home-Ownership Opportunities and Ensure that Housing Opportunities Meet the Location and Economic Needs of Residents; Improve Maintenance of Rental Units.

Managing affordable housing programs through a not-for-profit agency is recommended. The Village should also apply for federal Community Development Block Grant funding

to support home repair, rehabilitation, and first-time home-buyer programs. Establish tax incentives to encourage redevelopment of existing neighborhoods and use tax delinquent parcels to create affordable homeownership opportunities. Other recommendations include offering a density bonus in exchange for newly constructed affordable housing units, amending zoning codes to encourage construction of accessory apartments and “granny flats,” promoting formation of neighborhood associations, and publishing newsletters to educate the public about the impact of housing on economic development, land use, community facilities, and transportation.

Goal 10: HERITAGE & COMMUNITY

Use the Distinctive Erie Canal Heritage of the Village to Enhance Its Cultural, Recreational, and Economic Climate.

Community and entertainment events with historic themes, flavor, and focus are recommended. Also preserve, celebrate, and interpret buildings, sites, and other historic assets through signage, plaques, banners, flags, brochures, newsletters and other publications, lectures, walking tours, and a Village website. Analyze past architectural styles to suggest patterns for future building designs.