

FINAL DRAFT  
March 2018

# TOWN OF ELMA

## 2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



# TOWN OF ELMA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town of Elma Comprehensive Plan Update was made possible through the efforts of the following:

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# TOWN OF ELMA 2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive plan carefully assesses strengths and opportunities inherent in the community in order to develop a rational basis for proposed policies, codes and other activities. In New York State, the right to zone land is premised on having a comprehensive plan for the community. Land development is strongly influenced by zoning, public investment, and availability of infrastructure and transportation access. A comprehensive plan addresses all of these issues.

In order to develop a meaningful and useful comprehensive plan, many sources of background information must be provided. This strong basis in data helps local legislative and administrative boards determine where growth should take place and how it should be phased. These background elements comprise an updated inventory of planning data and mapping of various features, followed by careful analysis of trends and issues. Based upon the findings of these basic elements, along with significant input from Town residents, goals and objectives are developed to guide future development. Then specific recommendations are made intended to help the Town make progress toward achieving those goals.

This document is a Comprehensive Plan update for the Town of Elma. The project was funded through the Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) CBDG (Community Block Development Grant) funding program, which was acquired by Erie County. The Town of Elma has identified specific goals and objectives that are unique to its locale and this Comprehensive Plan update will help the Town to accomplish them.

This plan is designed to be consistent with other regional planning documents including, but not limited to: *One Region Forward: Regional Framework for Growth, A New Way to Plan for Buffalo-Niagara* (2014); *Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan* (2012), *REDC: A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York* (2011), and *Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth* (2006). In addition, this plan seeks to build upon the previous Comprehensive Plan completed for five communities (Aurora, East Aurora, Elma, Holland and Wales) in February of 2004. It will act as a stand-alone update for the Town of Elma, but the existing Regional Comprehensive Plan should still be referred to when utilizing this update.

### 1.1 REGIONAL AND LOCAL SETTING

The Town of Elma is located in eastern Erie County, approximately 12-miles from downtown Buffalo. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau calculated the population of the Town of Elma at approximately 11,317 residents. From 1980 to 2015, the Town has seen a net increase in population, from 10,574 in 1980 to an estimated 11,610 in 2015, an increase of 1,036 residents over the 35-year span.

The Town of Elma is characterized in the *Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth* as being both a "Developing Area," which are rural and sparsely settled areas experiencing development pressure and demand for extensions of public sewer, water, and

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transportation, and a "Rural Area," which are the regions least densely developed lands and include large tracts of forest and farmland. Approximately 50% of the Town is a Developing Area and 50% of the Town is a Rural Area. It should be noted that a very small portion of the Town's western edge in the Transit Road area near West Seneca, is designated a "Developed Area" (areas described as being developed areas that have grown out of the City of Buffalo and the first ring suburbs that are serviced by water, sewer, and transportation systems). The *Framework for Regional Growth* recommends that Towns can better define the locations of these referenced areas in their Towns.

Historically, the Town of Elma was largely a rural, agricultural community. This began to shift as the community transitioned to being a second-ring suburb of the City of Buffalo during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Farming remains a fixture of Elma's economy, but it has started to give way to some rural, residential growth.

### 1.2 PREVIOUS COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING ENDEAVORS

The Town of Elma last completed a comprehensive planning process in 2004, more than 12-years ago. The plan was regionally focused, encompassing the Towns of Aurora, Elma, Holland, Wales, and the Village of East Aurora. The previous plan was completed by Wendel Duchscherer and was titled *Regional Comprehensive Plan: Towns of Aurora, Elma, Holland, and Wales and Village of East Aurora*. The plan identified eight (8) regional goals and objectives and seven (7) Town of Elma specific goals and objectives, which were:

1. *Preserve the Rural Community Character;*
2. *Encourage Orderly Growth and Development;*
3. *Preserve and Promote Recreational Opportunities;*
4. *Provide for Economic Development;*
5. *Protect Significant Environmental Resources;*
6. *Minimize the Loss of Remaining Prime Farmland Soils to Development; and*
7. *Provide a Safe and Efficient Transportation System.*

### 1.3 REASONS FOR PREPARING A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

It is important for each community to have an effective Comprehensive Plan to guide future growth and development. New York State Law dictates that Town and Village planning, zoning, capital budgeting and other decisions should be based on a comprehensive plan that represents the community's vision for its future.

The goal of this Comprehensive Plan update is to develop recommendations for future development in the Town, while recognizing the community's unique assets and considering impacts upon surrounding communities. This Plan is intended to serve as a

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framework within which the community will be able to evaluate future land use and development issues. It examines the environmental, demographic, physical, and development aspects of each community and the regulatory setting guiding these factors. It addresses the issues and concerns specific to each community, based on citizen input from local residents through a variety of forums. The goals and objectives, recommendations, and implementation steps included in this Plan are designed to address the community's individual concerns, and reflect its unique and distinctive vision for its future.

At the same time, however, it is clear that the Town shares many of the same goals and faces many of the same challenges and opportunities as neighboring communities. In addition, it became clear that many issues couldn't be adequately addressed from a purely local perspective. They cut across jurisdictional boundaries, and are best approached on an inter-municipal basis. Therefore, this Plan identifies overarching regional issues and articulates goals, makes recommendations, and suggests implementation items that apply to more than one municipality. Nonetheless, specific goals and objectives were developed to address the Town of Elma's needs for this Comprehensive Plan update, as the focus of this update was on the Town.

Once adopted by the Town, the Plan will become its blueprint for continued growth and economic development in designated, planned areas, while at the same time preserving working agricultural lands and farming as a way of life well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It provides a variety of tools and options that can be used immediately or in the future. Implementation of the revised comprehensive plan is the responsibility of elected officials and appointed boards serving the Town of Elma. The Implementation Section provides a range of recommended actions that the Town could undertake, including zoning and other land use codes; capital improvements; economic development activities and other actions.

### 1.4 HOW THE PLAN WILL BE UTILIZED

In accordance with Section 272-a of Town Law, Towns have the power to undertake comprehensive planning and to adopt a plan to help promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the Town and to give due consideration to the needs of the people of the region of which the Town is a part.

By law (Section 272-a), the adoption of a comprehensive plan has the following effect:

- a. All Town land use regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan adopted pursuant to Section 272-a.11.(a); and
- b. All plans for capital projects of another government agency on land included in the Town comprehensive plan, adopted pursuant to Section 272-a, shall take such plan into consideration.

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Once adopted, the Town would begin to implement the plan by amending its land use regulations to conform to the comprehensive plan, and consider the plan in all of its land use decisions (site plans, subdivisions, and re-zonings). Yearly, the community would utilize the plan in determining its capital project plan and in helping to determine what projects and other implementation actions should be undertaken in the following year. Copies of the adopted comprehensive plan must be filed with County and State agencies, and would be utilized by those agencies in planning projects and actions that could affect the planning community.

This Comprehensive Plan update is the community's message to its residents, to developers, to industry, and to other levels of government, that the Town of Elma has given consideration to its environs and has proposed a program of development based upon sound planning principles and direction, with public input and support. It is important for the Town to have such a statement of policy, with supporting documentation that led to that policy. This ensures that the Town's interests are clearly stated, and provides guidance for the Town in evaluating proposals that come before it. Adoption of a Comprehensive Plan also lends weight to the Town's position when conflicts arise, because this position is based on sound planning and has public consensus behind its findings.

Policies, plans and capital improvement programs instituted by higher levels of government -- at the national, state, regional and county levels-- often play a significant role in shaping the future of local communities. The Town's Comprehensive Plan clearly communicates the Town's consensus in regard to its preferred future. This Plan has been prepared with an understanding of regional and State trends and policies. Where appropriate, it is consistent with these higher government programs; where there are variations, it explains the rational basis for any differences. The Joint Comprehensive Plan completed for the Towns of Aurora, Elma, Holland, and Wales and the Village of East Aurora in 2004, was used as a reference point and guidepost for this plan update.

The recommendations and policies in this comprehensive plan grew out of existing land use patterns, its strategic location in the greater Buffalo metropolitan area, future vision, and practical considerations of access to infrastructure and transportation, with an eye to preservation of important natural features. Business and industrial firms and, to some extent, individual homeowners are all engaged in looking into the future from time to time in order to provide some direction to their day-to-day activities. Most businesses, for instance, project their anticipated needs and goals for at least a five-year period. A community likewise must have some direction to its day-to-day activities. In fact, it is even more important for a community to think ahead, due to its size and complexity; the environmental importance of its assets; and the enduring and long-reaching nature of its decisions, particularly in regard to land use. A comprehensive plan can provide insight and direction for the future of the community, to protect its resources; plan for prosperity and provide improved local quality of life.

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A comprehensive plan provides a number of benefits:

- Dealing with minor problems so that they do not become major problems in the future;
- Limiting the impact of changes which can be foreseen and which will occur in the future;
- Shaping new development to the community's needs and preferences;
- Guiding both public and private action to save money, time, and effort;
- Improving coordination between municipalities; and
- Providing a unifying focal point for the efforts of all community interests.

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### CHAPTER 2: DEMOGRAPHICS/EXISTING CONDITIONS

The primary source of data for the information presented below comes from the U.S. Census Bureau. Two primary U.S. Census Bureau datasets are utilized when aggregating data for comprehensive planning purposes: the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS). The Decennial Census has been conducted every ten years since 1790, as required by Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution. It counts every single U.S. resident and it is the primary instrument used to determine apportionment, the process of dividing seats up in the U.S. House of Representatives. In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau, through scientific sampling, selects households to complete surveys. The data collected from these surveys serve as a scientific sample for producing estimates for the entire population.

The ACS data is the most up-to-date information available on the community. Approximately 1 in 38 U.S. households per year receive an opportunity to participate in the ACS, either by completing it online or filling out a paper copy and sending it in by mail. The U.S. Census Bureau aggregates this data and publishes reports based on the information contained therein online. The Federal government then utilizes this information aid with the decision-making process of allocating funds (approximately \$400,000,000,000 annually) back to individual communities for any number of projects such as school, road, and hospital improvements and/or construction.<sup>1</sup>

In some instances, the data collected by the ACS is not 100% accurate, it's not intended to be, but it does represent what is widely regarded by social scientists as some of the best information available on a given community for gaining a generalized understanding of major demographic issues and topics.

#### 2.1 POPULATION

The U.S. Census Bureau calculated the Town of Elma's population at 11,317 in 2010. In 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that the Town's population had grown during that five-year gap by approximately 293 residents to reach a total of 11,610.

Elma, like several other communities in Erie County, is beginning to serve as a second-ring suburb of the City of Buffalo. Over the last 35-years the Town of Elma's population has grown from 10,574 in 1980 to 11,610 in 2015, an increase of 1,036. The Town of Elma's population growth is not necessarily being driven by birth rate or immigration, but rather by second-ring suburban development, with increased subdivision activity. Residents previously residing in the City of Buffalo or first-ring suburbs are moving further afield in Erie County, often times, building low-density, residential subdivisions on lands that were previously agricultural/farmland.

