

Town of Otsego Comprehensive Plan

**Town Board
February 13, 2008**

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See separate document (*Appendices*) for background information supporting plan:

THE FOLLOWING APPENDICES ARE NOT CONSIDERED PART OF THE FOREGOING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ARE ANNEXED TO THE PLAN SIMPLY FOR REFERENCE, BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL PURPOSES AND SAID APPENDICES SHALL HAVE NO LEGAL OR OTHER ENFORCEABLE EFFECT.

Appendix A	Consultants Recommendations to Implement Goals
Appendix B	2006 Update: Public Input
Appendix C	2006 Update: Profile and Inventory of Town Resources
Appendix D	Zoning Build-out Analysis
Appendix E	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis
Appendix F	1987 Master Plan
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Vision Statement

The vision statement that follows is based on public input through workshops, focus groups, and surveys. A vision statement is meant to set the stage for the Town's future direction. It gives a picture of what citizens have said they want their Town to be. The vision statement should serve as a benchmark for public decision-making and actions by the Town of Otsego.

Here is our vision:

We, the Town of Otsego citizens, cherish and protect our rural and natural landscape. We assure that plentiful, accessible open spaces continue to exist. We see agriculture as a continuing important part of the Town's economy and character. We respect our traditions and history, and so preserve the Town's historic architecture and character. We wish to encourage new development to honor the ways our hamlets have looked through their long histories. Hence we promote careful design and placing of new buildings to complement and harmonize with those already here. We Town citizens are committed to involvement in its future and are proud of our strong community identity.

We foresee the future Town of Otsego as continuing to have a clean environment, beautiful landscape, a rural character. We foresee carefully managed growth and development, maintaining access to our natural areas. We foresee a place of safety for us and our families.

We expect increased year-round recreational and cultural opportunities, including biking, hiking, and walking trails, and ample access to Otsego and Canadarago Lakes. We see residents and visitors here enjoying even more access to the arts and cultural events.

We want added economic growth, with more diverse year-round businesses that serve both residents and visitors. We want low-impact, family-owned small businesses to flourish, not only in Cooperstown, but in Fly Creek, the Town's secondary center for retail and service operations. We want the Town of Otsego to develop housing and jobs to draw young families here.

We foresee high quality and diverse housing for all income levels and ages, with special attention given to housing our elderly so that they can continue life right here. We want residential development, concentrated in and around the hamlets, to strengthen our neighborhood, economy, and sense of community. We foresee hamlet amenities like sidewalks and street trees adding to its desirability as a place to live. Beyond the hamlets, we foresee a mix of current size and some smaller, affordable homes surrounded by open land and farms. We foresee all homes and neighborhoods safe and well maintained.

We want roads well-built, maintained, and reflective of our rural and historic heritage. We want traffic volume and speed controlled to harmonize with the Town as a place of homes.

We foresee high-quality schools for our youngsters and a Town government that works to provide both public services and reasonable taxes. We foresee the Town working even

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more cooperatively with the Towns and Villages in the Leatherstocking region, promoting their good and ours.

This is our vision, the touchstone for our shared future.

Goals

Once the vision statement was developed, it was possible to review the 1987 plan and its overall goals in light of current conditions and sentiments. Public input confirmed the 1987 goals were still valid to meet the long-range needs of the community and, thus, they are restated here. However, several additional goals are needed to meet the desired future conditions in the Town of Otsego and these are identified in *italics*.

1. Protect property values and maintain reasonable tax rates.
2. Protect sensitive environmental areas including viewsheds.
3. Preserve existing patterns of use in hamlets and rural areas.
4. Protect the historical, natural, community and rural character.
5. Promote adequate passive and active recreational opportunities.
6. Maintain the natural environment and open space, and minimize visual blight.
7. Ensure drinking water quality and availability in lakes and groundwater.
8. Seek cooperation with other towns and the County.
9. Maintain the existing network of roads and minimize hazards and congestion.
10. *Promote development of diversified housing opportunities for both seasonal and year-round residents.*
11. *Protect and promote agriculture and ag-tourism businesses.*
12. *Promote diversified economic developments that support existing and future businesses that cater to local needs, and that are consistent with community character.*
13. *Provide adequate levels of public services that are responsive to the needs of residents.*
14. *Provide appropriate levels and quality of infrastructure to accommodate existing and future commercial and residential uses consistent with our rural character.*

Recommended Strategies to Implement Goals

While all the strategies listed below are important to our goals, the first five listed are considered priority strategies that should be acted upon as soon as resources for action become available. It may be that other strategies are implemented sooner, because they are more easily acted upon, but focus should be on the first five strategies. Strategies within the two major categories are not listed in any particular prioritized order.

