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**Resource Type:** Planning Documents and Policy Statements

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**Jurisdiction Type:** Municipality

**Municipality:** Town of Reading

**Year:** 2017

**Community Type – applicable to:** Rural; Suburban

**Title:** 2017 Comprehensive Plan- Town of Reading, New York

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***Abstract***

Reading, New York’s 2017 Comprehensive Plan promotes the use of solar energy throughout the community. It calls for Reading to provide information about the feasibility of solar energy to residents and to collaborate with state and other organizations in programs that encourage growth in solar energy systems. The plan also calls for Reading to reform its land use regulations to specifically allow certain types of solar energy systems and to establish procedures for review and approval of both small-scale accessory systems and large-scale installations. Reading’s plan also calls for the operator of large-scale solar installations to provide a decommissioning plan to ensure that the land such installations are located on is put back to agricultural use when the life of said systems end.

***Resource***

See separate PDF below.

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

# **TOWN OF READING**

**NEW YORK**  
**FEBRUARY 2017**



# Introduction

A comprehensive plan is a document that describes the current state of affairs in the community as well as residents' vision, preferences, and goals for the future of their community.

The Town of Reading Comprehensive Plan is a future-oriented guidance document that is intended to serve as a point of reference to attain the long-range vision of the community. The plan provides background information and policies to assist with decision-making in our town.

The Town of Reading Comprehensive Plan is intended to reflect the desires and goals of the people of the Town of Reading, as gathered from a questionnaire survey of town residents conducted in October 2015 as well as community input at public meetings and focus groups in 2015 and 2016.

The Town of Reading Comprehensive Plan is not law and therefore is unenforceable as regulation. However, a comprehensive plan does have legal standing and can support the actions of leaders and citizens.

The Town of Reading Comprehensive Plan does not take away rights. Protecting and enhancing rights is a key element of this plan. Adopting the comprehensive plan does not result in the loss of any control at the local level or the elimination of citizen rights.

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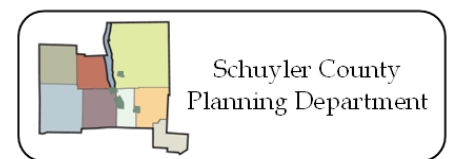
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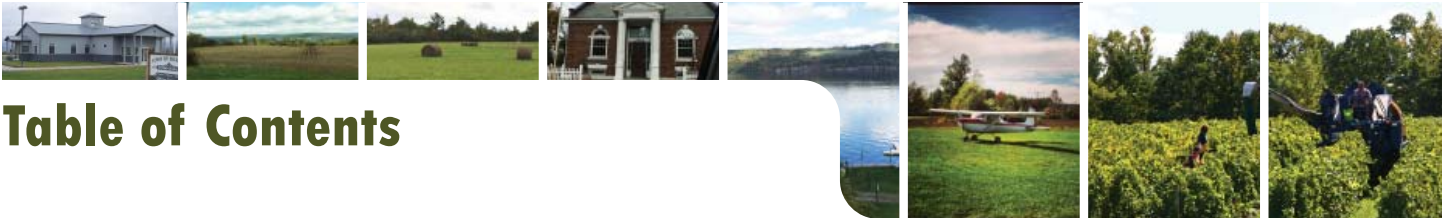
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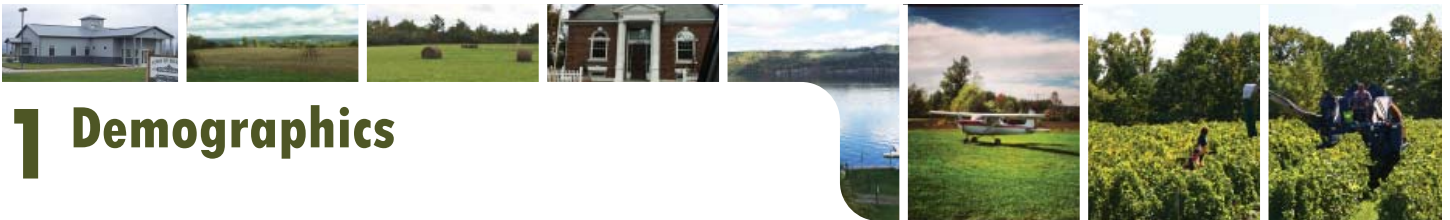
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# 1 Demographics

## 1.1 POPULATION

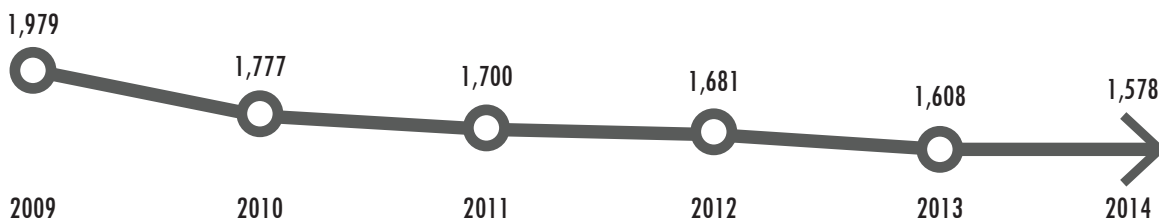
At the 2010 Census, the Town of Reading had 1,707 residents. The latest American Community Survey (ACS) 2010-2014 data, estimates the current population at 1,578. A look at the yearly estimates shows that the Town of Reading has been losing 1%-4% of its residents each year for the past 5 years.

The population trend and age breakdown in the Town of Reading is very similar to that of Schuyler County and many neighboring municipalities, with at least two distinct features. First, there is a declining population with little indication that this trend will change. Second, there are more residents in higher age brackets (45+) and fewer residents in younger brackets (45 and below). The lack of younger residents stems from a decrease in the overall population combined with young residents leaving the area for college or to find work. Many of those residents never return, further contributing to a declining population.

This has a few implications. This age structure does not promote the population growth needed to reverse the trend of a declining population, meaning that the Town of Reading will likely continue to see a loss of residents over the next 10-15 years. Fewer people will likely mean both a decrease in the tax base as residents leave homes and businesses. It will also mean a decrease in services required to serve those residents and businesses which are no longer present.

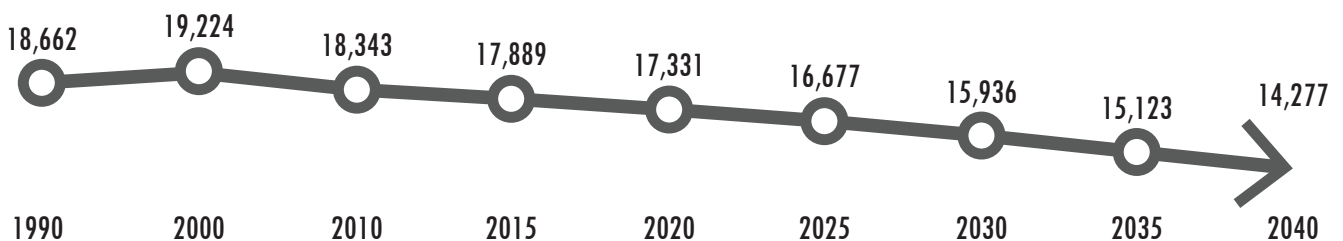
However, an older population will lead to an increased need for services for senior citizens such a senior housing, transportation, medical needs, food, and other social services. Such services can be expensive, but are nevertheless necessary to maintain a good quality of life. The Town should prepare to respond to this increased need for those citizens who plan to live in the Town of Reading for their entire life.

### Town of Reading Population



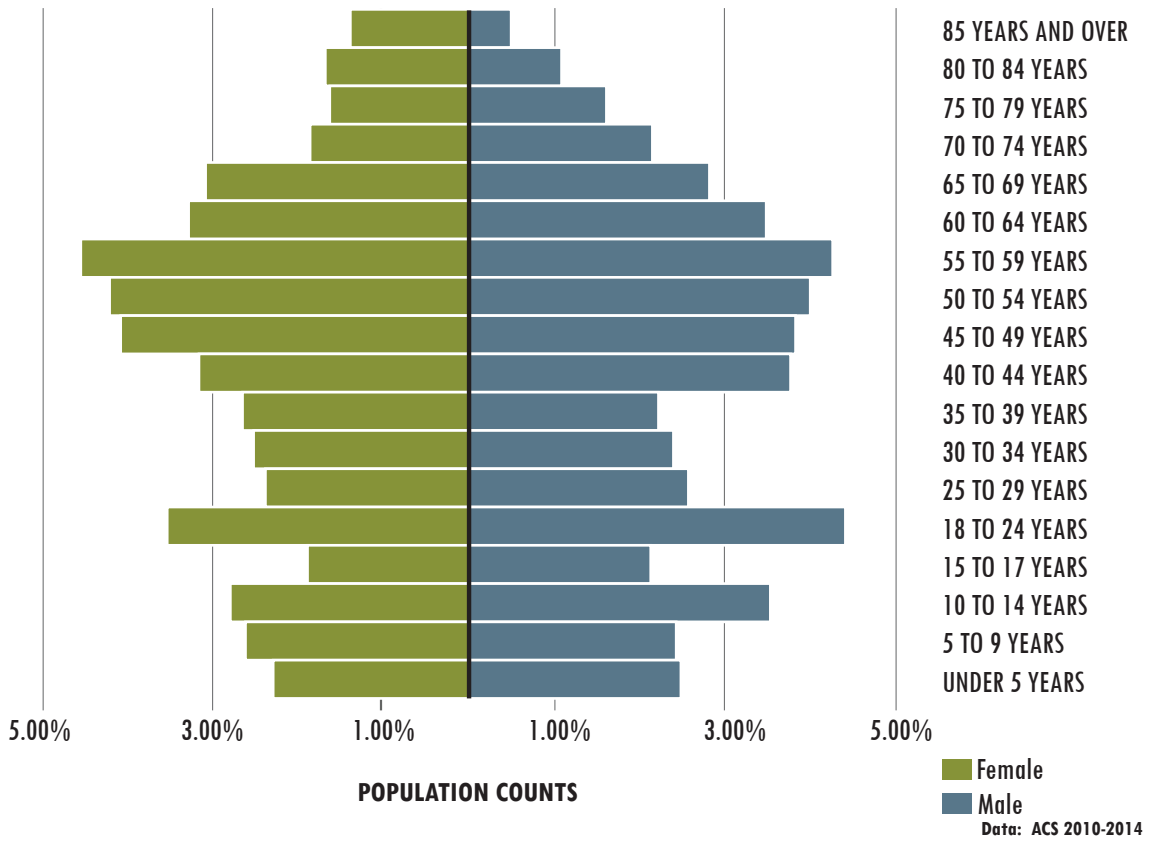
Data: ACS 2009-2014

### Schuyler County Projected Population

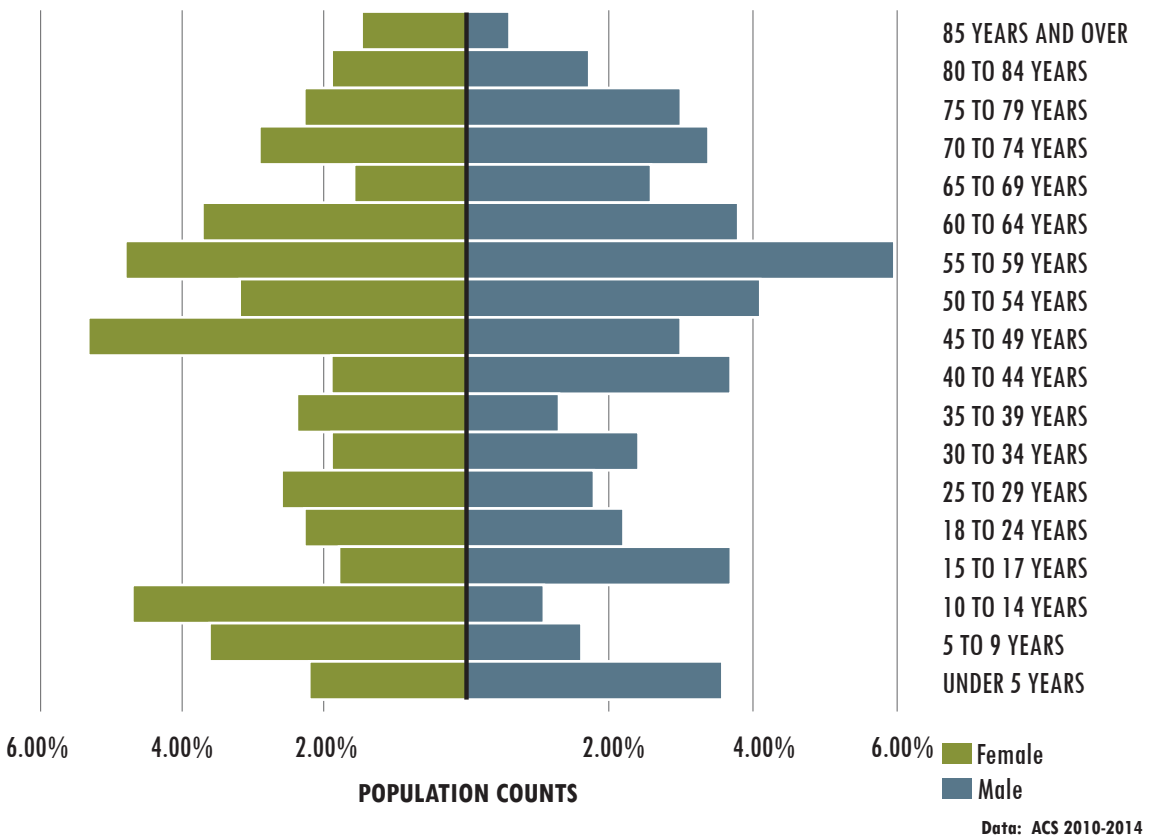




**Schuyler County Population, By Age**



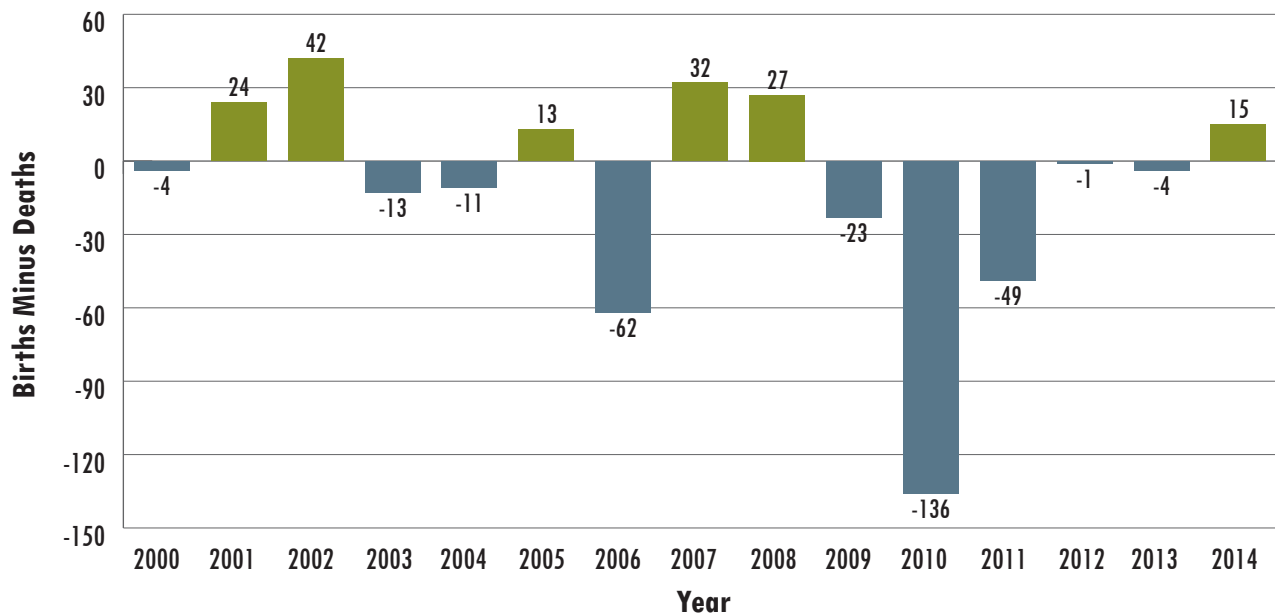
**Town of Reading Population, By Age**



## 1.2 NATURAL INCREASE AND MIGRATION

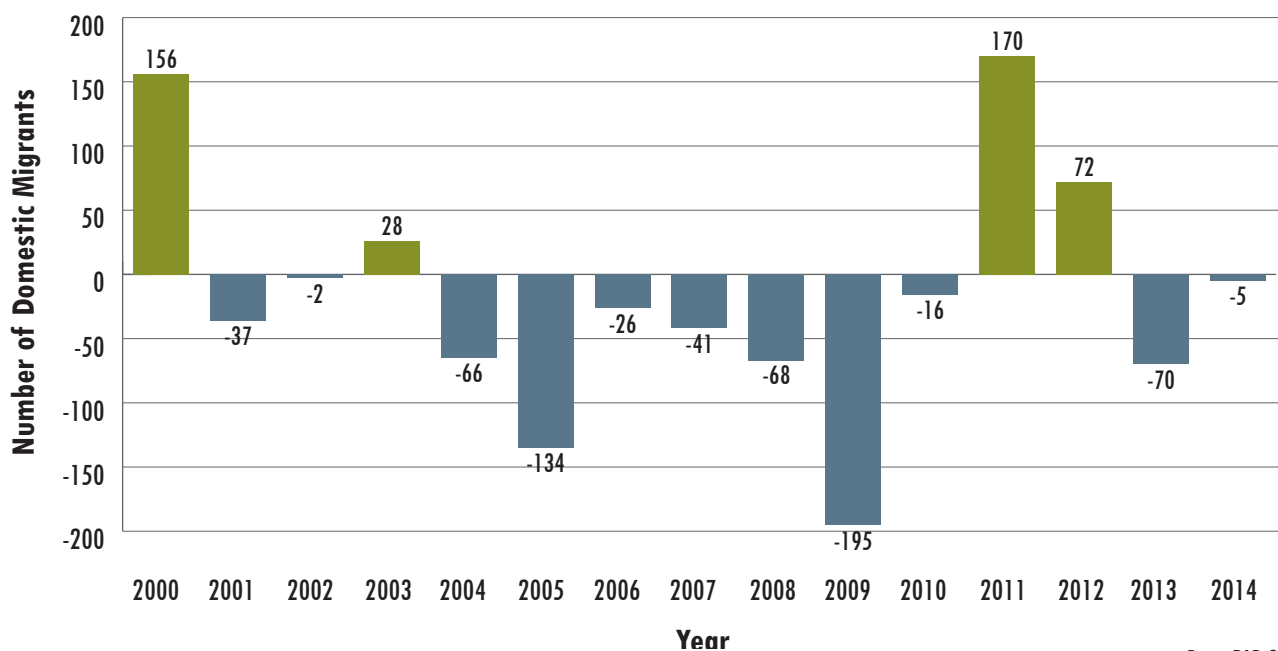
Both the natural change in population and migration in Schuyler County show that a decrease in population is typical for most years. Maps using ACS data on domestic migration show that Schuyler County both draws and sends residents primarily to other counties in NYS, and in the immediately adjacent counties. These surrounding counties also typically have a small youth and young adult population, meaning that attracting residents in these age ranges to Schuyler County or the Town of Reading is unlikely. A few residents are drawn from southern states, and may reflect the seasonal residency that is common in the Finger Lakes Region.

### Natural Increase (Birth-Deaths), Schuyler County



Data: PAD Cornell

### Net Domestic Migration, Schuyler County

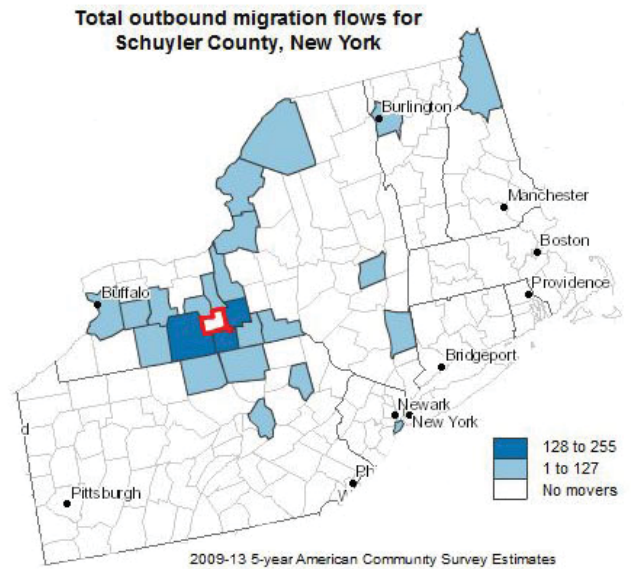
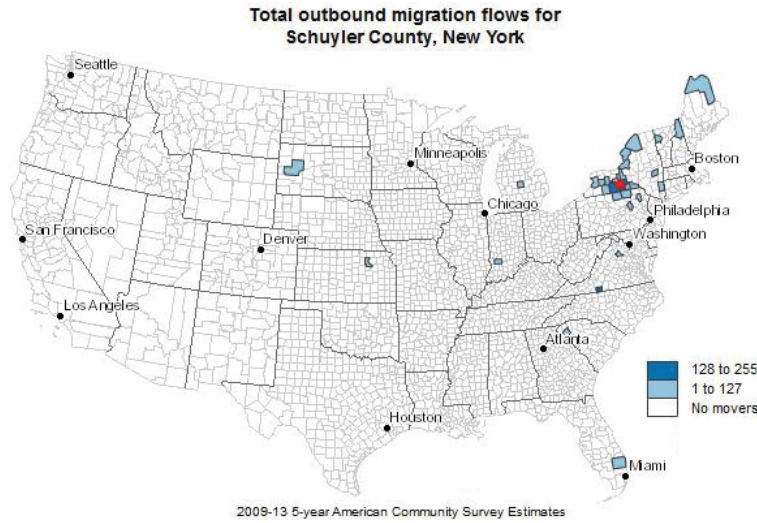


Data: PAD Cornell

### 1.3 RESIDENT MIGRATION PATTERNS IN SCHUYLER COUNTY: INBOUND AND OUTBOUND

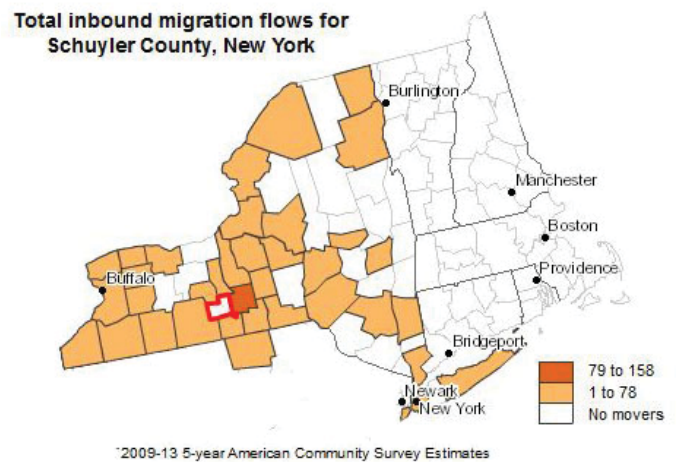
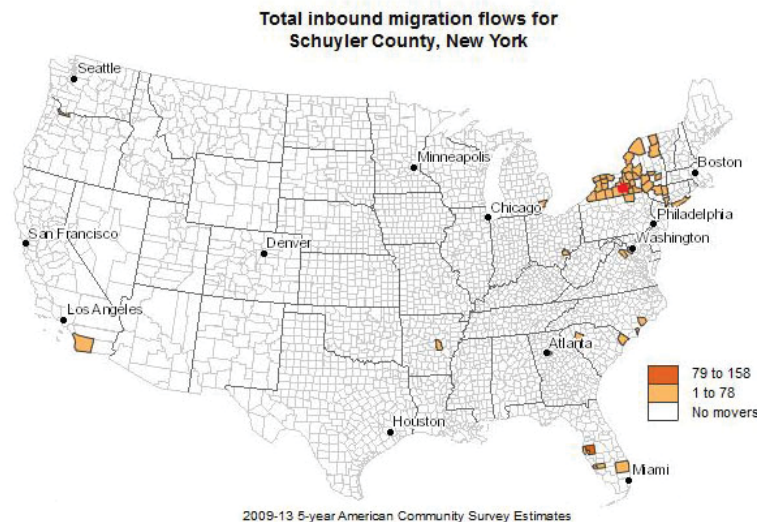
#### Outbound: People moving AWAY FROM Schuyler County to another county in the US.

Most people who leave Schuyler County move into the directly adjacent counties, while a few move to another location in upstate New York or northern Pennsylvania. Very few people leave the north east region as a whole.



#### Inbound: People moving INTO Schuyler County from another county in the US.

The majority of people moving into Schuyler County are from either Tompkins County or from Hillsboro County, Florida. The influx from Florida likely reflects the use of Schuyler County as a retirement destination for many people.



### 1.4 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

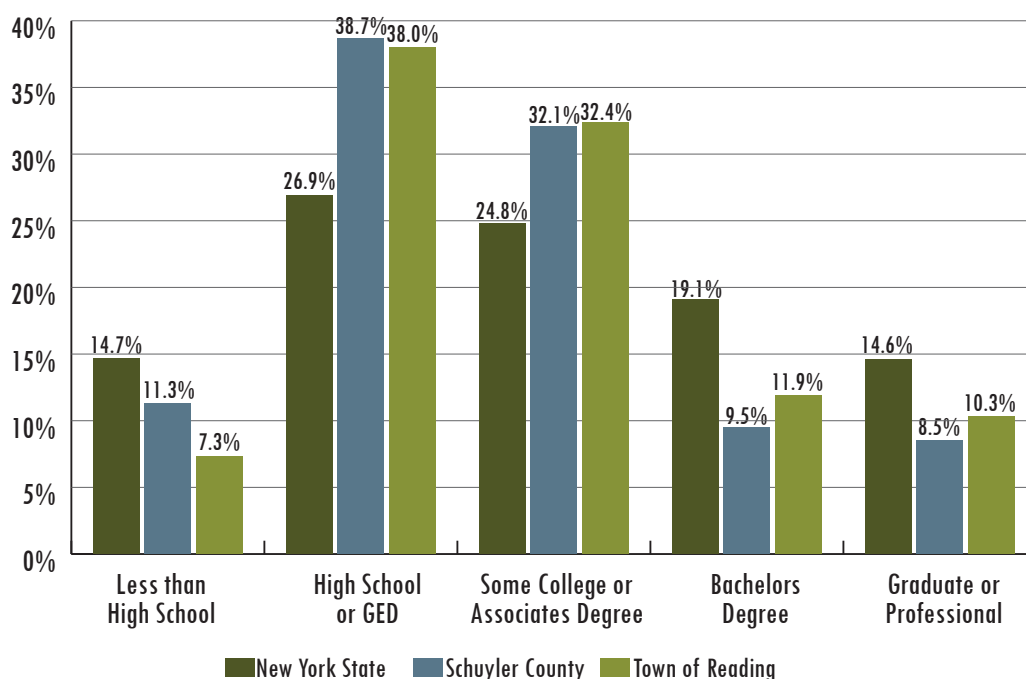
Town of Reading residents primarily attend the Watkins Glen School District, but a few attend Dundee schools. The Town of Reading residents are very well educated as compared with Schuyler County, with more residents having some college, a completed bachelor’s degree, or a graduate/professional degree than the county as a whole. Many of the residents with the highest education are still in their working years. This benefits the town in terms of providing a high quality workforce and innovative ideas, but can also provide a challenge in finding enough employment to satisfy those with higher levels of education.

### Educational Attainment by Age

POPULATION AGE BRACKET	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR HIGHER	BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER
Population 25 to 34 years	92.00%	12.40%
Population 35 to 44 years	95.30%	31.10%
Population 45 to 64 years	96.80%	27.50%
Population 65 years and over	85.30%	14.20%

Data: ACS 2009-2014

### Educational Attainment, Population 25 years and Older



Data: ACS 2009-2014

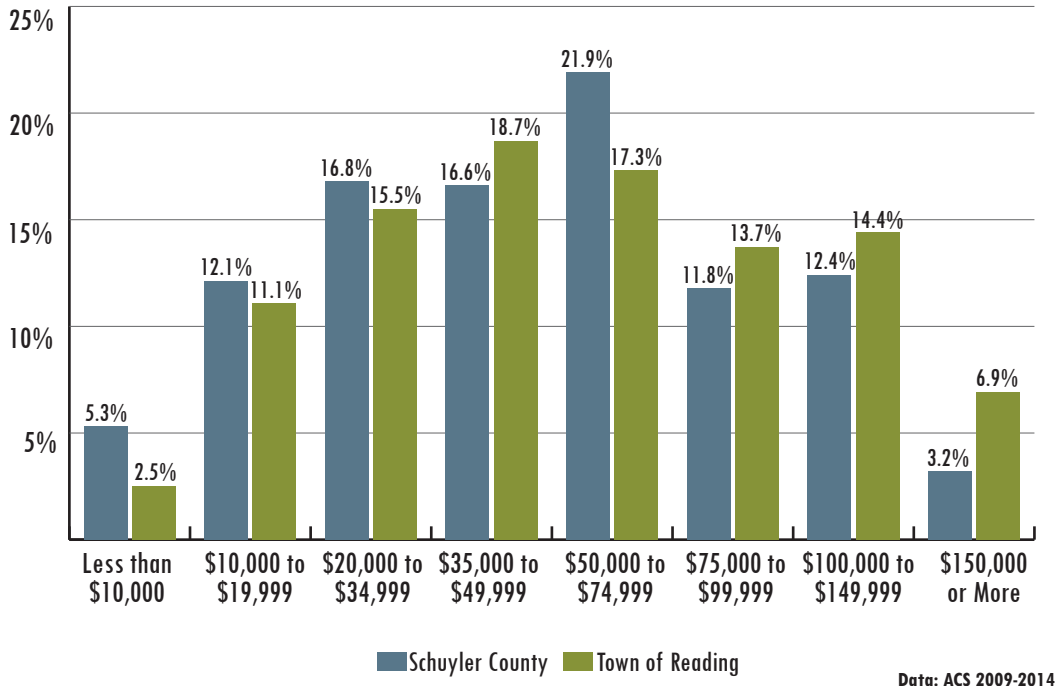
### 1.5 ECONOMICS

Residents in the Town of Reading have a healthy economic structure relative to the rest of Schuyler County. Town of Reading residents have the highest incomes in the county. They also experience less poverty and have less unemployment than both Schuyler County and New York State as a whole.