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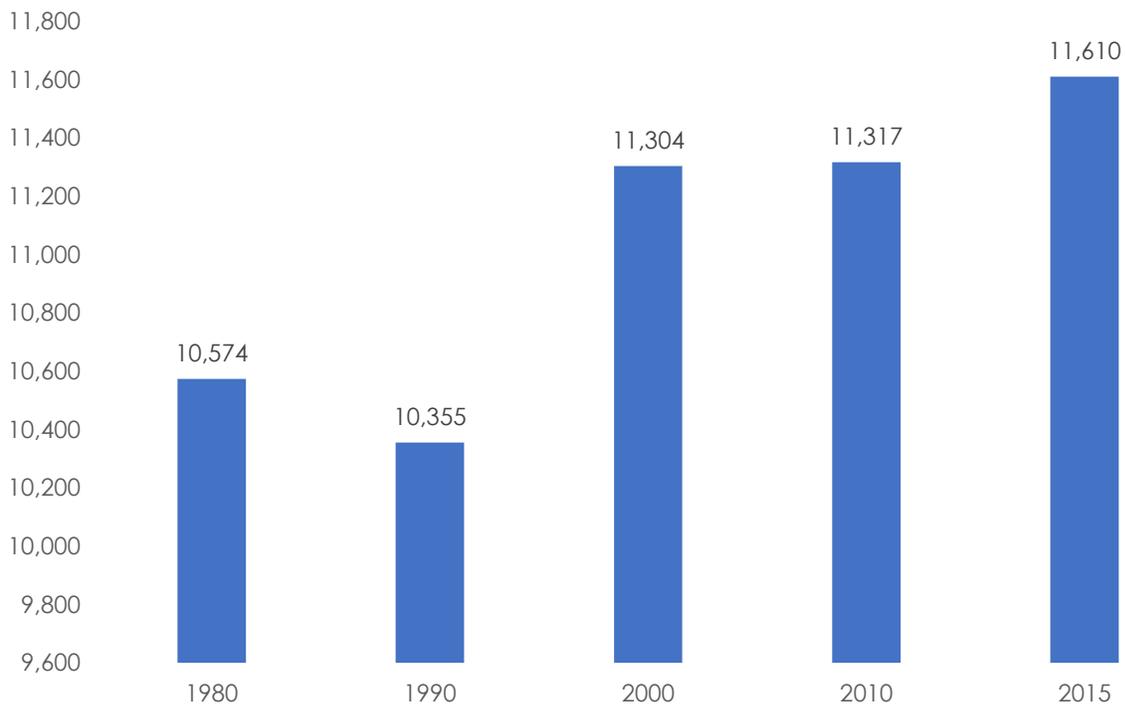
<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *How the American Community Survey Works for Your Community*, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/how-the-acs-works.html>

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It is anticipated that the Town will continue to experience development pressure and population growth for the foreseeable future. The development pressures are tangible in their impact on the community and, as a result, the Town placed a moratorium on new subdivisions in November 2015, until such a time that the Town's subdivision ordinance could be amended to adequately address the issues associated with new growth. Based on building permit data provided by the Town, 244 new single-family detached homes were built between 2010 and 2017, an average of approximately 35 new single-family detached homes per year.

**FIGURE 1: POPULATION TREND – TOWN OF ELMA**



### 2.2 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Median household income in the Town of Elma was estimated at \$78,424 in 2015. When compared to Erie County as a whole, where median household income was estimated at \$51,247, the Town of Elma's estimated median household income was significantly higher. The +\$27,177 in median household income for Elma's residents provides them with significantly more liquid spending power and economic capital than their county-wide peers. To provide some further regional context, the estimated median household income of residents in the City of Buffalo's municipal limits was estimated at \$31,918, approximately \$46,506 less than the Town of Elma's.

### 2.3 POVERTY LEVELS

The ACS estimated that poverty levels in the Town of Elma fell for both families and people from 2010 to 2015. Poverty levels are estimated by the number of families and the number

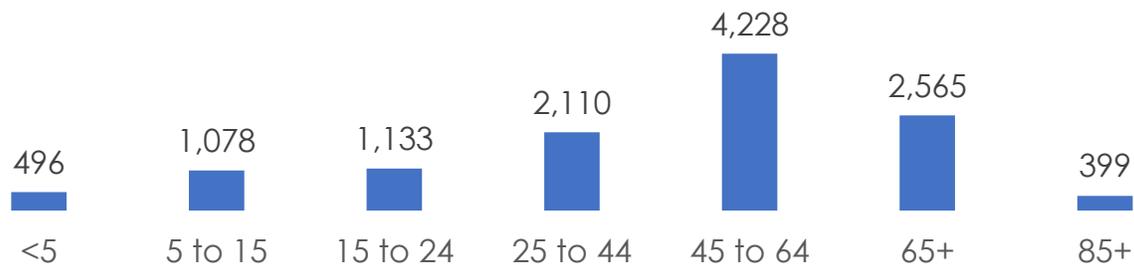
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of people whose income 12 months prior to survey was below the poverty level. From 2010 to 2015, poverty levels in the Town of Elma decreased for families, from an estimated 5.2% to 1.0% and for people, from an estimated 5.2% to 2.9%.

## 2.4 AGE DISTRIBUTION

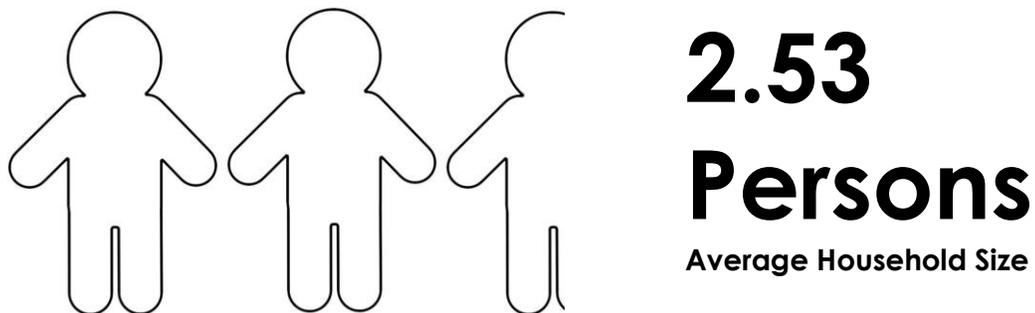
In the Town of Elma, seniors, age 65 and over, accounted for an estimated 22.1% of the Town's population, approximately 6 percentage points higher than the percentage of seniors (16.2%) found in Erie County's collective population. The number of seniors in the Town of Elma has increased by 6.15 % since the year 2000, when seniors accounted for 16.0% of the Town's population. In 2015, the percentage of the Town residents under the age of 20 was 18.8%, approximately one-fifth the Town's overall population.

**FIGURE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION – TOWN OF ELMA**



## 2.5 HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

**FIGURE 3: AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE – TOWN OF ELMA**



The average household size in the Town of Elma is 2.53 persons, while the average family size is 2.94 persons. The number of householders living alone (941) accounted for over one-fifth (21.1%) of the Town's populace. Family households (families) accounted for 75.2% of the types of households in the Town of Elma, while non-family households represented just under one-quarter (24.8%). Just over one-quarter of family households (27%) have children under the age of 18 living in the household.

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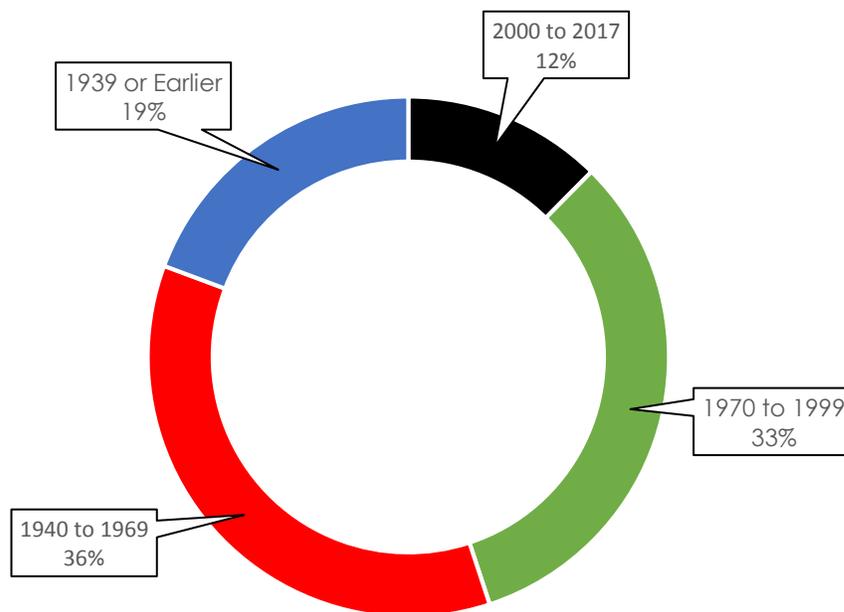
These household composition numbers are similar to what is found in Erie County as a whole, although there were some key differences. The Town of Elma has a higher average household size at 2.53 persons than the 2.32 persons average household size found in Erie County. The percentage of householders living alone in the Town of Elma, 21.1%, was significantly less than the 33% countywide.

In addition, the percentage of family households and non-family households in the County, 60% and 40% respectively, were different than what was found in the Town. The 60% of family households in the County was less than the 75.2% in the Town and the 40% of non-family households in the County was greater than the 24.8% found in the Town of Elma.

### 2.6 HOUSEHOLD UNITS

In 2015, the Town of Elma had an estimated 5,048 housing units and an estimated 237 of those units were vacant. The vast majority (4,511, 89.3%) of those units were single-family detached homes. Approximately 2,876 (57%) of the housing units in the Town were constructed prior to 1970 and approximately 1,009 (20%) pre-date 1940. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there were 32 buildings in the Town that contained 20 or more units in (e.g. apartment buildings). An additional five (5) housing units in the Town were mobile homes.

**FIGURE 4: HOUSING UNITS (YEAR BUILT) – TOWN OF ELMA**



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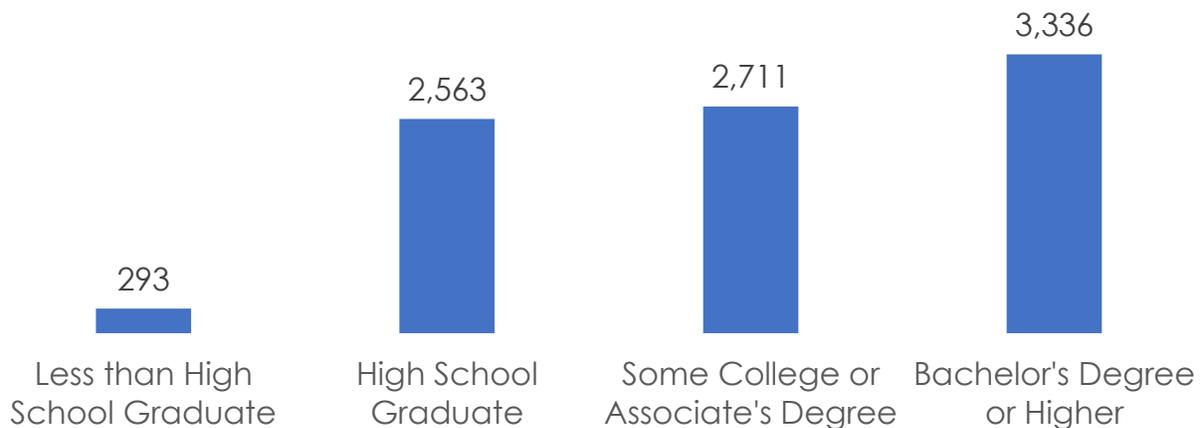
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### 2.7 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

It was estimated that 96.7% of the Town of Elma's residents age 25 and over were high school graduates (or have earned their GED) and approximately 20.3% of that same group hold a bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, 90.3% of Erie County's residents ages 25 and over were high school graduates and approximately 31.5% of persons within this age range held bachelor's degrees.

It was estimated that 96.7% of the Town of Elma's residents ages 25 and over were high school graduates (or have earned their GED) and approximately 37.5% of that same group hold a bachelor's degree. The Town's residents had generally higher levels of educational attainment than the residents of Erie County as a whole. Their significantly higher than average median household incomes reflect this education gap.