First Priority Strategies

1. Encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings for residential and/or commercial purposes, by permitted or special permitted use, throughout the Town.
2. Establish criteria to facilitate development of elder care facilities providing multiple tiers of service.
3. Update *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations* by modifying cluster subdivision provisions to increase the appeal of optional conservation subdivision and open space provisions by including reasonable set backs for new construction in rural areas.
4. Develop reasonable regulations for short-term residential rentals.
5. Consider tax and other incentives to private landowners who permanently conserve open space and farmlands or who protect scenic views on their properties.

Priority Strategies

6. Consider expansion of Service Trade Establishment definition or create new special permitted use(s) to incorporate low impact use (*i.e.*, storage, light fabrication, *etc.*) for pre-existing residential structures and outbuildings throughout the Town.
7. Expand upon existing development density centers to expand hamlets and business districts using a bull's-eye concept where zoning districts are formed with the densest development in the middle surrounded by areas of progressively less dense development.
8. Consider development of overlay districts for specific feature protections such as lake shore protection areas, aquifers, wetlands, streams, valuable soils, ridgelines, steep slopes, rural residential neighborhoods, agricultural, historic districts, and hamlets.
9. Consider low impact design criteria and engineering to reduce storm water and erosion impacts on slopes greater than 25%.
10. Review existing architectural standards and also consider standards that may be required for development desired by franchises and large-footprint chain stores.
11. Develop plan for potential future infrastructure requirements in the hamlets and

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business districts, with specific review of access to commercial areas, parking, pedestrian walkways, sewers, and water systems.

12. Evaluate conditions and plans for development along all seasonable roads and the projected costs for improvement of these roads.
13. Explore and assess the feasibility and desirability of a bicycle, equestrian and pedestrian trail system.
14. Consider alternative modifications of road specifications for new roads and all road improvements (*i.e.*, Context Sensitive Design).
15. Partner with County Highway and State DOT on highway maintenance issues such as invasive species control, herbicide uses, and deicer use.
16. Evaluate current law and consider new regulations pertaining to wind and other energy projects.
17. Evaluate water sufficiency and develop policies for ensuring water quality and quantity in parts of the Town where water sufficiency has historically posed challenges.
18. Enhance lighting standards to reduce glare and consider its appropriateness.
19. Consider modifying permitted recreational use to expand family oriented business for residents.
20. Promote lakes' recreational uses.
21. Institute a Town-developed Type I list per State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) law.
22. Consider public actions and policies to support affordable housing opportunities.
23. Consider requirements for vegetated stream side buffers to prevent erosion and to protect water quality.
24. Encourage farm stands by *Land Use Law* modification.
25. Consider modifying freestanding sign regulation to permit larger signs for farms identifying the farm and products produced.
26. Adopt a right-to-farm law for the Town.
27. Consider modifying regulations for residential-agricultural districts to permit food processing, composting, agriculture tourism and similar functions for agricultural products principally produced in the local area.

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28. Evaluate lands in the Town of Otsego for possible establishment of a new commercial district
29. Develop agricultural disclosure notices to be placed on new subdivision plats.
30. Institute a policy to prevent use of eminent domain by the Town, County or other governmental agency for the purpose of converting private land for economic purposes.
31. Consider additional permitted uses in the General Business Districts.

