

FINAL DRAFT

Town of Caroline

2006 Comprehensive Plan

Part I: Visions and Goals
Part II: Strategies and Actions



Town of Caroline Comprehensive Plan

The purpose of comprehensive planning is to identify a clear and compelling vision for the future and to develop strategies to reach that vision. The Town of Caroline Comprehensive Plan identifies this vision along with a set of goals that will help lead our town towards a bright future. The plan sets the path for helping Caroline to continue to be a beautiful, healthy, comfortable, and peaceful place to live.

Caroline 20 Year Vision

Working together, we envision Caroline twenty years from now as a place where:

- Every resident has a safe, affordable place to call home. There is sufficient housing affordable for low, middle, and high-income residents. Houses within Caroline are in good repair. New housing is denser in existing hamlets and housing focus areas, and is surrounded by farms and wooded lands.
- Green space is plentiful, enabling sustainable agriculture and forest production, reducing pollution, providing outdoor recreational opportunities, and preserving biodiversity and rural views. Sprawl is limited because development is concentrated in housing focus areas and in the hamlets of Brooktondale and Slaterville Springs.
- Environmentally aware and informed citizens take pride in passing along natural areas and resources to future generations. By careful advance planning, they preserve and promote the Town's rural character, public areas, historical heritage, cemeteries, unique natural areas, well-connected recreational spaces, community centers, high quality of water, air and land, and peaceful night skies.
- Residents enjoy a well-planned and maintained transportation system that offers a variety of options. Public transportation is available and encouraged as a way to reduce individual auto trips. A reliable affordable and frequent bus service serves the Town of Caroline, connecting the hamlets to Ithaca and other nodes of transportation, inside and nearby Tompkins County. Several Park and Ride sites encourage car-pooling.
- Bicycle and pedestrian transportation is encouraged and facilitated. A network of bike/pedestrian paths has been built, connecting hamlets and new housing nodes to the elementary school, parks, community centers, and existing neighborhoods. Sidewalks are maintained year-round as an encouragement to pedestrian use. Bicyclists travel local roads to enjoy seasonal color and interesting terrain. Traffic calming measures have been implemented as needed to control vehicular speed.

- The local economy flourishes with locally-owned small businesses. Scattered throughout Caroline, the businesses complement the peaceful rural nature of the town. The prospering local hamlets support a diversity of local businesses and are boosted by increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic due to increased housing density there. Brooktondale has developed a small but viable commercial center. Residents take pride in supporting these local businesses, which allow the town to maintain a modest level of economic self-sufficiency.
- Farming continues to be a viable way of life. Some family farms have become organic, some have developed specialty items, and others have found unique niches. Many of these farms depend on value-added product sales as a significant part of their income.
- The preservation of the best farmland has attracted a stable farming community, encouraged by the dependable sources of water and good soil and the diversity of agricultural activities within the town. Preservation of quality woodland has contributed to sustainable and responsible forestry practices within the town.

By working together, in our community and with surrounding municipalities, we can become this place, a community that reflects our town's values, builds on our strengths, and improves the quality of life for our children, families, and neighbors. The Town of Caroline Comprehensive Plan will serve as a guiding document to illuminate the actions we need to take to reach this vision, monitor progress along the way, and provide a basis for decisions that will shape the future of our town. Specifically, the Plan will:

- Define our values and vision;
- Guide our leadership in making decisions that support our long-term goals;
- Prioritize our efforts and expenditures;
- Strengthen our case in applying for grants that support our goals; and
- Recommend strategies that help achieve our goals.

Susan Barr, Chair
Louis Albright
Kathleen Quinlan
Erick Smith
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Caroline Town Planning Board
September 21, 2006

Caroline Comprehensive Plan

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A Community Process

The process of developing a comprehensive plan starts with a careful analysis of existing conditions and trends regarding the physical, environmental, social, and economic aspects of the Town. Existing conditions are projected into the future based upon current trends. Through a public participation process, community members help build consensus for a vision for the Town's future.

Impetus for developing the Comprehensive Plan came with a desire to enhance the quality of life among our town's citizens, and growing awareness of the need to protect our community from possible negative effects of growth. In the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, the planning process set out to celebrate and protect the diversity of lifestyles and interests within our community, build on the strengths of our community in achieving our goals, and guide the future of the town. The Caroline Town Planning Board was charged with developing a comprehensive plan that is:

- **Grounded** – reflects Caroline's community values, goals, and vision for the future;
- **Focused** – provides a blueprint for actions to achieve these goals; and
- **Viable** – engages the community to produce an achievable and successful plan.

In order to fulfill this charge, the Planning Board took seriously the process of engaging as many residents as possible in the comprehensive planning process. The Planning Board's job was not merely to produce a report, but to reach out and collaborate with the community, to educate residents about planning, and to involve them in developing the plan. These goals stem from the fundamental aim of the planning process: to engage residents in building community consensus for a vision for Caroline's future.

The roots for developing a comprehensive plan in Caroline date back to 1988, when the Town formed a Planning Committee that conducted surveys and community meetings and developed a Comprehensive Master Plan which included a vision statement, goals and objectives. Although the plan was not adopted, it established the need for a community-wide dialog about the future of our communities.

The current planning process began with a mini-survey during the Brooktondale Apple Festival in October 2003. Members of the Planning Board spoke with more than 40 residents, seeking their initial thoughts on what they like about Caroline and what they would like to improve. The results of these discussions and mini-surveys indicated what would likely be salient and important issues during the planning process.

From February through April 2004, a series of three community workshops were held that explored residents' goals, visions and concerns. More than two-dozen people participated in each of the workshops, sharing their desires, hopes and aspirations for the future of the Town.

Notes from the workshops formed the basis of the planning process. Throughout the process, regular updates in the Brooktondale newsletter kept the community informed and encouraged involvement.

In June 2004, the Planning Board conducted town-wide survey to collect public input for the comprehensive plan. The survey was mailed to all 1,770 registered voters in the Town, and of them, 451 people - 26 percent - returned the survey. A report analyzed results from the Town of Caroline Planning Survey, documenting what residents identified as priorities and goals for a comprehensive plan and the best strategies for achieving these goals.

Beginning in June 2004, three Working Groups began interpreting data from surveys, workshops, maps, and county studies, and started transforming ideas into writing. Composed of six to eight community volunteers each, the working groups drew on the strength and diversity of our community's experience, perspectives and expertise. The Working Groups addressed three main topics of the Town's comprehensive plan: (1) open space, environmental protection and outdoor recreation; (2) housing, roads and transportation; and (3) farming and small business. The working groups brainstormed, discussed, and drafted visions, goals and recommended actions to shape the Town's developing comprehensive plan.

Beginning in fall of 2004, the Planning Board reviewed the recommendations of the Working Groups and developed a draft plan that integrated feedback from earlier phases of public input into a single comprehensive plan. The Tompkins County Planning Department provided technical assistance and recommendations in adapting the working group reports into a viable plan.

The Planning Board completed the draft plan and sought public review in mid 2005. The Board mailed the plan's executive summary to residents, invited public comment, and held a series of public meetings to get input on the draft plan. After receiving public comment on the draft, the plan was revised and attention turned to Part II.