**FIGURE 5: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT – TOWN OF ELMA**



### 2.8 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Since the adoption of the RCP, the Town of Elma has seen some changes to the community. Single family and two family homes have been constructed at a low rate, resulting in additional residential units. A senior housing project has been constructed and new businesses have been built in the targeted commercial areas. The Town has also seen a growth in their Industrial base with expansions at Steuben and Moog. The Town has made improvements to the park system, fixed sewer lines, upgraded pump stations, has a new Town Hall, made additions to the Senior Center, completed improvements at the Highway garage, and has taken over Springbrook Shores. The Town has completed studies on commercial zoning in the Town and in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan made zoning code and map revisions. The Town has also evaluated multi-family residential and its subdivision code that resulted in additional Code and zoning map revisions.

<sup>2</sup> The 2015 ACS estimated the number of the Town of Elma's residents age 25 and over at 8,903.

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The existing zoning map is not greatly different than the zoning that existed at the time of adoption of the RCP, but includes the targeted changes associated with the above referenced studies (see attached Existing Zoning Map).

The existing land use conditions (based on assessment records- as they were done in the RCP) of the Town are illustrated in the Existing Land Use map of this Plan Update. It should be noted that although the predominant land use category is "Residential", many of the lands that are demarcated as residential are large parcels of land that have a single family home on them (this is one of the reasons why the Town has such a rural character). Commercial and Industrial development follow the zoning of the Town. It is noted that there are probably more agricultural properties than as shown on this map as assessment information is a poor way to identify agricultural lands. The Plan includes an Agriculture Map that illustrates the NYS/County Agriculture Districts, where prime farmland soils are located and the Ag parcels (again based on assessment records). The County's Ag Protection Plan illustrates more farms, and the Town should complete a better assessment of existing Ag lands.

This Plan update includes a new Environmental Features Map, which has, as expected, not changed since the RCP.

Also included is an Updated Community Features map and an updated Transportation Map. The new transportation map indicates Average Annual Daily Trips on the major roads of the Town. As would be expected, there have been significant increase in traffic on sections of the Major highways/roads in the Town; Transit road and Route 400. Some roads show a decrease and some show small increases. In general, it appears that major roadways carrying people to the Town and places outside of the Town (driving through) have more traffic, but the general roads within the Town are about the same. As reported by individuals, there are problem spot areas not showing up under volume increases but may be related to localized problems or roadway configuration or operation issues.

The existing RCP document should still be referenced concerning other information about the Town and most importantly how it fits into the planning of the other RCP communities (Aurora, East Aurora, Holland and Wales).

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### CHAPTER 3: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan update presents the goals and objectives that were updated for the Town of Elma under the guidance of the Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) and the community. This update sought to build upon and where necessary, amend, the goals and objectives outlined in the 2004 regional comprehensive plan, as they pertained to the Town of Elma.

In addition, this update was designed to expand upon the 2004 goals and objectives, ensuring consistency with regional planning documents including, but not limited to: *One Region Forward: A New Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara* (2014), the *Framework for Regional Growth: Erie & Niagara Counties, New York* (2006), the *Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan* (2012), the *Regional Economic Development Council: A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York* (2011), and the *Erie County Broadband Feasibility Study* (2017).

With the goals and objectives from the 2004 regional comprehensive plan in place, additional goals and objectives were created and, in some instances, the goals and the objectives from 2004 regional comprehensive plan were updated or removed altogether. For example, there were some goals and objective from the 2004 regional comprehensive plan that did not pertain to the Town of Elma, as they were more geared towards specific issues in neighboring communities. The goals and objectives focus on the major issues and concerns of the Town's residents and are aimed at helping to guide future growth and development in the Town of Elma. In *Chapter 5* (Findings and Recommendations) of this plan, specific actions that the Town can implement to achieve the intent of these goals and objectives.

#### 3.1 DEFINING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of a Comprehensive Plan establish what is most important to a community. They represent local values and priorities and provide insight into what the community will focus on for its future. The objectives listed below each goal help to clarify that overarching goal by providing more detail to what the community is trying to accomplish. As such, goals and objectives are used to help guide future decisions about growth, development, budgets, etc. in the Town so that individual decisions are made with an understanding about how they relate to the community's preferred future. The goals and objectives also provide guidance for decision makers at the County, Regional and State levels. The goals and objectives are general in nature, so they can remain relevant over the long-term. These goals and objectives also form the foundation for the specific actions – the recommendations of the Plan – that the Town will undertake achieve the vision. In general, goals and objectives are developed with a horizon of approximately **10-years**.

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### 3.2 PUBLIC INPUT

The original Regional Comprehensive Plan was designed from the ground up with extensive public input. Public participation is the critical element of the planning process, as such, a variety of avenues were utilized to solicit public input. For this update and specifically to help with any updates to the Goals and Objectives of the Town, there were two public information meetings with participatory features such as photo boards where attendees could leave comments and questions, traditional comment sheets, and formal and informal question and answer sessions. Additional public input was solicited through CPC meetings (the CPC was formed entirely of members of the community), electronic submission of comments via e-mail, press releases, and a survey. Within the Appendix of this Comprehensive Plan update there are examples of the materials that were utilized to solicit public input and the results of that input.

The goals and objectives updated and newly developed as part this update were, thus, born from the input received from members of the general public, committee members, and elected officials. Nothing was decided on or created in a vacuum or behind closed doors. To do so would have been to jeopardize the integrity of the comprehensive plan update itself. It is a planning document that is born from and dependent upon public input and feedback.

### 3.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

#### **1. Land Use**

**Goal:** Preserve the Rural Community Character (*Remained as one of the highest Priorities of the Town*).

**Objectives:**

- Properly manage growth and development to control sprawl and preserve the rural character of the Town;
- Maintain the existing quality of life by properly managing traffic and preserving open space areas;
- Promote the preservation and reuse of culturally and historically significant structures, such as the former Town Hall building;
- Promote development that is at a size and a scale compatible with the surrounding community;
- Encourage architectural designs and development styles that are in harmony with the character of the area;
- Seek to boost community pride and promote a focus on property maintenance;

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- Understand and emphasize the importance of Agriculture in Elma's character;
- Avoid standard residential subdivisions that do not fit into the character of the Town.

**Goal:** Encourage orderly growth and development (*This helps to preserve the Town's character and meet the objectives of regional planning initiatives*).

**Objectives:**

- Effectively buffer residential uses from the impacts of commercial and industrial development (correctly defining what a buffer is, and what it is not);
- Support and uphold the goals and objectives of the Regional Comprehensive Plan to properly manage growth in the Town;
- Monitor and understand the impact of growth in the community;
- Plan for a balance and diversity of uses in the Town to control the cost of and need for services;
- Encourage the use of alternative development techniques that manage density, minimize the adverse impacts of residential development, and control sprawl;
- Allow for the provision of adequate infrastructure that addresses public needs without encouraging excessive growth;
- Encourage the preservation of important natural and scenic features on lands that are proposed for commercial and industrial development;
- Investigate and encourage the accommodation of creative senior and affordable housing;
- Promote the renovation and reuse of existing developed properties;
- Utilize this plan to guide land use decision;
- Continue to utilize the Town's strong subdivision standards to control unwanted growth in the Town.

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### 2. Community Facilities

**Goal:** Preserve and promote recreational opportunities.

**Objectives:**

- Maintain existing recreational resources and provide increased opportunities for public recreation;
- Where economically feasible, promote the establishment of bike and pedestrian pathways and interconnections between recreational facilities within the Town and the region;
- Encourage the provision of recreational space in all types of new residential development; and
- Provide increased and easily accessible recreational opportunities to address the needs of the Town's youth, as well as seniors.

### 3. Economy

**Goal:** Provide for economic development.

**Objectives:**

- Focus industrial and commercial development in existing facilities before new areas are established;
- Provide adequate areas for existing industrial and commercial enterprise to expand and grow in context with the overall development patterns of the Town;
- Coordinate industrial development with Route 400 and the railroad line;
- Ensure industrial growth occurs in areas with adequate utilities and infrastructure; and
- Investigate the potential for an industrial incubator to promote new business and entrepreneurial development.
- Encourage and support the revitalization and success of the Seneca Street corridor;
- Allow for appropriate commercial development in the areas currently demarcated by the Town.

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### 4. Environment

**Goal:** Protect significant environmental resources.

**Objectives:**

- Properly plan development to preserve areas identified as important open space, including stream corridors, wildlife habitat and corridors, and farmland;
- Protect and preserve important viewsheds and scenic resources in the Town;
- Discourage clear cutting to preserve natural vegetation on private lands sited for development and maintain the rural character of the Town;
- Preserve and protect lands that recharge groundwater resources;
- Minimize adverse impacts to surface and groundwater resources from non-point source pollution and failing septic systems;
- Minimize the loss of remaining prime farmland soils to development;
- Continue and promote the use of creative tools such as conservation easements to encourage the protection of important resources.

### 5. Infrastructure

**Goal:** Provide a safe and efficient transportation system.

**Objectives:**

- Provide for a more pedestrian friendly roadway system by providing wider and safe right-of-way areas;
- Focus on maintaining existing roadways and repairing those that are dilapidated (e.g. Seneca Street);
- Ensure safe roads for automobile travel as well as for bicycle, pedestrians, and other modes of travel, through proper roadway maintenance throughout the Town and the improved enforcement of speed limits and other existing safety regulations;
- Properly manage growth and development to minimize exiting traffic volumes on already congested roads (e.g. Clinton Street, Bullis Road, and Bowen Road) and avoid congestion on other Town roadways;

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- Encourage use of acceptable north-south and east-west travel routes to alleviate traffic congestion;
- Focus any appropriate residential development around activity centers in the Town to encourage hamlet activity and reduce automobile dependency; and
- Strive to better accommodate the transportation needs of the elderly population in the Town.

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### CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the five (5) major goals and the objectives identified in *Chapter 3* of this Plan, generalized findings, specific recommendations, and a vision plan have been created. These findings, recommendations, and vision plan are designed to help the Town of Elma successfully implement the goals and objectives from *Chapter 3* and are organized into the following subsections of this chapter:

#### **FINDINGS**

- Subsection 4.2 Findings

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Subsection 4.3 Preserve Rural Community Character
- Subsection 4.4 Encourage Orderly Growth and Development
- Subsection 4.5 Preserve and Promote Recreational Opportunities
- Subsection 4.6 Provide for Economic Development
- Subsection 4.7 Protect Significant Environmental Resources
- Subsection 4.8 Provide a Safe and Efficient Transportation System

#### **VISION PLAN**

- Subsection 4.9 Vision Plan

The basis of the findings and recommendations came from a number of sources that include: committee input, public meetings, first-hand field research, consultant input and the findings and recommendations outlined in the *2004 Regional Comprehensive Plan*. Again, it should be noted that this plan update seeks to build upon the ideas laid out in the 2004 Comprehensive plan, not replace them. Similarly, this plan should serve as a “check-up” in terms of how well the 2004 plan has been implemented.

Additional ideas and further revisions were formulated based on the consultant's experience in other communities (what has been shown to work and what hasn't) and topical research.

The last subsection of this chapter contains the Vision Map, along with its supporting narrative. The Vision Map and supporting narrative are tools to help illustrate the ideas and recommendations generated in this chapter and can only be utilized in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan (not a stand-alone document).

#### 4.2 FINDINGS

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The following subsections provide a synopsis of the major findings, opportunities/constraints/conclusions, and issues confronting the Town of Elma.