History of the Process and Development of the Comprehensive Plan

In 2002, the Town of Otsego began to update its existing Master Plan. That plan, called a “Master Plan” was developed in 1987 and briefly discussed the issues of the Town at that time, including property values, the relationship between the Town and Village of Cooperstown, population density and land use, transportation, environment and public health. A summary of the goals and objectives of that plan are:

1. Protect property values and maintain reasonable tax rates.
2. Protect sensitive areas from random development.
3. Maintain low residential density.
4. Preserve existing patterns of use in hamlets and rural areas.
5. Protect historical and natural character of the Town.
6. Encourage interest in acquisition of public land for recreational and open space use.
7. Maintain the natural environment and minimize visual blight.
8. Ensure water quality in lakes, streams and groundwater.
9. Seek cooperation with other communities.
10. Maintain existing network of roads and minimize hazards and congestion.
11. Commercial, industrial and multi-unit residential development along highways should be restricted to clusters interspersed with low density residential, agricultural and conservation areas.

The 1987 plan, twenty years old in 2007, had not been updated since that time. This update is designed to accomplish the following broad purposes:

1. To evaluate current conditions and to understand issues and trends within the Town of Otsego;
2. To evaluate public sentiment and re-validate or change the 1987 direction with a clearly articulated vision for the future; and
3. To offer more specific strategies, actions, policies, and programs that could be undertaken over the next ten years to implement this new version of the Town of Otsego Comprehensive Plan.

In order to facilitate development of this plan, the Town Board authorized creation of a comprehensive planning committee to oversee development of a draft plan. The following groups were represented on the committee:

- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Planning Board
- Town Board
- Interested Citizens

The Planning Process

The Town of Otsego Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is a result of a multi-year research and planning effort. The Town accomplished the following steps to update the plan:

- February 2002 – Community Survey sent to residents (See Appendix B for results)
- December 2002 – Cooperstown Area Generic Environmental Impact Statement, of which the Town of Otsego was a part, released.
- 2003 - Comprehensive Plan Committee worked with Otsego County Planning Department to develop comprehensive plan.
- December 2003 through March 2004 – Neighborhood Meetings held (See Appendix B)
- Summer 2005 – Town of Otsego received funding to assist in updating plan
- Fall 2005 – Town hired planning consultant to assist in development of plan
- Fall 2005 – Two planning and visioning workshops held for the general public (See Appendix C for results)
- January 2006 – Supplemental survey conducted (See Appendix C for results)
- January through April 2006 – Five focus groups were held to gain public input specific to local government, agriculture, Fly Creek, Pierstown, and businesses (See Appendix C)
- May 2006 – Data analyzed and revised vision statement and goals developed (See Appendix A for full background information and data)
- June 2006 – Build-out conditions analyzed (Appendix C)
- October 2006 – Population Projections completed
- July to August 2006 – Plan recommendations developed.
- July 2007 – Public hearing hosted by the Comprehensive Plan Committee.
- October 4, 2007 – Draft Plan reviewed by Otsego County Planning Board.
- September 12, 2007 – Draft Plan submitted to the Town Board for their review and adoption.

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- December 12, 2007 and February 13, 2008 – Public hearings hosted by the Town Board.
- February 13, 2008 – Comprehensive Plan adopted by the Town Board.

Upon adoption of the Plan by the Town Board, the next step of the planning process involves implementation of the recommended strategies and actions included in the Plan. Generally, implementation will involve:

- Revision of local laws to reflect these goals.
- Implementation of other initiatives to ensure the Plan is met.
- Review of the Plan at least every five years to ensure changes in the Town of Otsego are consistent with the goals stated in the Plan.
- Periodic updates to the Plan to reflect current conditions, needs and desires.

Comprehensive Plan Implications

A comprehensive plan is a document that identifies the goals, objectives, guidelines, policies, and strategies for the growth and development of the community. It is designed to answer three questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?