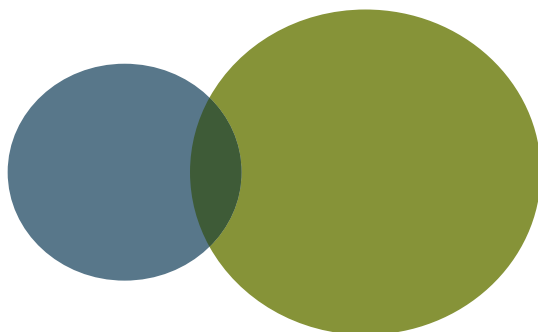
	POVERTY RATE	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
Town of Reading	4.5%	3.6%
Schuyler County	13.4%	6.4%
New York State	15.6%	8.9%

Data: ACS 2010-2014

#### Resident Income



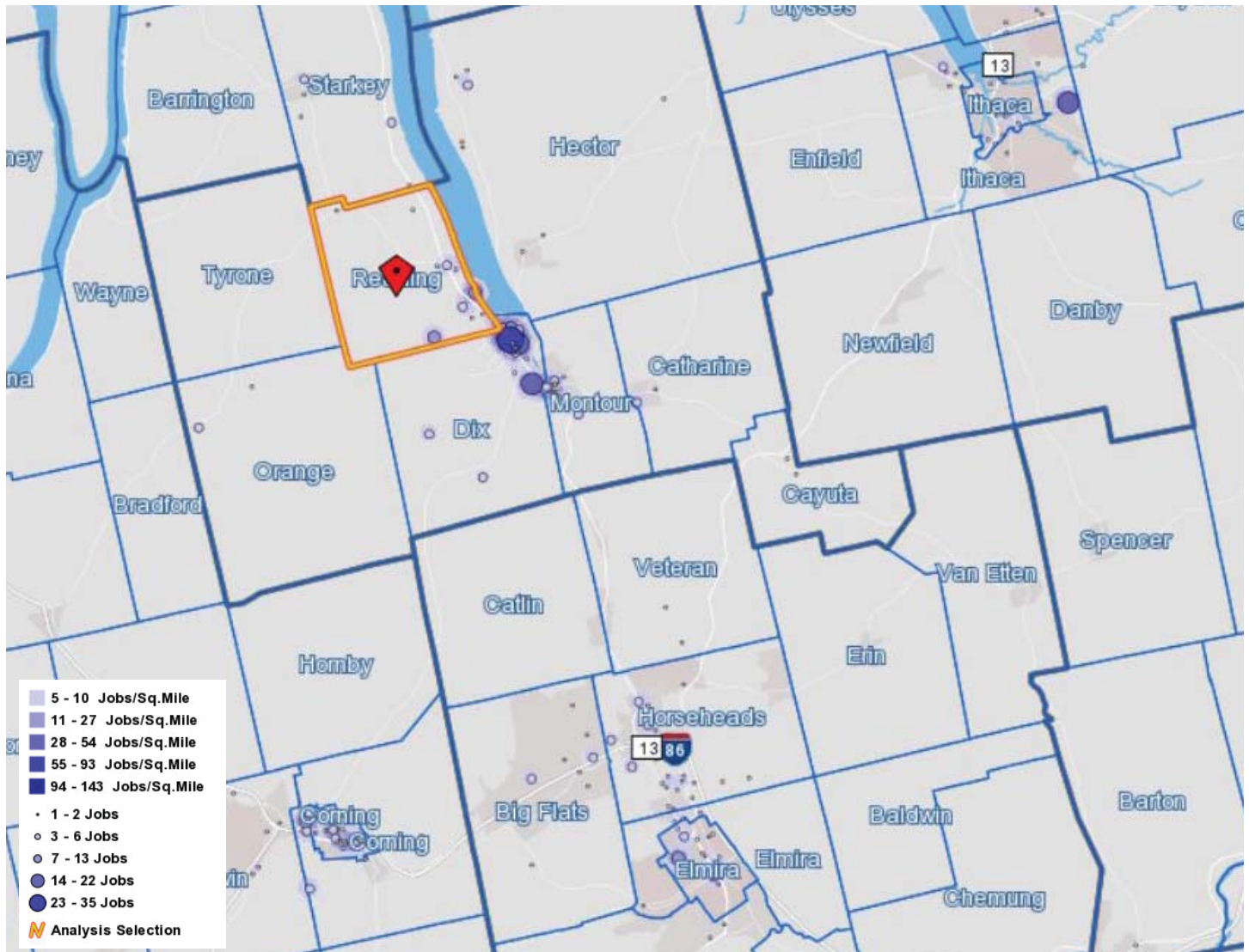
Most Town of Reading residents work outside of the town limits. However, employment in the town also draws a substantial number of regional residents to work in the Town of Reading. A very small number of people live and work in Reading.



- 369 - Employed in Town of Reading, Live Outside
- 625 - Live in Town of Reading, Employed Outside
- 38 - Employed and Live in Town of Reading

Data: U.S. Census Bureau. 2015. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program

The following commute map shows where Town of Reading residents currently work. Primarily, they work close to Reading, in Watkins Glen and Montour Falls. However, many residents also travel to the nearby cities of Ithaca, Corning, and Elmira for employment. This map shows that many residents are willing to make a commute of around 30-40 minutes, but the average commute is only around 20 minutes, focusing on the Watkins Glen/Montour Falls employment center



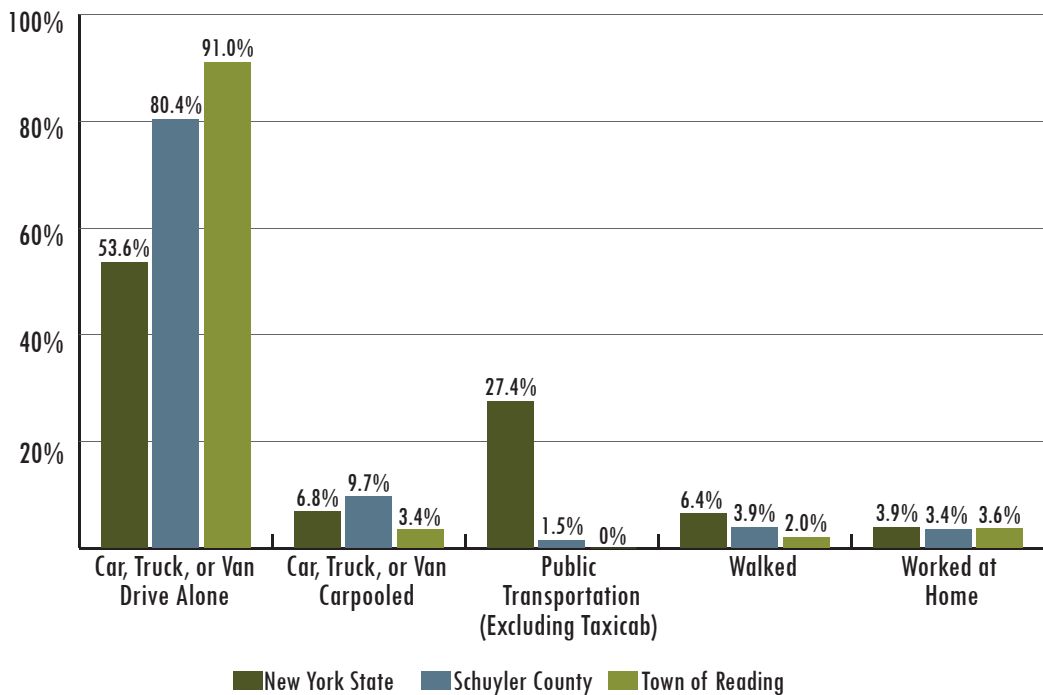
Data: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program

## Demographics

The Town of Reading has a shorter commute time than both the state and county averages. This indicates that residents in the Town of Reading typically work fairly close to where they live, as indicated in the map on the previous page. A shorter commute to work is shown to have a strong relationship with a higher quality of life. Appropriate supporting development in hamlets and villages, along with broadband infrastructure to enable working from home, could substantially contribute to local economic sustainability, and would further reduce required driving times for some residents, improving the overall local quality of life in the community. Most residents also drive alone to work, at a rate higher than both the county and state. This is not surprising, given the rural nature of the town. While it is unlikely that public transportation will become viable throughout the town, other alternatives such as carpooling, walking, and working at home could see an increase if new businesses and infrastructure are located to enable them.

	AVERAGE TIME TO COMMUTE TO WORK
<b>Town of Reading</b>	19.7 minutes
<b>Schuyler County</b>	25.9 minutes
<b>New York State</b>	31.9 minutes
Data: ACS 2010-2014	

### Modes of Commuting



Data: ACS 2009-2014

### 1.6 AFFORDABILITY

While many statistics might only look at the median home price or average mortgage or rent to determine the affordability of an area, there is more to affordable housing than a mortgage or rent. Transportation costs are the second-biggest budget item for most households and this cost has an important relationship with the location and cost of housing. Typically, the further you drive from developed areas such as villages and cities, housing cost decreases while the need to drive increases. The more each household drives, the more money it pays for gas, insurance, and maintenance. These costs are frequently considered separate from housing costs, but they typically have a direct impact on overall affordability.

The Location Affordability Index shows the combined cost of housing and transportation as a percentage of the median area household income. The ideal percentage for housing affordability is 30% of the median income while the ideal percentage of transportation affordability is 15%.

The housing in the Town of Reading is overall considered to be affordable in relation to the median income. However, the Town of Reading has a high transportation cost with respect to income, making living in the Town less affordable overall.

The high transportation cost is likely due to the rural nature of the Town and the need for people to leave the town for employment or other daily needs. The rural nature of Reading is not likely to change substantially. Increasing some businesses and places of employment inside the Town of Reading could increase the local economic sustainability, reduce the distances needed to travel for some needs, and reduce overall transportation costs. This would make the Town of Reading an overall more affordable place to live. However, supporting these developments in nearby villages and hamlets would also increase affordability without needing to develop in the Town of Reading itself.

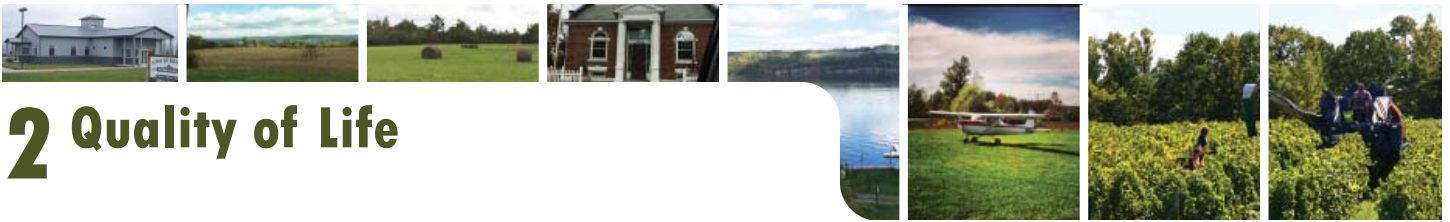


	HOUSING	TRANSPORTATION	TOTAL LOCATION AFFORDABILITY
<b>Ideal</b>	30%	15%	45%
<b>Town of Reading</b>	28%	32%	60%

Data: Location Affordability Portal. US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Transportation, & Sustainable Communities.



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# 2 Quality of Life

## POLICY

*To foster a greater sense of “Town of Reading” identity, facilitate easier and stronger connections throughout the community, and to provide greater outreach and opportunity to become involved in local government.*

### 2.1 DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

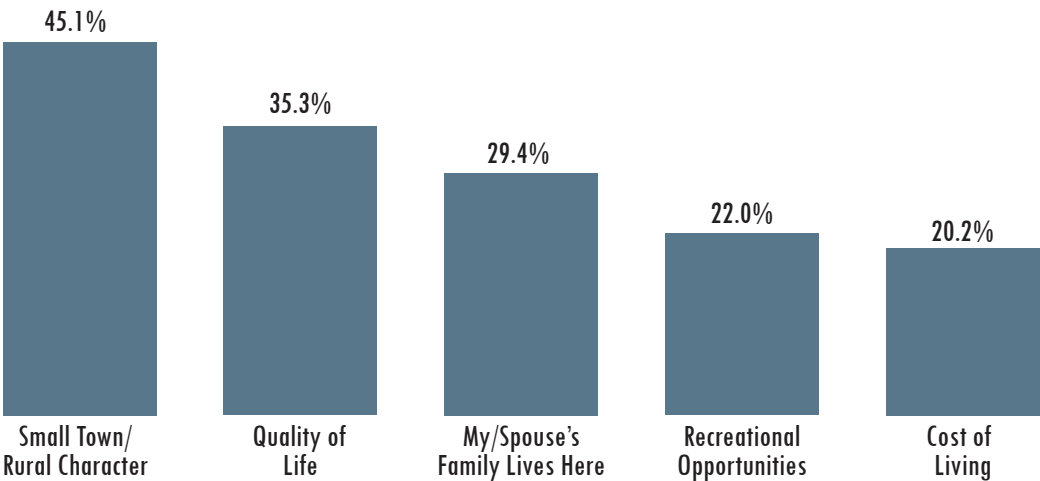
A high quality of life in a small town atmosphere is the defining characteristic of living in the Town of Reading. Residents strongly value the rural, quiet, and peaceful environment afforded by their natural surroundings, and consistently identify this aspect of the local lifestyle as the primary motivator for living in Reading. Protecting this rural character is the top priority for the future of the Town of Reading.

The Town of Reading defines its rural character as one that incorporates the vast natural surroundings, low-density development, and specific cultural and lifestyle preferences of residents.

The people of Reading value their open spaces such as forests and working agricultural lands as they provide a backdrop where one can enjoy nature in their own backyard as well as a source of income for many residents. They value the existing rural residential characteristics of large lot farms, small hamlets, and lakeside cottages. Further, residents appreciate the cultural aspects of living in Reading such as the strongly independent and self-reliant nature of the people, the low-cost, low-service, low-regulations environment, and a community that finds strength in its family connections, churches, and civic organizations to meet the local needs of residents.

These attributes provide opportunities for local business to grow, provide an affordable cost of living, and provide a high quality of life for residents. By maintaining and enhancing these attributes, the Town of Reading can ensure that the best aspects of the town continue to serve current residents as well as attract new opportunities that reflect the local values.

### Why did you move to the Town of Reading (Top 5 Reasons)



**2.2 STRENGTHS OF THE TOWN OF READING**



Residents identify the top strength of the Town of Reading to be the rural and small town character. Many of the other identified strengths further reinforced this idea such as: agriculture, peace and quiet, natural environment, open space, and scenic views.

Agriculture provides residents with a local base for employment, tourism, local food, and a scenic landscape. The natural landscape is visually stunning, and is enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. Natural areas such as forests and Seneca Lake also provide opportunities for recreation such as biking, hiking, hunting, boating, swimming, and fishing. The rural environment provides residents with peaceful, quiet surroundings, privacy, and a ‘bit of elbow room’ to work and enjoy life.

While residents enjoy a rural lifestyle, they also enjoy close regional proximity to the opportunities provided by nearby hamlets, villages, and cities. Being close to hamlets and villages throughout the Finger Lakes region provides residents the ability to enjoy local specialties such as culinary trails and tastings, cultural activities and festivals, outdoor recreation opportunities, and a variety of job opportunities. Larger nearby cities such as Rochester, Ithaca, Elmira, and Corning allow residents to experience an even more diverse set of activities, restaurants, museums, jobs and cultural events.

Residents of Reading are very fond of the people who live here. Bonds with family, neighbors, and friends are the primary forms of personal connection to the community. Family ties keep residents in Reading as well as draw former residents back. These connections provide social support to residents and help to foster local pride and support for entrepreneurial endeavors and local businesses.

Any future decisions in the town should consider these strengths and the benefits they provide to current and future residents of the Town of Reading.



Photo Credit: Norrie Cornelius

# Community

## POLICY

*To foster a greater sense of “Town of Reading” identity, facilitate easier and stronger connections throughout the community, and to provide greater outreach and opportunity to become involved in local government.*

### 2.3 RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Town of Reading residents connect with the community primarily through family, friends, and neighbors. Many also socialize and mingle at informal gathering spaces such as coffee shops and restaurants.

In general, however, residents do not feel a cohesive sense of community in the Town of Reading. The strong identity that nearby towns possess is something that is desired by Reading residents.

Many residents desire more locations to randomly and casually run into one another. In a rural setting such as Reading, this could easily be a coffee shop, diner, park or community events. Other residents desire a way to connect with potential employers, employees, or business connections.

A communal posting board at either the town hall or online could be used to spread the word about a variety of events and opportunities.

#### Examples:

- Farm Festival
  - Requires no Infrastructure
- Fly in Breakfast at ReDunn Field.
- Communal Working Space
  - Can build on Broadband Network once Built
- Breakfast / Coffee Joint



Fly in Breakfast at ReDunn Field, (source: [www.pennyanairport.org](http://www.pennyanairport.org))

One means of addressing resident involvement in the community would be for the Town Board to appoint a volunteer Community Engagement Committee to investigate possible actions and identify what actions have the greatest potential to boost resident involvement. Such a committee could help bring in grant funding and work with community organizations to provide events, programs, or facilities that foster a greater sense of community.

### 2.4 RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN TOWN GOVERNMENT

Nearly 30% of the population claims to participate in local government issues at least some of the time. However, the town has trouble finding people filling volunteer positions on boards and committees. A different outreach approach along with a more easily accessible system for advertising any vacancies could improve volunteer rates and attendance to town committees.

An important step to instill public trust in the local government and foster future community engagement will be to adopt additional methods of engagement that are inclusive, far reaching, and accessible for all residents. Ideas include:

- Facebook or other social media
- Online or town hall comment submission
- Small group or one-on-one discussion and comment
- Posting for vacancies online and on a community board
- Less stringent requirements for appointing committee and board members

Active government officials and volunteers want to feel that they can have a real and positive influence in town matters. Residents considering government involvement should be able to genuinely participate in an easy and responsive manner.

# Housing

## POLICY

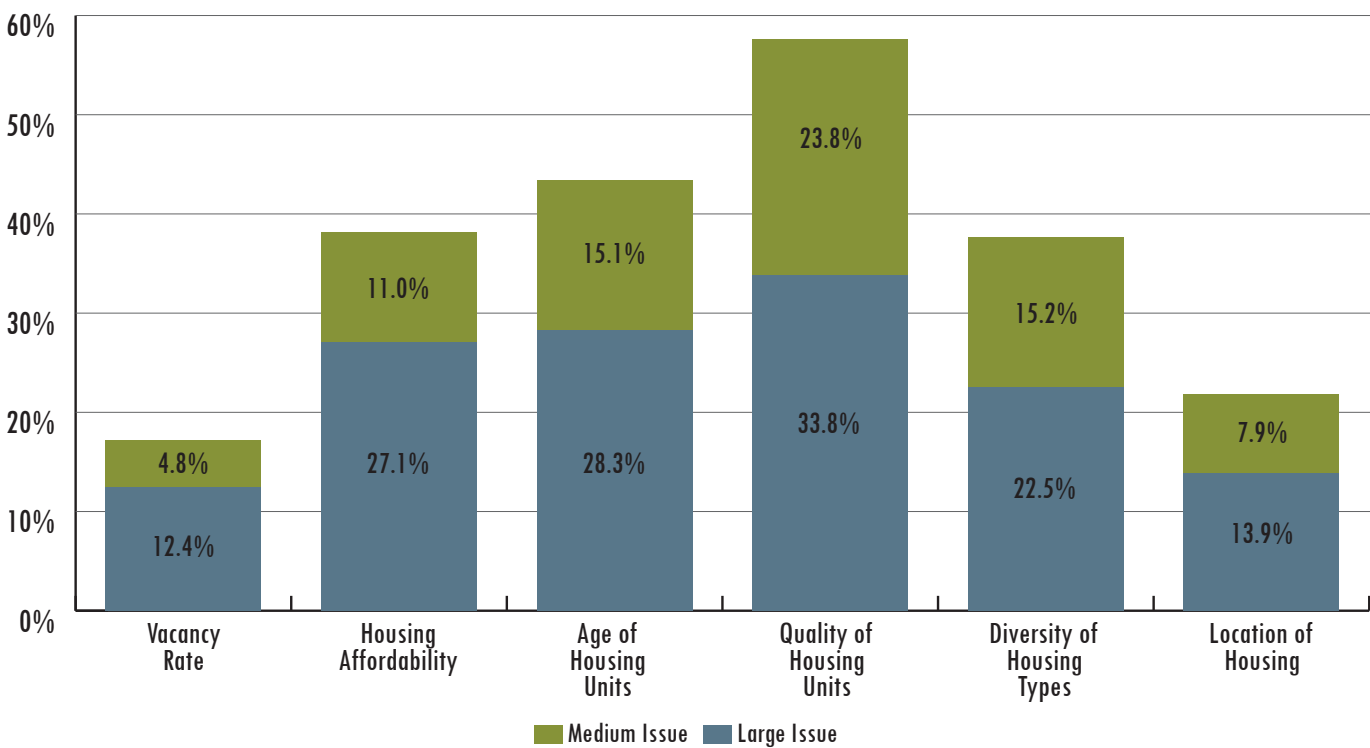
*To preserve the character of existing neighborhoods and residential areas while encouraging a diverse range of housing types, prices, and improvements/investments to develop and blend in with the existing character.*

### 2.5 HOUSING OVERVIEW

There are a total of 854 housing units in the Town of Reading. With a population of 1,707 residents, there are approximately 2 people per household on average in the town. Housing consists primarily of single family, owner occupied homes on rural lots.

Major concerns with housing include quality, age, affordability, and housing variety. Young adults in particular cite the lack of rentals, and poor quality housing to be major barriers to finding a place to live. Senior housing is identified as an upcoming and ongoing concern as the population ages and shifts the types of housing and services they require.

#### Survey Results: How would you rate the following housing issues in the Town of Reading?



## 2.6 NEIGHBORHOOD TYPES

There are three distinct neighborhood types in the Town of Reading: Rural Hillside, Traditional Neighborhood or Hamlet, and Lakeside Cottages. All three have specific characteristics and provide a variety of options for residents. Maintaining and enhancing the distinct character of each neighborhood type is strongly valued among residents.

### Rural Hillside

Most of the Town of Reading exhibits characteristics of a rural neighborhood community. It contains predominantly areas of low density, agriculture, rural residences, and forests. Large and small lots with farms and non-farming residences all coexist alongside one another. Most residences are spread out with space for privacy, quiet, and peaceful enjoyment of one's land.

### Typical Rural Hillside Density/Configuration

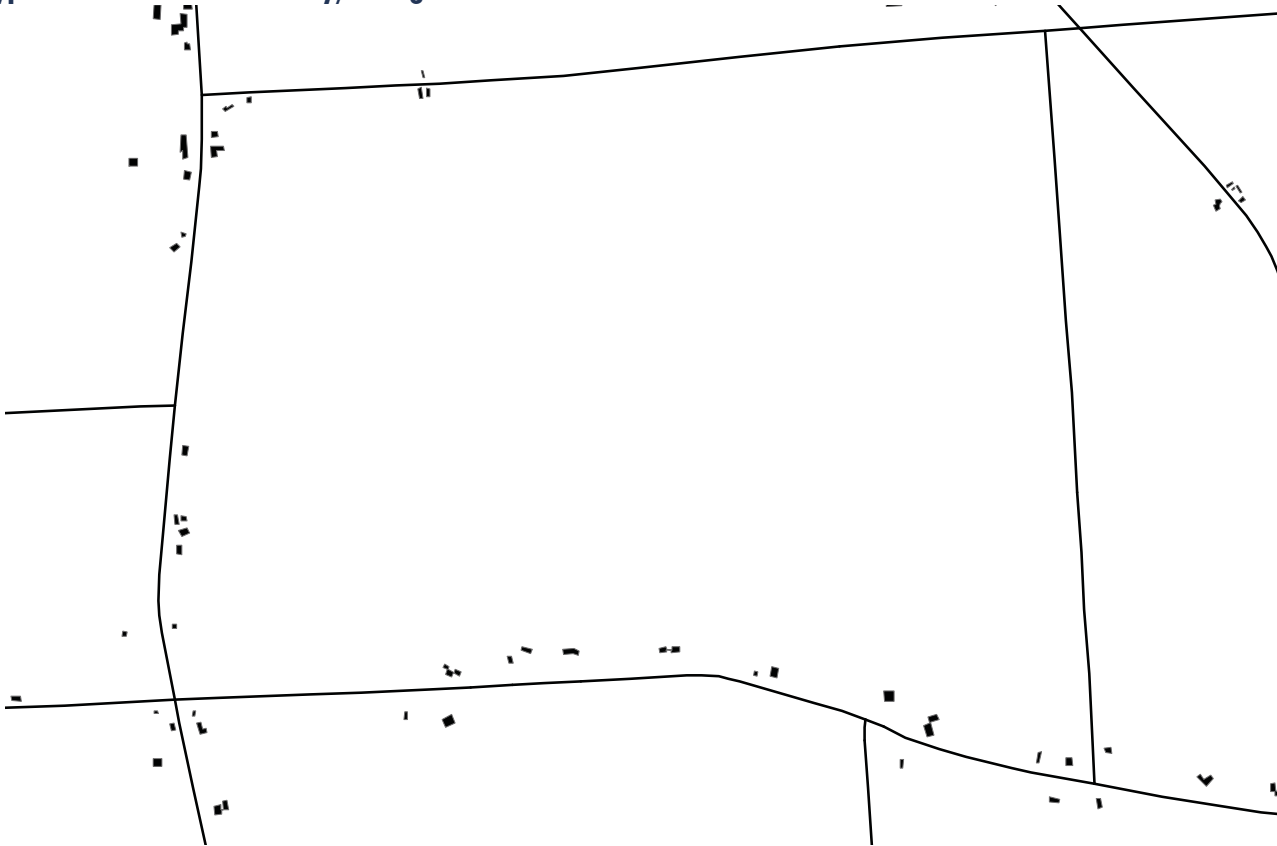
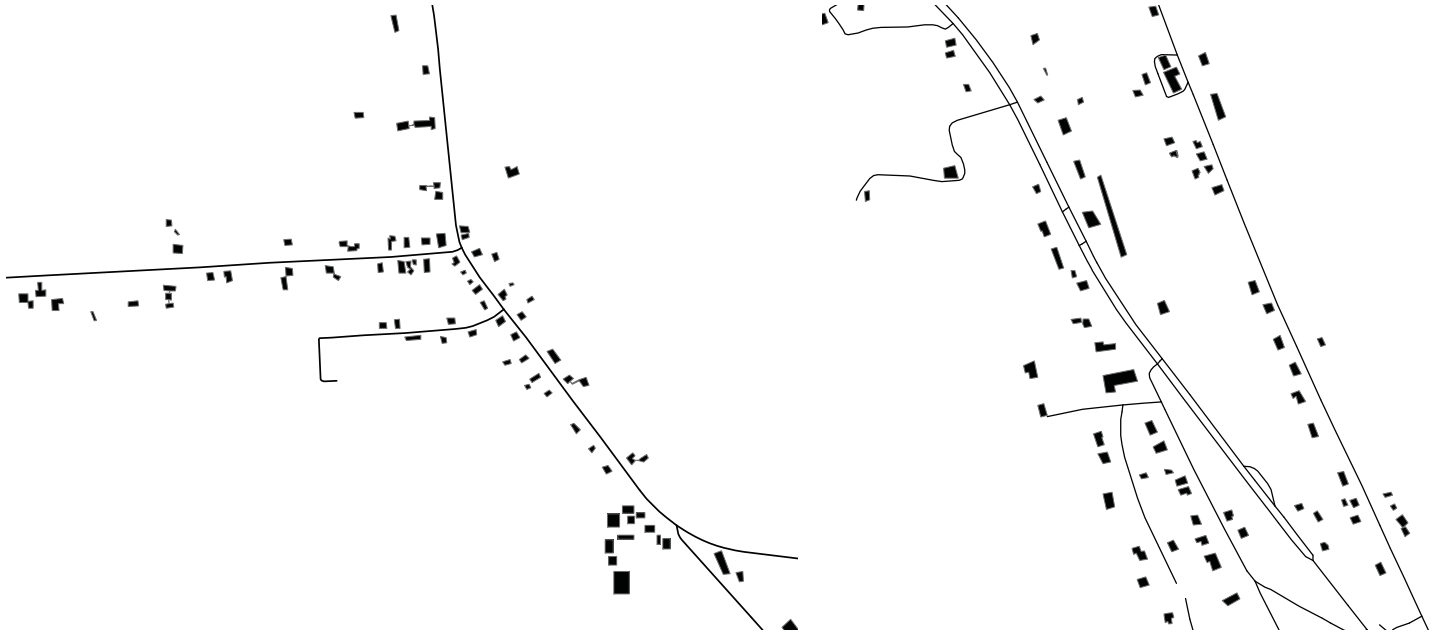


Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

**Traditional Neighborhoods and Hamlets**

A traditional neighborhood pattern exists in both Reading Center and the small neighborhood adjacent to Watkins Glen. Houses are on small lots and the layout forms a compact neighborhood filled with homes, businesses, and community amenities. Reading Center provides opportunities to run errands, shop, and meet neighbors. The Post Office, in particular, is a popular location for catching up on town happenings.

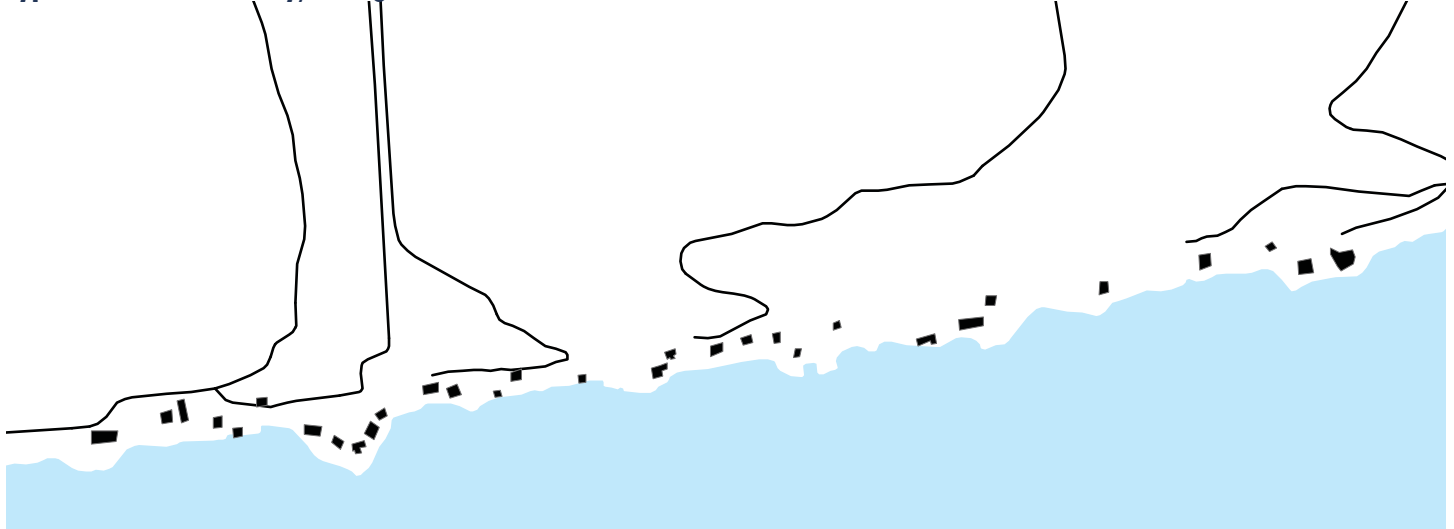
**Typical Neighborhood and Hamlet Density/Configuration**



**Lakeside Cottages**

The homes and cottages along Seneca Lake provide a scenic, beautiful place for both permanent residents and seasonal visitors to enjoy. These homes are typically on small lots directly between the water and a steep hillside. They have direct access to Seneca Lake and some include wooded areas, providing a wealth of recreational opportunities.

**Typical Lakeside Density/Configuration**



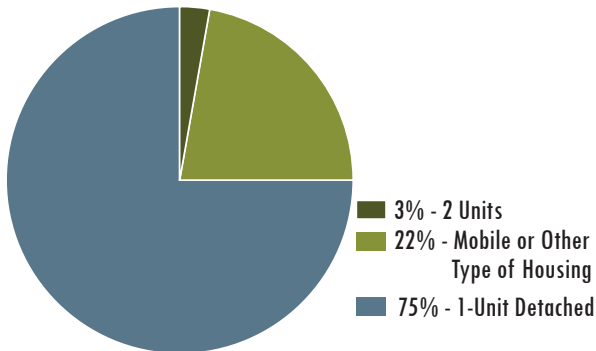
## 2.7 HOUSING TYPES

The predominant housing types in the Town are single family homes and mobile homes, along with a small number of duplexes. This is typical of other similar rural towns in the area.