- Subsection 4.2.1 Relevant Facts
- Subsection 4.2.2 Summarized Needs/Desires of Community
- Subsection 4.2.3 Opportunities/Constraints/Concerns
- Subsection 4.2.4 Zoning Specific Opportunities/Constraints/Concerns

### 4.2.1 Relevant Facts

- Agricultural uses are not the predominant land-use categories in the Town of Elma, although it remains a focal point of the community's collective vision and character;
- A commonly expressed opinion was the concept of preserving the rural character of the Town and the importance of avoiding the suburbanization of the Town. Residential uses make up most of the uses;
- It must be noted that many of the residential properties in Town are single-family detached homes set on large tracts of land, rather than what would be considered "typical" first or second-ring suburban subdivisions;
- When describing rural character, "farming" was not the first word utilized by Town residents, words such as "large lots" and "open space" were more commonly mentioned;
- Commercial development is concentrated on Transit Road and Bullis Road. Additional areas of commercial development are located on Seneca Street and Bowen Road;
- Industrial uses are located in Jamison Road and State Route 400 area. Much of the Town continues to maintain a rural, undeveloped quality;
- Roadways in the Town are predominantly two-lane, rural roads with little to no curbing and no sidewalks. The roadways do not have shoulders and are, generally, unlit;
- Traffic pressures (according to AADT provided the NYSDOT) are increasing, especially from the north (Town of Lancaster) and from the west (Town of West Seneca);
- Increase in cars on the road can also be attributed to the increase in the number of cars per household, which has consistently increased;

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- All of the Town of Elma is serviced by public water lines. In addition, there are small portions of the Town serviced by public sewer lines (there have been some requests to extend sewer for development purposes);
- State Route 400 serves as a major transportation connector/corridor for the Town to the wider region;
- The Norfolk Southern railroad runs directly through the Town, connecting it to the City of Buffalo and points further south, including Olean, and into the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania;
- The Town has completed zoning updates that identify where, what type and how commercial development can take place in the Town. The Town has also completed zoning updates relating to where, what type and how multi-family housing can occur. The Town also updated their subdivision regulations (keeping the restrictive components of the law) and have change their laws not to allow flag lots;
- The Town continues to see some requests for rezoning and residential development; and
- 244 new single-family detached homes were built between 2010 and 2017, an average of approximately 35 new single-family detached homes per year.

### 4.2.2 Summarized Needs/Desires of the Community

- Public sentiment is quite clear – the preservation of rural character, along with the retention of open space and natural resources, are of paramount importance and, if the issues were ranked, would be at the top of the list for the majority of Elma's residents. Maintaining the quality of life associate with the Town's rural setting is of the utmost importance;
- The residents of Elma also indicate a collective desire to support existing businesses and the growth of business, especially in those parts of Town that have existing commercial and/or industrial land uses. The quality of that development and how it fits into the character of the Town is also very important;
- Elma's residents recognize the importance of the environment to the community, in terms of both its function in providing natural resources and providing opportunities for passive recreation;
- Elma's residents, in general, do not support the conversion of rural open space into residential or commercial development, they prefer the re-development of existing residential and commercial developments over greenfield development;

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- The community believes that a safe, functional, and efficient transportation system is essential to the Town. Addressing problem areas and preventing the creation of new problem areas should be a focus; and
- The public wants to ensure that existing recreational services provided by the Town are preserved and improved, and passive recreational opportunities (open space) are expanded where feasible. There was not strong support raised at public meetings concerning the addition of trails and pathways in the Town; unlike in the RCP which includes trails and pathways connecting the participating communities.

### 4.2.3 Opportunities/Constraints/Concerns

The following summary of opportunities/constraints/conclusions are included to provide the reader with an overview of the challenges and opportunities identified during the course of the year-long development of this comprehensive plan update. They are not intended to be exhaustive in description, but rather to serve as highlights of those issues that have been identified during the process.

- Elma still exhibits the greatest development pressures in the communities represented in the Regional Comprehensive Plan. This pressure comes from Lancaster to the north and West Seneca and Orchard Park to the west. Development pressures have not resulted in large subdivision growth, though, due to lack of sewer services and most importantly the Town's restrictive zoning and regulations;
- There are three exits to the Route 400 expressway in the Town: Transit Road, Jamison Road and Maple Street. This is beneficial in one respect, but also increases the chances of development pressures;
- The Town has a well-developed industrial area located around Route 400, between the Maple Street and the Jamison Road exit. This area is also accessible to the Norfolk Southern railroad and includes a major rail siding. This area is an important component of the community, providing jobs and tax dollars. It should be protected and areas for expansion determined;
- Although there are three rural service centers, or hamlets, in the Town (Blossom, Springbrook and Elma Center), there is really no Town center. The Village of East Aurora provides many needs of the Town of Elma residents, especially in the southern part of the Town, and to a great extent acts as its Village;
- Water service is provided throughout the Town of Elma, with little problems or complaints (there have been some complaints about flows and pressures in certain areas). It has been noted as one of the best water systems in the County. Sewer service is provided in several small areas throughout the Town by package type wastewater treatment plants (some in need of future upgrades). There was little

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interest expressed in meetings or surveys to extend sewer service, except in and around existing commercial/industrial growth areas;

- Some interesting components of the Town's subdivision regulations help to direct growth: major subdivisions are only allowed in Residential A or B, and lots must have percolation of 1 inch in 30 minutes or better. If they do not, they can be split under the chapter entitled "Acreage Lot Development" (these require lot sizes of five acres or more). The Town also has a regulation on the books that restricts the number of lots that can be split off of the lot of record when the law was created (the four split rule). These regulations have helped to slow development in the Town;
- Three large stream corridors run through the Town. These corridors contain significant open space. The Buffalo Creek flows along the eastern boundary of the Town, where there are agricultural areas (within State Agriculture Districts), and environmental restrictions. This area is also abutted by the rural agrarian Town of Marilla. The stream then runs westerly through the northern part of Town, joining the Pond Brook branch of the creek and continuing westward into West Seneca. This stream corridor acts as a buffer to the development in Lancaster. The Pond Brook branch flows from the Village of East Aurora north through the Town and joins with the Buffalo Creek as described previously. The Pond Brook stream corridor contains important open space and acts as a buffer to the industrial areas in the Jamison Road area. Finally, the Cazenovia Creek runs through the southwest corner of the Town, providing an area of large open spaces;
- Primarily the northern section of the Transit Road corridor (and areas off of this corridor), Seneca Street (Route 16), Bowen Road near Bullis, and the Maple Street exit area are the only commercial areas in the Town. Isolated commercial zonings have been removed over the years (some remaining along Clinton). Each area is unique. The northern Transit Road area contains more intensive uses. The Bowen Road area has a retail plaza. The Maple Road area has automobile-dependent businesses and mixed uses, and the Seneca Street corridor is generally characterized by small businesses, although in the Spring Brook area there many automobile related businesses;
- Agricultural properties are spread throughout the Town, but with concentrations along the eastern side of Town. This area also includes a State Agricultural District. Another grouping of farms exists in the western/northwestern part of Town. Again a State Agricultural District extends from the northwest corner into the southwest corner of the Town. The County considers much of the Town of Elma (excluding the northwest area) an agricultural transition zone. The northwest corner of the Town is the area most under development pressures and is therefore most likely to lose its farms and open space features;
- Most of the Town of Elma contains prime farmland soils or prime farmland soils (when drained). Typically prime farmland soils are also soils that are conducive for development; and

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- Residential C – Agricultural zoning is the predominant zoning in the Town. This zoning is the least restrictive but generally results in residential development with homes on lots of one to five acres in size (due to percolation problems and avoiding reviews.) Residential C only allows residential and agricultural uses. Pockets of lower density residential zoning (Residential A and B) occur in the northeast corner of the Town (Elma Center to the north, south and west), the southern portion of the Town between the industrial area and the Town of Aurora, and in the southwest corner along North Davis Road. These zonings allow residential uses and business uses by special permit. Development usually occurs at lower densities, but changes to the code could better ensure these results.
- The Town has three parks, and a great library and Town Hall. These municipal services and others are provided with no general Town tax. The Town is financially sound and has a good fund balance.
- The Town has some roads that are in poor condition (mainly County roads) and have some poor intersections (noted in our public outreach meetings). Some also have complaints about speed limits and speeding.
- There have been issues raised about reduced memberships in the Fire Departments and how they can provide protection to the Town.
- The Town is primarily automobile dependent with little public transportation and opportunities for biking and walking.
- Since the last Comprehensive Plan the Town has seen the continued growth of Steuben and Moog; a senior housing project was constructed (Sylvia's Place); completed some park expansions and updates (and added walking trails to the park); built the new Town Hall; completed an addition to the Senior Center; made upgrades to the water and sewer systems; and conservation easements have been obtained on several parcels.

### 4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS; PRESERVE THE RURAL COMMUNITY CHARACTER

In an effort to help preserve the rural community character of the Town of Elma, certain measures should be undertaken. Major issues of concern with regard to community character include limiting future (potential) sewer line extensions, preserving remaining agricultural uses and prime farm soils and limiting residential development. Appropriate lands for open space preservation, including creek corridors, should be identified. To avoid sprawl-inducing development practices, rural development guidelines should be adopted and enforced (for any residential development that could take place).

Site clearance standards should be considered to preserve open space. The establishment of design standards for industrial development would be useful to avoid uniformity of design and insure that these uses are designed to fit with the character of

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the community. Emphasis should also be placed on the preservation of historic structures in the Town. Growth around the Elma Plaza area should be minimal, and protection of significant environmental resources in this area should be an objective.

- Although there are good tools in place to control where development could occur, where there is any development, there should be controls in place to direct the design of that development. Therefore it is recommended that the Town implement non-traditional development techniques, such as open development areas, overlay districts and adopt rural development guidelines, to control growth, manage sprawl and preserve open space. Open development area regulations should state limitations on usage and design guidelines (it should not be a tool to encourage growth);
- Enforcement, codification and potential updates to the existing overlay districts/design guidelines for the Elma Plaza (Town center) area, the Transit Road corridor (north of Route 400) and for the Seneca Street (Route 16) corridor. Overlays for other areas should be considered such as for the Maple Road/Route 400 interchange. These overlays could also include the design issues in other recommendations;
- Future sewer line extensions should be controlled to manage growth and, in turn, preserve the character of the community. Sewer lines may be extended for Industrial/commercial development. Only in extreme extenuating circumstances would they be extended for residential development. In those cases, two things need to occur; one, a fiscal analysis should be completed (is it financially sound in the short term and long term) and, two, standard subdivision designs that are not consistent with the character of the surrounding area should be discouraged;
- Institute appropriate programs to preserve the remaining important areas of farmland and prime farm soils. Farming is no longer a dominant industry in Elma but certain farming uses and areas of important soils exist that should be protected through conservation easements and other such appropriate mechanisms. A farmland protection plan should be considered to identify the best ways of protecting the remaining aspects of this important resource;
- Expand upon the existing conservation easement program and consider the creation of a purchase of agricultural conservation easements program (PACE) for agricultural lands. Local farmers and owners of large agricultural lands (including fallow properties) should be approached once an Agricultural protection plan is established;
- Aggressively promote the use of the Town Conservation Easement Program. Work with the Land Conservancy to seek out grants to purchase greenspace and protect important lands such as wetlands;

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- Create an Open Space plan that would identify significant lands for open space preservation and protection, particularly along creek corridors, where limited access could be provided (in some areas). Emphasis should be added to those lands identified on the regional and Town vision maps. It is not the intent of this objective for the Town to own all of these lands; some may only require conservation easements or the Land Conservancy can get involved (or other such organization). Most of these areas that are being protected will not have public access. Only areas around existing public spaces should be considered for public ownership and access;
- Adopt architectural guidelines to control the quality of design in the Town and to ensure that it is compatible with the character of existing development, and historic preservation standards to preserve and protect important structures, particularly in the historic Elma Village area. For non-residential structures, the guidelines will provide general requirements to ensure that structures are complementary to surrounding uses. It is not the intent of these guidelines to require certain types of buildings. Residential structures will not be regulated, except under the zoning code that requires certain sizes, setbacks, etc.;
- The Town's present zoning and density requirements, combined with the objectives of the vision map, should help in controlling the growth in the Town to levels that will not require major roadway improvements. Improvements to the industrial corridor should be evaluated for their impact to local roadways; and
- Necessary roadway improvements to address drainage and safety concerns, that are undertaken in rural areas of the Town, should not include sidewalks, curbing and/or street lighting as part of the overall project, where the addition of such amenities would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area.