It is not a law in itself, but State statutes require that all land use laws in a municipality be consistent with a comprehensive plan. The Town is authorized to develop and adopt a comprehensive plan by New York State Town Law Section 272-a. New York State considers adoption of a comprehensive plan a valuable tool to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the Town. A comprehensive plan is the policy foundation upon which communities are built. Once a comprehensive plan is adopted, there are several implications:

- All government agencies involved in planning any capital projects within the Town of Otsego must consider this Plan before they start the project. That means the Town has a much larger stake in what other governmental agencies want to do when they propose a project in Town.
- Community consensus and support can be built on the shared vision, goals, and strategies presented in the Plan.
- Programs and regulations may be adopted to implement the Plan to protect the Town's resources and encourage appropriate development and growth.
- The Comprehensive Plan aids the Town in applying for grant monies to implement the Plan.

Town Input and Data Collection

The issues, goals and recommended strategies detailed in this Comprehensive Plan are based on information and data gathered about the Town of Otsego and from the input of Town residents. These studies and analyses include:

- Background studies of land use, including a build-out analysis
- Population profiles and projections
- Existing housing conditions, affordability, and availability
- Community facilities
- Transportation resources
- Recreation and educational resources
- Public safety programs
- Environmental conditions
- Regional patterns and trends that affect growth.

Current Conditions and Issues as of Census 2000

Public Input

The public was offered a variety of opportunities to participate in the planning process from 2003 through 2007. These included neighborhood meetings, a land owner survey in 2004, a supplemental survey in 2006, a series of visioning workshops, five focus group meetings, comprehensive plan committee meetings, and other public meetings. A full reporting of the input received from these efforts can be found in Appendix B. The results from public input throughout the five year planning process have been consistent.

This information was organized into categories of community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and this allowed the issues and direction of this Plan to be defined. From this input, a vision and set of goals were developed followed by a series of recommended strategies designed to help the Town of Otsego address those issues and public needs. Appendix E details the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis.

Highlights of public input includes:

Overall, Town of Otsego residents seem satisfied with Town services, although many people had no opinion on them. Approximately 20% of participants expressed some dissatisfaction with the Planning Board, Code Enforcement, and overall communication with residents.

There was little desire to have big box stores, commercial junkyards, convenience stores, department stores, dry cleaners, funeral homes, health spas, liquor stores, motel/hotels, adult entertainment, drive through restaurants, or truck terminals in the Town of Otsego. Businesses that were desired included: agriculturally related businesses; animal hospitals; appliance stores; auto repair shops; bakeries; domestic lawn and garden services; farmers' markets; farming; gas stations; home-based businesses; restaurants with no drive-through; and multiple tiers of service elder care facilities. Responses were split regarding more tourism uses and some felt that these uses should be directed towards the Village of Cooperstown or hamlet areas in the Town of Otsego.

There is a strong desire to protect agricultural lands. About one-third of survey participants indicated they were supportive of residential development on other non-agricultural space lands. When asked where development should occur, in or near the hamlets of Fly Creek, Oaksville, Index, and Toddsville was the most frequent answer. About 23% were not in favor of any new residential development.

Support was given toward reasonable design guidelines to improve the appearance of new commercial development. The support for weekly rentals was split. When asked to evaluate the level of need for various types of residential development, people indicated a need for senior housing/assisted living, condominiums, hamlet-style neighborhoods, and subdivisions designed to protect open space. Group homes, mobile home parks, and mobile homes on individual lots were felt to be "ok as is." Opinions were split as to the

use of duplex residences and subsidized housing. Residents expressed some concerns related to water quality.

Public input also helped define rural character in the Town of Otsego. The most common definitions included terms such as:

agricultural	historic	beautiful	open spaces	bucolic	peaceful
charming	quaint	clean	quiet	clean air	scenic
farm	farmland	friendly	green space		

Although most recreational opportunities were considered adequate, a need for teen activities and outdoor activities such as biking and walking/running were identified.

In venues of public input, there was overwhelming support for endorsing town-sponsored preservation techniques that would lead to the protection of open spaces, working farms, small farms, historic buildings and sites, scenic landscapes, and critical environmental sites.

Historic buildings and sites received the highest level of support with 87% of survey participants indicating that they would endorse protection activities. There was also support for additional Town spending to protect open spaces, historic resources and farms: From 42% to 50% of survey participants supported using a mix of public tax dollars and private funds to protect those resources. Support was slightly less for these activities using only private money or grant funding. Participants were less supportive of using taxpayer money to support small and recreational farms, however, 19% of survey participants said they would be in favor of using public funds for protection critical environmental sites. Overall, there was support for using Town funding and the participants favored use of a mix of tax and private funding to accomplish that.