Recommendations of the working groups formed the basis of Part II. The planning board chose nine goals to focus on in the Part II action plan for the next five years (after considering those action points and priorities voiced at public meetings). On September 21st 2006 the Planning Board unanimously voted to send both parts of the Comprehensive Plan to the Town Board for the last public hearings and final approval.

Once accepted, the Comprehensive Plan becomes a living document. Every five years, it will undergo an extensive review and update process. The Planning Board will review the Plan, gauge the Town's progress towards meeting our goals, and update the goals and implementation approaches.

A wide variety of people and groups have been instrumental throughout the planning process. Volunteers on the Working groups represented a diversity of backgrounds and affiliations, and their experience and expertise have been invaluable. Community members responded to surveys and attended public meetings, sharing their diverse perspectives and visions. The Town also relied heavily on the cooperation and work of many agencies and municipalities. The County was especially important in assisting the development of the Plan. A more complete listing of the people who participated in the planning process is located in the Appendix.

Part I
Vision and Goals

Plan Sections

Housing



Housing in Caroline reflects the rural character of the Town, and is concentrated in the northwest of the Town, close to Ithaca. In 2000, Caroline had 1,276 housing units, composed primarily of houses, apartments, and manufactured housing. Single family homes compose the vast majority of housing stock. Seventy-one percent of residents own their homes while 29 percent rent.

Aging housing stock

Housing in the Town continues to age. Similar to most rural communities in the State, Caroline has a high percentage of older homes, which require greater maintenance and upkeep than newer homes.

Approximately 41 percent of all residential housing was built before 1940 (522 homes), and 31 percent was built between 1940 and 1979 (398 homes). The remaining 28 percent of homes (356 homes) have been built since 1980.

As the housing stock ages, upkeep and maintenance becomes more difficult. Older homes sometimes need costly and labor-intensive repairs. Maintenance of aging homes may be particularly difficult for low-income and elderly residents because they often lack sufficient

resources or assistance to do so. Without adequate upkeep, older homes can deteriorate rapidly.

Housing affordability

Housing is becoming more expensive, reflecting the growing issue of housing affordability in Tompkins County. Between 1990 and 2000, the median home value in Caroline increased over 30 percent, from \$75,000 to \$97,900. Since 2000, this figure has continued to increase.

Rising housing prices in Caroline represent a challenge to housing affordability. A significant proportion of Caroline residents lack affordable housing, defined as housing which costs no more than 30 percent of annual income. According to this definition, in 2000, over 18 percent of home-owning families live in housing they cannot reasonably afford. Rising costs represent a barrier to homeownership, because new homeowners will have more difficulty purchasing a home, and current homeowners will see rising taxes.

Renters are particularly impacted by rising housing costs. Between 1990 and 2000, the median rent in Caroline increased almost 67 percent, from \$334 to \$557 a month. In 2000, 37 percent of renters reported spending 30 percent or more of their total income on rent. This figure is similar to Tompkins County overall, where nearly

HOUSING COSTS IN CAROLINE		
	Tompkins	Caroline
Median value		
1990	\$94,000	\$75,000
2000	\$96,300	\$97,900
increase	\$2,300 (2.4%)	\$22,900 (30.5%)
Median rent		
1990	\$426	\$334
2000	\$611	\$557
increase	\$185 (43.4%)	\$223 (66.8%)

40 percent of non-student renters have housing affordability challenges. If rents continue to rise, renters will be forced to spend increasing proportion of their income on housing. Rising energy costs also contribute to greater homeowner and renter burdens.

Rising rents and assessments are making options to reduce housing costs increasingly important. Fortunately, some options do exist. For instance, opportunities are growing in Tompkins County for reducing energy costs through weatherizing and other energy-efficiency programs.

Hamlets

Throughout its history, the unique rural character of Caroline has been defined by the presence of several small population centers, the hamlets. Historically, there have been seven hamlets in Caroline. Of these, three are currently viable, defined as having a grocery store, a church, a community gathering place, and emergency services. Brooktondale is the largest hamlet, and has a post office, a store, two churches, a community center, and a fire hall. Slaterville Springs is home to the town hall and the library, a gas station and store, senior citizen housing, a church, a bar, and a fire hall. Speedsville is the smallest hamlet, and has a store, a church, a community center, a park, and a fire hall. The four



remaining hamlets of Caroline, Caroline Center, West Slaterville, and Besemer are historical housing clusters with limited services.

The three viable hamlets serve to unify the Town. Community centers, churches, fire halls, and post offices function as social centers for the entire Town. Despite their importance, the hamlets have been significantly weakened in the past 50 years as the population has spread out and economic activity has shifted out of Caroline. Although some small specialized business are currently scattered throughout the town, most residents must travel to Ithaca or Dryden for goods and services.

Development

Concerns are growing that population increases and housing development will threaten the rural and historic character of our Town. Retaining this character will be a major challenge in the next 20 years. Caroline must seek strategies to balance any development with preserving Caroline's natural beauty and sense of community. While not encouraging development, advance planning gives the Town the ability to help direct any development to areas that can best support it.

An important way to achieve such a balance is through supporting our existing hamlets. Strengthening these hamlets will help maintain Caroline's rural character by reducing the pressure on the surrounding rural areas. Encouraging housing density in hamlets and supporting

local small businesses and services will minimize sprawl, reduce the need for frequent car trips, and make our communities more human-scaled and walkable.

Spreading awareness of environmentally-friendly building practices and renewable energy will lessen the impact of development and promote a cleaner local environment.

20 Year Vision

In 2026, every Caroline resident has a safe, affordable place to call home. The Town of Caroline has experienced a modest increase in housing affordable for low, middle, and high-income residents. New housing is scattered throughout the town but development has been denser in existing hamlets and housing focus areas. Residences continue to be surrounded by farms and wooded lands allowing residents to enjoy hamlet life and rural beauty. Historical buildings and houses within Caroline are in good repair, providing increased value to residents. The hamlets have developed healthy blends of small local businesses that serve town residents. Our local institutions contribute to the strong sense of community within Caroline, and our town continues to be a safe, walkable, and neighborly place to live.

Goals

This comprehensive plan supports the Town in achieving the following housing goals:

1. Availability of affordable, durable, and safe housing for all residents.
2. Rental properties that are safe and meet state and local building codes.
3. Private property that is clean and attractive
4. Housing that is concentrated within designated focus areas (see Vision Map located in the appendix)
5. Housing that is maintained in ways that extend longevity with a focus on the upkeep of older homes and preservation of designated historic buildings.
6. Widespread implementation of low-impact and energy-efficient building practices.