### 4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS; ENCOURAGE ORDERLY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Elma is under the greatest growth pressure of the five communities. Pressure points include the Town of Lancaster to the north, the Transit Road corridor, and West Seneca to the west. Although these pressures exist, the Town has seen small/moderate growth rates from 2010 to 2017 (approximately 35 new single-family, detached homes were built per year during that time, for a total of 244).

The Town's zoning ordinance limits residential growth rates. In addition, public sewers are not available in most of the undeveloped portions of the Town. Commercial and industrial uses are limited to a handful of targeted/specific areas.

The Town seeks to maintain this balance. Directed/targeted commercial and industrial growth, with limited, tightly controlled residential growth (limited density and specific form).

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- The industrial area and commercial area around the Maple Road interchange of State Route 400 should take advantage of the transportation features in that area, but compete with the Village of East Aurora's central business district. Development in this area should complement, and not duplicate, the types of development currently found in the Village of East Aurora. The small commercial area in the Hamlet of Elma Center is a neighborhood type business area, and the Transit Road corridor is outside of the Village's service area;
- Further sewer extensions in the Town should only be considered for commercial/industrial uses in the Jamison Road corridor, or within existing sewer districts. The top priority is for industrial uses in the area in the vicinity of Route 400 and existing light manufacturing uses, which has been targeted for additional uses of this nature;
- Large-scale commercial development should be limited to the areas identified in the recent zoning revisions made in the Town. The zoning overlay along the Transit road corridor should continue to be updated to properly address aesthetic issues (give it an Elma flavor – different than West Seneca, possibly rural guidelines), access management, landscaping, signage, and sizes of structure;
- The commercial zoning that exists around the Maple Street exit of Route 400 should be continued, but should be evaluated to target appropriate uses and include aesthetic and improved design standards. In other words, create a new zoning category or design a zoning overlay district that would allow uses different from what is permitted along Transit Road. This area should accommodate more transportation dependent uses and small businesses rather than full-scale commercial uses (e.g., supermarkets, department stores, etc.) and not present direct competition with the Village of East Aurora;
- The new zoning regulations developed for commercial development along Seneca Street should be re-evaluated every couple of years to see if it is accomplishing the goals of this area. The Town should also encourage the investment in this area through potentially creating an "enhanced 485 b" tax program for this area;
- The Elma Plaza is in the Elma Center area and is the focus of this important rural service center. Expansion of this commercial area should be permitted in a focused/targeted manner, with no commercial rezoning outside of this area. This area should be targeted for development as the Town center, with emphasis on improved walking and biking opportunities, and increased opportunities for commerce, convenience retail, and public services;
- Rural cluster development regulations and rural development guidelines should be considered to address low-density residential clustering in non-sewered areas of Town (if development is allowed in these areas). These regulations should allow for small decreases in lot sizes and creative lot layouts to accomplish the preservation

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of important open space features and rural atmosphere (non-standard lots). These clusters would not be allowed in areas with the poor soils;

- Additional lands should be targeted for industrial development (in a campus style) in the Maple/Jamison Road/Route 400 area. In determining these areas, care should be taken to buffer any surrounding residential uses (see vision map for areas to be studied);
- Areas around the Aurora boundary near the Village should have improved non-automobile accessibility to the Village. This area, as denoted on the vision map, is an area under direct influence from the Village of East Aurora. Although this area is uniquely Elma, it should be tied into the village to afford the areas residents the ability to take advantage of the Village atmosphere (improved accessibility);
- The components of the subdivision regulations that limit major subdivisions to Residential A and B zones, and require a 1-inch in 30 minutes percolation, are appropriate and should continue to be enforced. These are excellent controls for residential growth issues, and for the protection of resources;
- Zoning overlays (Environmental Protection Overlay Districts- EPOD's) should be established along the three major creek corridors (Buffalo Creek, Pond Brook and Cazenovia Creek). These overlays will establish buffer areas, incorporation of open space into designs, and requirements for access or conservation easements. They will not take away the right to develop, just control how it could be done;
- To accomplish protection of important environmental features, and agricultural and open space features, the Town should consider zoning modifications in the southwest corner, and along the eastern border of the Town. These areas should be considered for an agricultural/conservation zoning category or a zoning overlay (instead of the present mix of Residential B and Residential C.) The southwest corner of the Town could keep its present zoning layout if a zoning overlay were placed over the area. This overlay would accommodate the mixture of uses, zones and features (farms, Residential B and C categories, state agricultural district, creek corridors, etc.) of the area but provide a continuity of design and a protection of character. The eastern border of the Town, in areas presently zoned Residential C – Agricultural, would also likely benefit from a strengthened Agricultural/Conservation zoning district. This area includes a state agricultural district, a grouping of farms, and is adjacent to the Town of Marilla (a strong agricultural community). This zoning could also help in the protection of the important stream corridor through this area;
- The Residential C – agricultural zoning should remain in the areas through the center part of Town extending to the northwest corner. This area also has a state agricultural district and some remaining farms, and therefore should keep this zoning category. There are other areas of the Town with the Residential C – agricultural zoning and these should remain. In the area along the Lancaster

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border (between the creeks and the border – see Vision Map), the Town should also consider a zoning overlay. This overlay would give design and layout requirements (rural development guidelines) that would keep this area rural and help to buffer the suburban residential development taking place in Lancaster;

- The Town may also want to consider increasing lot size and frontage requirements in these sensitive areas;
- Establish a means of monitoring growth in the community and provide a yearly report to the Town Board;
- Consider promulgating new laws or amending the existing Town's laws to encourage creative (not large scale apartment type buildings) senior and affordable housing (see the appendix for the Erie County program on this subject);
- Amend the zoning laws to properly define how to buffer residential uses from industrial and commercial uses;
- Establishing design review and use requirements for pole barns, clearly distinguishing between personal uses versus commercial uses;

### 4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS; PRESERVE AND PROMOTE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The quantity and quality of recreational opportunities in the Town is a quality of life issue that is supported by the public. Residents want existing recreational opportunities to be maintained and, where appropriate, improved upon. There is a demand for additional park space (both programmed and passive).

Recreational sports are run by private organizations (EMW) that receive some funding from the Town to help with operating expenses.

Maintaining open space and finding ways for residents to utilize passive open spaces is an issue that is important to the Town. There is also demand for trails and bike paths in the Town.

- Analyze the capacity and usage of existing facilities. Collaborate with the school system(s) to find ways to utilize school facilities for recreational needs;
- Continue to collaborate with neighboring communities in order to offset programming costs. In addition, continue collaboration with neighboring communities for existing and new facility-sharing opportunities;
- Consider making open space areas and stream corridors Critical Environmental Areas, under existing NYS law provisions;

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- Make targeted existing roadways bike and pedestrian friendly to the fullest extent possible;
- Find ways for residents to access open space areas and stream corridors. This can take the form of pocket parks and/or scenic overlooks;
- The Town of Elma should prepare an Open Space/Recreation Plan to identify appropriate lands for future recreational use and/or environmental conservation. The plan should address demographic trends, which show increased in the number of young people and elderly in Elma. This plan should also examine the current usage of existing Town recreational properties and other recreational facilities in the area;
- The Elma Town Park on Creek Road will continue to have improvements made. The ball fields at this site should be continued to meet demands but should explore off-site alternatives such as the Wales Town Park and others;
- The Town property owned on Knabb/Handy Roads is currently unimproved and could be developed with play fields and picnic areas. A plan should be developed for the improvement of this site;
- The lands behind the senior center should be considered for additional recreational opportunities, including picnicking and community events and concerts;
- Where feasible, sites for public access should be identified and provided to the creek corridors for passive recreation and scenic viewing. Walkways should be provided wherever possible along creek corridors, especially along Buffalo Creek, where there is an existing pathway;
- Some roadway shoulders could be striped to accommodate hiking and biking throughout the Town;
- Walking trails could be provided at various community facilities, and investigated at other locations;
- Utility easements should be examined as potential means of trail connections within the Town and between the other regional planning communities;
- Provisions for recreational space should be incorporated in all new residential development. Where feasible, land should be provided within the development for recreational use; and

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- The Town should continue to support the private organizations that are providing recreation activities in the Town; EMW, the Boys and Girls Club, Football leagues, etc.
- The Town continues to support the use of Elma Meadows, a County Park, by residents for golfing and sledding.

### 4.6 RECOMMENDATIONS; PROVIDE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is a desire in the Town of Elma to provide sufficient economic development activity to provide diverse job opportunities for residents, to provide needed services to the community, and to balance the tax base. This has to be done in conjunction with maintaining rural character and controlling growth.

Manufacturing jobs have continued their decline, with a disproportionate amount of new jobs being in the service sector. Elma has benefited from the decentralization of jobs away from the City of Buffalo and into suburban areas. The Town's industrial areas have high concentrations of employment.

Elma has the infrastructure in place, with the convergence of State Route 400 and the Norfolk Southern railroad, to be a competitive advantage in terms of industrial and commercial development. Elma also has utilities and larger parcels of land, both of which could serve further industrial development. The Hamlet of Elma Center has some commercial retail development and the northern Transit road corridor offers additional retail and business development opportunities.

The Town of Elma has strong economic development potential along the existing industrial corridor that runs along the Route 400 Expressway. This area has water, sewer and rail service, and excellent access to the interstate system via Route 400. The Maple Road industrial area (Jamison and Route 400) is the most promising industrial development area in the region. The presence of Moog and other industries provides an anchor for industrial development, creating an identifiable and marketable industrial area.

Commercial centers in Elma are primarily convenience retail. Retail concentrations include the small plaza near Elma Center and scattered retail uses along Route 16, especially in the hamlet of Springbrook area near Transit Road. Some commercial uses also extend along Transit Road. These are not primarily geared to the convenience retail market, but consist of a mixture of larger uses, such as auto sales. Some retail and commercial development is also occurring in the vicinity of the Maple Road exit off Route 400.