Profile and Inventory of Resources

While public input established the vision, goals, and overall direction for this Plan, a comprehensive planning database was developed to profile and inventory the resources, services, and characteristics of the Town of Otsego (See Appendix C). Resources included in this profile and inventory are:

- History and Historical Resources and Sites
- Physical and Environmental Features
 - Topography and Slope
 - Surficial Geology
 - Bedrock Geology
 - Soils
 - Surface Water, Wetlands, Floodzones, Watersheds, and Aquifers
 - Viewsheds
 - Ecological Data
- Land Uses
- Cultural, Social, and Economic Resources
 - Scenic Areas and Byways

- Trails
- Educational Resources
- Municipal, Community Facilities and Infrastructure
- Emergency Services
- Local Government Services
- *Land Use Law*
- Demographics and Population Projections
- Housing Affordability and Trends
- Employment and Business Characteristics

The information above contributes to the understanding of current conditions and of issues needing to be addressed.

Highlights of Population, Housing, and Land Use Trends

The predominant land use in the Town of Otsego is residential with 1,112 parcels covering over 12,000 acres of land (37%). Although there are relatively few farmed parcels (105), these uses cover almost 25% of the land in the Town. Agricultural activities are not diverse. Livestock operations dominate agricultural activities. Single family houses for all economic levels dominate residential land uses. Vacant land covers about 28% of the Town. A very small percentage of the Town of Otsego's land base is used for commercial or industrial purposes. All other uses account for about 10% of the remaining land base.

Demographic trends between 1990 and 2000 include:

- Young adults (18-24 years old) left the Village of Cooperstown and the Town at a high rate.
- Outside the Village, the Town gained new families with children, substantially offsetting the loss of young adults.
- The Town outside the Village gained some 'active adults' (50-64 years).
- The number of housing units and households outside the Village increased at high rates while the population grew significantly, but at a lower rate, indicative of a 'sprawl' growth trend.
- If both population trends and construction of new units continue at current rates, the future Town population is likely to remain constant or rise, though it will be more dispersed as all new growth is expected in the Town outside the Village. Further, housing starts will out-pace population growth.
- If the construction rate of new units declines, the future Town population would decline somewhat as well unless the large outward migration of young adults slows.
- There are more people moving in from other places in Otsego County than from other counties, regions, or states.
- There was a decrease in the number of vacant housing units while the number of seasonal or occasional use housing units increased.
- The median value of owner-occupied housing has increased and the housing analysis indicates that housing affordability is an issue for many people.

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- The Town of Otsego has a higher percentage of vacant housing, a much higher percentage of its housing stock as single family homes compared to other near-by towns (lower number of multi-unit dwellings), and a higher median value of homes compared to other towns.
- The Town of Otsego has fewer people below the poverty line compared to other near-by local towns.
- There are an increasing number of people not in the labor force, probably due to the increasing retired population.

A build-out analysis was also conducted to estimate the amount of development that can occur if all developable land in the Town of Otsego is built according to the Town's current *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations*. This build-out analysis applied the existing Town of Otsego *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations* and calculated the total residential density allowed at full build-out of the Town. It did not predict when this would occur, at what rate it would occur, or where it would occur first. It only predicts the end result. A build-out analysis is useful to judge whether or not the existing *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations* are likely to result in a development pattern that is consistent with the vision and goals of the community. Appendix D details this analysis.

Our analyses provide valuable clues about where the Town of Otsego is heading and where the current population would like it to go. The data were analyzed and synthesized by the Comprehensive Plan Committee and community and the vision, goals, and recommended strategies and actions were designed to address significant issues facing the Town.