Single family homes were listed as a beneficial type of housing by over 65% of town residents in the survey. This shows that the predominance of this type of housing in the town reflects that preference of a large majority of residents.

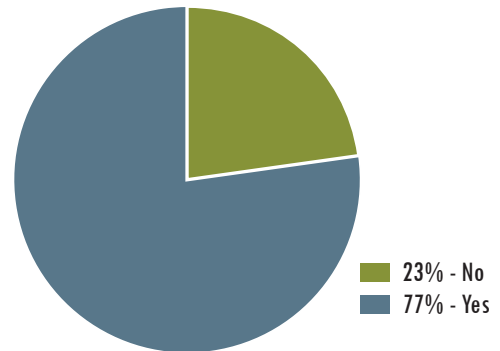
The median age in the Town of Reading is currently 48.7, which means that over the next 10-20 years, a significant part of the local population will have a shift in housing and service needs as they enter their later years. Even as they age, people hope to stay in the community. More than three quarters of survey respondents said that they plan on living in the community for the rest of their lives. Among the oldest survey respondents, aged 75 years and older, fully 96% percent plan to live in Reading for the rest of their lives. New mixed housing types will become particularly relevant and needed as the population continues to age.

### Variety of Housing Types



Data: ACS 2009-2014

### Survey Results: Do you plan on living in the Town of Reading the rest of your life?



### Examples of Housing in the Town of Reading

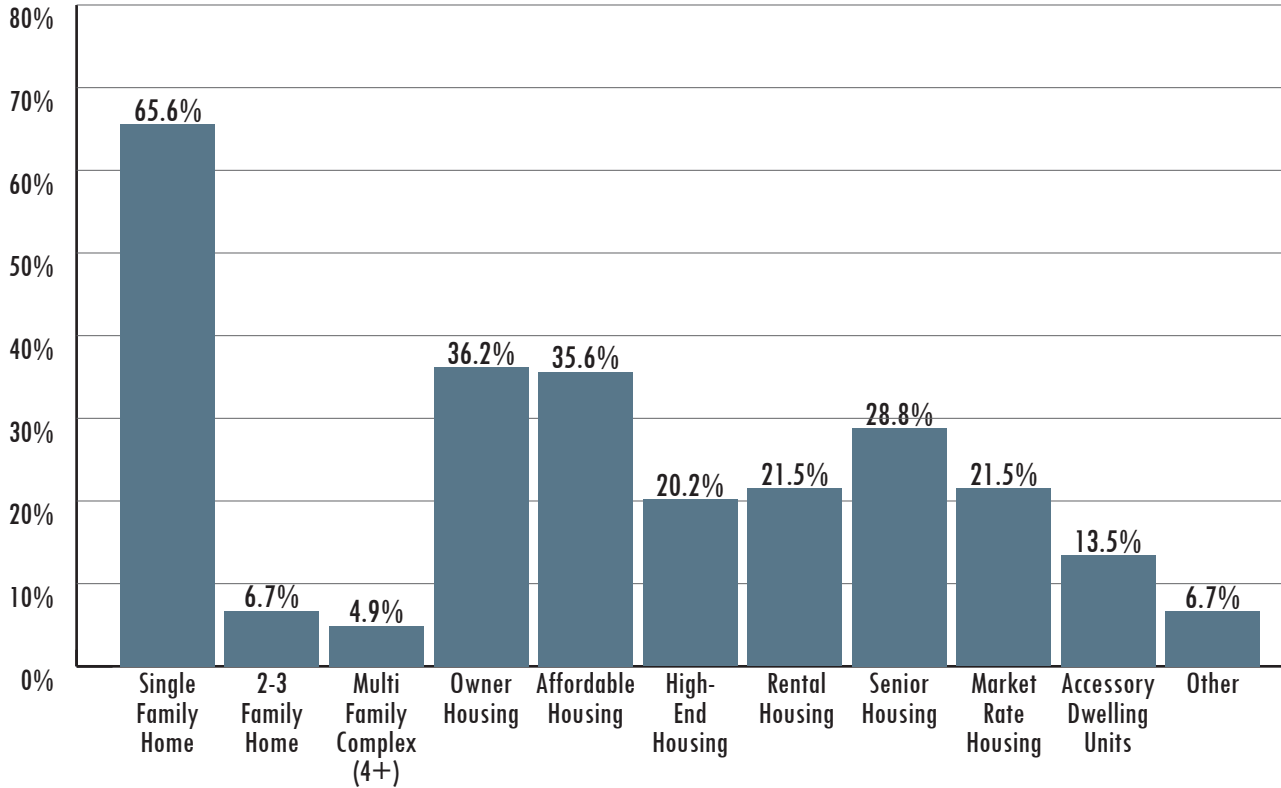


Photo Credit: Southern Tier Central Regional Planning Board



While single family homes are a strongly desired housing type in the town, a lack of variety of housing types can present struggle for residents at various stages in their lives. Some residents may prefer two or multi-family units for a variety of reasons including cost, lack of maintenance responsibilities, and social benefits. Senior housing can also provide a way for residents to remain in the Town and receive the amenities and services they need as they age.

**Survey Results: What types of housing would be beneficial addition to your community?**

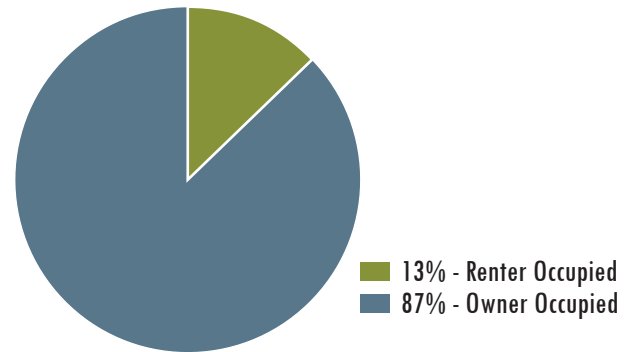


While these types of housing are likely to be found in Watkins Glen or Montour Falls, the Town of Reading does have some opportunity to create different styles and housing opportunities. For instance, duplexes could be appropriate in Reading Center or other hamlet areas. Small multi-family units could blend into the neighborhood adjacent to Watkins Glen where they can tie into public infrastructure.

## 2.8 HOUSING TENURE

The majority of housing stock in the Town of Reading is owner-occupied. This is a market that will always exist in the Town of Reading, and provides benefits to the town and residents. However, a variety of housing alternatives would provide residents more choices to fit their lifestyle and housing needs. Younger adults may not be able to afford a home right away. Rental housing provides a good alternative for them to ease into the housing market without requiring large financial investments. Older adults may also benefit from a variety of rental options, allowing them to relinquish some of the responsibility and work of property maintenance. Rental housing is commonly thought of as larger complexes, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. It can also include singles houses and duplexes or small multi-family units (3-6 family).

Housing Tenure

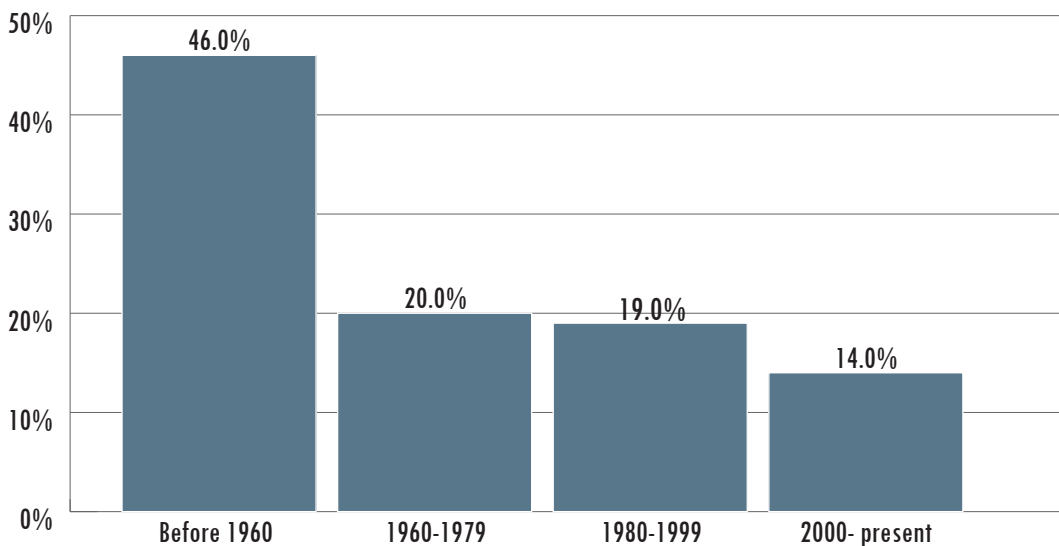


Data: ACS 2009-2014

## 2.9 HOUSING AGE

Almost half of the housing in the Town of Reading was built before 1960. Older housing stock can require more frequent and expensive changes to modernize or maintain their quality. While some residents will have the resources to invest in older homes, many residents may not. This may be especially true for younger residents looking to purchase a home for the first time, as well as aging residents looking to downsize or transition to senior housing. The Town should explore strategies to ensure that the housing stock is compliant with NYS Building and Maintenance Codes and to encourage energy efficient housing upgrades. Education about state or regional grant programs to assist in updating housing could provide beneficial resources to residents.

### Housing Age of Structures



Data: ACS 2009-2014

## 2.10 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

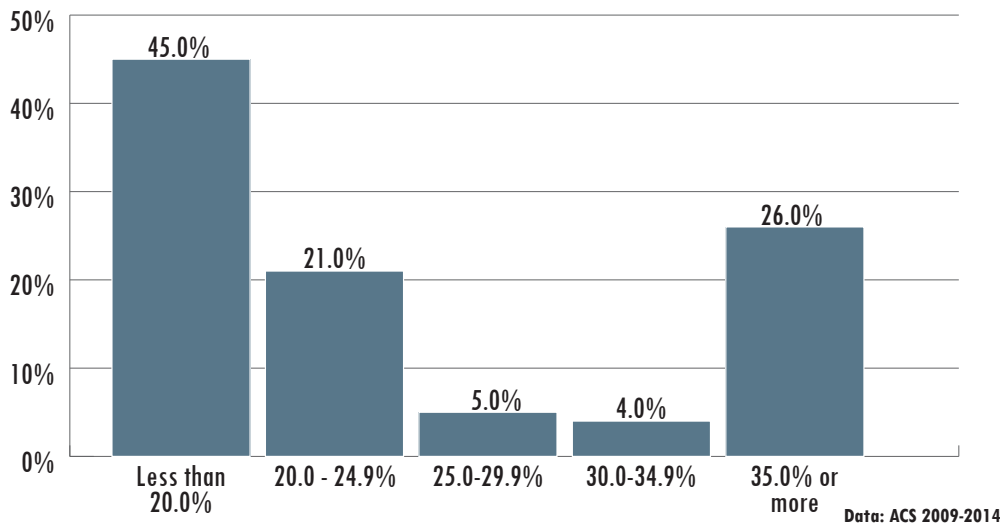
In order for any kind of housing to be considered affordable, the cost of that housing must be at or below 30% of the average household income of the person or people who would live there.

In general, housing in the Town of Reading is considered to be affordable, but there is a large difference between the affordability of housing types. Rental housing in the Town of Reading is overall more expensive for the people living in it than owner occupied housing.

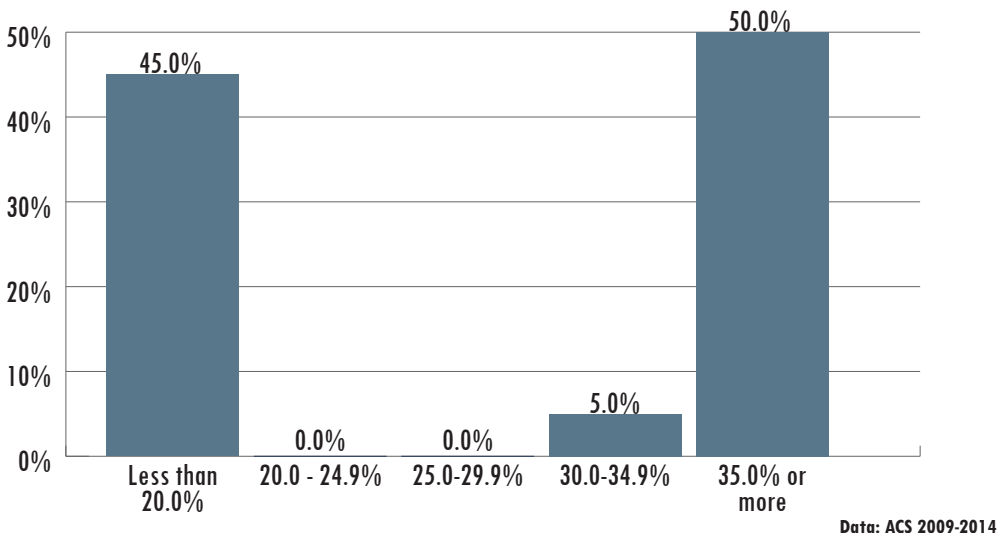
Owner occupied housing is typically less than 30% of the homeowners income, and nearly half of homes are less than 20% of the owners income. Although owner occupied housing is overall affordable, there is a small but noteworthy percentage of homes with costs more than 35% of their owners' income, many of which may be lakefront homes where housing prices are the highest.

On the flip side, over half of rental properties are above 30% of renters' income. This creates a financial hardship on residents who cannot afford to or do not wish to own a home, and dis-incentivizes potential residents who would prefer to rent. Encouraging affordable rental housing development in the Town would benefit all residents of the Town of Reading.

### Selected Monthly Owner Cost as a Percentage of Household Income



### Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income

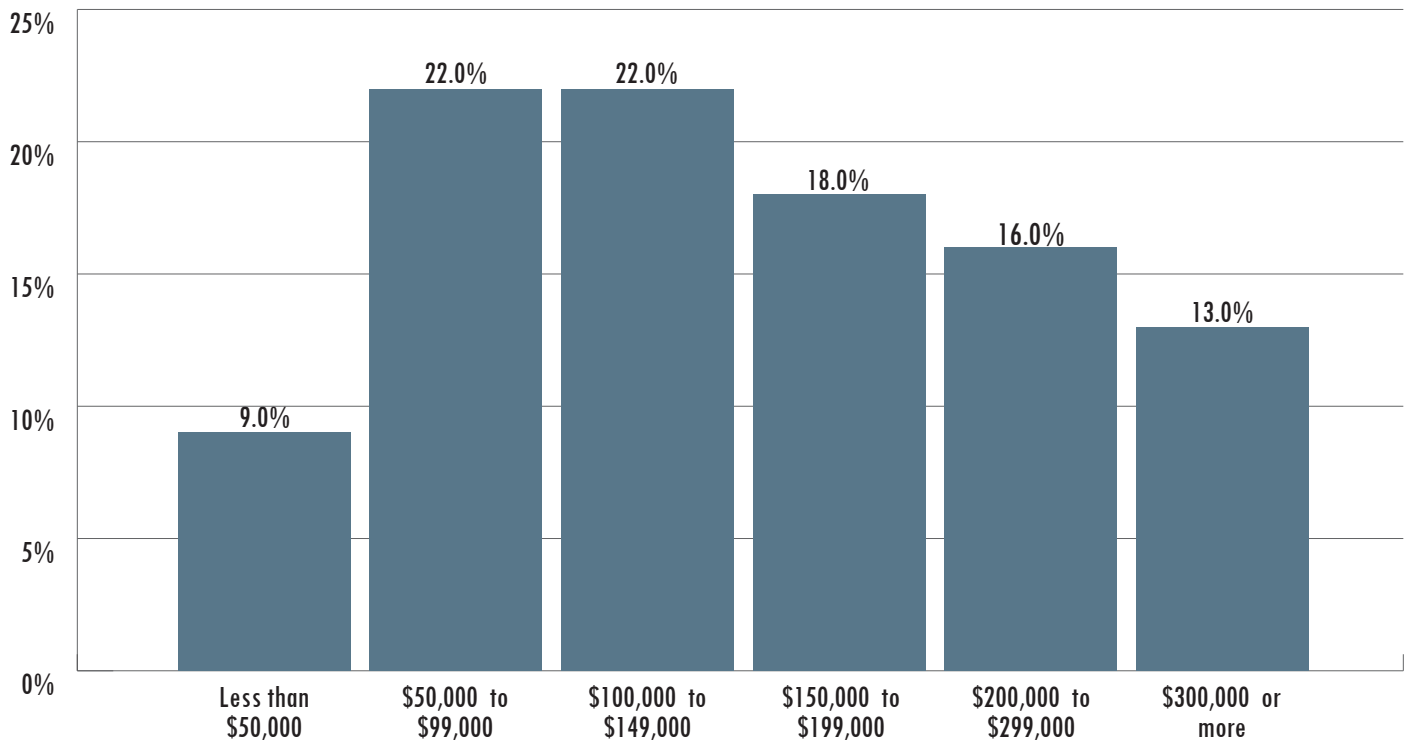


## 2.11 HOME VALUES

The Town of Reading has a high median home value of \$140,000 compared to other municipalities in the region (Schuyler County Median: \$99,700), creating benefits and concerns for residents. Coupled with the high value of land and high property taxes, large lots with large homes produce high value, high cost housing in the town. Many of the most expensive homes are located along the lakeshore with views and water access to Seneca Lake.

High housing values benefits the town tax base and individual residents when they sell their homes, but high housing costs also weigh on current residents and prevent new or young residents from being able to afford a home, driving people away from the town. Under the current Town of Reading Land Use Law as of September 2016, a number of successful strategies to provide affordable housing are currently allowed, including housing variety, small lots, and micro-homes. The Land Use Law enables housing variety by permitting any type of housing, with proper approvals, in any location in the town, near or adjacent to any other housing type or other land use. Small lots are possible, even though the Land Use Law generally requires two acres for each dwelling unit without municipal water and sewer services, because section 3.3 of the current law (as of September 2016) authorizes the planning board to grant modifications to this and other standards and section 4.2 establishes leeway for the planning board to approve development of lots with buildable areas as small as 2,500 square feet when justified by the site conditions with the exception of within the Seneca Lake Protection Area which requires 2 acre lots. The Land Use Law contains no minimum square-footage for dwelling units or other restrictions on small homes, effectively allowing any micro-home that meets the standards of the New York State Unified Fire Prevention and Building Code. Promoting or encouraging such housing in any future developments would assist in alleviating high housing costs in the Town. Any future subdivision law or any amendments to the land use law that are adopted should also allow for such strategies to be pursued.

### Housing Values in Town of Reading



Data: ACS 2009-2014

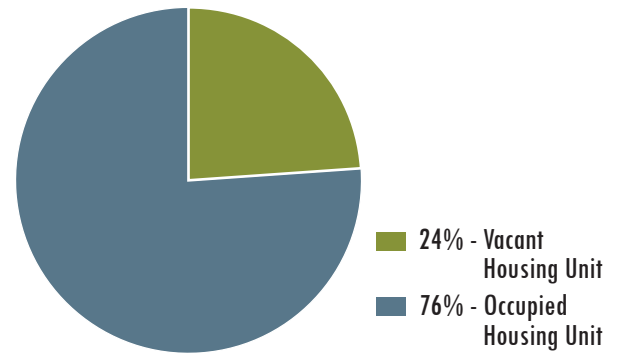
### 2.12 HOUSING OCCUPANCY/ VACANCY

The Town of Reading has a 24% vacancy rate among all housing units. Some level of vacancy is desirable, as it provides opportunity for residents looking to move to the town or change locations within the town. Homes that are vacant temporarily while for sale or for rent account for a small number of the housing units classified as vacant.

The majority of vacant units, however, are vacant due to the residence being used for recreational, seasonal, or occasional use. The American Community Survey estimates that 54% of vacant housing units, equal to 13% of all housing, are for such occasional uses. These homes can be a tax benefit to the town, as they typically pay taxes, but do not require year round services.

The remaining vacant housing units in the Town of Reading, estimated at 11% of all housing, are not for sale, rent, or occasional use. Many of these are simply abandoned. Some concerns have also been reported with vacant homes and properties, citing vandal or drug related behaviors on certain properties. Ensuring consistent property maintenance could discourage some of these behaviors if they are centered on deteriorating or otherwise abandoned property. A concerted effort to work with county law enforcement in problem locations could also help alleviate some issues.

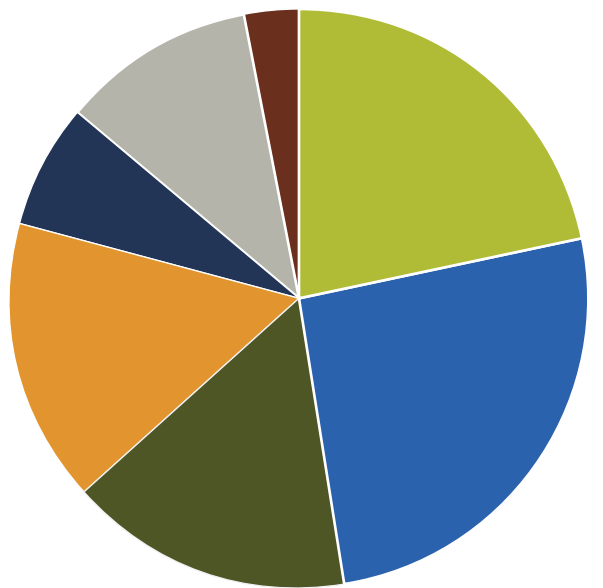
Housing Occupancy in the Town of Reading



Data: ACS 2009-2014

### 2.13 HOUSING HEATING TYPES

Town of Reading residents use a variety of energy sources to heat their home.



- 22% - Utility Gas
- 26% - Bottled, Tank, or LP Gas
- 16% - Electricity
- 16% - Fuel Oil, Kerosene, Etc.
- 7% - Coal or Coke
- 11% - Wood
- 0% - Solar Energy
- 3% - Other Fuel

HOME HEATING FUEL	EXPLANATION OR EXAMPLE
Utility Gas	Gas piped through underground pipes from a central system to serve the neighborhood
Bottled, Tank, or LP Gas	Propane gas stored in bottles or tanks that are refilled or exchanged when empty
Electricity	Electricity that is generally supplied by means of aboveground or underground electric power lines
Fuel Oil, Kerosene, etc.	Fuel oil, kerosene, gasoline, alcohol, and other combustible liquids
Coal or Coke	Coal or coke that is usually distributed by truck and burned in a stove hearth
Wood	Purchased wood, wood cut by household members on their property or elsewhere, driftwood, sawmill or construction scraps, and the like
Solar Energy	Heat provided by sunlight that is collected, stored, and actively distributed to most of the rooms
Other Fuel	All other fuels not specified elsewhere

## 2.14 PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Property Maintenance is cited as the biggest concern among residents in regards to the current housing stock. This is manifested in two forms: 1) Residents want their neighbors to maintain a good aesthetic on their property, and 2) Residents want to be able to maintain their own property with little hassle or unnecessary regulation. These two desires are somewhat at odds, because regulation and enforcement is an effective strategy to maintaining aesthetically pleasing properties to align with community values.



## 2.15 ACTION ITEMS

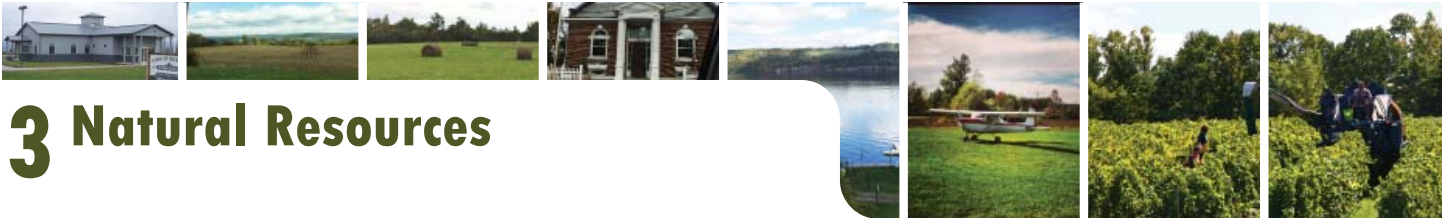
### Community

1. Consider creating a Town of Reading Community Engagement Committee to explore opportunities to foster a greater sense of community.
2. Post all vacancies for committee and board openings on social media and town website.
3. Post all town events/ meetings on social media and town website.
4. Organize quarterly community events, to be held at town hall or other location. Encourage residents of all ages to build a stronger sense of community.

### Housing

5. Promote housing development and maintenance that enhances the distinct character of each neighborhood type in the town, including rural hillside, hamlet neighborhoods, and lakeside cottages.
6. Use the flexibility and permissiveness of the Town of Reading Land Use Law to increase the variety of living options available, with an emphasis on housing options for young professionals and residents who hope to “age in place.” Consider incorporating specific review considerations into the Land Use Law that allow the planning board to offer modifications to lot size, setbacks, or other dimensional requirements as site-appropriate incentives for developments that include living options desired by the community.
7. Provide education about grant opportunities and encourage energy efficient housing upgrades of older homes to take full advantage of the existing housing stock.
8. Encourage future developments to provide affordable housing options for town residents, including where appropriate a mix of housing types, small lots, or micro-homes as currently allowed in the Town of Reading Land Use Law.
9. Encourage consistent code enforcement.

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# 3 Natural Resources

Natural resources incorporate all of the natural physical elements of the land such as soil, water, and vegetation, and scenic views. These resources can also include natural areas shaped for human enjoyment such as state forests, trails, historic and cultural areas, and access to water. By and large, Town of Reading residents believe that protecting these resources is important, both for their personal use and for the economic stability of the town and region.

## POLICY

*It is the policy of the Town to be a community that preserves and sustains the quality of its natural resources through the combined efforts of its residents, businesses, and government. Sound development practices, appropriate regulations and community stewardship should be employed to reduce or eliminate the degradation of these resources and promote safe land use practices. Land use activities, other than sound agricultural practices as part of a farm operation, should not be allowed to cause adverse impacts on other properties. In particular, special attention should be given to protect the Town’s open space, such as wetlands, woodlands, streams, farmland, and parks due to their environmental, aesthetic, and recreational value as well as to reduce risks from flooding and other natural hazards.*

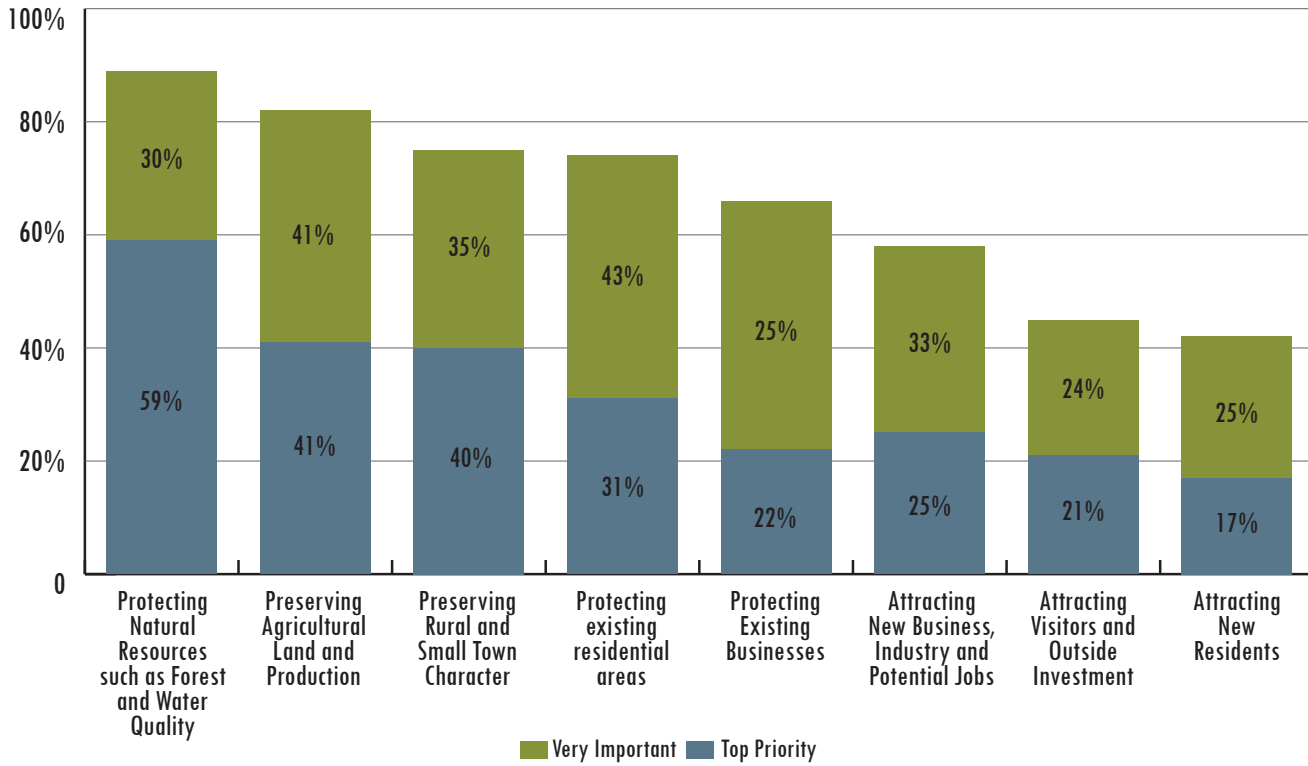
### 3.1 COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

Results from the survey of town residents show that overall there is quite broad agreement that protecting the town’s natural resources is important. In general terms, 45 percent of survey respondents said that the Small Town/Rural Character was one of the reasons why they chose to live in the Town of Reading. The woodlands, streams, lake waters, clean air, and rich soils are a significant part of what defines the rural character of the town. These natural assets are therefore indispensable for the quality of life that Reading residents enjoy.

Further survey results underline that natural resources are not just generally desirable; they should be considered among the top priorities whenever we have to balance competing interests. From a list of possible competing interest that local leaders would have to balance when considering any proposal for development, survey respondents gave the highest priority to (1) protecting natural resources, (2) preserving agricultural land and production, and (3) preserving rural and small town character.