Open Space and Environmental Protection



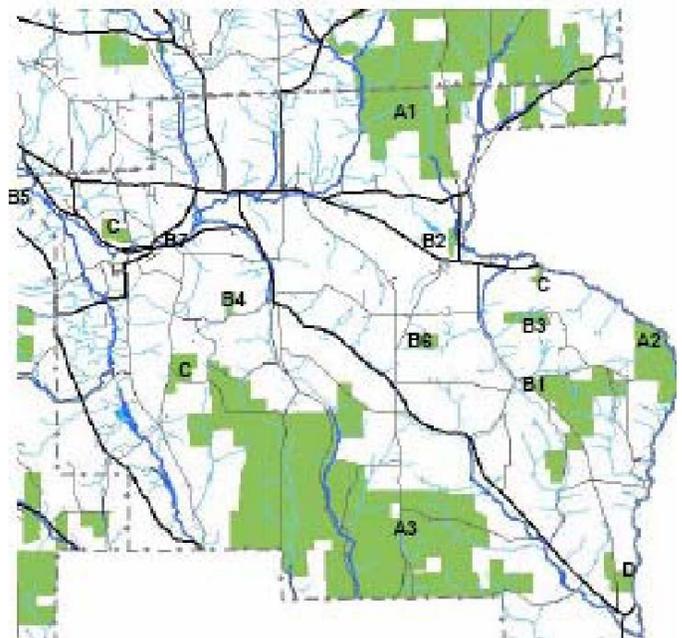
Open Space in Caroline

Two factors essential to the quality of life in rural areas such as Caroline are the availability of quality open space and an environment that enhances the enjoyment of our rural setting. Open space enriches our lives and adds ecological, social and economic value to our community. Caroline's open space encompasses many different areas of the landscape that have not been built over, including protected and unprotected lands, pathways and trails, cemeteries, and environmentally sensitive areas, in the form of fields, meadows, wetlands, marshes, streams, and forested areas. Protecting and enhancing open spaces provides value for residents and is an essential ingredient of quality of life in Caroline.

Although environmental protection is often associated with protection against air and water pollution, other environmental issues are essential to the rural quality of life, especially noise and light pollution. At present, Caroline is fortunate to have relatively clean air and adequate clean water. In addition, most residents expect peacefulness in their rural setting. Other rural communities have seen undesirable changes as population levels have increased. Our goal is to allow Caroline to develop in a way that maintains and improves the environmental factors that influence the quality of all of our lives.

Water is a resource requiring careful attention and stewardship. Caroline is uniquely located at the divide of two major northeastern watersheds. Rain that falls in the Town flows north to feed the St. Lawrence Seaway and south to the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, the City of Ithaca's municipal water supply is fed directly by Six Mile Creek. Water quality for those communities is fundamentally linked to how well we steward our lands. Preserving the quality of our natural water supplies is not only valuable to Caroline, but sets a precedent for our downstream neighbors.

Caroline's unique scenic quality and sense of place derive from the interrelationship among rural farmland, areas of undeveloped open space, and attractive hamlets supported by a mostly pleasant and healthy environment. Graced with significant natural and historic resources, this rural character creates an economic vitality through its support of numerous rural and home-based businesses, as well as an attractive place to live. Open space provides critical habitat and corridors for plants and wildlife, protects important water supplies, cleans the air, water and soil, prevents flooding, protects farmland, buffers sound pollution, establishes privacy, provides areas for



Protected open space in Caroline. Shaded areas represent protected spaces in the Town.

recreational activities, protects historically significant places, and preserves the charm and character of the area in which we live.

Protection of Open Space

Communities around the country are learning that, in addition to environmental and social benefits, open space conservation is an investment that produces important

PROTECTED OPEN SPACE IN CAROLINE	
TOTAL	Acres 7,350
A. New York State Forest	6,740
1. Hammond Hill State Forest	1,079
2. Potato Hill State Forest	890
3. Shindagin State Forest	4,771
B. Finger Lakes Land Trust	180
1. Cope Conservation Easement	32
2. Goetchius Nature Preserve	35
3. Govang Conservation Easement	32
4. Lawler Conservation Easement	33
5. Marash Conservation Easement	2
6. Olds/Isacks Conservation Easement	44
7. Saltonstall/Kellock Conservation Easement	3
C. Cornell University Natural Area	329
D. Tompkins County Reforestry Land	100

long-term economic benefits. High-quality open land is unmatched in agricultural productivity, recreational opportunities, and environmental attributes. Although the economic value of open land is often difficult to estimate, it is often greater than comparable developed land. Significant economic value may result from an investment in open space protection.

Caroline has a long history of open space protection. The Town of Caroline includes over 7,400 acres of protected land in the form of state forests, Cornell

University land, and land with conservation easements. Protected land totals almost 21 percent of the Town (Tompkins County overall protects only 14 percent of land). However, increased growth and development, particularly on open land, may threaten the quality of our open spaces. There have been 30 new houses started in each of 2003 and 2004, double the annual average from 1996 to 2002.

Residential Growth

While growing, our community must meet the needs of people and protect the integrity of the environment. Any healthy rural community landscape will provide for a diversity of land uses and promote residential, small business, farmland and open space. By preserving natural areas and open space, we enhance quality of life and the character of our community. Not only does protecting open space enhance the environment and ensure a higher quality of life for residents, it also saves collective taxpayer resources.

Environmental protection will be an ongoing challenge if residential growth continues. There are already pressures on our water resources as more residents seek access to water for new residences and for recreational use. Noise from a variety of sources becomes more intrusive as population density increases. Pressures on air quality and on the quality of our nighttime sky are also likely to increase along with population. By anticipating how potential changes may influence our environmental quality and seeking to take preventive actions we can help maintain the quality that most of our residents expect.

The quality of life in rural towns is intrinsically connected to the preservation of open lands and the environment. Protected land costs little to maintain and the value created by protecting open space is multiplied and shared by the entire community. To balance growth with environmental considerations, priority should be placed on minimizing residential growth while focusing residential

development within existing population centers of Brooktondale and Slaterville Springs and housing focus areas identified in the vision map (located in the appendix). Concentrating growth in the hamlets and

housing nodes reduces costs by using existing infrastructure and simultaneously protects open space from sprawling development.

20 Year Vision

In 2026, green space is plentiful in Caroline. Located at the divide of the Chesapeake and the St. Lawrence watersheds, our rural community recognizes our role in the regional ecosystem, and works to protect its environment and natural beauty. Our green space reduces pollution, enables sustainable agriculture and forest production, provides outdoor recreational opportunities, protects biodiversity, and preserves rural views. Sprawl is limited because new development is concentrated in and near the hamlets of Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs, and Speedsville. Environmentally aware and informed citizens take pride in passing along treasured natural areas and resources to future generations. By careful advance planning, they preserve and promote the Town's rural character, public areas, historical heritage, cemeteries, unique natural areas, well-connected recreational spaces, community centers, agricultural lands, the high quality of water, air and land, and control noise and reduce light pollution. Potential builders and the community decide together how proposed development supports the goals articulated in the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals

This comprehensive plan supports the Town in achieving the following open space and environmental protection goals:

1. Preservation of existing protected open space, and pursuit of additional opportunities for public open space and recreational amenities, particularly close to population centers.
2. Recreation on protected public open space that is safe and consistent with designated uses.
3. Development concentrated away from environmentally sensitive areas, particularly Unique Natural Areas identified by the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council.
4. Permanent protection of important natural features and open spaces, particularly of identified Unique Natural Areas.
5. Landowner stewardship of natural features and open spaces.
6. Preservation of water quality and quantity and protection against environmental degradation.

Infrastructure and Services

Transportation in Caroline

Two trends are converging to create pressures on roads and transportation in Caroline that, in turn, affect the quality of rural life. First, Caroline's center of economic activity has shifted away from its farming and logging roots to become a bedroom community for Ithaca and other nearby towns. Indeed, 75 percent of Caroline's employed population drives more than 15 minutes to their workplace. As people commute outside the town to work, traffic increases on Town roads.