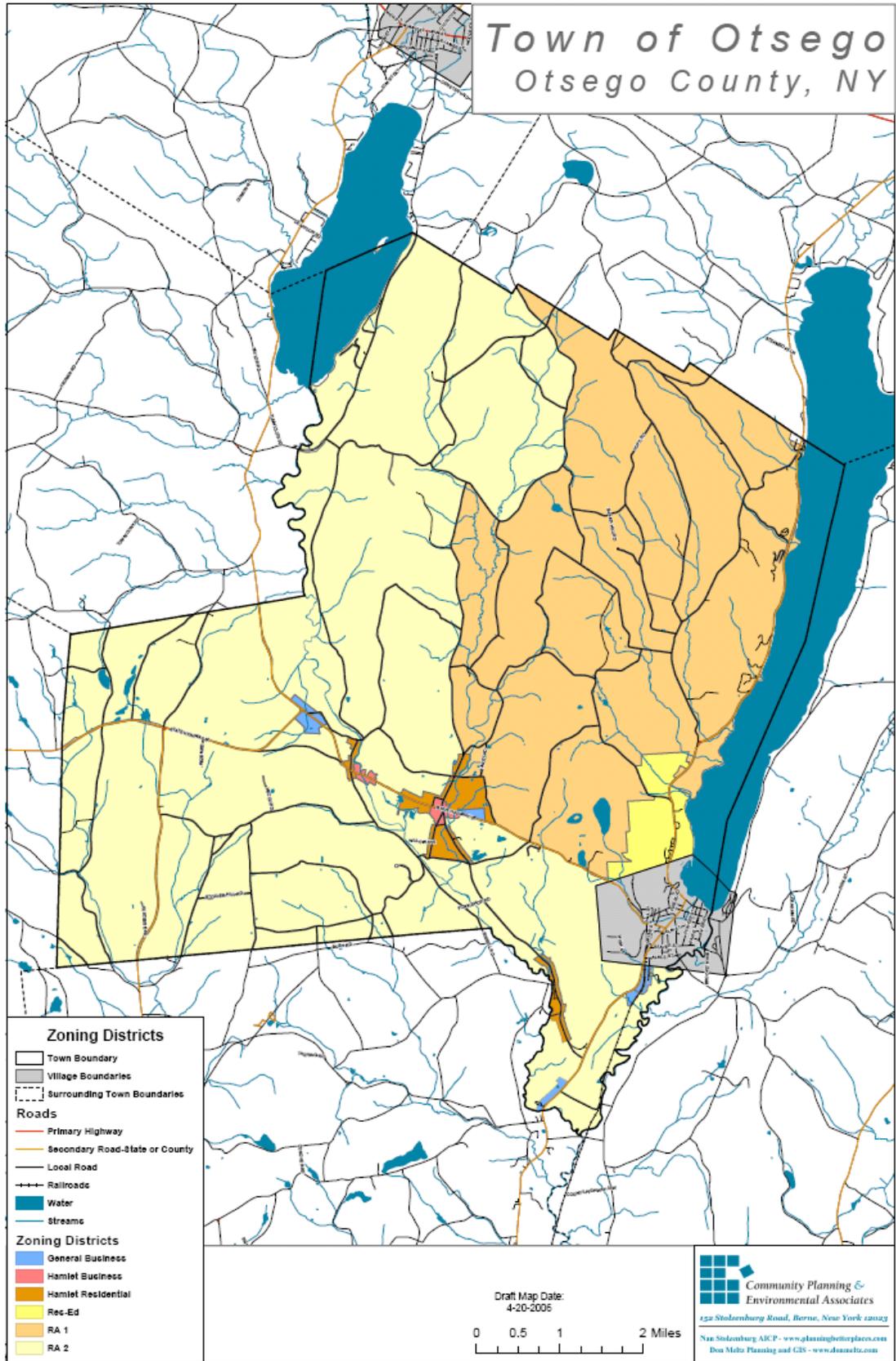
The results of the build-out analysis show that the current *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations* would allow 7,374 new homes to be built in the Town of Otsego. This would mean an additional 16,960 people, of which 3,731 would be school-aged (based on year 2000 population data). If however, major environmental constraints (wetlands, steep slopes over 20%, and streams with buffer areas) are taken into consideration then the development potential in addition to the existing *Land Use Law* and *Subdivision Regulations*, then the development potential would add 5,231 new houses with 12,031 residents.