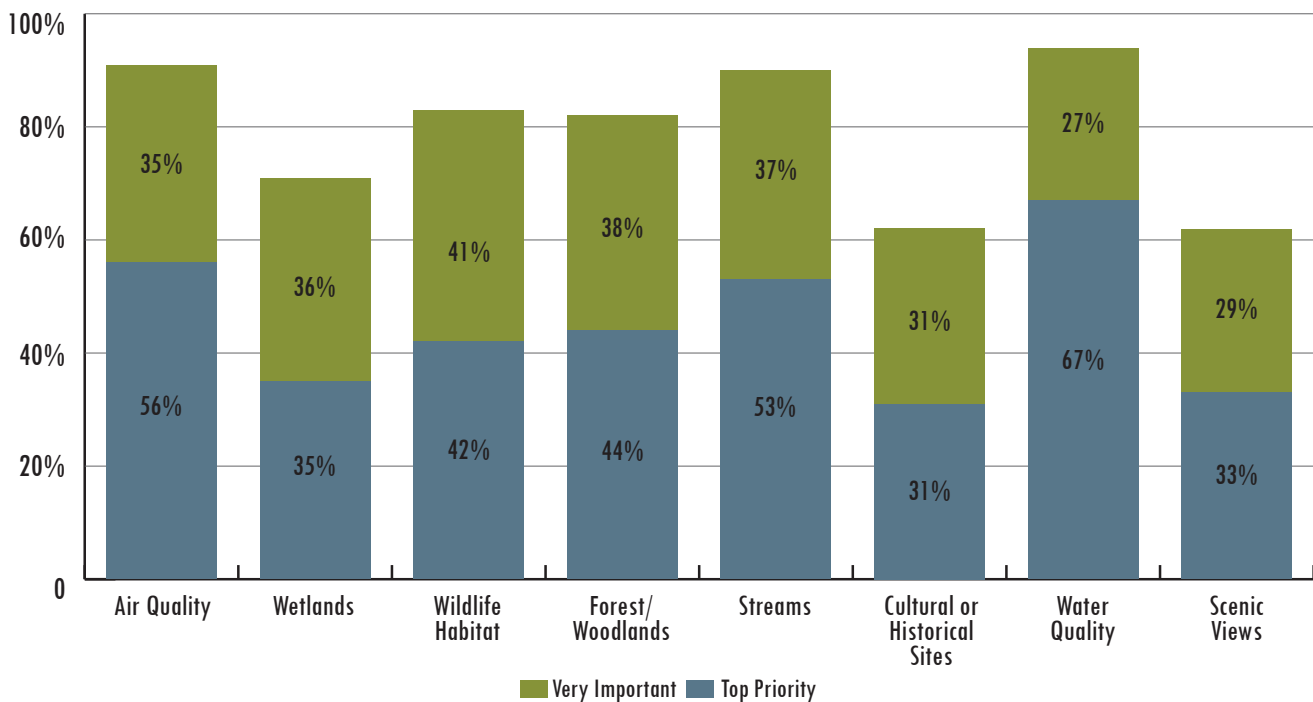


**Survey Results: Whenever a development project is proposed, be it new homes, new commercial or manufacturing uses, or energy uses, Town of Reading leaders must balance competing interest. Please indicate the importance of each of the following to you.**



Looking at specific natural resources, a strong majority of survey respondents indicated that they believe it is very important or a top priority to protect each of the eight different natural resources listed in the survey.

**Survey Results: How important is it to you to protect the following Natural Resources in the Town of Reading?**



### 3.2 PARKS, RECREATION, AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Town of Reading has a limited supply of public recreational resources. Sugar Hill State Forest is partially located within the Town of Reading, and has approximately 1.85 miles of officially maintained trails running through the town. In total, the forest comprises 964 acres of preserved forest area in Reading. Residents desire an increase in access to parks and trails nearby for kids to play, the community to meet, and for everyone to use for recreation. There is an abundance of vacant and forested land in the town that could provide an opportunity for park and trail development.

There is no public access to Seneca Lake in the Town of Reading, but many lakeside cottages have lake access, some for personal use, and others used for rental properties. The survey results show that public access to the lake is strongly desired, with 69% of respondents expressed the desire for public access to Seneca Lake. Making this happen could prove very difficult for a few reasons. Purchasing and developing the land for public use would be expensive as many lakeside properties are small, already developed, and expensive on their own. Additionally, securing a permanent railroad crossing for the public at large has not been a priority or favorable option for railroad companies.

As a possible alternative way for the Town of Reading to provide its residents with better access to the lake and regional trails, the Town could work with the Village of Watkins Glen to support the operation and maintenance of the Village's Clute Park in exchange for passes that Reading residents could use to park at the park for free. Such an arrangement could provide Reading residents with better access to the lake. Residents in the Town also have access to the Catharine Valley Trail which connects with other regional parks and Seneca Lake.

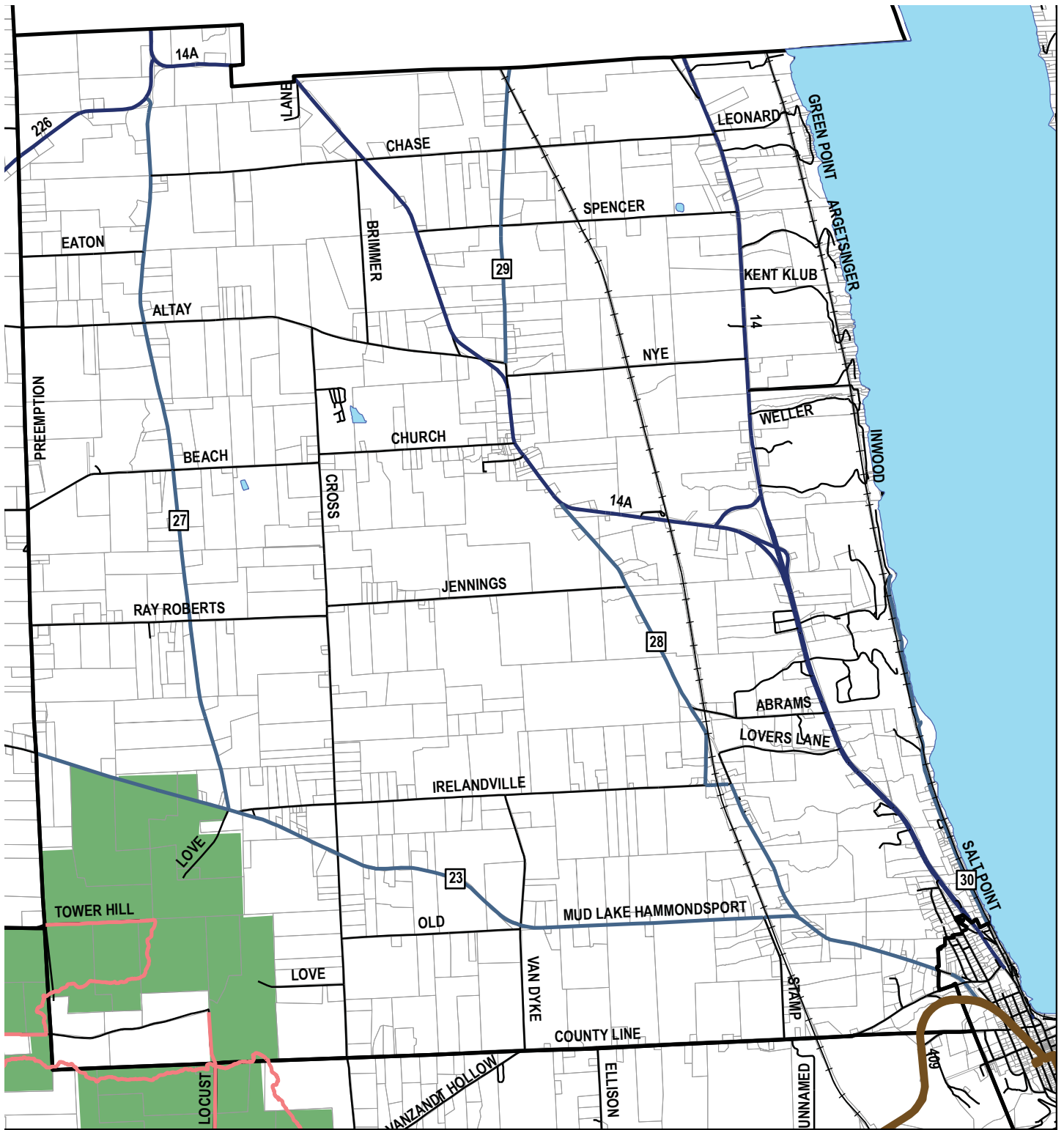
The Watkins Glen Historic Racetrack runs partially through the southeastern portion of the town. The track is officially designated as a Historic Site on the National Register of Historic Places. There are no other official historic resources in the town.



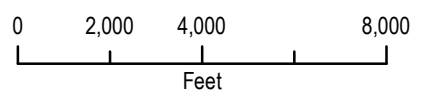
Photo Credit: Southern Tier Central Regional Planning Board

Natural Resources

Town of Reading Recreational Opportunities



- Hiking Trail
- Sugar Hill State Forest
- Watkins Glen Grand Prix Course, 1948-1952  
(on the National Register of Historic Places)



### 3.3 SOILS

#### Agricultural Soils

The Town of Reading has an abundance of soils that are classified as Prime agricultural soils. These soils have the ideal combination of physical and chemical makeups that allow them to produce high yields of regional crops. Protecting these soils from non-agricultural development will preserve long term economic use of such soils by residents.

The Schuyler County Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Plan (1999) and the plan's Supplemental Revision (2008) both identify the preservation of productive farmland as a goal of the county's agriculture and farmland protection program. Recognizing that preserving farmland is a necessary precondition for establishing "a foundation for a sound agricultural economy," the plans set a goal of "maintaining a base of 60,000 acres of Schuyler County land in farming (including 30,000 acres in active use for cultivation)." To help reach this goal, the plans also establish an objective to "identify Schuyler County's most valuable farmland (particularly vineyards...)" for purposes of providing protections and incentives to keep them in agricultural production. As these plans show, the prime agricultural soils in the Town of Reading are an important natural resource that is critical for the local economy and the rural character of the community.

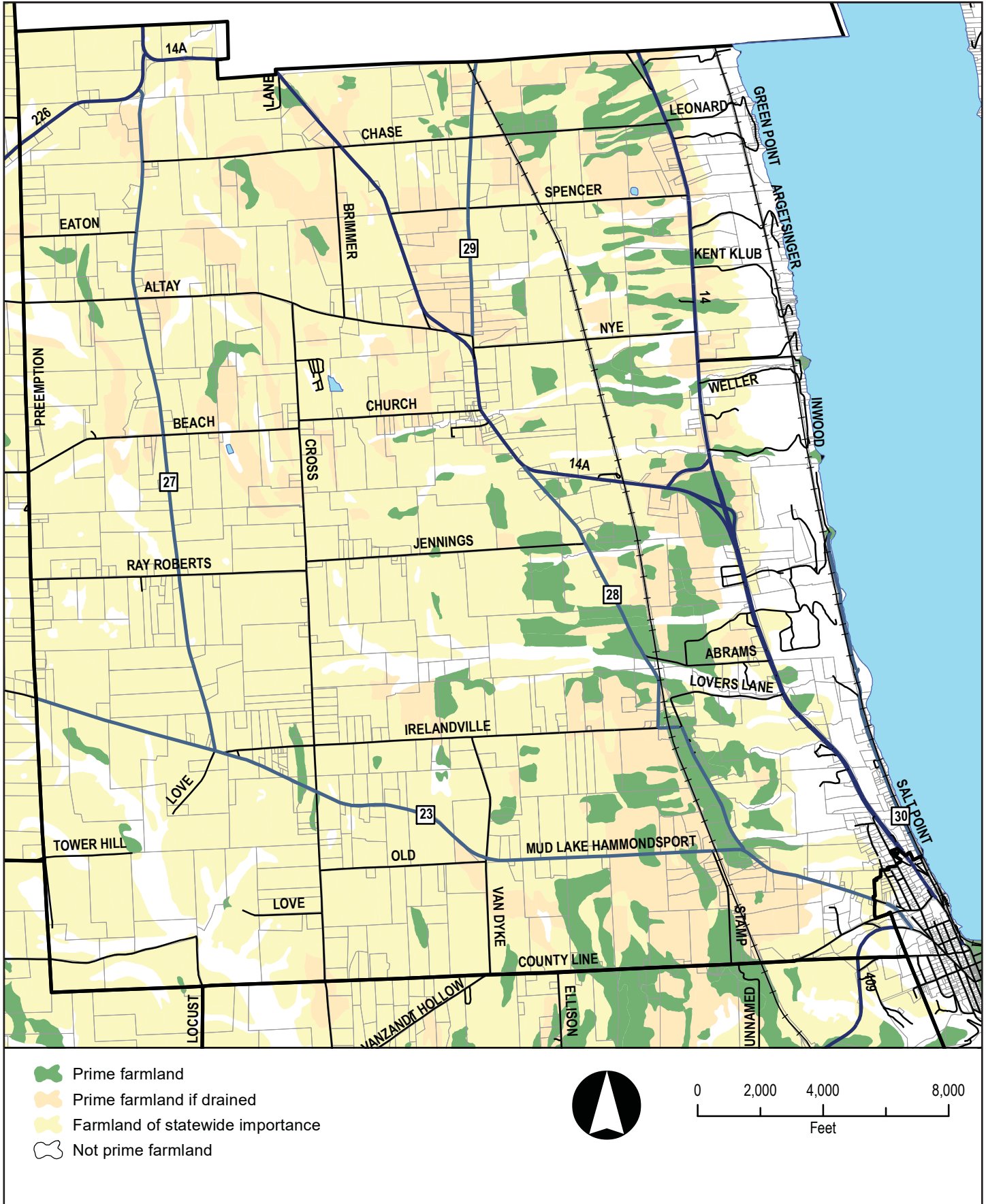
### 3.4 STEEP SLOPES

A steep slope is classified as a slope of the land over 10%. Building on such slopes may increase the amount of erosion resulting in property damage and a decrease in water quality. Steep slopes in the town are located primarily along the lakeshore, and along gullies. The current Town of Reading Land Use Law (as of September 2016), in section 4.4, lays out requirements for proposals on slopes greater than fifteen percent (15%) in order to minimize the risks of erosion and potential damage to the property and neighboring properties. These measures help encourage development on flatter and more easily buildable sites while at the same time minimizing the risks from development that does happen on steep slopes.

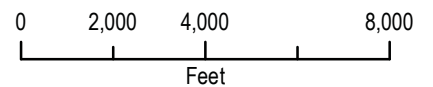
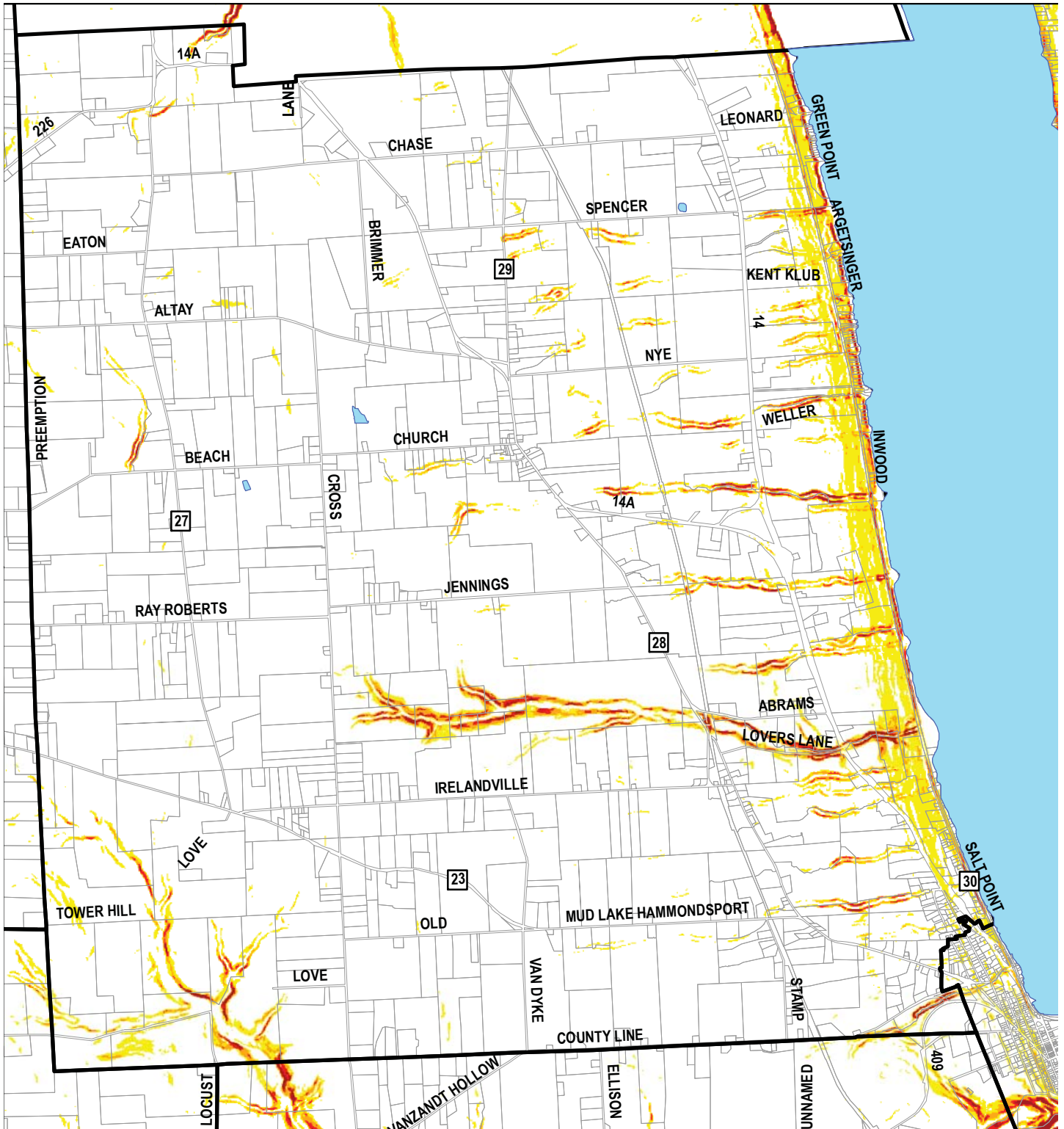
Survey results reveal that many town residents have mixed feelings about regulation to protect steep slopes. On the one hand, there is very strong support for preserving the specific natural resources that steep slope protections help preserve, including streams (identified as very important or a top priority by 89 percent of respondents), water quality (94 percent), and scenic views (63 percent). On the other hand, when asked about measures that could protect infrastructure investments from flood damage, only 36 percent of respondents expressed support for "restricting new development on steep slopes." This result may reflect that many of the survey respondents read the question as asking about new restrictions on steep slopes in addition to the existing measures in the town land use law, or as asking about new restrictions that would simply ban development on slopes.

When enforcing the Town's current steep slope protections or when considering future revisions to the land use law, the Town should focus on measures that do the most to protect the natural resources that town residents value so highly while being the least restrictive of reasonable development. Any development being considered should balance the needs of people living in the community with the need to protect the natural environment.

Town of Reading Prime Farmland Map



Town of Reading Steep Slopes Map



### **3.5 WATER**

#### **Seneca Lake Water Quality**

Because Seneca Lake is a substantial, essential, and iconic natural resource for the area, the town should prioritize its water quality for drinking, fishing, agricultural, and recreational purposes. Water quality refers to the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water. Water quality can be degraded by pollutants and runoff within a watershed including stormwater and agricultural runoff, erosion, failing septic systems, excessive chemical use, garbage dumping, and invasive species.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation classifies Seneca Lake as “threatened,” primarily by pathogens from inadequate septic systems and other wastewater treatment facilities and by occasional growths of aquatic plants and algal blooms. (Oswego River/Finger Lakes Waterbody Inventory/Priority Waterbodies List; listing for Seneca Lake, Main Lake, South was revised 5/18/2016)

The Schuyler County Water Quality Coordinating Committee has assigned high priority to both restoration and protection of Seneca Lake. Problems identified by the committee include moderate invasive species problems and isolated or minor problems associated with poor water quality, flooding, and habitat loss. They note that “large sediment loads are commonly deposited in the lake after heavy rains.” (from Schuyler County Water Resource Strategy, May 2007)

The Town of Reading Land Use Law, as of September 2016 includes water quality protection measures within the Seneca Lake Protection Area, which includes all land lying east of New York State Route 14 as well as within 50 feet of the banks of first order streams that drain into Seneca Lake. Uses that could result in discharges of hazardous materials are prohibited in this area. Regulations restrict buildings and fill within 25 feet of Seneca Lake and establish other standards.

#### **Groundwater Quality**

The Town of Reading has issues with water quality in regard to well water. Many residents and businesses cannot obtain potable water from wells due to the high levels of sulfur. Some landowners report needing to build extensive systems to get water from the lake, needing to filter the water they are able to get, or needing to purchase water from other sources. Public water could be a solution for areas that have difficulty accessing water.

#### **Wetlands**

Wetlands include areas that are completely submerged in water year-round as well as areas that are only wet intermittently. Wetlands provide a number of environmental benefits to the town. These areas act as sponges that soak up large amounts of rain, prevent flooding, and filter the water they collect, all greatly increasing the quality of groundwater and surface level water in an area. Wetlands are also productive ecosystems, providing habitat for wildlife and plants. Protecting wetlands will help safeguard the water quality in the town and the region.

The Town of Reading has numerous small wetland areas, particularly in the western part of the town. Although no wetlands in the town are regulated by New York State, a permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers may be needed prior to disturbance of wetland areas.

## Watersheds

A watershed is an area in which all rain and water from that area flows into a common body of water. There are four watersheds that drain from the Town of Reading. Three flow directly into Seneca Lake: Seneca Lake, Glen Creek, and Rock Stream. The small area of the town in the Tobehanna Creek watershed flows into Lamoka Lake, which drains to the Chemung River. This means that almost all stormwater runoff, erosion, pollution, and dumped garbage from land in the Town of Reading has a direct effect on the water quality of Seneca Lake.

## Streams

There are a few dozen streams in the Town of Reading and none of them have been identified as impaired by New York State. However, the Schuyler County Water Quality Coordinating Committee has assigned the Glen Creek Watershed with a high priority for both protection and restoration, citing severe and/or widespread stream instability problems (Schuyler County Water Resource Strategy, May 2007).

Streams play an important role in the natural ecosystem, and building too close to streams can result in a decrease in water quality and potential property damage. Due to the large elevation difference and steep grade from upland hillsides down to Seneca Lake, streams in the Town of Reading are particularly active systems, subject to bank erosion and downstream deposition of eroded sediment. These natural processes can be worsened by human activities that disturb natural vegetation, stream beds, and floodplains.

Reading is fortunate to have private and public property owners who have maintained forest vegetation along many of the town's streambanks. Woody vegetation provides streambank erosion protection, as well as wildlife habitat and shade to improve fish habitat. However, some stream corridors in the town have lost protective riparian vegetation when they have been developed. This is a particular concern for the steep streams flowing into Seneca Lake, where bridges, roads, and other development are subject to erosion damage.

### Examples of disturbances that can worsen the natural processes of streams:

- *Channel Straightening,*
- *Dredging,*
- *Bridge/Culvert Installation,*
- *Berms (which limit flow onto the floodplain),*
- *Removal of stabilizing vegetation,*
- *Filling of floodplains.*

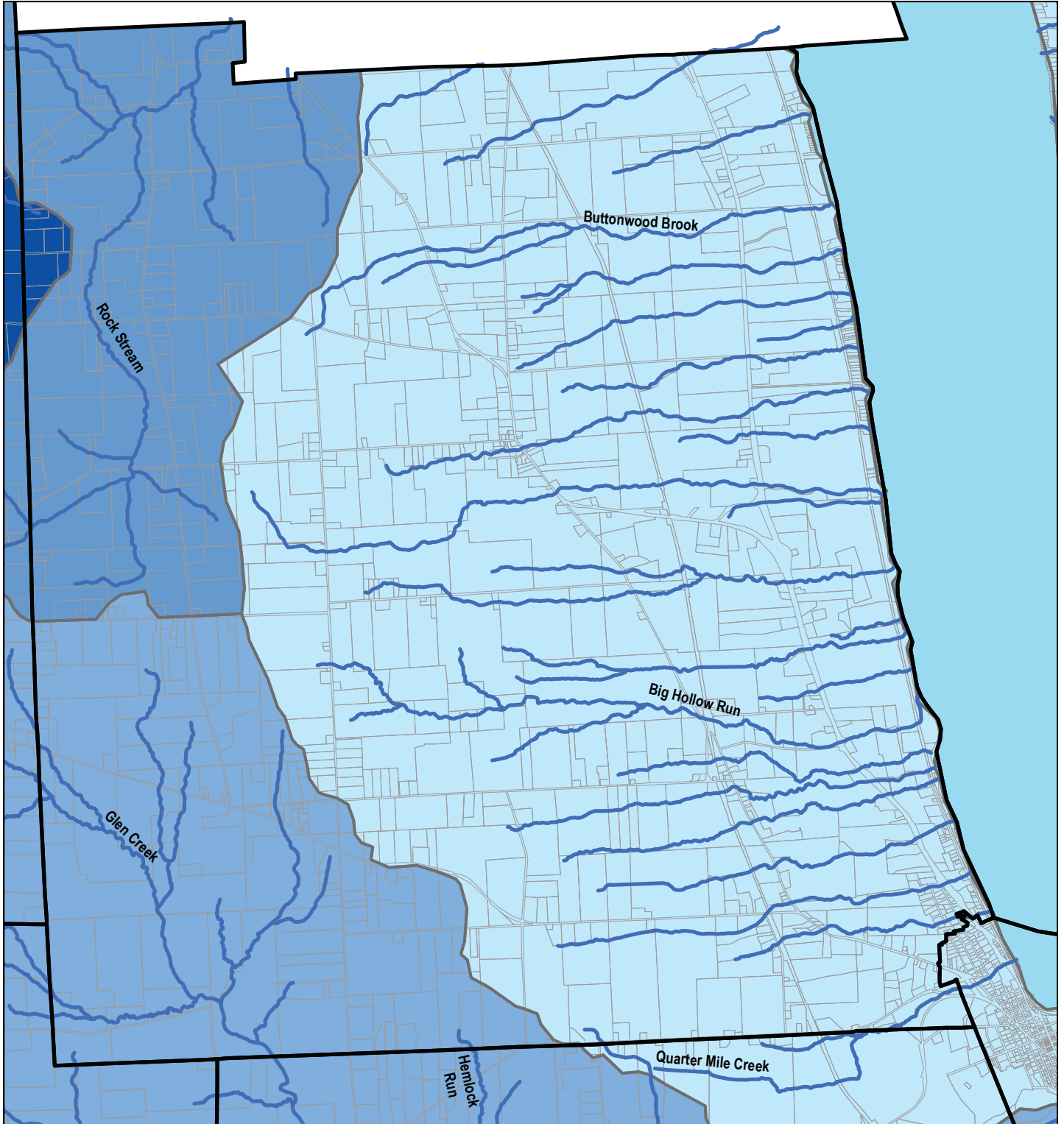
In addition, land use changes in the watershed can increase runoff or otherwise alter the delivery of water and sediment to the stream and thus contribute to imbalances in the stream.

One possible way for the Town to encourage the continued maintenance of riparian vegetation and preservation of streams would be to add stream setback provisions to the Town's land use law. Stream setbacks could require that new construction and buildings be set back a certain number of feet from the streambank and could restrict activities that disrupt stream functions. Currently, the Town of Reading Land Use Law (as of September 2016) does not have stream setback provisions, although the regulations for the Seneca Lake Protection Area in section 4.10 do apply also to land "within 50 feet of banks of first order streams that drain into Seneca Lake." The current law defines a "first order stream" as a stream mapped as a continuous blue line on a US Geological Survey topographic map from 1978. Relying on this definition means that important streams are not identified using the most up-to-date information and that the streams that do end up being regulated may not be the most critical streams or the most threatened. Any revisions to the land use law involving stream protections should re-evaluate which streams in the town are most in need of protection and make sure that any protections are targeted to those streams.

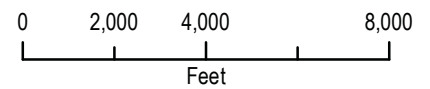
As with steep slope protections, survey results show that residents have mixed feelings about regulations to protect streams. While there is very strong support for preserving streams (identified as very important or a top priority by 89 percent of respondents) and water quality (94 percent), only 39 percent of respondents expressed specific support for "setbacks from streams to reduce property damage." When considering measures for stream protection in the future, the Town should focus on measures that do the most to protect the natural resources that town residents value so highly while being the least restrictive of reasonable development. Any development being considered should balance the needs of people living in the community with the need to protect the natural environment.



Town of Reading Watersheds and Perennial Streams



- Glen Creek Watershed
- Rock Stream Watershed
- Seneca Lake Drainage Watershed
- Tobehanna Creek Watershed
- Seneca Lake
- Perennial Stream



## **Floodplain**

Flooding is the highest-rated hazard in Schuyler County. The Town of Reading is most susceptible to two types of flooding: flash flooding on streams and Seneca Lake floods. Streams are susceptible to flash flooding, which is characterized by a rapid rise in water level, high velocity flows, and erosion. Flash floods are capable of tearing out trees, undermining buildings, and scouring new channels. Since the 1950's, the northeastern U.S. has experienced an increase in sudden deluges of rainfall, which cause flash flooding. Based on this trend, it is reasonable to expect a continued increase in the number of flash flooding events in Reading into the future. For the second main type of flooding hazard, flooding of Seneca Lake develops more slowly and water levels can remain high for extended periods of time.

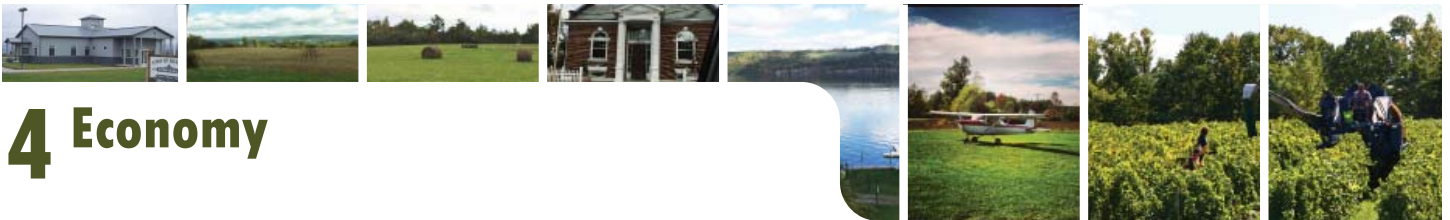
The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has not identified any flood hazard areas within the Town of Reading. However, the shoreline of Seneca Lake and areas adjacent to streams are subject to flooding. The New York State building codes require protection of buildings from mapped flood hazards and have been enforced along the Seneca Lake shoreline based on the lake flood elevation determined for the Village of Watkins Glen (from the Flood Insurance Rate Map and the Flood Insurance Study for the Village of Watkins Glen).

The Town of Reading participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which enables the availability of federal flood insurance in municipalities that adopt and enforce local regulations to reduce the risk of flood damage. A 1975 Town of Reading law (Local Law Number 1 of 1975) regulating the use of land likely to be flooded references a Flood Hazard Map that was subsequently withdrawn by the federal government. The Town should consider replacing this law with a law based upon the current NYS Model Local Law for Flood Damage Prevention for Communities with no FEMA Mapped Special Flood Hazard Areas. This model law would require review of development proposals to ensure that they are reasonably safe from flooding. Adoption and enforcement of this law would ensure continued participation in the National Flood Insurance Program and availability of flood insurance for properties in the Town.

In 2015, there were two NFIP flood insurance policies in the Town of Reading, with the total "insurance in force" of \$700,000. There has only been one NFIP flood insurance claim since 1968, with a payment of \$6,206.10 (Source: Hazard Mitigation Plan, Schuyler County, NY, 2015-2020). Because standard insurance policies do not generally cover flood damage, this means that damages resulting from floods in the Town of Reading are likely to be un-insured losses. Government disaster relief programs excel at helping communities rebuild from events that are widespread enough to receive federal disaster declarations. They do little, however, for the individual owner of a residence or business owner. In addition, many flash flood events are localized incidents that do not qualify for federal assistance.