Second, across the United States, dependence on cars has increased. More people own cars, commuting times are longer and highway speed limits have increased as cars and roads have improved. People expect to drive individually to destinations both near and far. The same trend exists in Caroline. Most people drive to work by themselves rather than carpooling or taking a bus.

Roads and Community Life

Taken together, these trends may threaten the quality of rural, small town life in Caroline. The Town's busiest roads, State Route 79 and Brooktondale Road continuing on to Valley Road, run through four of Caroline's historic hamlets (Caroline, Slaterville Springs, West Slaterville and Brooktondale). Mid-twentieth century road-widening initiatives on those main arteries have already taken a toll on hamlet life, shrinking front yards, removing trees, crowding out sidewalks, facilitating higher speed traffic

and increasing noise and local air pollution. While two sidewalks in Slaterville Springs connect businesses and services, sidewalks in Brooktondale are discontinuous, making it more difficult to walk to neighborhood destinations. As residents retreat to their houses and cars, they no longer have opportunities to know their neighbors. Increased private vehicle use is expensive for the Town and for individuals. Taxpayers bear the burden of higher road maintenance costs and car owners face rising fuel costs. Nonetheless, commuters do have other options. A survey of residents conducted in 2004 showed that 4 percent carpool to work, 5 percent take the bus and 6 percent either walk or bike to work, all reducing the number of cars on the road. While many people choose to drive their own cars for convenience, bus ridership might increase if the bus stops were located closer to people's homes, if service were more frequent and went into the evening, and if the bus served more destinations directly.

The design of towns, neighborhoods and cities can contribute to reducing traffic. New buildings can be situated along public transportation routes. Sidewalks and paths for bicycles and pedestrians can be built to facilitate walking and biking to nearby destinations and to bus stops.

Energy and Water

While there is increased interest in clean and renewable energy sources such as wind power and solar power in the Town, the majority of homes rely upon fossil fuels for their heat and electricity. New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG) provides a gas pipeline to 25 percent of Caroline homes. The rest of homes rely on propane (15 %), oil (26 %), electricity (11 %), or coal and wood (23 %) for heat. Abundant local availability of wood makes wood stoves common throughout Caroline. Numerous sites within the Town have good potential for wind power. Residents have the option to purchase wind-power generated electricity at an additional charge, without installing their own wind turbines. The Town's electricity needs are currently met

TRAVEL TIME TO WORK

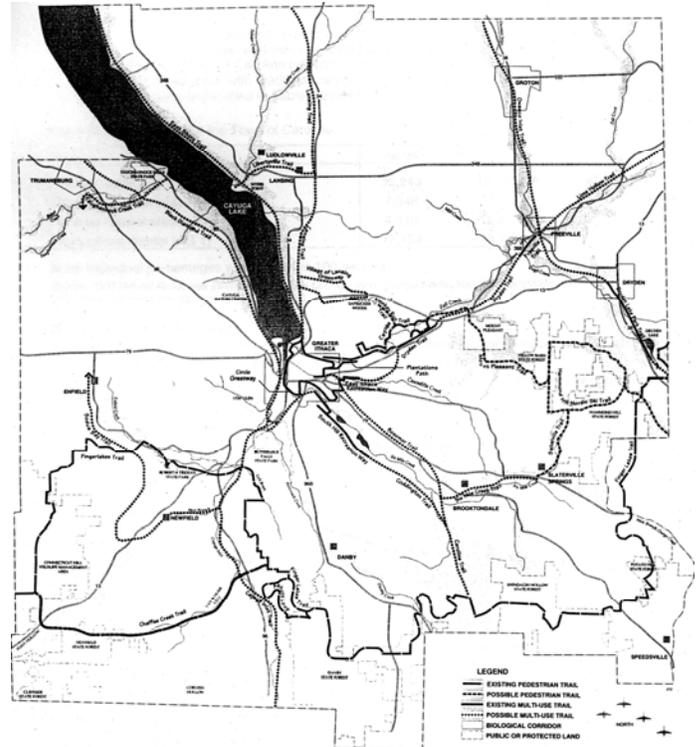
Residents driving to work	Tompkins	Caroline
Total	44,969	1,263
Less than 15 minutes	19,155 (42.6%)	270 (21.4%)
15 to 30 minutes	19,086 (42.4%)	672 (53.2%)
More than 30 minutes	6,728 (15.0%)	321 (25.4%)

through such a contract.

All homes and businesses rely on wells and private septic systems, as there are no public water or sewer connections. Little is known about the aquifers that supply these wells, although an aquifer study is underway. Well water quality and quantity vary widely across the Town. For example, parts of Brooktondale – where housing pressure is strong – suffer well water shortages and poor water quality. Other options may be needed in the future.

Communications and Emergency Services

An increased population, bringing modern expectations, creates demand for other services and utilities. Time Warner has extended cable service for television and Internet connections into some parts of the Town. Outlying areas rely on satellite or weak, limited antenna reception for television. Telephone infrastructure, with limited service provider options, relies upon overhead wires that are susceptible to storm damage. Cellular phone coverage is limited, in part due to the hilly topography.



Caroline Greenways

Emergency services, including firefighting and paramedic services are provided by three local volunteer fire companies. As residents increasingly work outside the town, it is more difficult to recruit volunteers, even as the demand for services increases. Fundraising activities of these companies, through pancake breakfasts and chicken barbeques, provide important social occasions and community gatherings for local residents. Increasing support and pride in these services will increase quality of life for all residents.

20 Year Vision

In 2026, residents of Caroline enjoy a well-planned and maintained transportation system that offers a variety of options. Public transportation is available and encouraged as a way to reduce individual auto trips. A reliable, affordable and frequent bus service serves the Town of Caroline, connecting the hamlets and housing nodes to Ithaca and other transportation nodes, inside and outside Tompkins County. Several Park and Ride sites encourage car-pooling.

Roads are shared safely by motorists, farm vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. Roads are well-maintained, following careful plans for capital improvements. Traffic calming measures have been implemented as needed to control vehicular speed. The Town works with the County and the State Department of Transportation to reduce speed limits within population areas and at dangerous locations.

Modern communication systems have been installed and are available to all. Public sewers and water have been extended into Brooktondale and natural gas lines have been expanded. Elsewhere in the town, private septic systems and wells are maintained conscientiously. Emergency services have adequate volunteers and Town support to continue to provide high quality services.

Sidewalks and pedestrian paths are maintained year-round as an encouragement to pedestrian use. Additional sidewalks and paths have been added and upgraded.

Goals

This comprehensive plan supports the Town in achieving the following infrastructure and services goals:

1. Pedestrian ways and bikeways between Slaterville, Brooktondale, and Ithaca, especially the Coddington, Six Mile Creek, and Besemer trails.
2. Housing with pedestrian walkways and safe access to main roads.
3. Easily accessible public transportation that is widely used.
4. Consistent and sensible speed limits that are enforced.
5. Safe roads in good repair and maintained efficiently.
6. Buildings easily identifiable from the road for emergency response.
7. Increased energy conservation and use of renewable energy sources.
8. Expanded access to modern communications

Small Businesses in Caroline

Over the last 50 years, the percentage of residents who earn their major income from within the Town of Caroline has steadily decreased, while those earning income outside the Town has substantially increased. Although data on businesses are scarce, it is likely that the number of businesses supporting one or more full-time workers has also decreased dramatically. The number of retail businesses in the hamlets has also decreased, primarily a victim of better transportation to surrounding supermarkets and shopping centers. The center of economic activity, both earning and spending, has steadily moved towards Ithaca and a few other surrounding towns.