- The retention of existing businesses should be a priority. It is easier to retain existing businesses than to recruit new industry;

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- The economic development priority of the Town is to strengthen existing businesses and industrial areas through in-fill development, expansion, and redevelopment;
- New commercial and industrial development should only occur where there is sufficient capacity, in terms of roads, sewer, water, and other infrastructure, to accommodate growth;
- The Town should coordinate and collaborate with the local business community and the school system(s) to ensure the availability of a local labor pool with appropriate employee skill;
- The area around the Jamison Road and Maple Road exits on the Route 400 Expressway should be reserved for light industrial development, and land uses not compatible with industrial uses should be discouraged. In addition, consideration should be given to careful site planning to maximize the regional economic development potential of this area;
- Any new retail development in the Town of Elma should be concentrated near where existing retail is already located (in accordance with the recently developed changes to the code and zoning map. These areas include the immediate Elma Plaza area, Transit Road, Seneca Street in the vicinity of the Spring Brook hamlet, and in the immediate vicinity of the Maple Road exit of Route 400;
- The area in the vicinity of the Plaza should be developed as a Town center or more distinct hamlet-like area. Additional retail development in this area should be encouraged in a manner that promotes a walkable scale, and serves surrounding residential uses. The area should contain a mix of land uses, including residential and public uses, to help support the retail and better form a Town center;
- As previously noted, additional commercial development could be accommodated at the Maple Road exit of Route 400, although such development should be balanced with the need for industrial land and should not include uses that would directly compete with the Village of East Aurora business districts. This location is appropriate for more automobile-oriented uses, such as those that already exist in the area;
- It is recommended that larger scale retail uses be concentrated at the northern end of Transit road, and not be allowed south of the Route 16 intersection;
- As started in the recent commercial zoning modifications, smaller scale commercial and retail uses are appropriate for Seneca Street (Route 16), particularly in the vicinity of the Spring Brook hamlet. However, these uses should be controlled and designed to be in character with the rural nature of the surrounding area. Commercial sprawl and strip development should be avoided along this roadway; and

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There are a number of agricultural properties (Agriculture is a business) in Elma, providing large amounts of open space in the Town. These properties contribute significantly to the community's identity, and should be preserved. To accomplish this and to help the farmers continue to farm, the Town should investigate how it can help support the farms and their business. This can be done through a local Agricultural Protection Plan, but in the meantime, the Town should meet with the farming community and find out their needs.

### 4.7 RECOMMENDATIONS; PROTECT SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The Town of Elma has a variety of significant environmental features. These include watersheds, creek corridors, tributary streams, wetlands and hydric soils, floodplains, open spaces, and large expanses of mature woodlands. Many of these resources provide important wildlife habitat for numerous species of fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Although the town contains significant environmental resources that would severely limit development.

Three large stream corridors run through the Town. These corridors contain significant open space. The Buffalo Creek flows along the eastern boundary of the Town, where there are agricultural areas (within State Agriculture Districts), and environmental restrictions. This area is also abutted by the rural agrarian Town of Marilla. The stream then runs westerly through the northern part of Town, joining the Pond Brook branch of the creek and continuing westward into West Seneca. This stream corridor acts as a buffer to the development in Lancaster. The Pond Brook branch flows from the Village of East Aurora north through the Town and joins with the Buffalo Creek as described previously. The Pond Brook stream corridor contains important open space and acts as a buffer to the industrial areas in the Jamison Road area. Finally, the Cazenovia Creek runs through the southwest corner of the Town, providing an area of large open spaces.

The stream corridors are typically surrounded by floodplains (please see the Environmental Features Map). Significant areas of floodplains are situated along Buffalo Creek and Cazenovia Creek. Wetlands are also present in the Town (please see Environmental Features Map). Although the Town contains areas of wetlands regulated by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, they are limited in extent. Small areas of identified federally regulated wetlands exist in the Town as well.

The entire Town is serviced by public water systems, although public sewers are much more limited and confined to a few small areas. Most of the Town is un-sewered and, as such, failing and poorly maintained septic systems threaten water quality. Stormwater drainage in the community is primarily handled through a network of culverts and roadside ditches that ultimately drain into local creeks and streams. As a means of preventing localized flooding in the community, drainage and erosion control measures should be implemented.

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All planning decisions in the Town of Elma, whether through SEQR or through routine policy, must take environmental impacts into account.

- The Town should prepare an open space plan to assess where priority lands exist for protection and conservation, including areas along important creek corridors;
- The prominent stream corridors in Elma are important components of its rural character. They should be preserved and utilized in ways that preserve the Town's rural character. In addition, connections between existing parks, open space areas, and these stream corridors should be provided where feasible;
- Elma should consider the adoption of local wetland regulations to further protect federal and state wetlands, particularly where septic systems are in use;
- The Town should also consider the adoption and site clearance standards to prevent sites from being completely cleared of vegetation during development or redevelopment;
- Elma should continue to work with neighboring municipalities to adopt watershed management strategies, including best management practices (see the watershed management plan completed through Erie County). Some of these recommendations are already included in this section: wetlands regulations, Overlay districts, open space inventory/plan, improved site clearance/erosion and sediment control, Farmland protection plan, etc. Another recommendation includes incorporating more low impact/green infrastructure requirements into the Town's Codes;
- The Town should work to educate staff and residents (and help farmers) as to the best practices involving site development, the use of fertilizers, pesticides, road salts, and the disposal of hazardous materials (HAZMAT) in order to further protect surface and groundwater quality. The United States Natural Resource Conservation Service (East Aurora) could be of great assistance in this;
- The Town should work to ensure that private septic systems are properly maintained and that failing systems are detected and properly mitigated; and
- Elma should adopt stricter sediment and erosion control regulations in order to help protect stream corridors. Similarly, stronger drainage requirements would help alleviate erosion within roadside ditches/culverts.

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### 4.8 RECOMMENDATIONS; PROVIDE A SAFE AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

State Route 400 has excess capacity and will adequately service the Town for the foreseeable future. The Maple Road and Jamison Road interchanges along State Route 400 provide two of the Town's primary industrial and commercial areas with direct connections to the wider region.

The Town's roadway systems are typically rural, two-lane roads that support local travel. These roads typically have narrow or no shoulders, no curbing, no lighting, and are served by roadside drainage ditches. Public transportation (by bus) is minimal and not a realistic option for most residents. There are some on-street bicycle routes that run through the Town. These include: Girdle Road (North/South), Bowen Road (North/South), Seneca Street (North/South), Pound Road (North/South), Northup Road (North/South), Transit Road (North/South), Clinton Street (East/West), and Rice Road (East/West).

The Town of Elma is dealing with increased volumes on its roadways due to growth pressures from the west (West Seneca) and from the north (Lancaster). This presents a challenge, as the widening of these roadways would negatively impact the rural character of the community.

The NYSDOT continually identifies certain locations where accident rates and/or design deficiencies are resulting in congestion or other traffic problems. Since these priority investigation locations (PILs) and priority investigation intersections (PIIs) are always changing, the communities should annually work with the NYSDOT (and Erie County) to help prioritize these problem areas. In doing this, consider the areas and intersections that were raised during the public outreach for this Plan Update (see appendix). Yearly meetings with residents should help to keep this list up to date.

The Norfolk Southern railroad line runs through the Town and has an active switch near Jamison Road. The railroad is another connection to the regional economy that can be harnessed to drive opportunities for industrial development.

- The railroad is a valuable asset for the transport of freight and should be protected. The Town should exert political pressure to ensure that the railroad is continued and expanded upon, where appropriate;
- The Town should collaborate with neighboring municipalities to conduct a corridor/access management traffic study to effectively address future growth and roadway usage in and around the Town. Funding should be sought from Erie County, with the support of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council. This should be region-wide in scope, as the roadways in the Town cross municipal boundaries and, in many cases, so to the traffic problems;
- The Town should work with the NYSDOT and Erie County to address the traffic issues occurring on NYS, County and Town roadways (see areas identified during the public meetings);

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- Bike and pedestrian access options, and expansion opportunities, on County roads should be explored by the Town (in collaboration with Erie County). Similarly, bike and pedestrian access options, and expansion opportunities, on State roads should be explored by the Town (in collaboration with the NYSDOT);
- In other parts of this Plan update, the use of zoning overlay districts have been recommended. These should be designed with traffic flow kept chiefly in mind. Traffic issues go hand-in-hand with land use decision making. Access management should be considered (curb cuts, setbacks, timing/location of traffic lights, siting and separation distances, etc.) should be considered. The Town should look at the adoption of access management regulations (samples can be provided through the NYSDOT);
- Protecting community character is the principal concern of the Town's residents. In order to do so, strict site planning and subdivision review should be observed, taking into full account: density, site orientation, existing roadway capacity, existing traffic patterns, access management, etc. Plans should be referred to the NYSDOT and the County early in the development process to ensure their input is properly considered by the prospective developer. The SEQR process is an excellent tool for starting such an evaluation and making sure the project has minimal impacts or mitigates impacts;
- Roadway widening and other such capacity expansion projects should not be undertaken outside of established sewer districts or within agricultural districts. Development should be encouraged in developed areas, where biking and walking are more feasible and where adequate public facilities already exist;
- Industrial development should occur (and be targeted) in and around State Route 400. This additional development should be tied to the examination of Route 400 interchange improvements; and

### 4.9 THE VISION PLAN

The Vision Plan for the Town of Elma, created for the original Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), provides the overall description of the specific planning areas of the Town. This map, along with the RCP, helped the Town in making zoning decisions and zoning code revisions over the last 15+ years.

Based on public and committee input, and the concepts of the regional planning documents created since the last plan, the Vision map of the Town now includes the following changes/clarifications.

The primary "growth" areas still include the Transit Road area and the Industrial area of the Town. The Transit Road growth area has been further refined to only include a

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smaller area primarily focused on the northern sections of Transit Road (Approximately the “developed area” as illustrated in the Regional Framework for Growth, RFG). The Industrial area of the Town has been refined (from what is illustrated in the RCP) to include only those areas currently zoned Industrial. This area is a very important economic engine of the Town and it should be understood that the areas surrounding these noted lands (the larger area shown on the RCP Vision map) need to be carefully planned to not impact the Industrial base (these areas could be long term Industrial areas).

To help with defining what is truly the “developing area” of the Town (as discussed in the RFG; which allows Communities to better define these areas), the vision map has been amended to not illustrate the larger growth area around Transit Road, and has removed the reference to a “Hamlet Growth Transition Area” (this is not a growth area) and further refined this Hamlet area. There is really very little of the Town that the Community would define as “developing”.

The area in the center of the Town previously denoted as “Agricultural/Open Space Transition Area” has been removed. This area is similar to the remainder of the Town; the “Rural Residential” classification. This “Rural Residential” area, as its name implies, includes the more rural residential areas of the Town. These areas are not planned for additional growth.

The Vision Map still illustrates the “Rural/Resource Protection Area” and the “Agricultural Protection Area”. These areas have important resources that should be considered in any decisions by the Town. The Plan also notes that most areas of the Town (even outside of these specific areas) should have their rural resources and character, and any agricultural lands, protected.

The “Community Character Protection Area” is still shown at the northern end of the Town, and is important to help keep the character of that area, as it transitions into Lancaster.

The “Village Transition Area” just identifies the fact that this area is close to the Village of East Aurora and should be connected to that rural center. This area has been reduced in size to better reflect the area that is within the “direct influence” area of the Village.

It should be noted that all of these areas; “Community Character Protection”, “Agricultural Protection”, “Village Transition”, “Rural Resource Protection”, and “Rural Residential” all are rural areas of the Town, and must be managed to protect rural character and control growth to meet the goals of the Plan.

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### CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTATION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preparation and adoption of the Comprehensive Plan update is a continuation of the planning process. The Comprehensive Plan update is an active document and should continually be updated. Therefore, the Town of Elma must take the necessary steps to ensure that the recommendations of this Plan update are implemented. Thus, this chapter of the Plan update outlines an implementation strategy for accomplishing some of the recommendations set forth in Chapter 4 and for achieving some of the goals and objectives outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter does not include all the recommendations outlined in the Plan (see Chapter 4 for all discussions), just those recommendations that must occur in a planned order or are strongly prioritized. The following implementation strategy includes a step by step approach with established priorities.

Upon adoption of the Plan update, the Town of Elma should prioritize the designation of an Advisory Committee, or a designated committee, as the entity(s) responsible for the Plan update's implementation. The information contained in this Comprehensive Plan update must be kept current so that the recommendations, as well as the implementation process, are based on, and reflect, existing conditions. An annual or bi-annual review process should be established to allow for the continuing review and updating of this Plan.