### **3.6 ACTION ITEMS**

- 1.** Ensure that future development activities protect and sustain our natural resources and environment.
- 2.** Pursue energy conservation technologies and techniques, and consider adopting renewable energy policies to minimize the community's environmental footprint.
- 3.** Consider revision of the Town's Steep Slope Regulations (Land Use Law for the Town of Reading, Section 4.4) to provide clearer guidance for avoiding and mitigating the impacts of development on various slopes.
- 4.** Consider revision of the Town's Seneca Lake Protection Area requirements (Land Use Law for the Town of Reading, Section 4.10) to better balance protection of our natural resources with preservation of the existing community character in development along the lakeshore.
- 5.** Consider revisions to the site plan approval process and review criteria in order to provide ways to promote designs that protect natural features (especially stream corridors, wetlands, and forested areas), limit unnecessary impervious surfaces (e.g. large parking lots and wide streets), and implement green infrastructure stormwater management practices (for bioretention and infiltration of runoff).
- 6.** Investigate ways to encourage residents to protect and restore riparian buffers without additional regulations, such as educational materials or technical assistance.
- 7.** Consider repealing Town of Reading Local Law Number 1 of 1975 (regulating development activities in the Flood Hazard Area as depicted on a Flood Hazard Map, which was subsequently withdrawn) and adopting updated regulations based on the current NYS model local law (Flood Damage Prevention for Communities with No FEMA Mapped Special Flood Hazard Areas).
- 8.** Support development of a Flood Insurance Rate Map that identifies flood hazard areas within the Town.
- 9.** Provide the owners of property near streams and along the lakeshore with information about flood insurance and mitigation strategies for reducing flood damage.



# 4 Economy

## POLICY

*To support and maintain the existing economic diversity and successful business community in the Town of Reading. To improve the economic opportunity and quality of life for all residents by increasing the number and quality of jobs in a way that respects the rural character of the town.*

### 4.1 ECONOMIC BASE

The main economic and employment base within the Town of Reading comes from two job sectors: “Manufacturing” and “Retail Trade”. These are official industry designations that include wineries, breweries, cheese making, industrial oil and gas, salt, chemicals, motor vehicle dealers, and other similar businesses. Together, both manufacturing and retail trade provide over 80% of the jobs in the town, and contribute a large share of the Town of Reading’s tax base. It is likely that both sectors will remain an important piece of the local economy.

In Schuyler County, visitors spend over \$33 million a year in the county, with most of that money spent on lodging and second home purchases. Around 4.5% of labor income and around 6.6% of employment generated comes from visitors and the tourism industry. This creates a tax savings per household in Schuyler County of about \$581 to maintain the same amount of revenue and services. The food, lodging, and recreational businesses in the Town of Reading support and benefit from this regional industry.

Reading has a large proportion of industrial work in the town. These companies support the tax base in the town and have historically provided many jobs to local residents. A variety of industrial activities are supported by residents, including: intensive plant agricultural, high tech industry, and light manufacturing of any kind. This would likely involve smaller developments and agriculture based endeavors. On the other hand, most residents are strongly opposed to heavy manufacturing operations within the town.

Small businesses are a vital and vibrant part of the Town of Reading, as there are many residents who own and operate such businesses. There is a large diversity in the kinds of establishments in the Town of Reading, including wineries, recreational vehicle sales, bed and breakfasts, inns, auto related businesses, recycling, antiques, and much more. In fact, there is a lack of large chain or big box establishments, giving Reading a uniquely natural, small town feeling. This local entrepreneurship and economic diversity is a strong source of self-sufficiency and pride in the town. The continued growth of these businesses will remain a local asset.

**Jobs Located within the Town of Reading Boundary, 2013**

JOB TYPE	SHARE
Manufacturing	45.60%
Retail Trade	35.00%
Transportation and Warehousing	7.60%
Health Care and Social Assistance	2.80%
Accommodation and Food Services	2.50%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2.00%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	1.50%
Construction	1.00%
Wholesale Trade	0.80%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.50%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	0.50%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.30%

**Jobs Held by Residents Living in the Town of Reading, 2013**

JOB TYPE	SHARE
Manufacturing	17.00%
Retail Trade	15.90%
Transportation and Warehousing	13.10%
Health Care and Social Assistance	11.70%
Accommodation and Food Services	8.60%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	7.60%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	5.00%
Construction	3.10%
Wholesale Trade	2.60%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2.40%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	2.30%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	2.30%

While the Town of Reading is seen as a rural and agricultural town, agriculture is not listed in the top 10 sectors that provide jobs in the Town of Reading. This is partially because wineries are included in the “Manufacturing” sector. Further, many farming enterprises in the Town of Reading are smaller, family based, and do not employ large numbers of people.

## **4.2 ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

### **Availability of Jobs**

There are several economic challenges in the Town of Reading. There is a lack of available jobs, especially good paying and stable jobs, in or near the town. This encompasses several related issues such as a lack of jobs for a workforce with higher levels of education and a lack of diversity of jobs. Additionally, low wage and/or seasonal employment is common in the tourism and hospitality industries.

These challenges affect all residents and businesses. Older adults worry about keeping young adults as well as families in the town, as a loss of population can exacerbate other challenges in the town. Young adults have difficulty finding a job locally, forcing many to find work elsewhere for short or long periods of time. Business leaders have trouble finding skilled employees in a limited and dwindling workforce. They find it hard to keep talent because of low wages and seasonal schedules, creating a great deal of employee turnover. Others find themselves hiring workers year round, even for seasonal positions, as a means of retaining their productive workforce.

Unemployment of current residents in the Town of Reading is very low (3.6%), although some people are challenged with underemployment through either seasonal or short term work. This does not always provide the desired quality of life for residents, and makes it difficult to rely on such jobs to move into the area or to remain here over many years.

### **Distance to Jobs**

While the Town of Reading does have one of the shortest average commutes in the county, most residents leave the town for their primary source of employment, and many expressed a desire to have more jobs closer to or in Reading. Many travel a short distance to Watkins Glen and Montour Falls, while others travel as far as Ithaca, Elmira, Corning, and Penn Yan. As long commutes are associated with a decrease in quality of life, the Town should take care to support local businesses and developments that would encourage more jobs nearby.

### **Commercial and Service Needs of Residents**

Half of Town of Reading residents say that their daily needs are not met though the current business offerings. Although one of the strengths of the Town of Reading is the rural setting, this presents challenges for accessing daily services. Many residents find it cumbersome to have to drive a long distance for every item, even when they just need a gallon of milk or a tank of gas. This is especially true, and a growing concern, for older citizens who mention the amount of driving for services as a worsening struggle as they enter old age.

### **Internet**

A lack of reliable, high speed internet is a hindrance to businesses town-wide. Current businesses cannot fully utilize web resources that require high speeds. Future businesses are discouraged from locating in the Town if they are web-based or if their business relies on high speed internet to function. Expanding high speed backbone, and eventually individual business connections will improve the business potential in the town.

### **Water & Sewer**

A large number of businesses, including establishments that residents desire, will not be built without sewer and water infrastructure. While it may not be strongly desired to develop sewer and water capabilities, the lack of such infrastructure will continue to be a challenge for business development.

### 4.3 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Due to the abundance of vacant land and interest in certain activities and amenities, entrepreneurs in and around the Town of Reading have many opportunities to bring residents the services they desire.

#### Vacant Land

Vacant land comprises approximately 32% of the land in the Town of Reading and is largely located in the more rural sections of the town. Much of it is located on prime farming soils or in prime locations adjacent to the Village of Watkins Glen and along Seneca Lake. This provides a great deal of opportunity for a variety of businesses.

#### Sense of Community and Identity

Town of Reading residents desire to create a greater sense of identity and sense of community as a town. This includes having places to connect with local residents, both in person and online. Most residents connect with each other through their phones or email, but desire a place where they can “run into each other spontaneously”. This could be a breakfast diner, social activity, co-working space, coffee shop, restaurant, or other community institution. While not all business ideas will be feasible in the Town of Reading, there is a clear need for such businesses to foster a greater sense of local social cohesiveness.

#### Commercial Businesses

Economic success in the town is first and foremost reliant upon the continued investment in and support of the strong base of existing businesses. If many town businesses were to grow, even incrementally, the overall impact to the town would be large. New businesses are also a key part of local economic growth. The most common suggestion for a new business in the Town of Reading is for a gas station and/or a general store. People recognize that residents and tourist visitors alike must either drive to Watkins Glen or Dundee to get gas, and both options are inconvenient. Small grocery purchases such as milk or eggs would also be made easier with a nearby general store. Residents are not looking to “commercialize” the town or to create any larger developments that would take away from the overall rural character. However, a small store is strongly desired in the town.

#### Regional Specializations

People recognize the strengths of the town and region (such as agriculture, forestry, tourism) and see the potential for additional niche and supporting businesses to enhance the local economy. Suggestions included cabinet makers, cooperage, or other woodworking, specialty food processing, and expanded tourism and outdoor recreation activities.

#### Job Board or Staffing Agency

A needed service in the community is a way to better connect employers and potential employees. There used to be a staffing agency that businesses found helpful, but it has long since disappeared. Bringing these parties together could be substantially aided by either another staffing agency or a locally focused online or physical job forum where people could post projects or positions they need to fill. This could particularly assist in filling short term or project based work, where employers have the most difficulty finding workers.



Example of Co-Working Space Source: [www.symmetry50.com](http://www.symmetry50.com)



The Cooperage at Mystic Seaport Source: [www.mysticseaport.org](http://www.mysticseaport.org)

## Tourism

The tourism industry in the Town of Reading is similar to that of the larger Finger Lakes region. It is largely based on visitors enjoying the natural beauty of the area and the agricultural, food, and beverage specialties that the region provides. Preserving and supporting these local strengths will ensure that the area remains a vibrant destination worth visiting.

### POLICY

*To protect and grow tourism and tourism related industries by expanding existing businesses, allowing new enterprises to develop, and by preserving and enhancing the existing tourism amenities and local strengths it is built upon.*

#### 4.4 LOCAL TOURISM

A number of tourist based industries are located in the Town of Reading including wineries, a brewery, restaurants, “bed and breakfasts” inns, and hotel/motels. These businesses make up a significant part of the local economy and rely heavily on tourist visitors for their livelihoods. Additionally, many residents list their homes for rent as vacation rentals. This allows many residents to supplement their income by loaning their home out, and expands options for visitors looking to stay in the town. Further, 13% of homes in the Town of Reading fall into the category of seasonal homes, which are usually second homes purchased by seasonal residents.

The winery and brewery industries are continuously growing at a steady rate within the Town of Reading and Schuyler County as a whole. As of 2016 there are 4 wineries and one brewery within the Town of Reading. The wineries in Schuyler County bring in nearly a million visitors every year and contribute approximately \$20 million to the local economy (Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan 2008).

#### 4.5 BENEFITS: TAXES, EMPLOYMENT, ENTERTAINMENT

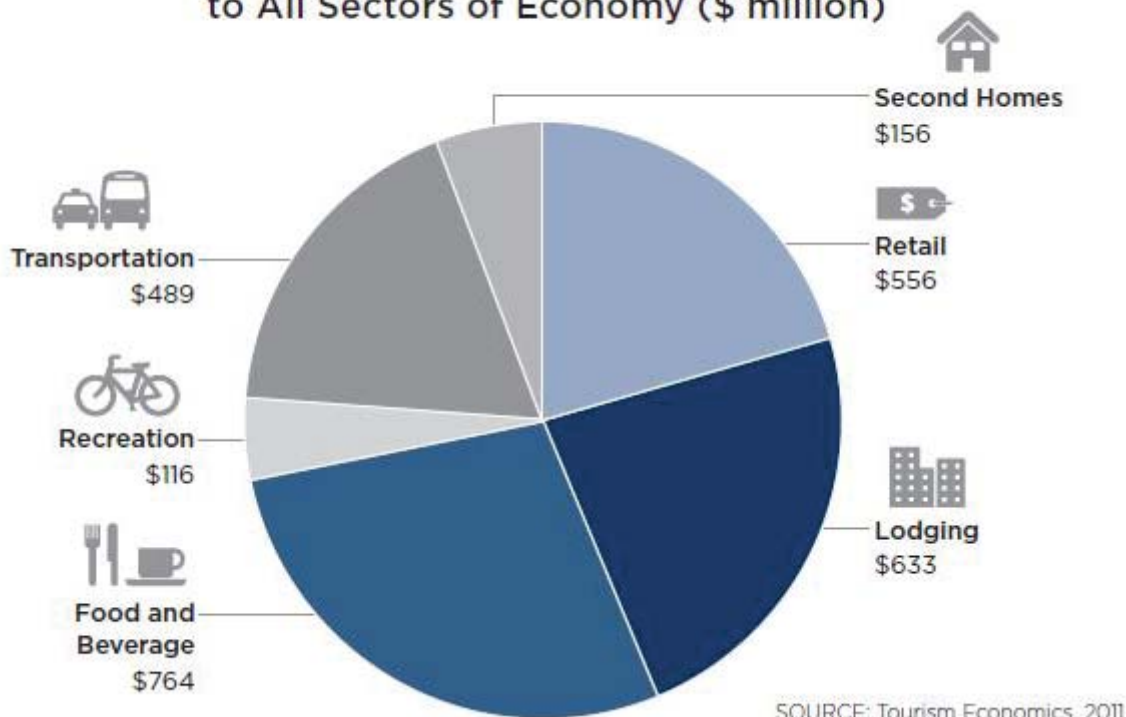
Seasonal homes and residents create a tax benefit for the town, where such residents pay taxes on property and spend money locally when they are in the area. While they do not require as many services as full time residents, because they are gone most of the year, seasonal residents also are not counted within the Census which can negatively impact the town’s ability to secure population-based funding such as spending for schools, roads, bridges, hospitals, and other essential services.

Tourism is a strong part of the local economy, providing an income for many residents and a tax base for the town. Several tourism related businesses express that they are planning to expand over the next 10 years. If such expansion occurs, the town can expect an increase in tax revenue as businesses experience an increase in sales. These tax benefits are cited by residents as a major benefit to the tourism industry locating in the town. Residents also derive personal enjoyment from such activities, as they frequent food and beverage establishments, both for family and community purposes.



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

### Finger Lakes Travelers Significantly Contribute to All Sectors of Economy (\$ million)



#### 4.6 OPPORTUNITIES: TO GROW TOURISM

With the tourism industry growing in Schuyler County, there are many opportunities which Reading could capitalize on. Some of the needs identified by tourism agencies in the region include:

- A variety of types of overnight accommodations (ie. hotel, motel, rentals, etc.).
- Activities beyond the libation industry, which may include activities such as miniature golf, movies on the lawn, or farmers markets. These could also be events that serve the needs of the community.
- Increased property maintenance. People are often coming to this area on vacation, it would be beneficial if the area looked like a place that people want to go on vacation.
- Extended hours. Cafes and retail should stay open after 5pm and be year around businesses.

Many of the local and regional tourism agencies have indicated that if tourism related business were to have extended hours there is a large enough demand from local visitors to make it economically feasible. However without opportunities beyond standard business hours it can be difficult to attract visitors to the area.



Photo Credit: Chad Hendrickson



#### **4.7 CONCERNS: TRAFFIC, SAFETY, EMPLOYMENT**

The tourism industry is not without its drawbacks. An increase in traffic that creates safety issues was cited as the major concern among residents. Specific areas around tourist attractions were identified as issues due to the speed of the road, alcohol related accidents, and noise related nuisances. Some of these issues could be addressed locally, where noise ordinances could be enforced and speed limits could be reduced on local town roads. Other issues may only be addressed with state or county action such as an increase in police presence, a reduction of speed limits on state and county roads, or additional road infrastructure such as pullovers and turn lanes. Some of these solutions may require an increase in town spending on services. While tourism provides local jobs, many of those jobs are seasonal or part time and some have relatively low pay, making it difficult for residents to ensure a steady quality of life and difficult for businesses to maintain good workers.

Tourism can bring both financial and quality of life benefits, however it can also create traffic and safety concerns. Residents generally think that the level of tourism in the town could be comfortably expanded and would actively like to see an increase in the tourism industry. As tourism continues to expand and is promoted as a opportunity for new development as well as a way to increase the tax base, it will be important to weigh the impacts of new tourism development on the rural character of the town.

#### **4.8 ACTION ITEMS**

##### **Economic**

1. Create a Town of Reading Business Directory
2. Create a Town of Reading job board or staffing agency
3. Promote high speed internet/ fiber optic backbone installation through the Town of Reading
4. Identify options to sustainably and affordably increase individual connections to the future high speed internet/ fiber optic backbone installation.
5. Identify opportunities to convert vacant lands into productive or active uses.
6. Continue the positive working relationship with the Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPED) to market and attract appropriate business developments to the Town.

##### **Tourism**

7. Support the preservation and enhancement of natural resources as a basis for tourism and other economic development opportunities.
8. Encourage the expansion and development of the tourism industry.
9. Encourage improved property maintenance.



# 5 Municipal Services, Infrastructure, and Budget

## POLICY

*To provide basic, high quality town services and facilities to enable a good quality of life and support economic opportunity, while retaining a low tax rate for residents and businesses.*

### 5.1 CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

As with many other small towns, the Town of Reading has a small, declining population base, but must still maintain the existing infrastructure and services. The existing layout and future development of services and infrastructure will affect the quality of life of residents, as well as the town budget.

#### Roads

The predominant service provided by the town is the construction and maintenance (including snow removal) of town roads. This constitutes a large portion of town costs, but is an essential service that many residents desire. The main roads in the town are paved, while a few less traveled roads are dirt.

Managing drainage on the Town’s roads is an ongoing challenge. Roadside drainage systems are designed to remove excess water from the road corridor, but can also serve as conduits conveying sediment and other pollutants directly into water bodies. Poor drainage can cause washouts, flooding, and other roadway damage. Many of the Town’s roads have undersized culverts and roadbank erosion problems.

#### Garbage and Recycling

Recycling is provided at a collection point at the town hall once per week so that residents can drop off their reusable waste. Garbage and other waste collection is offered by private trash haulers and is accepted on a weekly basis alongside the recycling pick up at the town hall.

#### Fire and Police Protection

The Town of Reading has established a Fire District to provide for fire protection within the Town. The Village of Watkins Glen Volunteer Fire Department provides coverage to the majority of the town while the Dundee Fire Department provides coverage to a small area of the northwest portion of the town. Police protection is provided primarily by the state and county. The town allocates a small amount of funds towards police assistance for local traffic control and equipment only.

#### Resident Satisfaction with Services

Overall, residents are happy with the services provided by the town. The most desired improvement to the current services are an increase in the number of days and times that garbage and recycling can be dropped off. Such a limited service period does not provide all residents with enough time to dispose of their waste.

#### Survey Results: Resident Satisfaction

SERVICE	SATISFACTION RATE
General Road Maintenance	65%
Snow Removal	78%
Garbage Collection (1 Drop-off Point, weekly)	58%
Recycling (1 Drop-off Point, weekly)	64%
Fire Protection	80%
Ambulance	83%
Police Service	75%
Electric Service*	78%

\*While the survey indicated that residents were happy with their electricity service, public input meetings received many complaints about a lack of needed electric capacity and frequent power outages. This may be a problem limited in scope, but could affect the quality of life for some residents. If the problem was to worsen, business development could also be affected.

Services that many residents would like to see improved or added are listed in the table below. While many residents were eager to improve certain services such as high speed internet and cable television, there was little commitment from residents to pay for those improvements through taxes. High speed internet is the most likely candidate to be supported through a tax increase

**Survey Results: Resident Satisfaction**

SERVICE	WANT IMPROVEMENTS?	WILLING TO PAY FOR IMPROVEMENTS?	PROVIDED BY:
Drainage/ Stormwater Control	46%	Yes 11%	Highway, Code Enforcement
Cable TV	56%	Yes 14%	Utility Company
Cell Phone Coverage	49%	Yes 12%	Utility Company
High Speed Internet	71%	Yes 21%	Utility Company

**Broadband**

Broadband to facilitate high speed internet is not available throughout most of the Town of Reading. A project to bring a high speed broadband fiber backbone to the Town of Reading is currently under way. It is likely that if a business or resident wishes to connect to the extension, they will have to pay for the connection out of their own pockets. The Town of Reading could pay for individual connections if residents wanted to pursue that route. This would involve raising taxes to pay for it.

**Code Enforcement**

Overall, the biggest service with which residents were actively dissatisfied was the consistency of application of the building code and land use laws. The current land use law is seen as confusing and the process required to get an application approved is seen as too lengthy. Residents feel that neither the codes nor the process are applied uniformly, which often results in conflicts and frustration with the Code Enforcement Officer who is the primary town representative whom residents interact with.

**Town Website**

The town website was last rebuilt in 2015 and provides basic town information such as departments, board minutes, tax rolls, and contact information for town employees and boards. Town Board meeting minutes are posted on the website, but not meeting minutes from the Town Planning Board or other Town committees. The website could be reorganized to make the currently available information easier to find and expanded to include other helpful information such as copies of local laws, relevant application forms, the town budget, and possibly a bulletin board or other listing service for local businesses and town events.

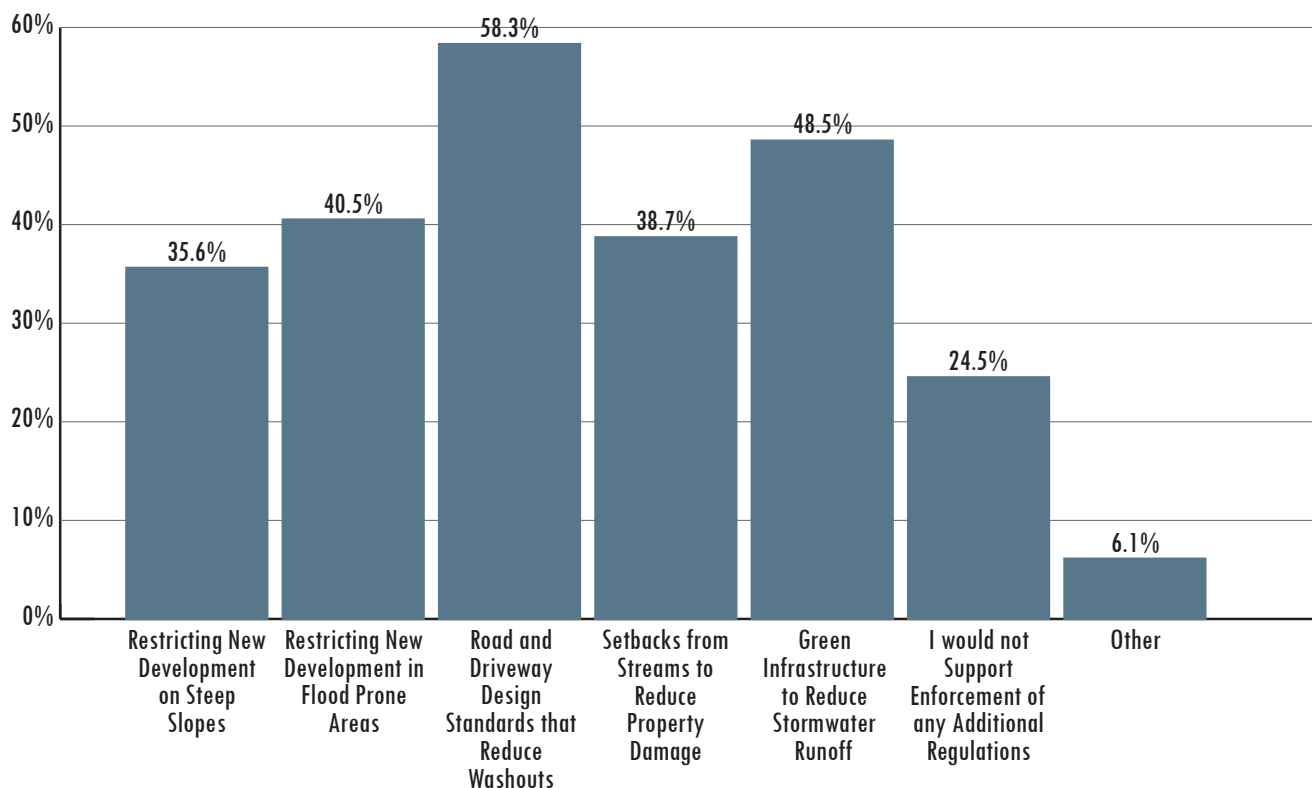
## Drainage/Stormwater

Steep slopes and poorly drained soils in the Town of Reading pose challenges for managing runoff from existing and new development. Alteration of natural drainage patterns and land cover can dramatically change the transportation and storage of water, contributing to flooding, erosion, and water quality impairment. If drainage paths are blocked, water may pond upstream of an obstruction. Concentrated flows and reduced infiltration into the ground can contribute to flooding and washout problems in down-slope areas. Because the potential for causing erosion, flooding, and other problems is much greater when development occurs on steep slopes, the Town of Reading imposes additional requirements in areas where slopes exceed fifteen percent (15%).

Construction activities that disturb one or more acres of land require a State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permit for stormwater discharges. This permit requires use of erosion control practices during construction and, for some projects, control of the quality and quantity of runoff from completed projects. Improved runoff management practices can be promoted by encouraging use of green infrastructure practices that protect natural features, minimize the amount of pavement, and enable water to soak into the ground.

Roads and driveways are particularly susceptible to washout and drainage problems, particularly on steep slopes. They should be designed and maintained in a manner that does not direct concentrated flow onto roads, toward neighboring properties, or into water bodies. In the community survey, 58.3 percent of respondents supported the enforcement of road and driveway design standards that would reduce washouts. While the specific design and construction standards for roads and driveways are already specified by state and local law, it can sometimes be confusing or difficult to find information dealing with particular situations, especially for private homeowners looking to build a driveway. The Cornell Local Roads Program provides several publications with helpful guidance that deals directly with washout and drainage problems, especially their workshop manual for “Roadway and Roadside Drainage” (CLRP #98-5). Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board provides a guide specifically for “Building a Rural Driveway,” available online at [http://www.stcplanning.org/usr/Program\\_Areas/Water\\_Resources/Stormwater/Rural\\_driveway\\_October\\_22\\_2009.pdf](http://www.stcplanning.org/usr/Program_Areas/Water_Resources/Stormwater/Rural_driveway_October_22_2009.pdf).

### Survey Results: In light of recent flooding events that caused a lot of damage in the Town of Reading, would you support enforcement of regulations that would help protect infrastructure investments in the Town?



#### POTENTIAL REGULATIONS

## 5.2 TOWN FACILITIES

### Community Meeting & Recreation

Currently, the only community area or building in the Town of Reading is the town hall which is predominantly used for government functions. Many residents are satisfied without additional public space, and are not interested in additional facilities for town use. However, nearly half of residents would like to establish a public use area to provide opportunities for recreation and community gatherings. This is especially desired as a way to build a sense of community and local identity which was identified as a concern by residents. Ideas from residents include:

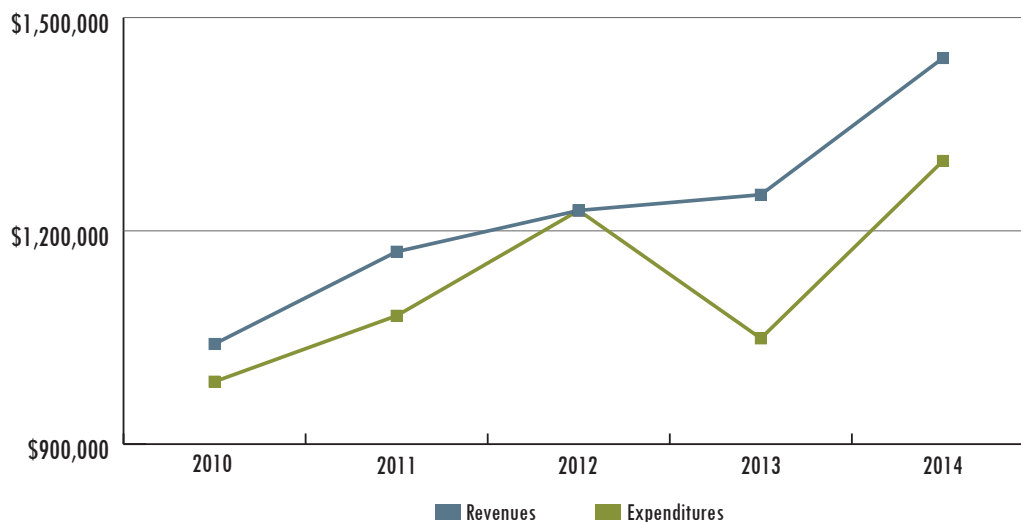
expand town hall use  
garbage transfer station  
park/picnic  
recreation center  
play field  
more parking at town hall  
community center

It is likely that larger or more complex facilities would be costly to the town. Expanded use of the town hall as a community center or for specific events would only require the use of lights and heating/cooling for the existing building. It may also be possible that donated land or other contributions could make such facilities feasible. For instance, a park or picnic area might only require that private land is donated or opened to the public for recreational use. A note to keep in mind: A public park used to exist, but was shut down due to under-use and insurance pricing considerations, and similar constraints may exist for future public use areas.



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

### 5.3 TOWN BUDGET



#### Budget items affected by development

##### Roads

As with most other municipalities in the area, local funding for highway expenses comprises the largest section of the town budget, nearly 40% of the total. This is to be expected, as roads are the largest piece of infrastructure the town has, and maintenance and other services such as snow removal are expensive to provide. Because this is where much of the town taxes are expended, it is essential to ensure that any improvements are cost effective and smart investments over the long term. New developments will have an impact on roads, and therefore an impact on road spending. Larger or more spread out development, especially on what are currently low volume and low capacity roads, will put more wear and tear on those roads. This will require more frequent and costly road improvements that residents will pay for in taxes. Further, improvements such as wider roads or right of ways will impact the rural character of the town. The Town of Reading should pursue road use agreements with new developments, particularly industry, that are expected to increase traffic in heavy vehicles or otherwise significantly increase wear and tear on town roads.

##### Public Safety: Police and Fire Protection.

Public safety is another big budget item comprising over 14% of the overall budget. Police and fire protection are essential services for residents and businesses. Because residential land uses typically cost more in services than they pay in taxes, additional residents and home constructions in the Town of Reading will increase the need and cost for each of these services. Currently property owners are taxed 0.666040 per thousand for fire protection service.

##### Water and Sewer

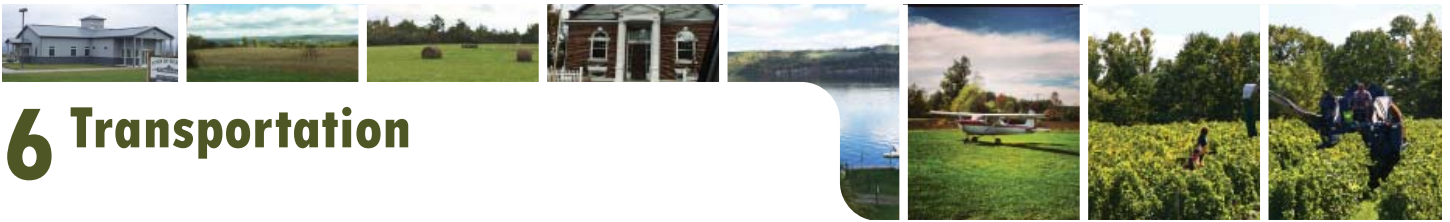
Water and sewer services combined comprise nearly 19% of the overall town budget. These costs are paid for directly by the residences and businesses that utilize these services. Therefore, they do not impose an additional tax burden on residents who do not use them. However, it should be noted that an expanded infrastructure will result in an increased financial burden on some residents and this burden should be considered as the town balances other goals such as keeping taxes low and maintaining a largely rural atmosphere. Expansion of water and sewer services allow for denser and increased development. The town should consider the potential change to the rural environment before approving a water and sewer expansion.

### Garbage and Recycling

There is an increased demand for these services both by current residents and new incoming residents. This demand is only expected to increase as new residents move to town, especially if residents move from a place where they are accustomed to waste removal services.