Despite these changes, at least 90 businesses now operate in the town. Most are small, employing one full-time equivalent person or less and tend to be scattered over the town. Retail stores within the hamlets has shown less vibrancy, with traffic on Route 79 currently supplying the most steady customer base in Slaterville. The retail stores in Brooktondale and Speedsville do not have this conduit for delivering customers. While Route 79 traffic will likely sustain several retail businesses in Slaterville, the future of retail businesses in Brooktondale and Speedsville is less certain. Although Brooktondale has a population center capable of supporting some level of business, easy access to Ithaca provides competition. Because Speedsville is “centrally isolated” the viability of the small retail store there may be more stable.

Supporting this diverse mix of local businesses and increasing support for retail trade in the hamlets strengthens the vitality of the Town and offers economic opportunity for residents. Currently, residents, businesses, and farms are interspersed across the town and this intermingling is expected to continue. However, as the number of residents grows, the potential increases for conflict between businesses, farms and residents. More



concerns have arisen about how businesses fit into the landscape and support the values residents place on living in the Town. Issues such as visual appearance, noise and light pollution, and air and water quality emerge. Because the town currently has few regulations or guidelines, inappropriate business development could adversely affect the quality of rural living. The situation is exacerbated as neighboring towns place additional restrictions on business development, making unregulated municipalities susceptible to undesirable businesses unable to find locations elsewhere.

Finding a balance between supporting a vital locally-owned business community interspersed across the Town and supporting the quality of rural residential life poses a significant challenge.

20 Year Vision

In 2026, Caroline's economy flourishes with locally-owned small businesses. The Town's foresight in supporting the development of both modern communication facilities and sources of renewable energy have made it a leader in supporting locally-owned business and have greatly enhanced the viability of this diffuse business network. Scattered throughout the town, the businesses fit seamlessly with the rural residential nature of the town. Because these businesses have worked with the Town to create this compatibility, environmental concerns about air and water quality and light, odor, and noise pollution have diminished. In addition, both the Town government and local businesses have made serious efforts to make their operations environmentally responsible. The number of Caroline residents has increased somewhat, concentrated in areas that simultaneously preserve the rural nature of the town and support the local economy. The prospering local hamlets support a diversity of local businesses and are boosted by increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic due to the network of biking and walking paths. Brooktondale in particular has developed a small but viable commercial center where residents have access to a variety of items and services from, for instance, a local grocery, coffee shop, and general store. Slaterville continues to depend primarily on tourists and traffic on Route 79. Speedsville is supported by a number of small enterprises, including farming, logging, and other locally-owned businesses.

Residents take pride in supporting their local businesses, which allows the town to maintain a modest level of economic self-sufficiency. The growing number of small businesses provides increasing economic support for town residents. A growing sense of town identity and community pride has resulted in an excess of volunteers for town services in the hamlets and rural areas, including both fire and emergency services.

Goals

This comprehensive plan supports the Town in achieving the following small business goals:

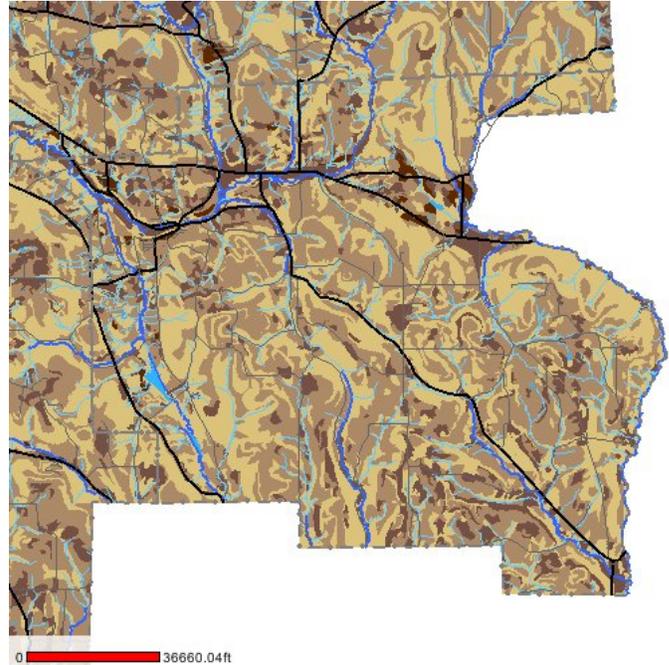
1. Increased town pride, civic engagement, and support of local businesses.
2. Opportunities for new small and home-based businesses, central to continued viability of the town.
3. Economic development in hamlets compatible with other long-term goals.
4. Enhanced infrastructure that supports small business enterprises.
5. Encouraging locally-owned businesses that integrate with the rural residential and agricultural nature of the town, and discouraging commercial development that would negatively affect local agricultural, business, and residential communities.
6. Encouraging businesses to protect air and water quality, reduce impact on traffic density and road quality, use clean and renewable sources of energy, and embrace sustainable business practices.

Changing Agricultural Landscape

Agriculture and forestry are two important and historic industries in Caroline that continue to contribute to the economic and aesthetic vibrancy of the Town. They provide opportunities for local entrepreneurship and employment as well as a local supply of food and lumber. Well-managed agricultural and logging operations help maintain the beautiful vistas and inviting woodlands and open spaces that are at the heart and soul of the town.

Both industries have undergone significant changes in the last 50 years. The number of full-time farms dropped from over 80 to fewer than 12 while the vibrant milling industry that once spread over the town has diminished to only a few scattered sawmills. Some of this trend is connected to larger national trends that see small farms and businesses of all types being consolidated. Other factors have also played an important role. In agriculture, most of the land being farmed 50 years ago was suitable for pasture and hay production, typical of that time, but poorly suited to crop production. Most of the lower quality soil is either no longer farmed or used to supplement existing farms. Farming is currently concentrated on the better soils and there is an insufficient amount of these better soils to adequately supply the needs of existing farmers, adding to the financial stress of the farming community.

The decline in logging and milling is closely related to the disappearance of most of the old-growth forest that once covered most of Caroline. However, as current forest lands are better managed and as abandoned farmland returns to its natural forested state, the supply of suitable logging trees in the town will stabilize or even increase in coming years. In addition, as the cost of fossil fuel increases, the potential for marketing wood products for fuel should increase, providing a potential market for



Agricultural soils in Caroline. Darker areas signify soil better suited for agriculture.

forest products unsuited for lumber.

Current Trends

While the number of full-time farms has declined, the number of part-time and hobby farms has increased, many taking over previous full-time farmsteads. However, the future of agriculture is difficult to predict. To a certain extent, survival of individual farms is beyond the reach of the town. National agricultural economic conditions and the desire of individual families to maintain their farms over the generations are two primary factors.