In addition, members of the Advisory Committee (or designated committee) should meet with local, county, and state agencies to discuss the Plan update and to determine how these agencies can help with its implementation.

#### 5.2 UTILIZATION OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter breaks down the implementation actions into Priority 1 Actions, Priority 2 Actions, and Priority 3 Actions. Priority 1 Actions should be completed first and are anticipated to take place in the first two (2) to three (3) years after plan adoption. Priority 2 Actions are those that can take place after a particular Priority 1 Action takes place, or as the community desires, in the first five (5) years after plan adoption. Priority 3 Actions are considered long-term actions or toolbox items, those that may or may not be necessary depending on future scenarios, or are alternative ideas for certain Priority 1 and Priority 2 Actions (that may not have achieved the desired results). Priority 3 items are considered "Tool Box" actions that can be utilized by the Town when needed -or never utilized- if so desired.

For Priority 1 and Priority 2 Actions, there are four (4) categories that the actions have been broken into: Zoning, Other Codes and Regulations, Cooperative Actions, and Other Actions. The first two categories, "Zoning" and "Other Codes and Regulations," are those actions most utilized by the Town Board to control land use in the Town. The next category, "Cooperative Actions" are those actions that should be done with, or in cooperation with,

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neighboring communities, Erie County, the School District(s) and/or New York State. The final category, "Other Actions," are those to be undertaken by the Town itself.

Under each of the categories, there is also a methodology section that explains who should complete these actions and how they should be accomplished. Finally, a general estimate of cost is given for these actions and potential sources of funding.

### 5.3 PRIORITY ONE ACTIONS

- Adopt the Comprehensive Plan update and continue, or form a new, Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation and updating of the Plan; and
- Establish a budget (update each year) for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan update.

#### A. Zoning Issues

- Research and draft rural development guidelines for the Town;
- Research and draft an environmental protection overlay zoning district (EPOD) for the southwestern region of the Town (Rural/Resource Protection Area);
- Evaluate and draft a steam corridor EPOD (utilize the watershed plan and other sample overlays);
- Build upon the design guidelines already created for the Town to include other areas of the Town such as the Elma Center area and Seneca Street. These could also be Overlay districts that include design standards;
- Continue to enforce the current subdivision restrictions in the Town. Create a document that represents a synopsis of these rules and regulations to present to individuals who are proposing subdivisions.

#### **Responsibilities/Methodologies**

The Town Board through its Planning Board or a committee (with the assistance of a consultant or other Planning agencies) would research and draft these new regulations. The Town Board, once they were found to be acceptable, would follow normal zoning code amendment procedures to adopt these changes (public hearings, SEQ, notifications, referrals, etc.).

#### B. Other Codes and Regulations

- Amend the site plan review regulations to lend more focus to issues of community, character, traffic impacts, aesthetics and historic preservation;
- Work with the Town Attorney to create a Policy memo that describes the 4 lot split law and other subdivision restrictions in the Town; and

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- Adopt a policy concerning sidewalks, curbing, and street lighting for rural areas;
- Consider the creation of rural/road frontage cluster development regulations;
- Reinforce the requirements in the subdivision regulations (zoning code) limiting major subdivision in A and B zones and restrictions due to percolation rates (poor soils).

### ***Responsibilities/Methodologies***

The regulations and text amendments could be formulated through the Planning Board with the assistance of a consultant or an organization such as the New York Planning Federation. For those codes being adopted, the Town will need to follow the regular procedures for code revisions.

### ***Funding/Costs***

The costs of implementation would range from approximately \$3,000 to \$10,000 and could be funded locally or through NYS Grant monies.

### C. Cooperative Efforts

- Recreational planning should be continued to be coordinated with the schools, the private organizations running recreation programs and with the neighboring municipalities;
- Zoning and Code implementation actions could be coordinated with neighboring communities that are considering similar neo-traditional planning tools;
- Agricultural protection programs/plans could also be coordinated with neighboring communities (see "other recommendations");
- All zoning and code revisions and large development projects should be referred to neighboring municipalities for their input;
- The Advisory Committee should meet two (2) times per year for the first two years, and then annually thereafter, to discuss implementation, issues and problems, potential revisions to the Plan update, and possible joint projects or agreements with neighboring municipalities;
- Work with neighboring municipalities to pursue a regional open space protection plan;
- Continue participation in the Southtown's Water Consortium Plan;

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- Work cooperatively with neighboring communities to develop neo-traditional zoning techniques and rural development guidelines that are compatible in nature;
- Consider amending the site plan review and subdivision regulations to allow for a better review of transportation impacts to the region. Work with neighboring municipalities to ensure that amendments are similar and achieve the same results;
- Work with the neighboring municipalities to adopt consistent site clearing standards and other development requirements with the goal of protecting watersheds;
- Work with neighboring municipalities to promulgate and adopt best management practices (BMP's) for use of fertilizers and pesticides, road salt use and application, and disposal of hazardous materials. For these BMPs, the communities should seek the assistance of agencies such as the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- With assistance from the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service, work with the neighboring municipalities to continue to improve erosion and sediment control guidelines to protect stream corridors from the impacts of development and excessive stormwater runoff; and
- Work cooperatively with neighboring municipalities to approach tourism from a regional perspective.

### ***Responsibilities/Methodologies***

In most cases the Town Board or appointed committees (including Town Board members) will lead and facilitate these activities.

### ***Funding/Costs***

These planning activities will have minimal costs, but involve a great deal of time (volunteers and boards). The costs of implementation would range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and would probably be funded by the Town.

### **D. Other Actions**

- Work with the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service to establish program(s) to educate residents on the maintenance of wells and septic systems. The Town should also investigate potential funding sources to assist homeowners with the improvement or replacement of these facilities;
- Apply for a grant from NYS Agriculture and Markets for a grant to complete an Agricultural Protection Plan (may be difficult due to the amount of farms);
- Create a plan for the area of the Elma Plaza (Town Center) and for the Maple road/ Route 400 Interchange area;

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- Create a marketing plan for the Town's Conservation Easement program;
- Research the use of an enhanced 485 b program for the Seneca street corridor;
- Create a tool for monitoring the growth in the Town;
- Study and evaluate the recreational needs of the children and senior citizens of the community. Set up strategies to accommodate these needs; and
- Create improvement plans for the Town's recreation and park facilities.

### ***Responsibilities/Methodologies***

The Town Board would initiate these actions, and appoint or assign this to an appropriate committee. The committee, possibly working with a consultant, would make recommendations to the Town Board for their acceptance and implementation. The Town could also work with the University at Buffalo for concept designs for the Town Center and Route 400 interchange area. Grant applications may need the assistance of a grant writer.

### ***Funding/Costs***

The cost of implementation would be a broad range and could be funded through Town funds or applicable NYS grants. The Agricultural Protection Plan could cost \$30,000 or more and would require some matching funds.

## 5.4 PRIORITY TWO ACTIONS

- Complete a Comprehensive Plan update annual report and especially note those Priority 1 Actions that have not been completed. Target and reprioritize those actions. Assess any subdivision and site plan activity that occurred in the previous year to assess overall compliance with Comprehensive Plan update. Also, evaluate the impact (desired results) of the Priority 1 implementation items that were completed. Recommend the Priority 2 Action items that should be undertaken in the coming year;
- Establish a new budget for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan update.

### A. Zoning Issues

- Formulate a new zoning category, and/or adopt a zoning overlay for the commercial area around Maple Road/Route 400 interchange (based on the plan created);
- Consider and possibly adopt a new zoning district (agricultural/conservation) for area along the eastern border of the Town, or consider an overlay district (with or without the completion of an Agricultural Protection Plan); and

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- Consider a zoning overlay along the Lancaster border to protect character.

### **Responsibilities/Methodologies**

The Town through its Planning Board, possibly with the assistance of a consultant, would draft new regulations, and prioritize land to be zoned to these new zoning categories. The Town Board would then follow normal rezoning procedures to adopt these changes (public hearings, SEQR, notifications, referrals, etc.).

### **Funding/Costs**

The cost of implementation would range from \$8,000 to \$15,000 and would be funded by the Town.

## B. Other Codes and Regulations

- Research and create Architectural design guidelines;
- Evaluate the need for changing lot size and frontage requirements in the rural areas of the Town; either through an Overlay or through modifying the existing zoning districts;
- Amend the zoning code to properly define the buffers between residential and commercial/Industrial uses;
- Research (use County Program) the need for alternative forms of senior/affordable housing options. Draft potential code amendments that would allow some creative alternatives.

### **Responsibilities/Methodologies**

The actions should be led by the Town Board, but could be assigned to the Planning Board or a committee to research them and to complete the code revisions. This may necessitate the need for hiring a consultant, but many sample codes exist to minimize this need. For those codes being adopted, the Town will need to follow the regular procedures for code revisions.

### **Funding/Costs**

The cost of implementation would range from \$1,000 to \$4,000 and would be funded by the Town.

## C. Cooperative Efforts

- Continue to implement watershed management strategies and best management practices for Pond Brook, Buffalo Creek, and Cazenovia Creek. This effort should include a public education component and coordination with surrounding communities;

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- The Town should work with neighboring communities to implement the farmland protection strategies outlined in the *Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan (and the local plan if completed and adopted)* and to be proactive in adopting strategies including, but not limited to: tax incentives, financing packages, and economic development grants. Implement policies that ensure that farms are treated as businesses and that they get support like the businesses in the communities;
- Based on research and preliminary planning done in the Priority 1 Actions, the Town should coordinate with neighboring municipalities to complete an open space/corridor protection plan;
- The Town should work independently and with the neighboring communities to implement the strategies outlines in the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council's (GBNRTC) *2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update and any updates to this document*;
- The Town should work with neighboring communities to explore possibilities for increased public transportation or creative alternative modes of transportation;

### **Responsibilities/Methodologies**

These are all actions that require strong Town Board leadership. Once the actions to be started for that year are determined, assignments can be made to boards, committees, or groups. These groups will work with appropriate agencies and/or consultants to address this action. Recommendations would be made to participating legislative boards for their implementation.

### **Funding/Costs**

The cost of planning would be a wide range depending on the results of these investigations and would be primarily funded by the Town. The cost of implementation is unknown. There are grant programs available for planning activities, but most of these monies would be for implementation (open space protection, public access, farmland protection, etc.).

### D. Other Actions

- Work to ensure continued rail service throughout the Town;
- Evaluate the need for a complete streets program/law;
- Begin evaluation of the possibility of sewer extensions in the proposed industrial expansion area in the Town. Based on these results more accurately define the for possible industrial zone expansion;

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- Continue planning improvements for the Town owned lands at Knabb and Hardy Roads. Also evaluate and plan additional passive recreational opportunities at the lands behind the senior center; and

### **Responsibilities/Methodologies**

The Town Board should take the lead in these actions, but work with Recreation or other committees to help implement these actions. Law changes or additions to laws require standard requirements for local laws. Work with the County in evaluating possible sewer extensions. Capital expenditures will require the normal procedures to accomplish funding. The Town Board should work with their State and Federal representatives to research possible grant programs for septic system improvements.

### **Funding/Costs**

The cost of planning (and conceptual design work) would be a wide range; the cost of implementation (sewer extensions, park upgrades, public access, etc.) is unknown. There are grant programs available for utilization of public parks and public access to them, these funds should be pursued. Sewer components need to be coordinated with Erie County and the cost of upgrades could be paid for at the expense of the prospective developer or through Town bonding (low interest loans or grants).