#### **5.4 ACTION ITEMS**

- 1.** Work with Schuyler County and other interested municipalities to study the feasibility of recycling service.
- 2.** Identify areas of the town for growth and preservation. Allow increase of water and sewer lines in growth areas, while working to preserve and limit water and sewer infrastructure in preservation areas.
- 3.** Through land use laws, encourage hamlet development to keep road infrastructure cost low.
- 4.** Work towards growing the town website with posted local laws and documents.
- 5.** Continue to provide training opportunities for Town Code Enforcement Officer and Planning Board. Evaluate where the inconsistencies in enforcement lie and what needs to be done to become more consistent.
- 6.** Seek funding to study feasibility of expanding broadband service throughout the town.
- 7.** Establish an annual dumpster day to assist residents with property cleanup.
- 8.** Identify and update inconsistencies within the Land Use Law for easier and more consistent enforcement.
- 9.** Clarify and update the application procedure for project proposals to the Planning Board. Provide clear guidance on the procedure for potential applicants, including posting all application forms and materials on the Town's website.
- 10.** Evaluate all roads to ensure adequate drainage capacity for all culverts, bridges, and ditches.
- 11.** Systematically address road drainage issues and improve roadway resilience as resources permit.
- 12.** Promote good stormwater management by providing landowners and developers with information about practices for managing runoff near its source and assistance with the state stormwater permit process.
- 13.** Provide technical assistance and voluntary design review for driveways and private roads.



# 6 Transportation

## POLICY

*To support the existing level of road network infrastructure and maintenance services, improve safety and noise issues when and where possible, and to enhance alternative transportation options where necessary and feasible.*

### 6.1 LOCAL, COUNTY AND STATE ROADS

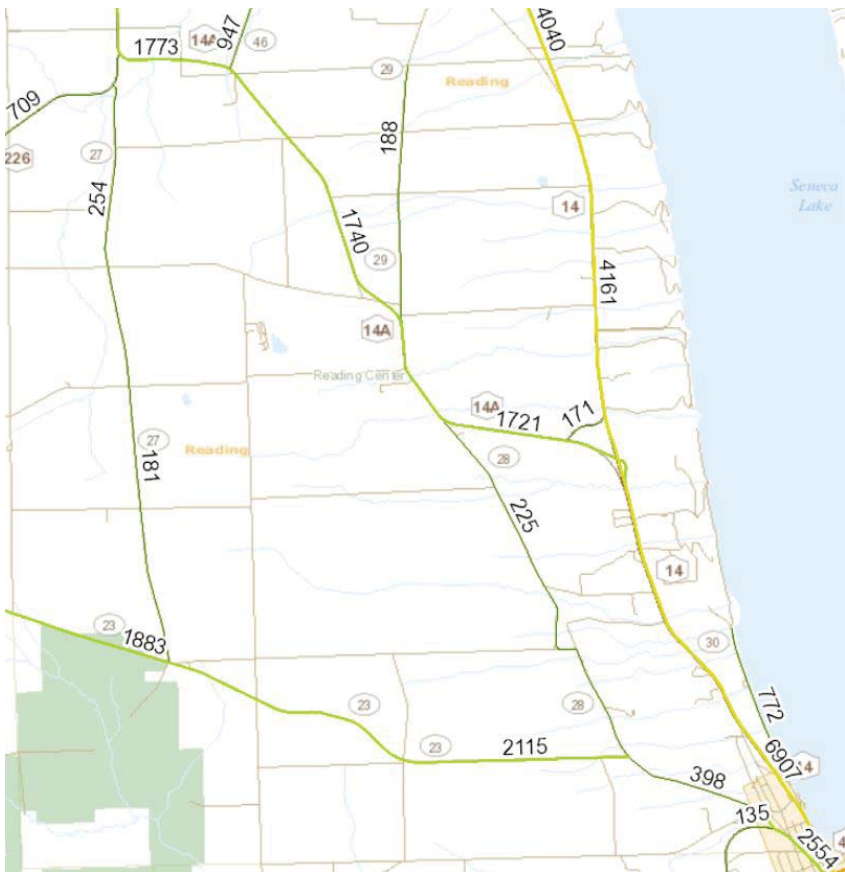
The Town of Reading encompasses three state routes, five county routes, and a large number of town roads. The town is responsible for maintaining the more than 34 miles of town roads within its borders.

The majority of town roads, over 25 miles, are paved, while nearly 9 miles remain unpaved. Some residents wish for more roads to become paved while others enjoy dirt roads as part of the rural way of life. Paving new roads could provide better access to property and make driving on some roads easier, but would require an increase in town taxes to provide for building and maintenance.

Traffic in the town primarily flows through State Route 14, County Route 23, and State Route 14a. Advocating to keep these roads maintained will be important to keeping residents and visitors safe.

These higher traffic roads also correspond with areas within the town where residents would support new development.

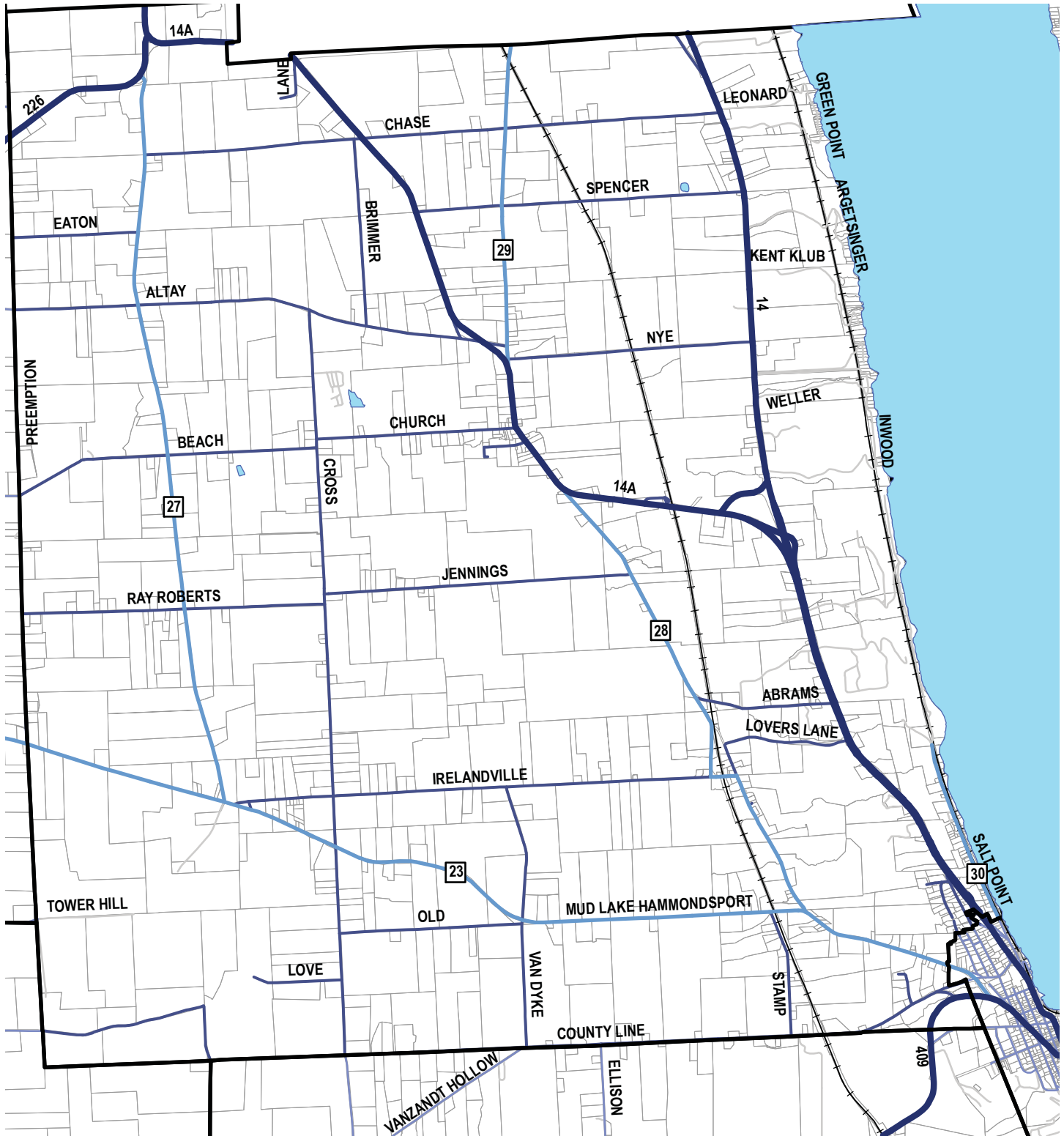
The current level of maintenance including road repair and snow removal is satisfactory to a majority of the residents. When asked specifically about ways to protect the town’s infrastructure investments from damage by flooding, a 58.3% majority of survey respondents supported the enforcement of road and driveway design standards that would reduce washouts. Maintenance and roadway design standards were further addressed in Chapter 5 “Municipal Services, Infrastructure, and Budget.”



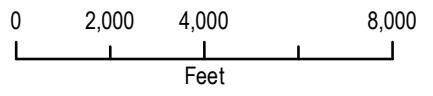
Data: New York State Department of Transportation



Transportation  
Town of Reading Road Network



- Town of Reading Road
- County Road
- Other Town or Village Road
- State Highway
- Private Way

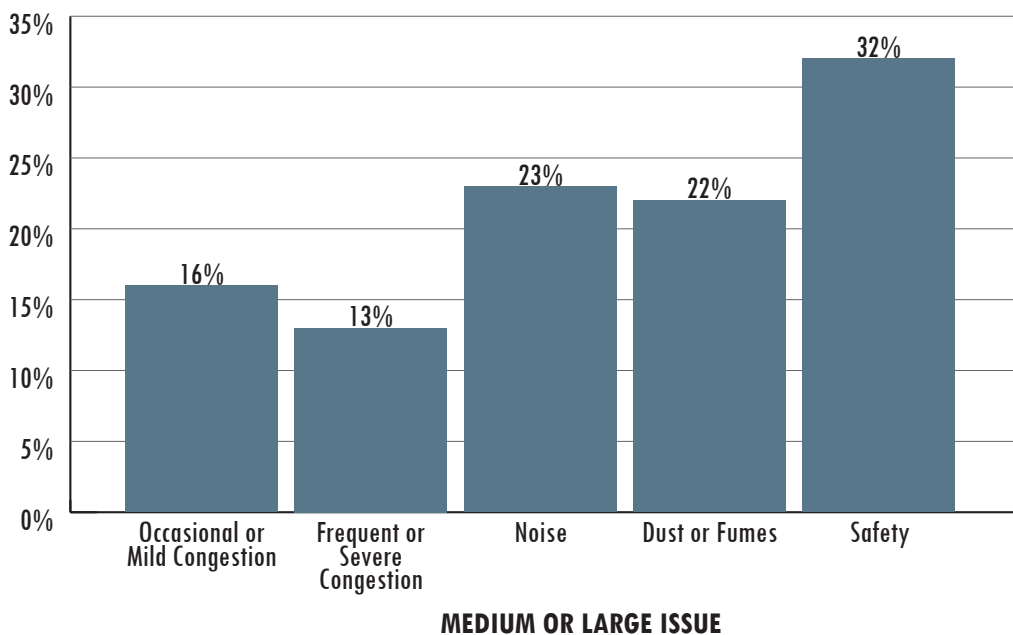


## 6.2 LARGE TRUCK TRAFFIC

Many large trucks come through the Village of Watkins Glen, up State Route 14, and use State Route 14a to travel through Reading Center. The trucks use State Route 14 to avoid I-90 and the tolls and weigh stations associated with the northern route. This issue is a problem throughout Schuyler County and the Southern Tier, and is being addressed by County Leaders. Residents interested in assisting should write their state/county legislature representative.

Other large trucks likely deliver to local industries. For the most part, the destinations and routes used by large trucks follow state and county roads, especially County Route 30 (Salt Point Road), State Route 14 and State Route 14A. However, all legal vehicles are permitted to travel on town roads and large trucks do occasionally make use of the local roads. Because heavy vehicles cause more damage to local roads than other traffic, the Town of Reading should pursue road use agreements with any non-agricultural industry that intends to locate or expand in the town. The Town of Reading currently has no road use agreements with any users. In a road use agreement, the Town establishes existing baseline conditions on specific town roads, and the road user (e.g. the owner of an industrial facility served by heavy vehicles) agrees to repair any damage beyond the baseline conditions that can be attributed to vehicle traffic associated with the road user’s facility.

### Survey Results: Concerns with Transportation in the Town of Reading.

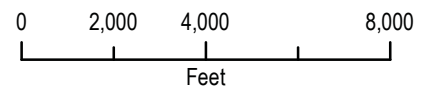


### 6.3 TRAFFIC CONCERNS



**Traffic Concerns**

- Speeding
- Truck Traffic and Noise
- Road Maintenance
- Problem Intersection



In surveys and focus groups, residents expressed a range of concerns about traffic in the Town of Reading. The concerns that were mentioned most frequently were speeding and heavy truck traffic.

The greatest areas of concern for speeding include:

- State Route 14A through Reading Center
- County Routes 23, 28, 29, and 30
- Cross Road

The greatest areas of concern for truck traffic and noise include:

- State Route 14
- State Route 14A, especially through Reading Center
- County Route 30 (Salt Point Road)
- County Route 23.

Heavy traffic and poor visibility cause problems at intersections including:

- State Route 14 at County Route 30 (Salt Point Road)
- State Route 14 and 14A (Gabriel’s junction)
- Intersections on State Route 14A in Reading Center (at County Route 28, Church Road, and County Route 29)
- County Route 23 near Stamp Road, railroad tracks, and County Route 28

Road maintenance and the visibility for turning vehicles, especially on State Route 14, were also brought up by a number of residents. Several people complained about heavy traffic and congestion in Watkins Glen during large events and the summer tourist season.



**6.4 TRAFFIC SAFETY**

Traffic safety is cited as the biggest issue related to transportation in the town, especially when combined with the effects of tourism. Overall in Schuyler County, the number of vehicle crashes has gone down slightly since 2011 while the number of crashes where people were injured has dropped even more. The Town of Reading has a crash rate comparable to all of the other towns in Schuyler County. In 2013, the most recent year with available crash data specifically for the Town of Reading, there were 49 vehicle crashes in the town, including 8 crashes that resulted in personal injuries. (25 of the total crashes were cases of a single car hitting a deer or other animal.)

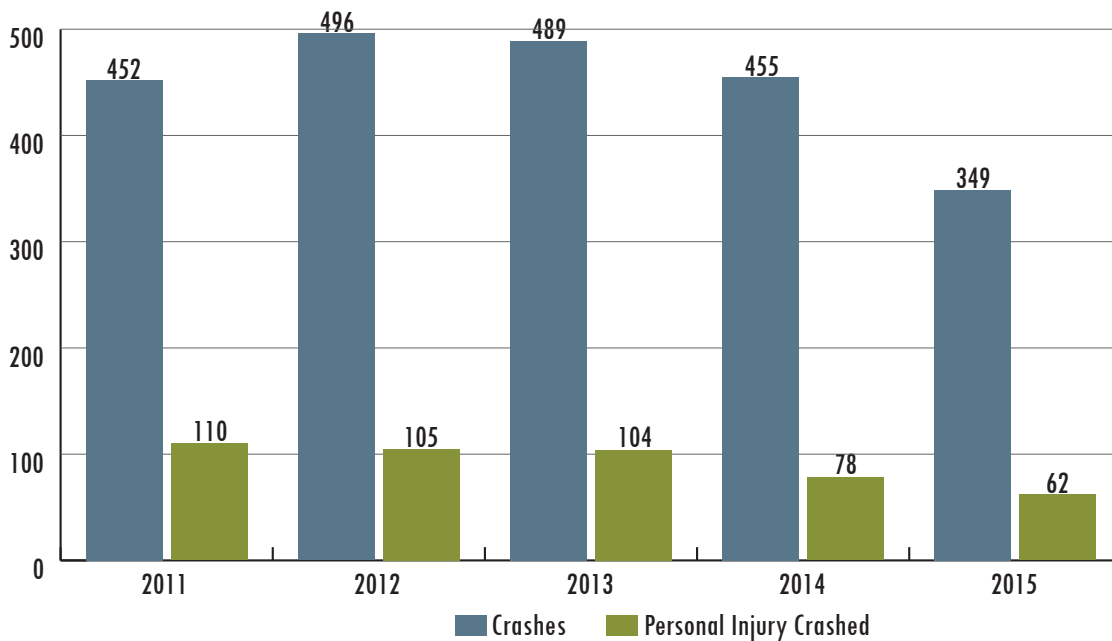
Of the 489 total crashes in Schuyler County in 2013, the police officer who filled out the accident report identified alcohol as a contributing factor to the accident in 15 crashes.

While visitors to the area provide a large boost to the economy, locally and regionally, large events and the summer tourism season bring larger amounts of traffic to the area, creating a nuisance for some residents. Increased traffic on summer weekends frequently causes congestion in Watkins Glen. In fact, the increase in traffic was the biggest concern among residents related to tourism. In Reading itself, most of the wineries and other tourist destinations are on Route 14, a multi-lane road with a higher speed limit, so starting, stopping, and frequent turns made by tour vans and visitors’ cars can easily interrupt the flow of traffic.

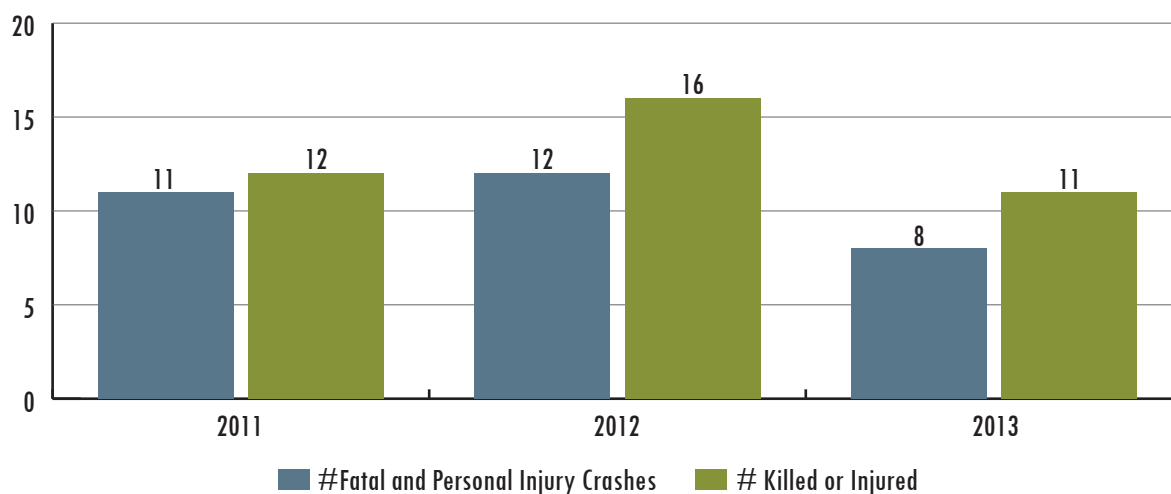
Although this tourism-related traffic is a nuisance for other drivers and does require extra attention to watch for stopped or turning vehicles, for the most part summer and weekend congestion does not pose a significant threat to safety. Compared to the hundreds of vehicle crashes throughout the year, there have been fewer than ten crashes during weekend daylight hours in the summer tourist season (May to September) in each of the past five years.

Specific areas of concern in the town include the speed and heavy trucks on Salt Point Road, the speed and heavy trucks on all county roads, and the speed through Reading Center.

**Vehicle Crashes and Crashes Involving Personal Injury, Schuyler County**



### Vehicle Crashes and Crashes Involving Personal Injury, Town of Reading



Alcohol-related crashes are a small percentage of total vehicle crashes, and even among alcohol-related crashes a still smaller percentage involve drivers who were drinking at a winery or other destination in the region’s beverage tourism industry. Even though wineries, breweries, and distilleries are not a major traffic safety concern, they can be useful partners for trying to improve traffic safety and prevent alcohol-related crashes. In particular, promoting access to taxi services, ride sharing, or charter vehicles can reduce the number of visitors who attempt driving after drinking while at the same time improving access to the tourist destinations. For the transportation services, the tourist market may be a promising market since visitors have consistently demonstrated a willingness to pay for high-quality experiences.

### 6.5 ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Schuyler County Transit provides a limited number of transportation services. Dial-a ride services exist on Mondays and Fridays. Their information hotline provides residents with information for rides:

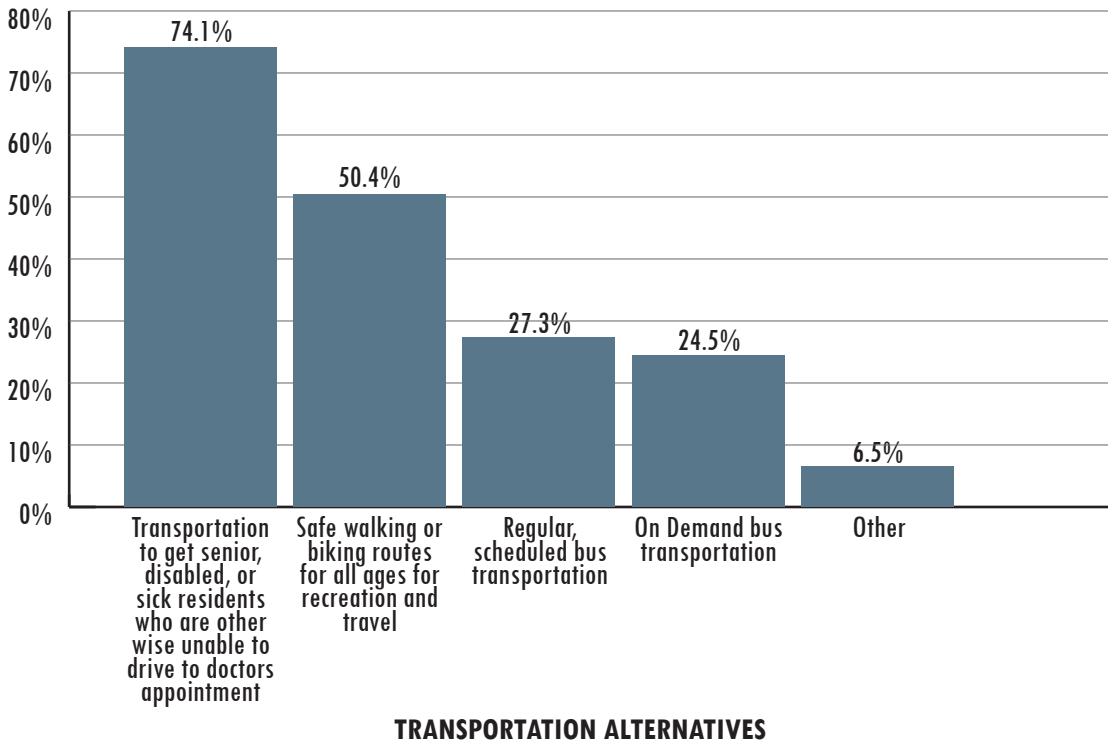
*“Riders may request transportation to meet their personal needs such as for medical appointments, grocery shopping, pharmacy, banking, hair appointments, volunteer assignments and more.”*

*The Schuyler County Transportation Call Center coordinates with a network of transportation providers including: Schuyler County Transit public transportation, Schuyler County Office for the Aging, RSVP, The Arc of Schuyler, and Veterans Services volunteer drivers.”*

The Town of Reading residents’ most requested option to get residents to doctor appointments might currently be met by Schuyler County transit, but might need more education and outreach to residents to ensure they know how to access these services.

The results of the community survey underline the importance of transportation for allowing residents to “age in place”. When the survey asked respondents what they would need to feel comfortable and secure living in the Town of Reading into old age, transportation and access to health care were two of the most frequently mentioned needs.

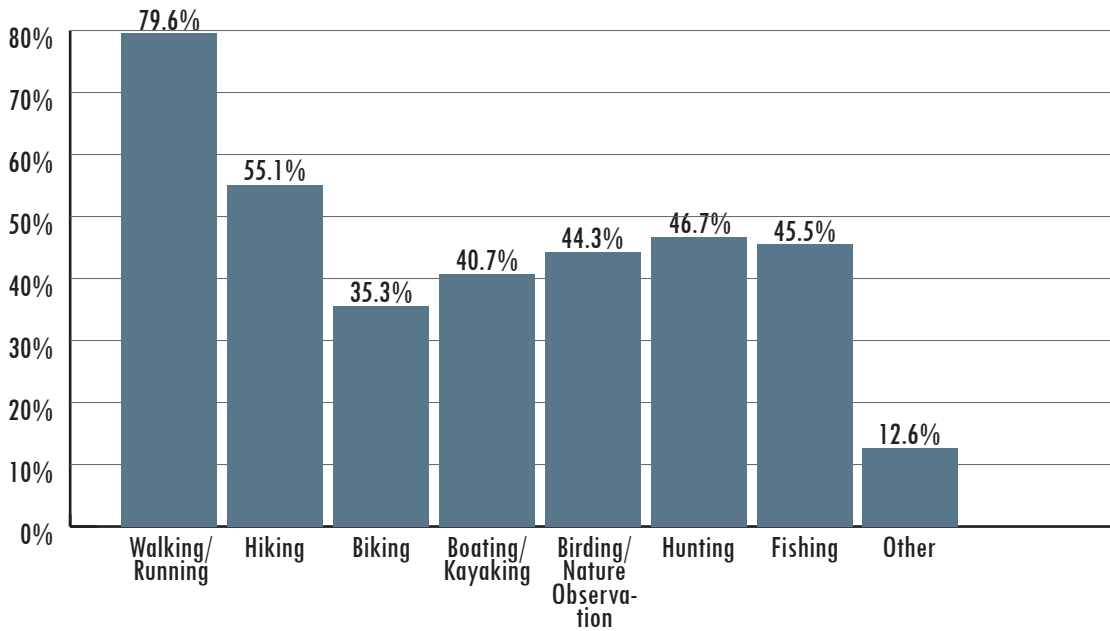
**Survey Results: Which alternative options of transportation might be appropriate in the town?**



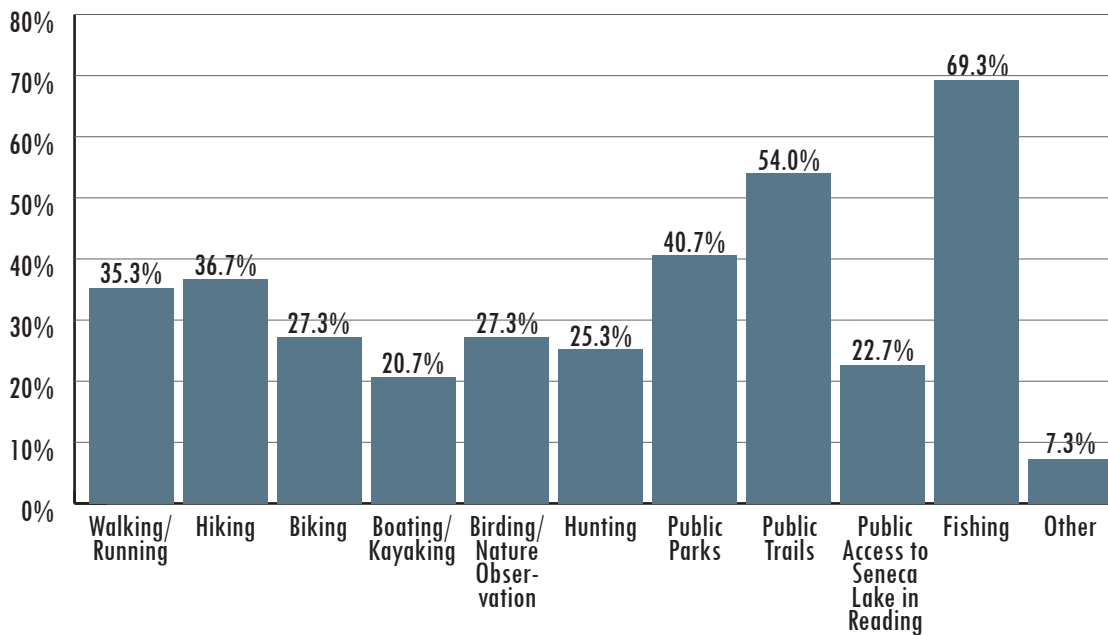
Safe walking and bike routes are also desired by residents. State Route 14 is a designated bike route, but due to its busy nature and steep incline through much of the Town of Reading, it is possible that many residents are not comfortable biking there. While biking and walking as a form of commuting will not be likely for much of the Town of Reading, recreational walking and biking is widely enjoyed by most residents in the town. The rural character of the town provides many local opportunities for recreational walking, hiking, and bicycling, particularly in the town’s woods, gorges, and hollows. There are many existing walking trails on private land that residents use with the permission of their neighbors who own the land. Even in areas of the town without public lands or parks, neighbors have developed community connections to make the most of the current natural assets.

Overall, the survey results show that residents participate in a variety of outdoor activities and would support additional opportunities to enjoy these activities. In particular, 69% of respondents expressed desire for public access to Seneca Lake. As discussed previously in the Chapter 3, Natural Resources, it may be challenging to provide direct public access to the lake within the town, but the Town of Reading could work with the Village of Watkins Glen to provide free parking passes at Clute Park for Reading residents.

**Survey Results: Which outdoor recreational activities do you participate in within the Town of Reading?**



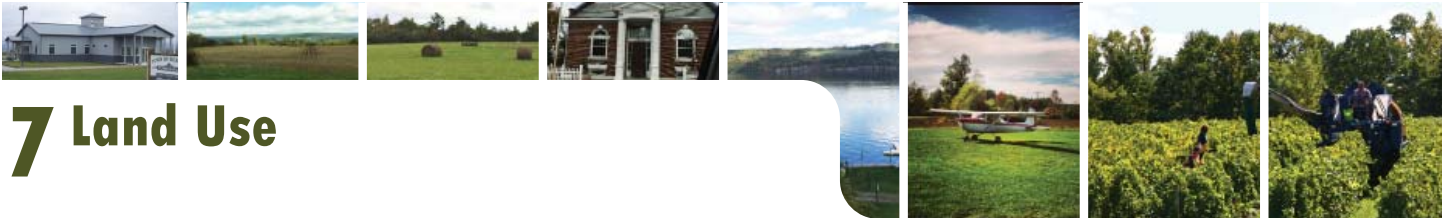
**Survey Results: Which outdoor recreational activities would you like to see more of in the Town of Reading?**





## **6.6 ACTION ITEMS**

- 1.** Work with state and county law enforcement to strengthen enforcement of speeding, particularly on County Routes 23, 28, 29, and 30 Cross Road, and State Route 14A in Reading Center.
- 2.** Make sure that residents know about dial-a-ride services from Schuylers County Transit and promote this option by putting information on the town website and distributing information through Meals on Wheels and other services that likely riders currently use.
- 3.** Consider providing bike lanes, wider shoulders, or caution signage on busier roads to make them more inviting for recreational bicycling and walking and to make it easier to access existing public and private trails.
- 4.** Work with wineries and other tourist destinations to promote taxis, ride sharing, charter vans, and other transportation services in order to reduce drunk driving and improve access to these destinations.



# 7 Land Use

## POLICY

*To maintain a low-regulation environment that allows landowner flexibility in development and promotes strong economic opportunity, while protecting neighboring properties from potential negative impacts. Clarity, simplicity, and uniform enforcement are top priorities in land use law creation, revision, and implementation.*

### 7.1 CURRENT LAND USES

The primary land uses in the Town of Reading are residential and agricultural. Much of the land classified as residential also includes some degree of farming operations. Further, while much of the land in the Town is classified as vacant, most of the vacant land is also residential and agricultural in nature, just not currently in use. Nearly half of the land in the town is registered as a State Certified Agricultural District, providing multiple benefits to the landowners when farming activities are pursued on their land.