Nevertheless, the Town can play a significant role in the preservation of its natural resources, especially its prime agricultural soils. The viability of agriculture depends on the existence of contiguous agricultural lands with sufficient acreage to maintain a critical mass of agriculture activity. In addition, farmers considering long-term investments in agricultural infrastructure require some level of confidence that agriculture will continue to

be viable in the town. Caroline has a very limited acreage of good agricultural land. According to a recent county survey, there are only about 1300 acres of “prime” and “good” agricultural soils currently being farmed along with another 2900 acres of “fair” soil. A significant acreage of prime and good soil has already been lost through development. A substantial proportion of the remaining viable agricultural soil lies along Route 79, and will likely give way to future development if no action is taken.

The viability of both agriculture and logging depends on the preservation of two essential natural resources, high quality agricultural lands and woodlands. Although land deforested for agriculture will return to woodlands over time, agricultural land that undergoes development is lost forever. Good agricultural soils are an irreplaceable natural resource, nearly impossible to restore once disturbed through development. If current development pressures continue to build unchecked along Route 79, it is likely that much of Caroline’s best agricultural land will be lost, eliminating any possibility that an active farming community will be a part of future generations of the town.

WORKING FARMS IN CAROLINE		
Year	Farms	Acres
1959	82	16,674
1964	70	15,053
1980	40	7,000
1989	12	3,000
1996	19	4,997

1996 FARMS BY SIZE			
	Acres	Farms	% of Total
<i>TOTAL</i>		19	100.0
less than 50		2	10.5
50 to 99		3	15.8
100 to 199		4	21.1
200 to 499		9	47.4
500 to 999		0	0.0
more than 999		1	5.3

1996 FARMS BY INCOME			
	Income	Farms	% of Total
<i>TOTAL</i>		19	100.0
less than \$10,000		6	31.6
\$10,000 to \$39,999		6	31.6
more than \$39,999		7	36.8

20 Year Vision

In 2026, farming continues to be a viable way of life. Most of the families who were farming in 2005 are still in business, even though conventional dairy farming may operate at reduced levels. Because of their innovation and the preservation of the best farmland, farming families have adapted to changing economic conditions. Some family farms have gone organic, some have developed specialty items, such as farm-made cheese or yogurt, and some have found unique niches. Many of these farms market value-added products as a significant part of their income. Families who decided to stop farming were able to sell their land satisfactorily – with most of the land going to part-time farms, preservation, or other environmentally sustainable uses.

Caroline residents take pride in preserving the town's natural resources, especially the best agricultural lands. The preservation of the best farmland has attracted a stable farming community, encouraged by the dependable sources of water and good soil and the diversity of agricultural activities within the town. High-agricultural value land identified in the vision map is protected and in use. Preservation of quality woodland has also contributed to sustainable and responsible forestry practices within the town.

Goals

This comprehensive plan supports the Town in achieving the following farming and forestry goals:

1. Agricultural practices that protect the quality of land, streams, and wildlife.
2. Preservation of the Town's most viable agricultural land.
3. Preservation, enhancement and expansion of healthy woodlands.
4. Appropriate infrastructure for farming and logging enterprises to ensure adequate sources of supplies and strong markets for agricultural and lumber products.

Part II Strategies and Actions

Caroline Five Year Action Plan

Part I described the 20 year vision for Caroline and described five main topics – Housing, Open Space and Environmental Protection, Infrastructure and Services, Small Business, and Farming and Forestry as essential components of that vision. A set of goals was articulated for each of the sections that will lead us toward the overall vision of the Town. In Part II, we describe strategies to reach those goals and a plan of action for coordinating Town efforts so that our highest priorities are addressed over the next five years. In crafting this action plan, we:

- Built on the recommendations of the working groups convened in the summer and fall of 2004.
- Incorporated suggestions for action offered by residents during public meetings in 2004 and 2005
- Sought opportunities for efficiencies between goals across topics. Each of the topics is interrelated; what we do in one topical area affects those in other areas. The action plan strives to identify high yield actions that, when implemented, will contribute to the achievement of multiple goals. Thus, while Part I of the plan treated each topic area as a separate section, here we describe an integrated plan of action.
- Balanced regulatory approaches that ensure minimum standards are met, with education and outreach activities that emphasize community engagement and voluntary participation.
- Recognize that Caroline has a rich tradition of volunteer activity. This action plan is meant to harness that volunteer energy and provide an organizing framework and structure that will channel this enthusiasm and commitment toward the shared goals and vision of this comprehensive plan, enabling residents to contribute in ways that match their interests and skills.
- Remember that Part I describes a 20 year vision and goals. Part I is meant to provide a long term guiding framework. In contrast, Part II is meant to provide practical advice on how to implement this plan in the coming five years. As such, we do not pretend that all goals will be addressed fully or equally in the short term.
- Believe that Part II will require more frequent revisiting than Part I. Minimally, this section of the plan needs to be revisited on a five year basis. Ideally, progress will be monitored continuously, with corrections made as lessons are learned or short term objectives are met. We recommend that working groups provide annual updates that are publicly available
- Anticipate that cooperation with other appropriate entities will be a guiding principle in all of the work going forward. These may include, but are not limited to, collaboration with other municipalities, the County, Cooperative Extension and Finger Lakes Land Trust.
- Assume that we will seek funding that supports the comprehensive plan vision and goals.
- Support and encourage other volunteer activities that are consistent with the vision and goals articulated in Part I, even if they are not actively described here.

TABLE OF ACTIONS

What	Who	By When	Housing						Open Space & Environment						Infrastructure & Services								Small Business						Farming & Forestry				
			1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	
1. Propose Legislation to Guide Land Use and Commercial Development	Planning Board	July 2008				x		x	x		x				x		x	x				x		x	x	x	x			x	x		
2. Establish the Natural Areas and Trails Group.	Planning Board	Dec. 2006								x	x	x	x	x	x	x														x	x		
3. Establish the Caroline Small Business Committee.	Planning Board	Dec. 2006																					x			x			x				x
4. Establish the Caroline Clean-Up and Beautification Corps.	Planning Board	Dec. 2006			x		x		x	x		x	x	x									x							x	x		
5. Research and develop local nuisance laws (junk, noise, light, odor).	Planning Board	April 2007			x		x								x								x										
6. Implement the Stormwater Management Guidelines.	Town Board/ Watersheds Comm.	2008 2011							x										x											x	x		
7. Apply the results of the aquifer studies.	Watersheds Committee	Ongoing	x									x																		x	x		