### 5.5 PRIORITY THREE ACTIONS

- Possible sewer line extensions in areas that would allow residential subdivisions (not a recommendation of this Plan), would necessitate the need for a zoning overlay to control the types of subdivisions to be built;
- Adopt architectural guidelines to control quality of design in the Town. Historic preservation standards should be evaluated for areas containing structures of historic significance. Design guidelines should also be adopted for non-residential structures;
- If a major road corridor becomes adversely affected by increases in traffic, consideration should be given to decreasing residential densities in that area;
- Expand the commercial area in the Elma Plaza area, to accommodate additional support businesses;
- Provide improvements for walking and biking opportunities in the Elma Center area;
- Begin expansion (rezoning) of the industrial zone as discussed in the Vision Plan section, or as determined in previous studies;
- Provide walking, biking, hiking opportunities in the "growth area" around the Village to accommodate connections into the Village;

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- Consider adding an agricultural/conservation zoning in the southwestern portion of the Town;
- Consider amending the Residential C zoning district to be based on densities (i.e., allow 3/4 to one-acre lots, with an overall density allowance of one dwelling unit per five acres, which would result in a certain amount of open lands that could be deed restricted for farming or preservation);
- There should be greater coordination between the business community and the school system (particularly BOCES) to ensure the availability of a local labor pool;
- Protect the railroad corridor from incompatible uses, and lobby with appropriate agencies to maintain service. Consider commuter usage and the possibilities of intermodal transport;
- Consideration should be given to reconstructing the Route 400 interchange at Maple Road (full service access);
- Expansion of public transportation or the addition of other forms of transportation should be explored;
- Consider a regional recreation facility such as a pool, skating rink, etc.;
- Consider acting with surrounding communities in designating important stream corridors as Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs);
- Investigate trails to link Knabb Road Park, Elma Senior Center Park, Iroquois School facilities and other features in the Town;
- Investigate improving designated roadway shoulders to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles; and
- The communities should pursue joint efforts to address issues that affect the regions by pooling resources, filing joint grant applications for funding, undertaking mutual studies, establish joint committees, etc.

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### CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL

A Comprehensive Plan is categorized as a Type 1 action under the State's Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) Act. As such, the Town, as Lead Agency, is required to examine the potential environmental impacts of the plan. To facilitate this requirement, the comprehensive plan itself can be set up to represent the components of a GEIS (see §272-a.8 of Town Law). This format enables the reviewers, the Lead Agency, all involved and interested agencies, and the public to review one comprehensive document that outlines plans for the future and the potential environmental implications of these plans. The inclusion of this chapter is intended to help in the environmental evaluation.

#### POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The underlying purpose and a major goal of a Comprehensive Plan is to promote appropriate land use and avoid significant adverse environment impacts in the community that it covers. The Part 2 of the EAF does not identify any potentially moderate to large impacts and no significant environmental impacts. However, it is important here to acknowledge and discuss potential adverse impacts.

#### SHORT TERM/LONG TERM AND CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Based on the environmental setting of the Town of Elma, the following potentially significant adverse environmental impacts could occur if the community does not plan adequately and provide the proper tools for the management of growth and development. The comprehensive plan is designed to properly guide growth in the Town to lessen the negative impacts of land use and development decisions.

##### A. Impacts on Land (see Environmental Features and land use Maps)

- The Town of Elma is rural in nature, a characteristic that is valued by area residents. Inappropriate planning and development actions could negatively impact the land resources of the Town.
- The Town of Elma has areas of hydric soils, and some wetlands and floodplains. There are also some areas in the Town with slopes greater than 15 percent. Improper development of these areas could result in drainage, flooding and/or erosion problems within the Town and in downstream areas.
- There are some areas in Elma where the soils are categorized as prime farmland, or prime farmland when drained. There are extensive areas covered under

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agricultural districts and many farms. Development of these areas could displace irreplaceable resources.

- Some locations in the Town of Elma contain significant areas of mature woodland. Inappropriate development of these areas could have a negative impact on the rural character of the Town and important open space.

### B. Impacts on Water (See Environmental Features Map)

- Buffalo Creek, Little Buffalo Creek, Cazenovia Creek, and numerous other tributaries of these waterways run through the Town of Elma. Floodplains surround some portions of these waterways. Inappropriate development could lead to flooding or drainage problems, and hazards to public safety. These creeks are also important for environmental protection, open space preservation, drainage, wildlife habitat and aesthetics.
- Most residences in the Town use groundwater for the discharge of sanitary waste (septic systems).
- There are areas of wetlands and hydric soils. Inappropriate development in these areas could lead to flooding and drainage problems, and adversely impact groundwater resources.

### C. Impacts on Flora and Fauna

- The Town's expansive areas of non-developed lands, fields and woodlands, steep slope areas, as well as the wetlands and creek corridors, support many non-threatened and non-endangered plant, avian and animal species. These areas provide important habitat for many resident species, and are an important element of the rural character of the Town. Over-development and poor site planning decisions could adversely impact these resources.

### D. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources (See Agricultural Map)

- Portions of the Town are located in a State designated agricultural district. One of the important land uses and economic activity in the Town is agricultural.
- Agricultural uses have been declining over the last decades, although agriculture remains important in the Town.

### E. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources

- The aesthetic resources of the Town of Elma include significant views (especially in areas around the creek corridors), open spaces, parks, and historic buildings. These resources contribute to the atmosphere and character of the Town, and could be negatively affected by inappropriate development.

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### F. Impact on Open Space, Parks and Recreation

- Parks and recreation resources in the Town of Elma are identified in Section III.
- The Town also has important open space resources, with large portions of the Town including undeveloped woodlands and meadows.
- Inappropriate development, including increased demands caused by population increases, could have an adverse effect upon these resources.

### G. Impact on Critical Environmental Area

- There are no designated critical environmental areas in the Town.

### H. Impact on Transportation

- The transportation system in the Town of Elma is heavily based upon roadways and automobiles. Public transportation is very limited, and the rail line is used for very limited commercial and freight uses only. No passenger rail is available.
- The major roadway corridors in the Town are described in Section III.
- Travel for pedestrians and bicyclists can be difficult in the Town.
- Poorly planned development in the Town has the potential to adversely impact the transportation network. Although the roads are mostly level of Service A, localized problems could occur if development is not planned and designed properly. Development in the surrounding communities may also have impacts on the Town's transportation system.
- Additional development may also increase potential conflicts between automotive and non-automotive modes of transportation.

### I. Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood

- The population of the Town of Elma has been relatively stable. While there was population growth between 1990 and 2000, recent Census data indicate population has returned to 1990 levels.
- The rate of new households being generated in Elma experienced a similar trend, strong growth between 1990 and 2000, partly reversed between 2000 and 2010.
- The growth in number of households has been strongest in the Town, which saw an 8 percent increase between 1990 and 2010, compared to a 4 percent decline within the Village.
- The Comprehensive Plan supports limited residential growth.
- The Town supports commercial and industrial growth in targeted designated areas of the Town in order to support tax base and employment opportunities.
- With targeted, well planned growth, the Town's character should not be adversely affected.

## ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS THAT CANNOT BE AVOIDED

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With or without the adoption and implementation of a Comprehensive Plan, the region will continue to have new development that will impact the environment. The adoption of this plan and implementation of the suggested actions will allow the Town to better manage growth and development, and reduce potential environmental impacts. All development actions taking place after the completion of this study will still be subject to the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process on a site specific basis. This plan can assist with the review of those future development actions.

### GROWTH INDUCING ASPECTS OF THE PLAN

Most of the implementation actions outlined in this study will help to control and moderate growth within the Town, and encourage growth in specific areas where it can be best supported. The Plan does not include any recommendations to encourage additional growth.

### MITIGATION MEASURES

It is the objective of any comprehensive plan to help to reduce the potential impacts that could be caused by the present development trends in the planning community. This can be accomplished by providing techniques for changing the development trends of a community, such as amending zoning or other development regulations, or by providing tools to help mitigate the possible impacts of those development trends, such as providing for improved infrastructure, increased/improved standards for development, etc. A good comprehensive plan will supply techniques for modifying or clarifying the direction of the community, and the tools for reducing the impacts of development that themselves do not create other adverse environmental impacts. The following section discusses the study's recommendations and the logic as to why and how they help mitigate the potential impacts of future growth.

#### A. Impacts on Land

- The plan recommends a number of measures to protect the land and environmental resources of the community.
- The plan supports the protection of agricultural lands in the Town. Techniques include completing an Agricultural Protection Plan strengthening the economic viability of farms, encouraging agricultural support services,

#### B. Impacts on Water

##### **Surface Water**

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- The plan supports directing development away from the designated stream corridors, and recommends an overlay zone to protect these resources.
- The plan supports increased drainage standards and avoidance of poor soil areas to further reduce impacts to surface waters from development. It also supports the implementation of recommendations from the watershed management plan.
- New requirements, when necessary, will also help to protect these resources.

### **Groundwater**

- Directing growth to areas with public infrastructure will help in the protection of groundwater resources in the Town of Elma. Current laws provide excellent protection.

### C. Impacts on Plants and Animals

- As discussed previously, the Elma community will be taking efforts to protect and preserve the stream corridors and open spaces in the community. By targeting these important habitats for protection, the Town is minimizing impacts to the flora and fauna of the region.
- The plan also identifies important features like floodplains, wetlands and unique environmental features, so that they can be incorporated into designs and/or preserved.

### D. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources

- As previously discussed, the Town will be coordinating activities to protect and preserve agricultural land and agricultural operations.
- Other programs and ideas will be attempted as needed to try and assist farmers to stay in business. If the economics of farming (related to Agriculture) can be helped, farming may continue which will assist with the agricultural land preservation.

### E. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources

- The preservation of community character is one of the major goals of this Plan. Community character includes the aesthetic resources of the community such as significant views, open spaces, farmland, important structures and the Towns' overall rural character. The community has identified these resources and the plan identifies actions to be taken by the community to protect these features.

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Development guidelines will help to maintain the rural character of this community.

### F. Impacts on Open Space, Parks and Recreation

- The plan identifies these resources and provides methodologies to protect and preserve them during development.
- Major features are identified in the Plan and some are incorporate into the vision map and are considered an integral part of the Town's future.

### G. Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas

- There are no CEA's in the Elma community.

### H. Impacts on Transportation

- Transportation in the community is heavily based on roadways and automobiles. Generally, traffic counts are low and there is not significant congestion, except there are localized problems along major routes coming in from Lancaster and off of Transit road.
- One of the other issues of transportation relates to the region's accommodation of pedestrians and bicycles. The plan recommends continuing to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the Village of East Aurora.
- Public transportation in the region is minimal and Elma will continue to work with the County and Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority in trying to improve public transportation.
- The railroad running through Elma is an important asset to the region. The community has planned around this feature (continuing access to industrial areas and preventing encroachment of incompatible uses), and is strongly interested in the railroad being improved and remaining active.

### I. Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood

- Population trends suggest that the growth rate in the Town of Elma will remain modest.
- Economic development and local jobs has become a larger issue, and the plan attempts to proactively support additional locations for job supporting development.

## EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

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Throughout the planning process, alternatives for helping the Town achieve its Goals and Objectives were evaluated. These recommendations and implementation alternatives were evaluated for not only their desired results, but also their impact to the environment, the needs of local residents, private property rights, and the vitality of the community.

It must be noted that long term recommendations were not thoroughly evaluated in this section since these actions are only to be considered in extenuating circumstances where the Town is seeing greater levels of growth pressure or where short term recommendations are not achieving the desired results.

Under the present growth conditions in the Town, the "No Action" alternative was considered. However, to enable the Town to properly plan for its chosen future, to prepare for potential development activity over the next 15 years, and to better direct and manage such growth and development, this alternative was deemed inappropriate. Furthermore, the chosen action plan will provide greater protection to the environment than the present course of action.