#### Town of Reading Land Use Distribution

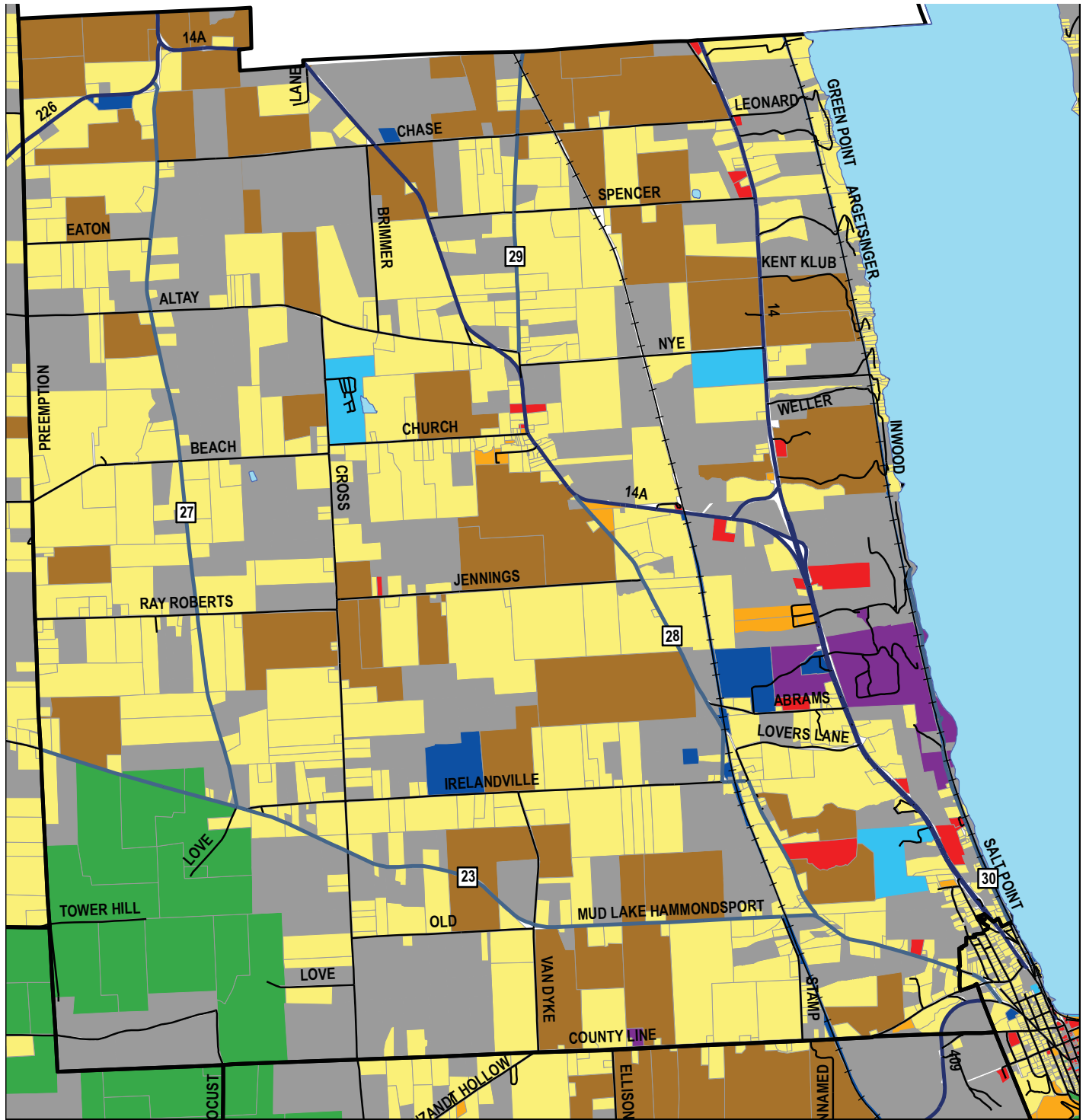
LAND USE	DEFINITION	PERCENT
<b>Residential</b>	Property used for human habitation.	38.8%
<b>Vacant Land</b>	Property that is not in use, is in temporary use, or lacks permanent improvement.	32.4%
<b>Agricultural</b>	Property used for the production of crops or livestock.	18.4%
<b>Wild, Forested, Conservation Lands &amp; Public Parks</b>	Reforested lands, preserves, and private hunting and fishing clubs	5.3%
<b>Public Services</b>	Property used to provide services to the general public. Examples: Landfills, Cell Towers, Gas measuring station, Railroad, Electric and gas facilities, Telephone, Water, Sewer, Transmission lines, Flood control	1.3%
<b>Industrial</b>	Property used for the production and fabrication of durable and nondurable man-made goods.	1.2%
<b>Recreation &amp; Entertainment</b>	Property used by groups for recreation, amusement, or entertainment. Examples: Fairgrounds, parks, camping, outdoor sports, picnic grounds, golf course, social organizations, marina	1.0%
<b>Commercial</b>	Property used for the sale of goods and/or services.	1.0%
<b>Community Services</b>	Property used for the well-being of the community. Examples: Schools, highway garage, parking lots, special institutions, police and fire protection, libraries, homes for the aged, religions, cemeteries	0.6%

The following map shows property type classifications as recorded in the New York State Real Property System, based on the town tax assessor’s classification of the actual current use of the land. This map shows how properties throughout the town are currently being used. It is not a zoning map. This map is not a recommendation or requirement for how land could be used in the future.

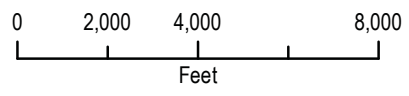
This map also does not show whether land has, or is eligible for, an agricultural assessment or other tax exemption. Lands that are eligible for an agricultural assessment may be classified here as agricultural, residential, vacant, or any other land use.

# Land Use

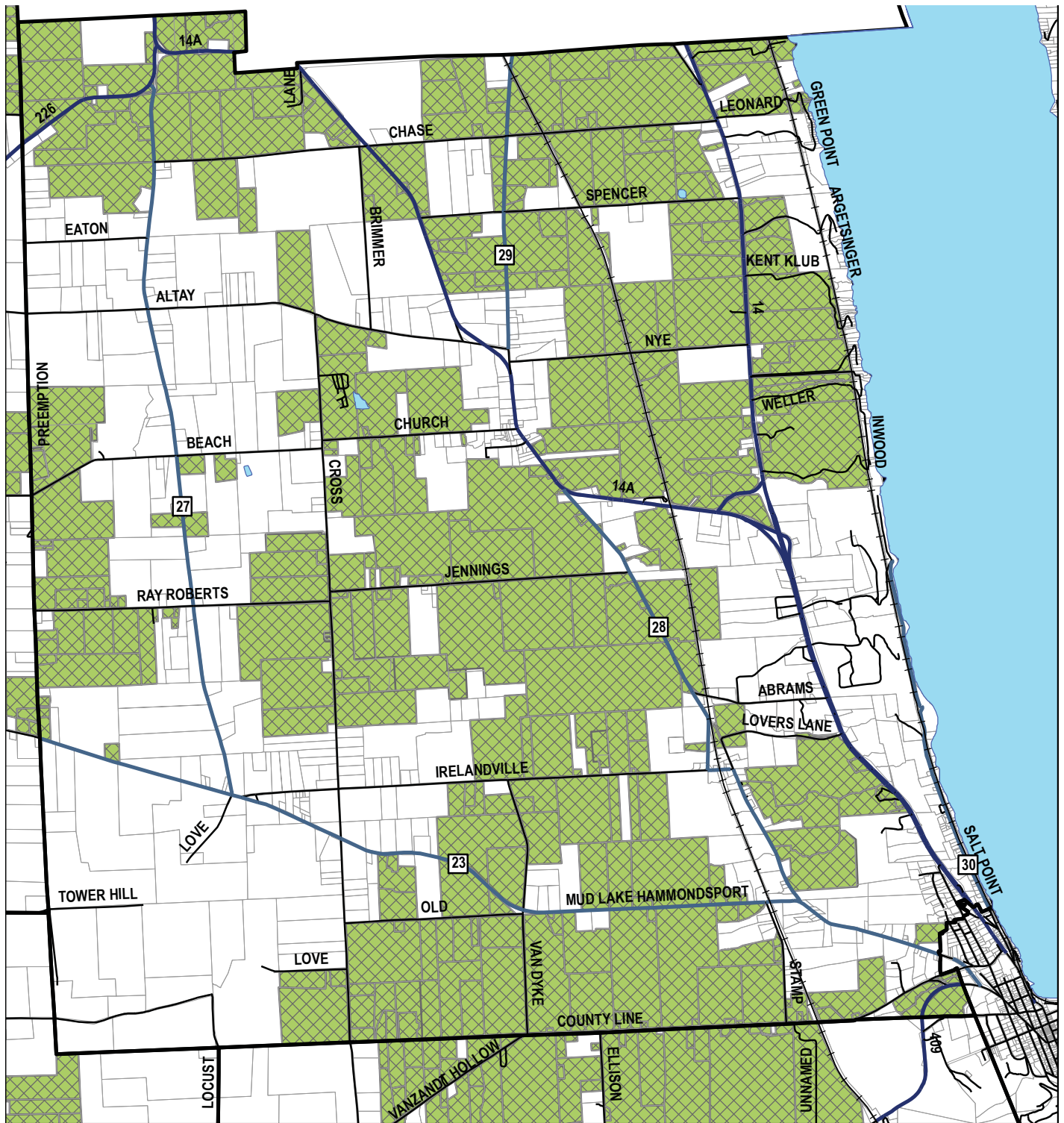
## Current Land Use Map



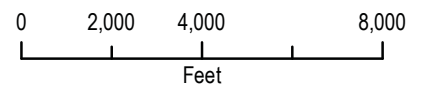
- Agricultural
- Residential
- Vacant Land
- Commercial
- Recreation & Entertainment
- Community Services
- Industrial
- Public Services
- Wild, Forested, Conservation Lands & Public Parks



# Schuyler County Agricultural District #2 Map



 Schuyler County Agricultural District #2



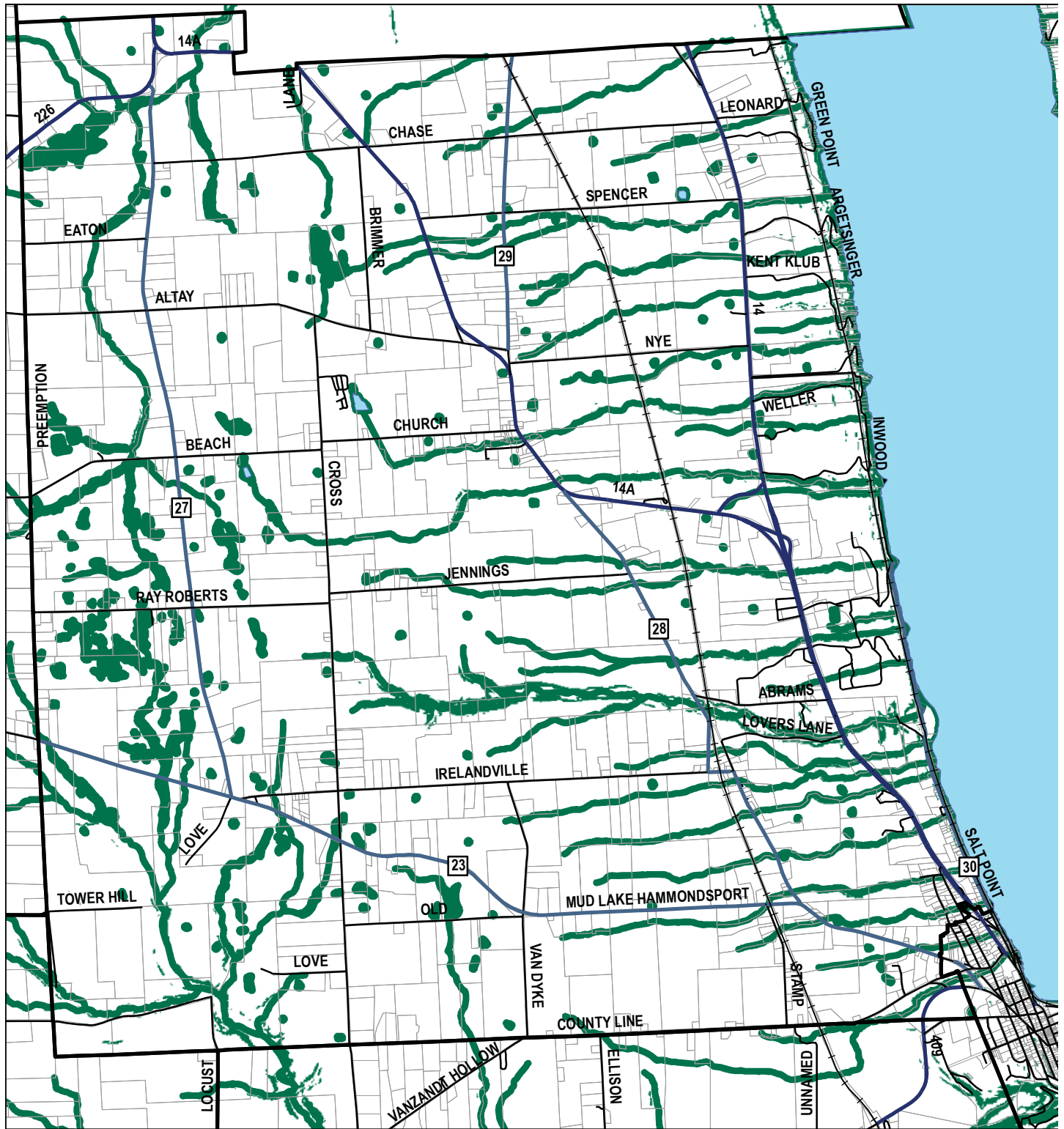
## **7.2 CONSTRAINED LANDS**

Constrained land refers to land that is located in or near a feature that makes it more dangerous, expensive, or infeasible to build on a certain piece of property. Such constraints are typically natural features such as steep slopes, floodplains, streams, wetlands, or other features that might threaten development.

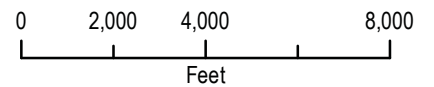
The Town of Reading does not have a large issue with constrained lands. There are very few steep slopes (slopes over 15%) to worry about, with those that exist mainly affecting lakeside homes and cottages. Combined with the current limitations of expanding non-conforming buildings and lots, steep slopes on these parcels will make development increasingly difficult.

Streams and wetlands are a bigger concern for development. Over a dozen streams cross the town and wetlands line the lakeshore and are abundant on the western half of the town. Many landowners will face challenges with land that abuts these water sources, especially where many existing buildings are already built within 100 ft. of these areas such as: Reading Center, the Irelandville hamlet, along Jennings Road, in the neighborhood adjacent to the Village of Watkins Glen, and along Seneca Lake.

Town of Reading Constrained Lands



- Constrained lands
- Less than 100 feet from a stream, wetland, or waterbody; or
- Slope greater than 15%



### 7.3 CURRENT LAND USE LAW

The Town of Reading last amended their land use law in 2009. The current law is minimal, with no zoning component. Residents want to live in a low-regulation environment and value the diversity of economic opportunity provided by fewer regulations. Overall, the current land use law reflects this desire and seems to serve the town fairly well.

Residents generally favor allowing most types of development, primarily opposing those that are large in scale or otherwise disruptive to the existing rural character. The current law supports this and is very open to most kinds of development, allowing all uses throughout the town with a minimal amount of dimensional standards such as setbacks.

Most developments are allowed, either through “By Right”, by “Site Plan Only” approval, or by “Special Use Permit”. While this openness allows landowners to use their land as they wish, it does not give the town or planning board much flexibility to require mitigation of the negative impacts of new development in order to protect surrounding neighbors.



#### Potential Additions to Land Use Regulations

Any changes to the land use law should be reflective and consistent with the concepts and goals of this comprehensive plan document.

##### Subdivision

Subdivision regulations are currently under development and will be the primary strategy for managing growth in the Town of Reading.

Focus groups indicated the need and desire for subdivision regulations to help guide development in a way that protects the existing character of the town. Preferences for certain parcels sizes or land use patterns are not strong one way or another. Overall, residents are not overwhelmingly negative towards any type of subdivision size if it is done in a way that does not negatively impact neighboring properties.

##### Updates for Clarity

Residents and government officials alike agree that the biggest problem with the current law is the need for more clarification, consistent enforcement, and expedited approvals. All three of these issues are crucial from a legal and economic standpoint. All landowners must be treated equally before the law. Clear rules that are not open to interpretation are essential to achieving equal and fair treatment. Different rulings on similar land use cases can open the town to legal liabilities. It is also important for residents and business owners to be able to easily understand the law and anticipate decisions of the planning and town boards on such issues. Further, misunderstandings from an unclear law erode public faith in the local government and unnecessarily lengthy approval processes dissuade residents and businesses from investing in the Town of Reading.

##### Non-Conforming Lots/Buildings

There is a desire for more leniency in regards to sites and uses that are defined to be non-conforming, particularly with the expansion of residences. The current law does not allow expansion beyond 25% of the existing gross floor area. Many residents have found this problematic as they want to add a bedroom, garage, or porch to their home, and find their application denied. If many similar types of applications are denied, and therefore similar variances are desired, it makes sense to re-visit the regulation in question to determine if it needs to be altered in any way.

## 7.4 FLOOD DAMAGE PREVENTION

Floods present threats to personal safety and property investments through road washouts and large volumes of high-velocity stormwater runoff. While the Town of Reading does not have much in the way of floodplains, heavy rains such as those that occurred in June 2015 where nearly 3.5 inches of rain fell in the Town of Reading, have caused substantial property damage. When asked, half of residents said they would support the increased use of green infrastructure to protect infrastructure investments and over half of people support better road design and driveway standards to do the same. A full quarter of residents would not support the enforcement of any additional regulations

## 7.5 PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Lack of maintenance and junk ridden properties are of particular nuisance to many residents. This does not include licensed and regulated “Dealers in Second Hand Junk and Auto Parts Activities and Businesses” as regulated by the Town of Reading. Rather, this refers to homes and other businesses who are viewed as deteriorating or eye sore properties. This includes, to some extent, vacant residences and properties in the town. The Town of Reading has the biggest proportion of its land classified as ‘Vacant’ as compared to other towns in Schuyler County. While not all vacant properties are neglected by the owner, the ones that are create a run-down look to the area and may have the potential to draw in criminal activity to those properties. Strategies to improve specific laws as well as code and law enforcement could be successful in cleaning up nuisance properties.





## **7.6 POTENTIAL FOR DIRECTING DEVELOPMENT**

Many residents believe that while the exact use of a site does not matter, the owner's attention to how it looks and how it impacts neighbors is extremely important. However, the resident survey indicates that while residents are typically supportive of private land use rights, they are also in favor of gentle direction for larger or potentially disruptive land uses.

Residential land uses are seen as acceptable to be located anywhere in the town. On the other hand, residents indicated very clearly that they would support both commercial and industrial developments being directed towards previously developed areas such as the village or hamlets, or towards main roads and highways. Maps drawn by residents further support this separation, indicating main roads and hamlets for growth, with other areas for preservation. The map on the next page represents a compilation of the residents views on where growth and preservation within the Town of Reading should occur.

While there are limits to the amount of regulation residents are willing to accept, they do favor basic laws that protect residential areas. In particular, there is a desire to mitigate the negative impacts of development on its neighbors. If there were a desire in the future to address land use issues differently, a form based zoning code might provide a better fit for the town than a traditional zoning ordinance. A form based code would focus on how a new development looks and impacts its neighboring properties, not on which use is allow on each piece of land.

New development should be mindful of the character of the existing neighborhoods. Each area of the town has particular characteristics which identify it, and new developments should be respectful of this.

## **7.7 TOWN LAND USES AND TAX IMPACT**

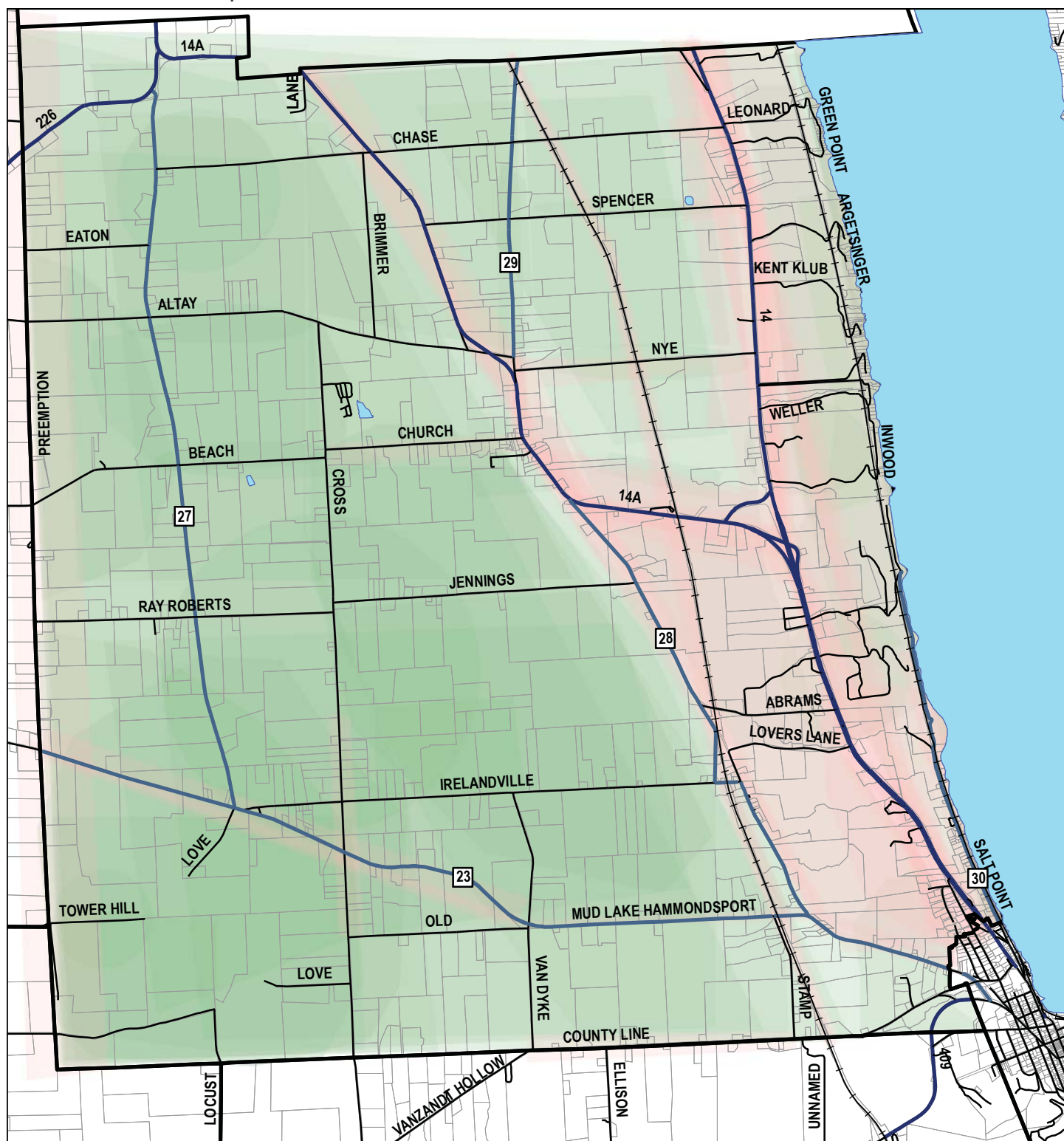
The Town of Reading is generally seen as a low-cost, low-service municipality, and residents prefer it to remain that way. The Town of Reading pays the least amount of taxes of any of the surrounding municipalities. This is likely due to a combination several factors.



The type of land use that is present in a location affects the services that are required to be provided by a municipality or county, and therefore affects the taxes that must be collected from residents, businesses, and industry. Typically, agricultural, commercial, and industrial land uses generate more tax revenue than they require in services, whereas residential uses require more spending on municipal services than they pay back in taxes.

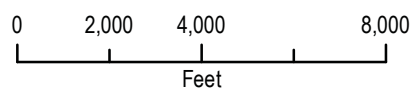
The three biggest official land uses in the Town of Reading are "Residential", "Vacant Land", and "Agricultural". Combined, these land uses contain just under 90% of the land in the Town of Reading by acreage. This pattern strongly resembles other rural municipalities in the region. It also matches the perceive characteristics the Town, which is identified as primarily rural. This makeup of land uses is unlikely to change substantially. Both Schuyler County as a whole and the Town of Reading are predicted to continue to lose population. Further, substantial infrastructure investments, and therefore significant developments, are not likely to occur through much of the Town of Reading in the foreseeable future.

While residential land use is the largest part of the Town of Reading tax base, Reading also has a relatively high number of uses that demand few services such as commercial, industrial, and public services. Industrial and public service uses in particular compromise a uniquely large portion of the Town of Reading tax base, more so than any other town in Schuyler County. These uses, because they require so few services, provide a financial benefit to the town in terms of taxes. This reduces the need to raise taxes on residents to provide the same level of services.

### Town Resident Public Participation: Growth vs. Preservation



-  Areas for Growth, as indicated by workshop participants
-  Areas to Preserve, as indicated by workshop participants
- Deeper color indicates areas chosen by multiple participants

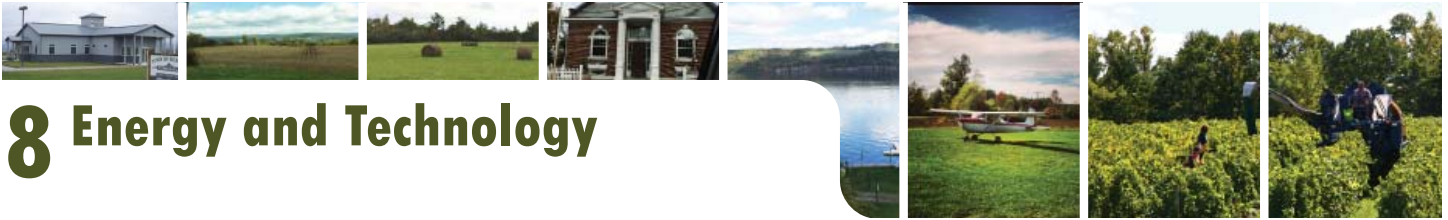


Vacant land in Reading consists of primarily abandoned agricultural land and vacant residences, although there is also some vacant industrial and commercial land. Typically, many owners of vacant land do pay taxes and do not require as many services since there are no activities occurring there.

There is also a lack of infrastructure and services in the Town of Reading that must be maintained. The Town of Reading does provide a few services such as road maintenance, snow removal, garbage, and recycling. The lack of additional service obligations or infrastructure keeps taxes low for residents and businesses, a tradeoff which many residents are satisfied with and enjoy.

### **7.8 ACTION ITEMS**

1. Develop measures that ensure the town can require mitigation of negative impacts on neighboring properties.
2. Develop guidelines or laws to protect economic investment and public safety from flooding events
3. Revise land use laws to allow greater flexibility for development on non-conforming buildings and lots.
4. Review and potentially revise the development review process to ensure that the time required to approve a development is no longer than is necessary to do a proper review and mitigate for concerns.
5. Ensure that new developments near constrained lands (such as areas next to streams, steep slopes, wetlands, and flood zones) are addressed with great care, ensuring that any negative impacts to those areas are mitigated for, while strongly encouraging development that minimally impacts these areas to begin with.
6. Consider extra protection measures for areas with prime agricultural soil .



## 8 Energy and Technology

New technology is continually improving that allows us to use energy more efficiently and stay better connected to other communities around the world. These two areas of technological advancement—energy efficiency and telecommunications—have great potential to make living in Reading better and more sustainable, if the community welcomes these technologies and incorporates them into its vision for the future.

### POLICY

*To encourage and allow development of local and sustainable energy production methods and better connectivity so as to allow residents the opportunity to earn money, increase their self-sufficiency, and reduce their environmental impact.*

### 8.1 SOLAR

There are at least two solar panel installations in the Town of Reading, one commercial and one residential. Many residents express the desire to expand the solar energy capacity in the town to increase local self-sufficiency in energy production and save money on energy costs.

Overwhelmingly the most common type of solar technology today uses panels of photovoltaic cells, which convert light directly into electricity. Small-scale solar installations, composed of panels mounted on building roofs or directly on the ground, are an option for home-owners and businesses in the town who are interested in reducing their demand for outside energy. A typical small-scale solar energy system might comprise several hundred square feet solar panels and have a generation capacity of around 4 kW during daylight hours. A system of this size can generate a significant share of the electricity used on-site, but generates less than the electricity demand of a typical household or small business.

Utility-scale solar installations, often called solar farms, are larger facilities designed to sell power to the electricity grid rather than use the electricity on-site. Due to the costs of construction and maintenance, solar farms are usually developed for a power generation capacity of at least 1 MW, more than 100 times the scale of most residential solar installations. In New York State, electric generating facilities of 25 MW or more, including solar facilities, are reviewed under a statewide siting and approval process established by Article 10 of the Public Services Law of New York State. The state law also exempts these major electric generation facilities from local regulation or review. For business ventures interested larger-scale production, solar farms are possible on properties with acreage in the town.



Photo Credit: Chad Hendrickson

There are many New York state programs that are aimed at encouraging solar. Some offer special financing options. Providing information about solar energy, promoting its use, and partnering with state and other organizations could substantially increase the amount of energy that is produced locally using solar panels. Another way that the Town can encourage solar installations is to adopt solar energy provisions into its land use regulations. Currently, the Town of Reading Land Use Law (as of September 2016) does not mention solar energy generation by name. However, a reading of the law indicates that a small-scale accessory solar installation would be allowed by right and a utility-scale solar farms would be eligible for a special permit. As mentioned above, utility-scale installations over 25 MW can be approved under the separate statewide Article 10 process, regardless of local law. The Town of Reading Land Use Law could be clarified to identify solar energy systems by name as a permitted use and establish procedures for review and approving small-scale accessory systems as well as large-scale installations.

An important issue for utility-scale solar installations is what happens after the end of the useful life of the facility. Agriculture is the primary focus of land use in the rural areas of the town where a large-scale installation is most likely. To maintain the availability of land for agriculture, any solar installation must be completely removable at the end of the facility life and the land must be recoverable for agricultural use. As part of special permit review, installation operators should be required to have a decommissioning plan that establishes responsibility for removing equipment and remediating the site after the facility is decommissioned. In principle, remediation should be the responsibility of the facility operator and should not fall to the landowner or the Town.