Overview of Actions

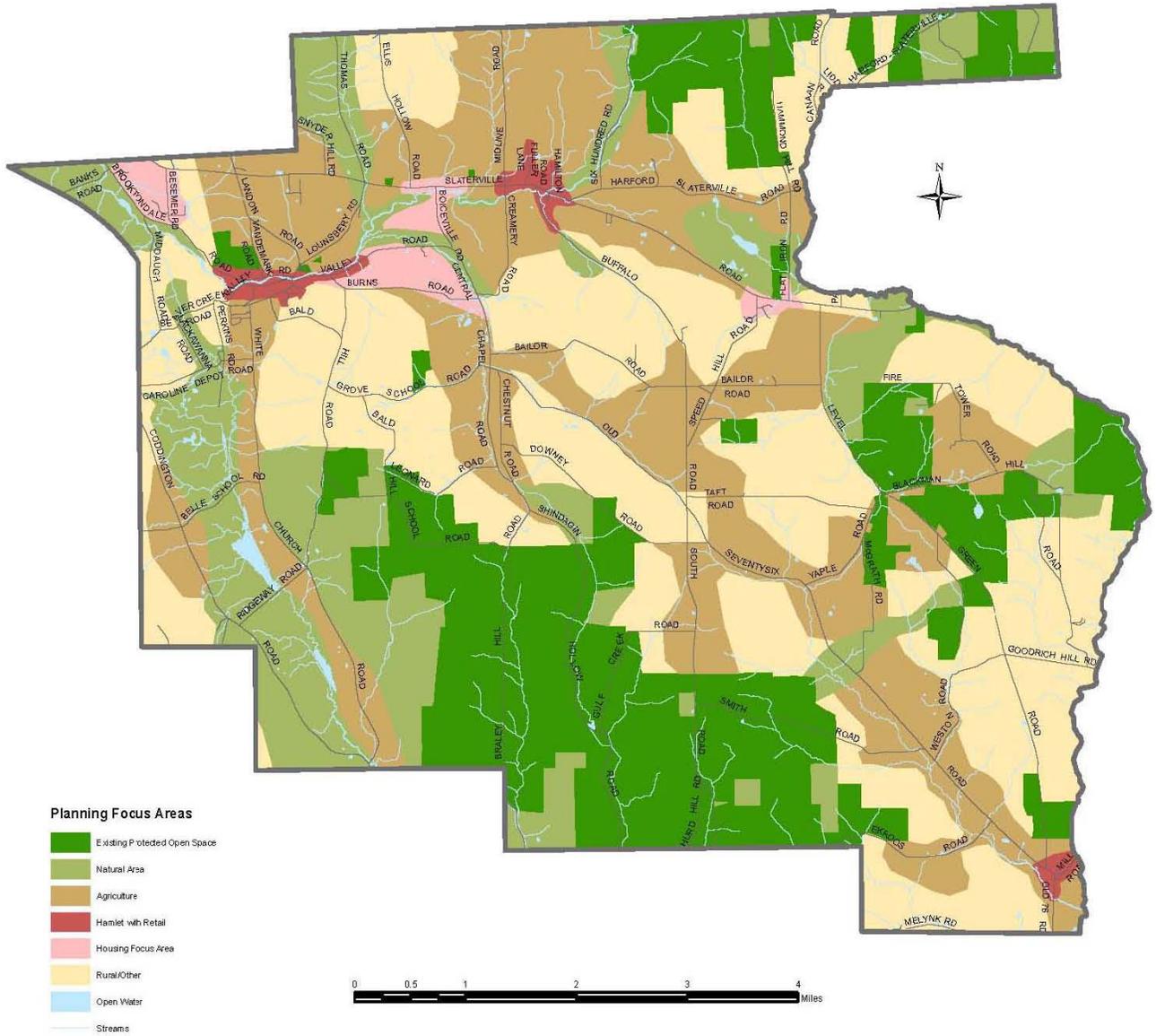
Here we describe each of the nine main approaches which over the next five years will move Caroline toward fulfilling the Comprehensive Plan's goals.

1. Propose Legislation to Guide Land Use and Commercial Development.
 - Create a process of site plan review or a development guidance system. Our objective is to find a balance that acknowledges ownership freedom, yet is respectful of the rights of others. Both site plan review and a development guidance system are designed to provide protection to landowners about what type of activity or development occurs on neighboring parcels. The advantage of this process is that it treats each project on a case-by-case basis, building in opportunities for neighbors to provide input on specific projects and suggest ways to ensure compatibility with surrounding uses. This is unlike a zoning system, in which a uniform set of rules is developed for each portion of the Town. The vision and goals articulated in Part I serve as guiding principles that will be incorporated into the system.
 - Consider other legislation.
2. Establish the Natural Areas and Trails Group. This group will have parallel activities, united by their focus on land preservation:
 - Develop pedestrian trails and bikeways between Slaterville, Brooktondale and Ithaca. The first priority of this group and a reasonable five year goal will be to secure an easement for the Coddington Trail that will connect Brooktondale, along the old railway bed, to the South Hill Recreation Way at Burns Road, locate funding and begin construction. During this initial five-year period, the group will also explore the feasibility of and possible approaches to establishing the Six Mile Creek Trail and the Besemer Trail.
 - Work with existing groups such as the Finger Lakes Trails Club to sponsor activities such as trail maintenance and orienteering programs. Create and distribute maps of existing trails in the town, install signs at key open space access points and promote their appropriate use.
 - Outreach to landowners of unique natural areas and high quality farmland to promote awareness and use of Land Trusts, conservation easements and other incentives for land preservation.
3. Establish the Caroline Small Business Committee. The committee will:
 - Assess current business community needs and issues.
 - Develop a resource guide to help potential businesses be aware of what is available in the town.
 - Develop ways to publicize products available from small businesses in town, such as a welcome packet for distribution to new residents.
 - Develop ways to enhance viability of hamlets for both residents and businesses.
4. Establish the Caroline Clean-Up and Beautification Volunteer Corps. This working group will coordinate with the Planning Board and others to carry out the following activities:
 - Coordinate a yearly clean-up day (or days) in Caroline.
 - Recruit individuals and groups to gather and dispose of recyclable items and junk from public lands and private lands where property owners are unable to bring the items to the clean-up day site.
 - Develop innovative programs to support, recognize and reward individuals and groups making particularly effective efforts to clean up and beautify Caroline.
 - Pursue beautification grant opportunities.
5. Research and develop local nuisance laws. The Planning Board will:
 - Research current law concerning public nuisance – junk, noise, light, and odor – and educate the community.
 - Identify methods of enforcement and make recommendations to the Town Board.
 - Draft a local code that will set limits to public nuisance, define junk, and limit pollution.

6. Implement the Stormwater Management Guidelines. Work with the Watershed Committee to implement guidelines as required by State law, including:
 - Implement local law for construction of stormwater runoff and erosion control.
 - Work with area agencies to educate landowners on stormwater runoff control.
 - Investigate options to protect the water filtration, erosion control, and wildlife habitats of riparian areas along Caroline streams, perhaps through adoption of riparian buffers.
7. Apply the results of the aquifer studies to land use. The aquifer study in the Upper Six Mile Creek Valley is complete. The results provide information about the location of the aquifers, water volume, water quality, and recharge areas. A similar study will be conducted on the Wilseyville Valley aquifer from 2006-2009.
8. Review and revise, if necessary, the Caroline subdivision and manufactured housing laws. An advisory sub-committee of the Planning Board will be formed to review existing subdivision and mobile home park regulations in the Town and State and recommend changes to the Planning Board.
9. Work closely with Energy Independent Caroline to encourage and support adoption of energy conservation and renewable energy technologies within the Town.
 - Make energy conservation and renewable energy part of the site plan review/development guidance system and ensure there are no undue impediments to installation and use of renewable energy technologies.
 - Provide printed information related to energy conservation and renewable energy throughout the building permitting process.
 - Support, through pro-active education efforts, installation of energy conservation and renewable energy technologies. Form a volunteer corps to educate and assist homeowners, when requested, to implement such technologies.
 - Identify suitable wind power and microhydropower sites within the Town.
 - Identify and recommend key strategies to encourage mass transit use for commuting and use of renewable fuels for Town vehicles as appropriate.