New York State provides a partial tax exemption for solar energy systems. Specifically, under section 487 of the Real Property Tax Law of New York State, real property that contains a solar, wind, or farm waste energy system is exempt from taxes on any increase in assessed value due to the system for 15 years. During those 15 years, the property owner still must pay the full amount of taxes on the property that they would owe if the renewable energy system were not there, but they do not owe any extra taxes on the value added by the system. The law allows local taxing jurisdictions, including counties and towns, to opt out of this exemption by passing a local law. Opting out of this exemption means that the town, county, or other taxing jurisdiction is able to charge the full amount of tax, including tax on added value due to the renewable energy system. Past experience in other parts of New York State has shown that opting out discourages both small-scale and large-scale solar installations but does not increase tax revenue, since any solar energy systems that would be subject to the tax simply do not get built. The Schuyler County Legislature has considered opting out, but as of September 2016 neither Schuyler County nor the Town of Reading has passed a local law to opt out, meaning that the section 487 tax exemption currently applies for both town and county taxes

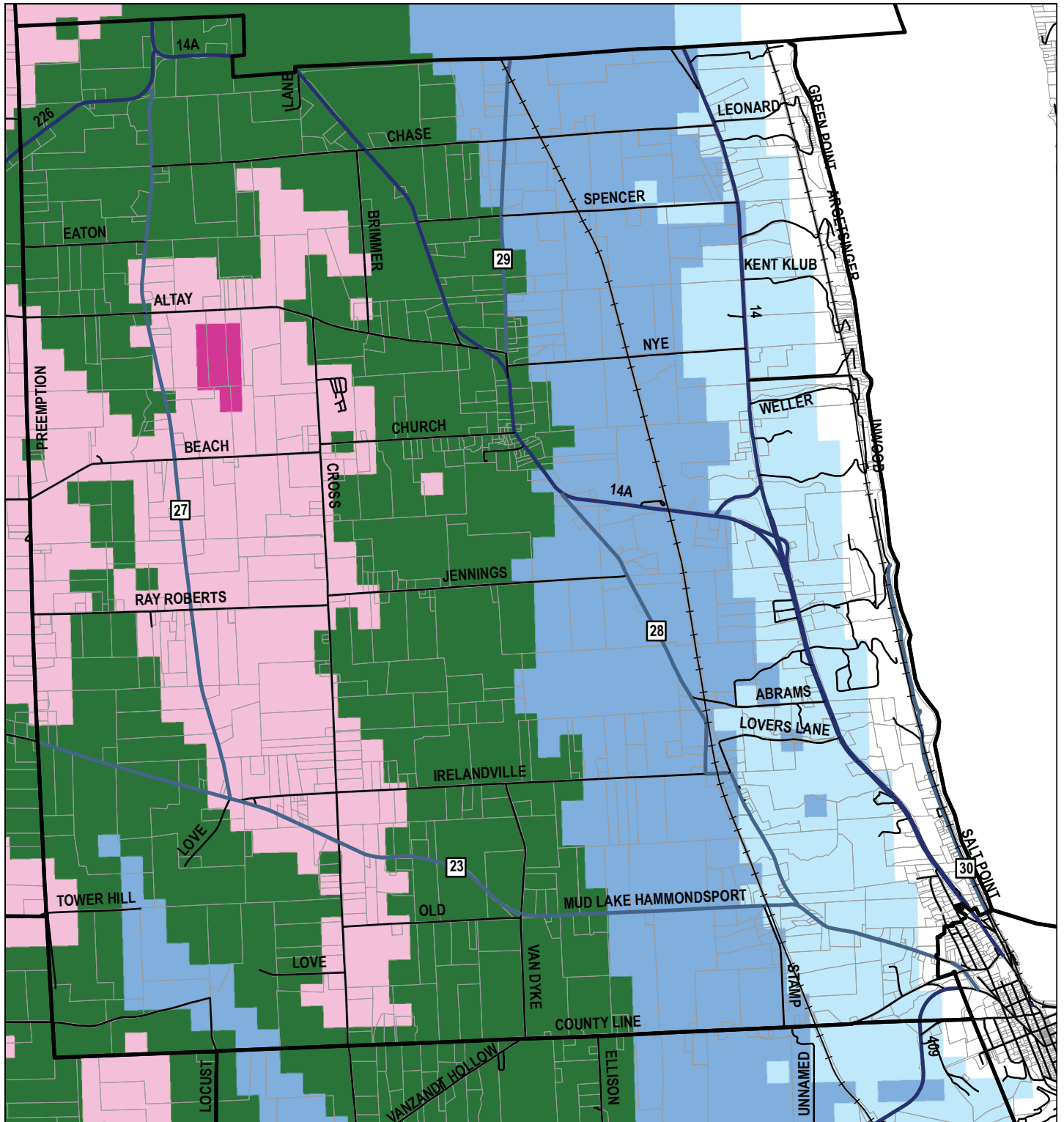
### **8.2 WIND**

The Town of Reading has some potential for wind development in the western portion of the town. The map below shows the average wind speed in the Town of Reading. The areas within the Town with the greatest potential for wind energy generation, shown in pink and fuchsia, are in the western upland portion of the Town.

While much of the wind development in the region is located west of Reading, other developments such as the one in the Town of Dix are very close. Wind energy provides local benefits such as energy production and income for some landowners. It also has local consequences such as aesthetic changes and noise nuisances. The Town of Reading should be prepared to address potential wind energy projects as well as their potential impacts to the town.

A community wind project where a group of people pool their resources to buy and install a turbine has shown to be an effective way to generate electricity for those involved in the project. This places less of an economic burden on the participants because the cost is being distributed over a group of people and not just one individual. This could be an excellent way for the residents of Reading to get together and install their own turbine while instilling a sense of community as well.

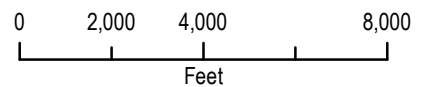
Map of Wind Resources in the Town of Reading



Mean Wind Speed in meters per second (m/s)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  < 5.5 m/s (12.3 MPH)        |  6.5 - 7 m/s (14.5-15.7 MPH)   |
|  5.5 - 6 m/s (12.3-13.4 MPH) |  7 - 7.5 m/s (15.7-16.8 MPH) * |
|  6 - 6.5 m/s (13.4-14.5 MPH) |  7.5 - 8 m/s (16.8-17.9 MPH)   |

\* Minimum Wind Speed Required for Wind Power

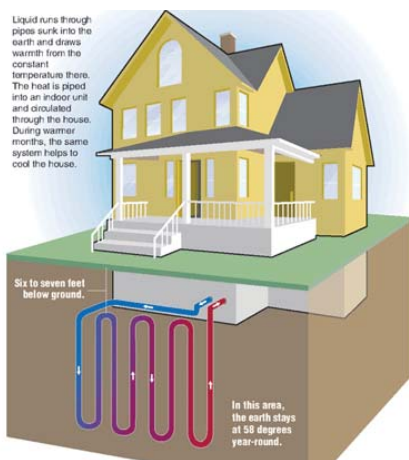


Small scale turbines depending on their size can be utilized for pumping water, charging batteries, and for providing electricity for homes. Many incentives are available through NYSERDA and the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Energy in America Program (REAP) to provide residents with the funds to install their own turbines and even sell surplus electricity back to the grid.

As with solar power, the current Town of Reading Land Use Law does not mention wind energy generation by name. Presumably, however, wind power systems would be allowed by right as an accessory use or be eligible for a special permit for larger-scale systems. As mentioned above, utility-scale installations over 25 MW can be approved under the separate statewide Article 10 process, regardless of local law. Wind energy systems of all sizes are also eligible for the section 487 tax exemption, as discussed above for solar energy systems.

Another issue that utility-scale winds farms have in common with solar farms is the need to plan for decommissioning and remediation after the end of life of the facility. Any revision to the Town of Reading Land Use Law addressing wind power generation should require operators to develop a decommissioning plan as part of special permit review. The plan should establish responsibility for removing equipment and remediating the site, preferably by the operator, after the facility is decommissioned so that the land is available again for agricultural use or other development.

### 8.3 GEOTHERMAL



Geothermal heating and cooling is another energy efficient way to heat or cool homes and commercial properties. A geothermal heat pump, also known as a ground source heat pump works by using the earth's constant temperature under the ground to heat and cool lines. In the summer, for example, the heat pump dissipates excess heat into the ground, while in the winter it would use the higher temperature underground to heat lines that return to the home or business on the surface. Although technically not an energy source since it simply makes more efficient use of existing energy, this technology works and can be a good way to reduce energy demands. However, a geothermal heat pump system is expensive to install without the site being fully cleared. As such, this technology usually only makes sense with new developments. New developments should be encouraged to consider geothermal heating and cooling.

### 8.4 BIOMASS: TIMBER AND BIOFUEL

Biomass is the most widely used resource in the world for providing energy. The most common forms of biomass are wood and agricultural residues, but also include biofuels. At its simplest, an example of biomass energy generation would be a land owner harvesting trees on their own land to supply a wood stove for heating their home.

Biomass is considered a renewable energy because, if done sustainably, biomass will take carbon out of the atmosphere while it is growing and return the carbon in the same quantities when it is burned. For example, when a tree grows it sequesters carbon dioxide during photosynthesis. After the tree is felled and combusted, that carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere but since the carbon came from the atmosphere in the first place, no additional carbon is contributed into the climate system.

Many of these fuel plants are suitable for growth in Reading including switchgrass, hemp, miscanthus, and tree species such as poplar and willow.

Agriculture residues are also a promising source of local renewable energy. Individual farmers can make use of their own byproducts. More efficiency could be gained by a shared system, but this would require coordination to collect and transport the biomass.

It is important to understand that these biomass resources, especially the timber, should only be used in a sustainable manner. Other nearby towns in Schuyler County have experienced issues with erosion caused by improper timber harvest practices. Practicing sustainable forestry and use will help to prevent erosion, continue to protect the air quality of the area, and keep the contiguity of the landscape intact. If the extraction of timber for biomass is to be undertaken, the town should make sure that provisions are set in place to prevent any unnecessary destruction of land or the roads. The NYS Department of Environment Conservation publishes a field guide on “Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality”, and the local Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County also offers resources for sustainable woodlot management and timber harvesting.

## 8.5 NATURAL GAS



There is currently no natural gas production in the Town of Reading. Well registrations with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation show that there are fewer than 30 exploratory or formerly productive gas wells in the town, none of which are currently active.

Aside from gas-producing wells, there are 36 active wells used for brine disposal, storage, and other operations of the salt caverns located in the town. There is a proposal to store liquid petroleum gas in the salt caverns. The impacts of this proposal and the town’s possible responses are discussed in Section 9.5 of the following chapter.

## 8.6 ENERGY HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Many of Reading’s older homes are not energy efficient and could use some upgrades. NYSERDA offers programs to increase home energy efficiency, and in the process make them safer and more appealing. Many of the programs NYSERDA offers allow for special financing of the upgrades where the monthly loan payments are paid simply by the energy savings you experience once the upgrades are complete. The loan often goes with the home at the time of sale. There are also programs such as EmPower New York that will pay 100% of the improvements for a family of four with a household income of less than \$50,628, even if you are simply renting the home. These programs should be advertised to homes of concern within the Town.

## 8.7 ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Commercial buildings can also benefit from becoming more energy efficient. A variety of energy efficiency techniques, from programmed temperature control to orienting buildings to maximize natural light, can reduce the long-term energy costs of commercial properties and help businesses’ bottom line. However, many of these techniques require up-front costs that may make initial financing difficult, even if cost savings will pay off in the long term. Targeted incentives for energy efficiency, such as setback reductions or allowing increased square-footage, can help make new energy-efficient construction feasible. These incentives are more useful when targeted to development proposals that commit to specific energy efficiency certification programs, such as LEED.

Some lighting technologies, such as outdoor LED lights, can directly lower costs for commercial developments by reducing the amount of energy necessary to provide the desired amount of light. In addition, other energy-efficient lighting strategies, including timers and downcast fixtures targeted to ground areas that need the most illumination, save energy and also reduce light spill, ensuring that dark skies can remain dark.



### 8.8 BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS

Certain portions of the Town of Reading, including Route 14 Reading Center, and areas contiguous to the Village of Watkins Glen, are currently served by cable-modem internet and DSL with advertised speeds that meet the FCC’s minimum definition for broadband of downloads at 25 Mbps. However, these services remain well below the speeds of 100 Mbps download or faster that most consumers expect from “high-speed internet.”

One of the most important factors determining the speed of internet access is the physical distance between your computer and the nearest fiber-optic cable. Fiber to the Premises (FTTP) broadband technology brings optical fiber directly to the home or business and offers the highest possible speeds. FTTP is not currently available anywhere in Reading. Other broadband services use different technologies to connect a home or business to the nearest optical fiber cable that serves as a broadband backbone. Cable-modem internet services use coaxial cable, the same cables that bring cable television to the home, while a digital subscriber line (DSL) uses telephone wires to cover the “last mile” between the computer and the broadband backbone. The shorter this “last mile” distance, the faster the internet access will be. Consequently, the closer a community is to a broadband backbone, the faster internet access that community will have.

Broadband backbone is required to access high speed internet and cable television services. Many residents strongly desire to bring broadband backbone to the Town of Reading to increase the business development potential as well as to improve the quality of life for residents. Fast internet would:

- Allow current businesses to expand or improve their offerings
- Encourage new businesses to start where they were previously unable
- Allow youth to improve their education by using the internet to do research and homework
- Improve the quality of life for residents who wish to use the internet for work, entertainment, or other services that require high speeds

Currently internet service in the Town of Reading is offered by Time Warner, Haefele, Verizon, and Frontier. Additionally, Empire Access offers internet service in the southeast corner of the town near the Village of Watkins Glen.

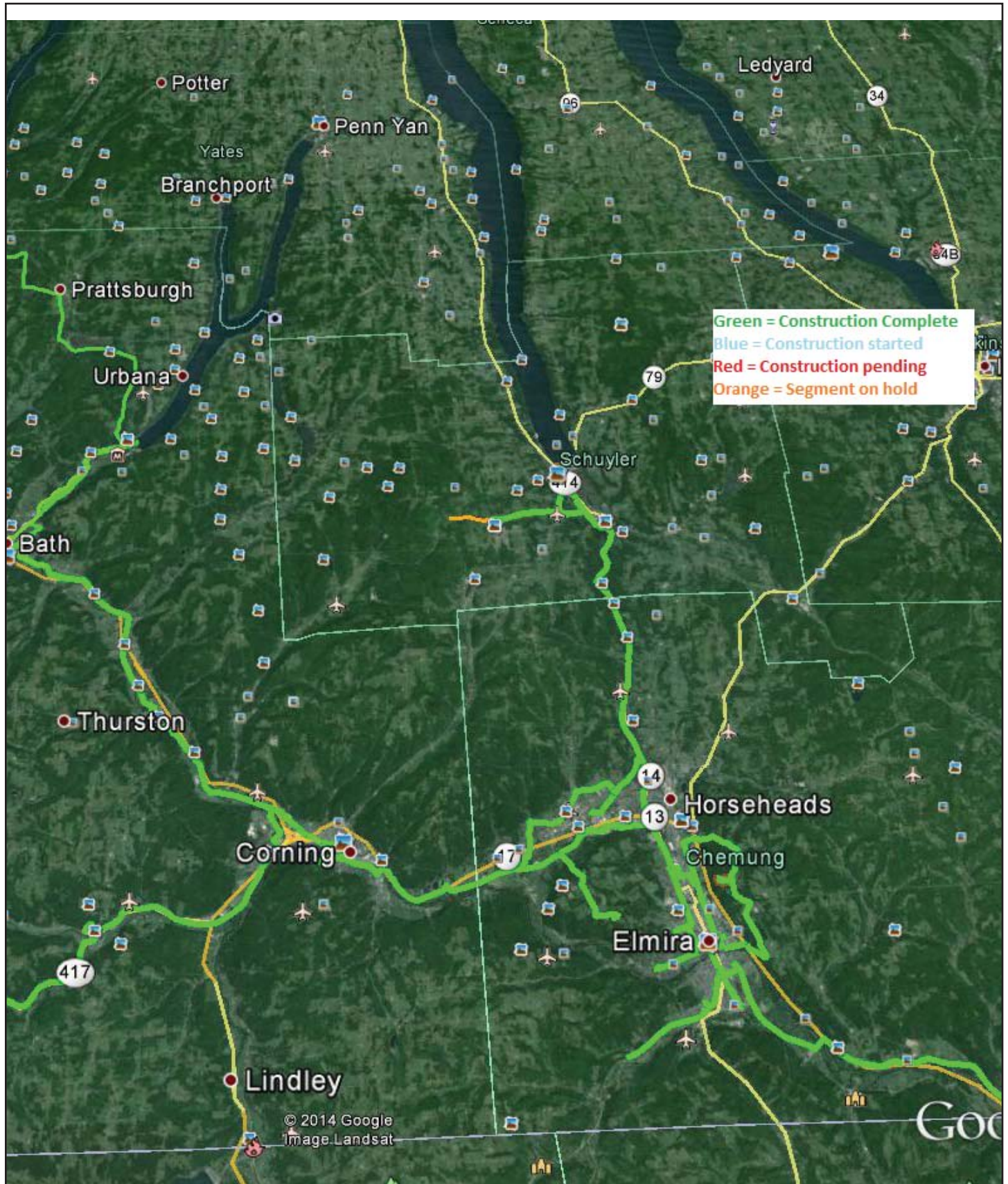
Until summer of 2016, there was no broadband backbone that ran through the Town of Reading. As of August 2016 when this plan was being written, construction was complete on laying a fiber optic backbone along Route 14 from Dresden to Watkins Glen, although the backbone was not yet put in service. The new backbone in Reading was constructed along with the Yates County open access fiber optic network, which provides a connection between the Southern Tier Network (STN) backbone network to the south and the Axxcess Ontario fiber ring to the north. The Yates County open access fiber optic network, including the backbone in Reading, will be managed and operated by STN as part of their network. The publicly owned network will be made available by lease to multiple internet service providers to provide broadband service directly to businesses and residential consumers.

There is also a proposal to extend the fiber optic backbone in the future through Reading Center to Tyrone and the Bradford Central Schools. If this extension was built, it would provide high speed internet service to even more areas of Reading.

In order to access the fiber optic network, businesses and residents will need to pay to connect their property to the backbone lines. Because it will require investment in infrastructure, the high expenses of connecting could be infeasible for many people in the town. The Town of Reading could decide to raise taxes to fund such connections, but residents generally do not indicate that they are willing to pay higher taxes for this service. As a result, it may be more efficient to let only those who wish to have broadband pay out-of-pocket for such connection. The availability of widespread broadband access will also make living or building in the Town of Reading more attractive, which could spur development in the town.

SECTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE	COST
Approximate cost per mile of backbone	\$40,000 per mile
Approximate cost per foot of ‘last mile’ fiber optics to the home	\$40 per foot
* Approximate costs from STN and SCOPEd.	

Map of Broadband Accessibility in the Town of Reading



**8.9 CABLE TV**

Cable TV is available in some parts of the town from Time Warner Cable (approximately from Watkins Glen to Abrams Road) or Haefele TV (in the majority of remainder of the town). Satellite TV is available anywhere with a direct view of the southern sky, although satellite connectivity can be interrupted by heavy rain or snow. Typically, individual customers shoulder the costs of extending cable to their property or installing satellite dishes.

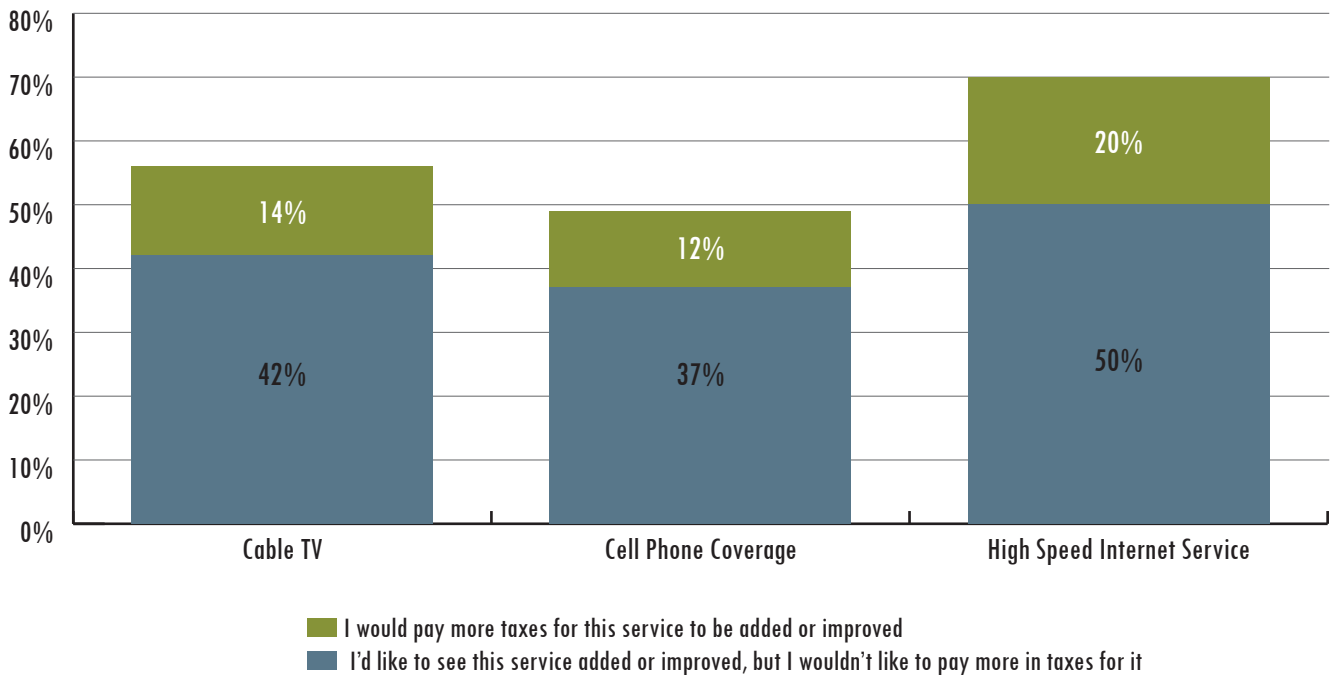
**8.10 CELL COVERAGE**

Consistent, widespread cellular coverage raises the quality of life for residents as it allows them to anticipate service and have access to it for personal use or emergencies. Nearly half of residents would like to improve cellular coverage in the town, however, most are not willing to pay for it. Typically, cell companies pay for additional coverage by constructing cell towers.

If a company should propose additional towers, the Town of Reading should consider the residents’ desire for such additional coverage when reviewing such development. Beyond the additional coverage, the Town of Reading should consider and mitigate other impacts of cell towers such as aesthetic changes to the landscape.

Currently, the only mention of telecommunication towers in the Town of Reading Land Use Law (as of September 2016) is section 3.2 which limits the height of towers to 195 feet or less. Specific review considerations could be added to the law to support the planning board’s review of any tower proposals, with the goal of efficiently mitigating aesthetic impacts while encouraging the expansion in cell coverage that residents desire.

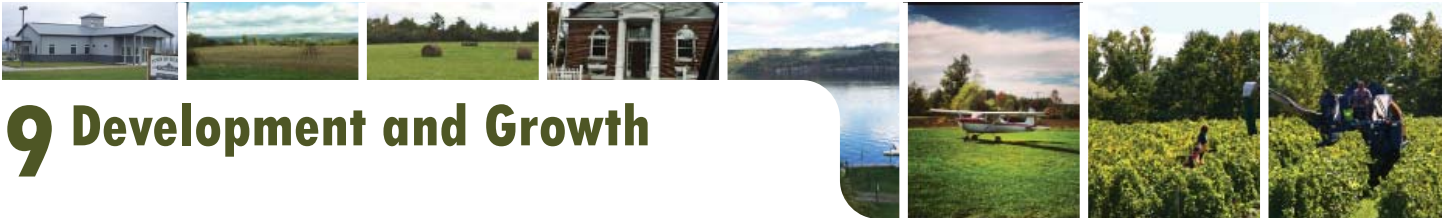
**Survey Results: Residents Desire for Technology Improvements**



## 8.11 ACTION ITEMS

1. Adopt provisions for solar and wind installations (both small-scale and large-scale) into the land use law, including a process for guaranteeing removal of equipment and full remediation of the site at the end of the operating life of the facility.
2. Ensure that logging for use as biomass is conducted in a sustainable manner by working with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County and NYS DEC to provide information and advice on sustainable forest management.
3. Consider offering incentives, such as setback reductions, to commercial developments that choose to use on-site renewable energy sources.
4. Consider offering non-financial incentives for commercial developments that meet higher efficiency standards such as LEED status.
5. Work with local code enforcement to learn the new New York State energy code and what it means to development.
6. Provide information on the Town's website for renters and home owners about special programs such as Assisted Home Performance with Energy Star and EmPower New York to upgrade the energy efficiency of homes in the Town.
7. Work with the Southern Tier Network and direct internet providers to determine if there are ways for the town government, without significant cost commitment, to facilitate new consumer connections to fiber optic broadband backbone in the town.
8. Add specific review considerations for telecommunications towers to the land use law in order to efficiently mitigate aesthetic impacts while encouraging the expansion of cell coverage.

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# 9 Development and Growth

## POLICY

To address potential growth in a physically sustainable and fiscally responsible manner that retains the rural character of the town and supports development of appropriate scale and location.

### 9.1 CURRENT GROWTH TRENDS

#### Permanent Residents: Decline

The Town of Reading experienced its last peak in population in the 1980's and 1990's, and has been slowly losing or maintaining population ever since. This decrease is due to the aging of the current population and a lack of younger populations or families moving to or remaining in the area. Projections show that population loss is a trend that is characteristic of all of the surrounding counties in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier, and is not likely to change in the next 25 years.

#### Temporary Residents & Visitors: Stable, Low Growth

Studies of regional tourism show that in Schuyler County, the number of visitors and dollars spent has grown slightly in the past years. Visitors to Schuyler County spend most of their money on lodging accommodations, whether temporary such as bed & breakfasts and motels or permanent such as second homes. An increase in tourism could affect the Town of Reading in terms of additional development for second homes, an increased need for short term lodging, and an increase in the need for food, beverage, recreation, and retail establishments.

#### Housing Growth: Stable, Low-Growth

Housing permits have remained stable for the past 15 years, with an average of 5 homes built each year. This likely reflects housing for both permanent and temporary homes. There is no indication that a substantial wave of housing growth will occur in the Town of Reading. However, even incremental increases in new homes will require increases in town services and needed tax revenue over time.



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

## 9.2 DIRECTION OF FUTURE GROWTH

### Desires of the Residents

There is a split among residents over whether the Town of Reading should grow to try to create jobs and expand the tax base or maintain the current rural character as it stands.

The top priority of residents when considering new development is to protect natural resources, as they are strongly considered to be a major strength of the town. Other priorities of residents include preserving the rural and small town character, and preserving agricultural land. However, frequently cited challenges in the town are based around the lack of convenient services and a lack of “things to do” nearby. Addressing these challenges would require some amount of growth and development, whether in the Town of Reading or in nearby towns and villages.

Accomplishing both goals is possible, but would require thoughtful attention to new development along with reasonable mitigation measures, if required. If managed properly, development should provide the desired level of jobs without eroding the rural character of the town. There is a preference for protecting existing character, residents, and businesses over attracting new ones. However, newcomers are also welcome, with new businesses being prioritized over new residents.

Appropriate types of developments for the Town of Reading include:

- Small commercial or industrial developments in and adjacent to the Village of Watkins Glen or Reading Center that would utilize the existing developed areas and infrastructure
- New home businesses that naturally increase jobs and retain town character
- Businesses in the leisure, service, and tourism industries that would reflect the existing character of the town and would build upon the current strengths of the area



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

### 9.3 FOCUS ON HAMLETS

Hamlets refer to the small, central, unincorporated communities across NYS that provide a neighborhood or cluster of development within otherwise largely rural areas. Reading Center is the main hamlet area in the Town of Reading, and Irelandville is a distinguishable, although much smaller hamlet area. Although not a separate hamlet, the area immediately adjacent to Watkins Glen exhibits many of the same characteristics as a hamlet. This area, including Salt Point Road and the neighborhood up the hill, will have similar benefits and can be treated in much the same way as a hamlet.



Photo Credit: STC Regional Planning Board

Hamlets are a great place to promote traditional neighborhood development and pedestrian friendly amenities such as footpaths or sidewalks, crosswalks, and small recreational areas. They provide a sense of community, as they resemble a small, mixed use neighborhood and typically encompass residences, businesses, and community institutions. Within a short distance of Reading Center, for instance, is the post office, the town hall, and a few small, local businesses.

Because of their compact nature, hamlets are typically great locations to provide infrastructure and promote development. Efforts should be made to enhance the unique character and benefits of hamlets whether during new construction or retrofit investments. Special attention should be paid to new developments to ensure there are no negative impacts on neighborhood character such as large scale buildings or on neighborhood resources such as water quality.

### 9.4 WATER & SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE: OPPORTUNITIES AND COSTS

Expanding development throughout most of the town is both currently infeasible (as there is not enough water and sewer infrastructure to support it) and undesirable for many residents (due to cost and town character considerations). The level of future infrastructure investment will be the most influential issue to guide the level of development in the Town of Reading. Such infrastructure would impact the town in multiple ways.

The predominant areas that residents express interest in water or sewer investments include Reading Center and Salt Point Road. Infrastructure would enable a large expansion of opportunities for business and residential growth in the town that are not currently possible. This might expand the tax base, provide needed jobs, enhance recreation opportunities, and promote a variety of housing types.

On the other hand, such development could substantially change the rural, low-density character of the town. While water and sewer would attract small businesses and provide opportunities for residents to start businesses, it might also attract larger developments that are not in sync with the local character. Without zoning or some other direction and guidance provided to future development, the Town of Reading would not be able to dictate which kind of development they would attract once such infrastructure was built.

There is the potential to connect to the regional wastewater treatment facility that is being constructed for Watkins Glen and Montour Falls. This facility will have enough excess capacity to allow the Town of Reading to hook in to their system, and could be used to expand the sewer capabilities in the Town without having to construct a separate, more expensive system at solely the cost of users. This would substantially lower the cost for potential sewer infrastructure.

It is important to note that a water or sewer district is paid for by the people who use the service, not by the town at large. In many, and possibly all cases, this will render new infrastructure to be financially infeasible. Other costs associated with new development, such as road maintenance, will be distributed amongst the entire town.



Any infrastructure development would need to be carefully considered and have support from those people who would be paying for it. Further, the entire town should consider whether the potential development that accompanies such infrastructure is compatible with the vision for all town residents.

### 9.5 LPG

In 2008, a project was proposed to store liquid petroleum gas in subterranean salt caverns in the Town of Reading. This project has been the subject of much controversy in the town, drawing many voices from the Town of Reading as well as people from adjacent towns and villages, people from around New York State, and many out of state parties.

Supporters of the project cite the need for jobs and an expansion of the tax base. Supporters also believe the project is needed to support local jobs that would keep people here and financially support the town. Opponents cite dangers to the environment in the case of a spill, leak, or explosion of the gas or associated trucks and trains used to transport the gas. Opponents also believe that adverse impacts from the project could threaten existing jobs in the tourism industry.

It is not clear from the comprehensive planning process that a majority of town residents either support or oppose the project.

Results from both the resident survey and public input meetings show a split of 50/50 among residents.

However, 57% of those residents who support the project do so, “only if the negative impacts are mitigated for”. Mitigation is a substantial foundation on which most supporters stand.

The town leadership and residents should consider whether the potential positive benefits as well as the potential negative consequences are real, reasonable, or will be realized by the Town of Reading. Mitigation of any negative consequences should be a part of the overall decision making process.

Should government boards in the Town of Reading have the opportunity to approve or deny this project, they should take care to seriously examine and balance potential positive benefits and negative consequences, as either decision will have a multitude of impacts on the town.



### 9.6 ACTION ITEMS

1. If considering water or sewer infrastructure: Identify actual desire and willingness to pay among target residents and businesses.
2. Promote growth in hamlet areas that enhances the unique character and benefits of hamlets.
3. Utilize current and new measures in the Town of Reading Land Use Law to mitigate negative impacts of proposed development on neighboring properties.
4. When considering new development, prioritize the preservation of the town's existing rural character.