Appendices

Vision Map



Vision Map Description

The Planning Board developed a Future Vision map to ground discussions and convey broad concepts described in the Comprehensive Plan. It is important to first define what this map is and what it is not. The Future Vision map is *not* the plan itself and it is *not* a recommendation for laws on land use. The map *is* a reflection of what nature has provided to us, how people have settled and used the land, and how we expect land use to change. The map is a picture of what the Town could look like in 2026. The major sections of the Plan each relate to the map.

Hamlets

Caroline has seven historical hamlets: Besemer, Brooktondale, Caroline, Caroline Center, Slaterville Springs, Speedsville, and West Slaterville. Of these, Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs and Speedsville are described in this plan as *viable hamlets*. Viable hamlets (dark red) have more infrastructure and services than typically present in other areas of the Town: a community center, church, store, and fire station. The three viable hamlets have no clearly defined boundaries, and the map provides only general demarcations.

Open Space

Caroline has many acres of already-existing protected open space (dark green), including state forests, Cornell-owned land, and land with conservations easements. In 2026, we expect currently protected land to remain protected. Shindagin Forest is a large and most obvious example. We also expect some additional land to undergo some form of protection. Based on county information resources, these spaces are added to the map.

Natural Areas

Caroline has numerous wetlands and other areas of special or unique natural value identified in the *Unique Natural Areas Inventory of Tompkins County* (light green). These areas are scattered over the entire town, but are concentrated along and near the Six Mile Creek corridor. The map also highlights small areas of open water, and streams (light blue).

Agriculture

Caroline has limited resources of rich agricultural land. Farming has tended to remain where soil is better and where fields are contiguous. The map highlights areas having the highest expected value to agriculture (light brown).

Housing

Two considerations relate to future expansion of housing and other development in Caroline. First, the Town expects that the greatest development pressure will be in northwest Caroline, closest to Ithaca. Second, the Town works to preserve aspects of Caroline that residents desire to preserve, including farmland, open space, and unique natural areas. To balance these considerations, the map offers a strategy for guiding residential growth in Caroline. The Town does not nor wishes to restrict individual housing in Caroline. Housing will likely expand in Caroline as individual houses are added

throughout the Town. This is what might be termed *isolated* development. In contrast, there may be *clustered* development where multiple houses are built in close proximity.

The map shows three regions where clustered development could be encouraged. The regions are called *housing focus areas* (light pink). The first is at the far northwest corner of the Town, where housing is already relatively dense but is not an existing hamlet. The second and third somewhat fill in the area between Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs, and West Slaterville. These areas could link existing communities and promote an integrated community where small commercial development can become more viable, children can bike safely to school and to visit friends, and residents can walk to nearby services. The fourth small housing focus area is near the intersection of Speed Hill Road, which provides ready access to Route 79 and has existing housing development.

Rural and Other

Additional areas in Caroline contain a mix of woods, fields returning to brush and trees, steep hillsides, rural home sites, and some agriculture. A single category, called “rural/other”, was created and colored yellow.

2004 Resident Survey

The *Town of Caroline Planning Survey* was one of a series of activities to solicit public input on the comprehensive plan. The items in the survey were developed based on input provided at three community visioning workshops held in February through April of 2004 and through informal polling of residents. The survey was mailed to 1,770 residents (all of Caroline's registered voters) in June 2004. Twenty-six percent were completed and returned by mid-July. While this is a high return rate for a survey, the Planning Board wanted to be sure that the survey accurately represented the residents of the Town of Caroline.

The age of respondents generally followed actual age distributions in Caroline, although younger adults were slightly underrepresented among survey respondents. Approximately 3 percent of the respondents were 18 to 24 years old, 29 percent were 25 to 44 years old, 48 percent were 45 to 64 years old, 10 percent were 65 to 74 years old and 9 percent were 75+ years old. The survey also reflected opinions from both new and long-time residents. Approximately 42 percent of the respondents have lived in Caroline at least 20 years, another 20 percent have lived here 10 to 19 years and 32 percent have lived here less than 10 years. Additionally, both rural residents and those in hamlets took the time to reply. Approximately 36 percent of respondents lived in rural areas and the remaining 64 percent came from the hamlets of Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs and Speedsville.

The survey's three major questions asked respondents on a scale of 1 to 5 to rate (1) the importance of listed goals, (2) the current Town success in accomplishing these goals and (3) the desirability of suggested actions in achieving the goals.

Table A summarizes the results pertaining to the importance of and current success on Town goals. With average ratings ranging from 3.2 to 4.4, respondents found all goals moderately to very important for the Town to address. In general, residents rated the Town's current success at addressing these goals as lower than their importance, with average ratings from 2.4 (somewhat unsuccessful) to 4.1 (very successful). There is the most room for improvement on goals where importance is rated high and current success is rated somewhat lower. Such goals may warrant particular attention in the comprehensive plan.

TABLE A. Importance of and current success on Town goals		
<small>(5 = extremely important / successful, 1 = unimportant / unsuccessful)</small>		
Town goals (in order of importance)	Average importance	Average success
A Maintain high quality of current town services	4.4	4.1
B Preserve water quality and quantity	4.4	3.4
C Provide safe rural roads	4.1	3.5
D Clean up properties and areas along roadways	3.9	2.4
E Identify/protect environmentally sensitive areas	3.7	3.1
F Maintain vitality of hamlets as rural centers	3.6	3.3
G Support and improve safe/affordable housing	3.6	2.9
H Maintain current economic base of town	3.6	3.2
I Preserve large public areas of open space	3.3	3.2
J Support preserving private areas of open space	3.3	3.1
K Maintain small public parks	3.2	3.0
Overall rating	3.8	3.2

There are many possible actions that can be taken to address these goals. Table B summarizes the desirability of a variety of potential Town actions that could help achieve these goals. With average ratings ranging from 3.1 to 4.0, respondents found all actions *moderately to very desirable*.

TABLE B. Desirability of possible Town actions		
(5 = extremely desirable, 1 = undesirable)		
	Possible Town actions	Average desirability
a	Enforce existing regulations to keep properties clean	4.0
b	Require setbacks for new buildings from streams/wetlands	3.8
c	Provide incentives to preserve best agricultural land	3.7
d	Restrict development incompatible with hamlets	3.6
e	Encourage rehabilitation of historic properties/older homes	3.6
f	Prohibit/restrict large-scale commercial development	3.5
g	Require permanent open space as part of new subdivision	3.5
h	Provide financial incentives to owners for keeping open space	3.4
l	Encourage development in areas with less viable land	3.3
j	Improve existing parks and outdoor recreation areas	3.3
k	Strengthen enforcement of building codes	3.3
l	Developers must include affordable housing in new developments	3.1
m	Promote small scale local tourism	3.1
n	Zoning for existing high and low densities	3.1
o	Install additional road signs warning of hazards	3.0
Overall rating		3.4

A complete report of the survey results is available at the Caroline Library at the Town Hall and the Town of Caroline website www.townofcaroline.org.

The Planning Board thanks all residents who took the time to thoughtfully complete this detailed survey. The results were helpful in developing a comprehensive plan for the Town that reflects the desires of community members. Thanks also to H. Christine Richards, Town of Caroline Planning Board Summer Research Assistant, for preparing the survey summary.

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Kathleen Quinlan
Dominic Frongillo
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Stacey Crawford
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