Mapped Resources

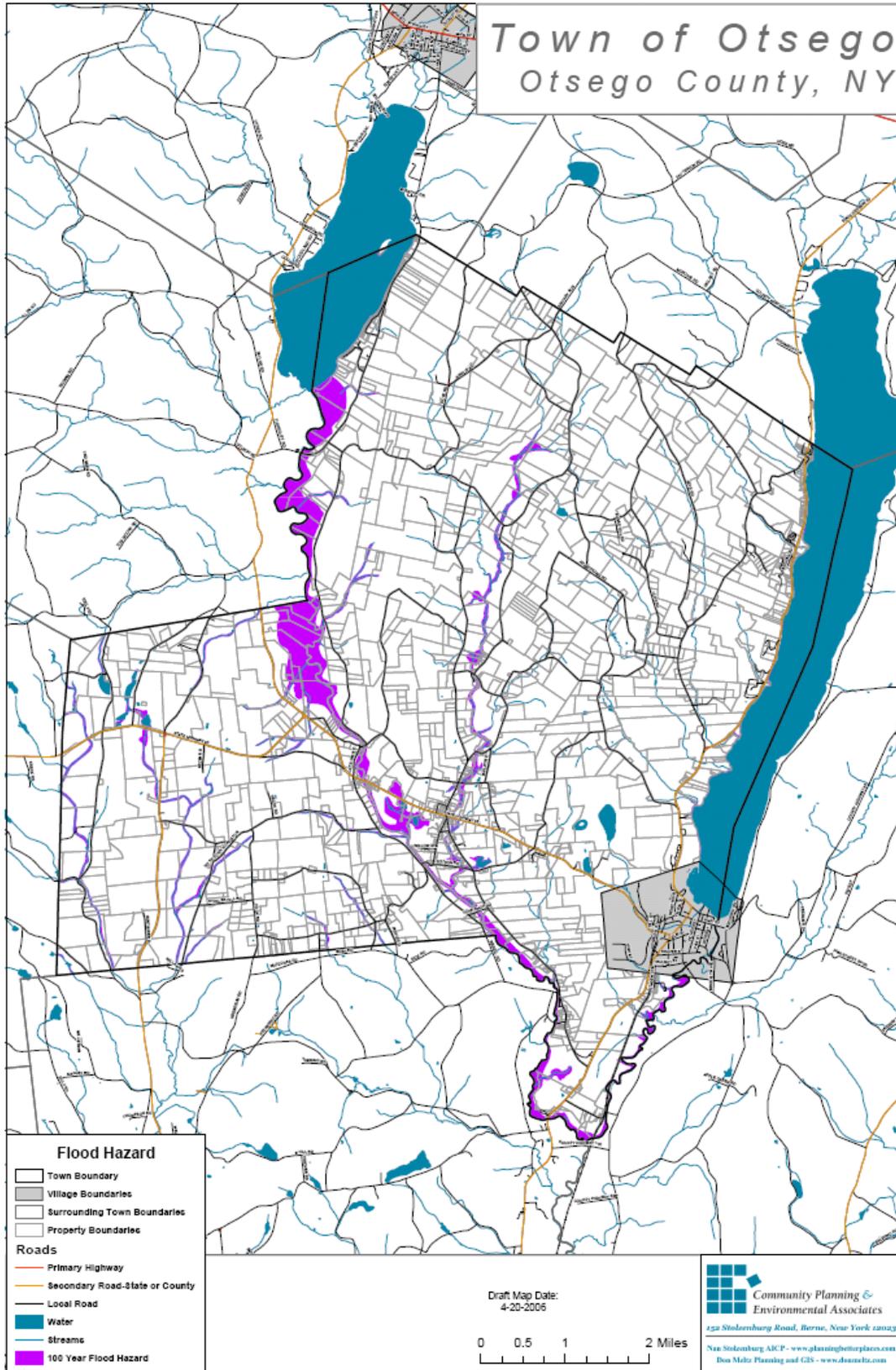
Mapped resources produced for this Plan include the following:

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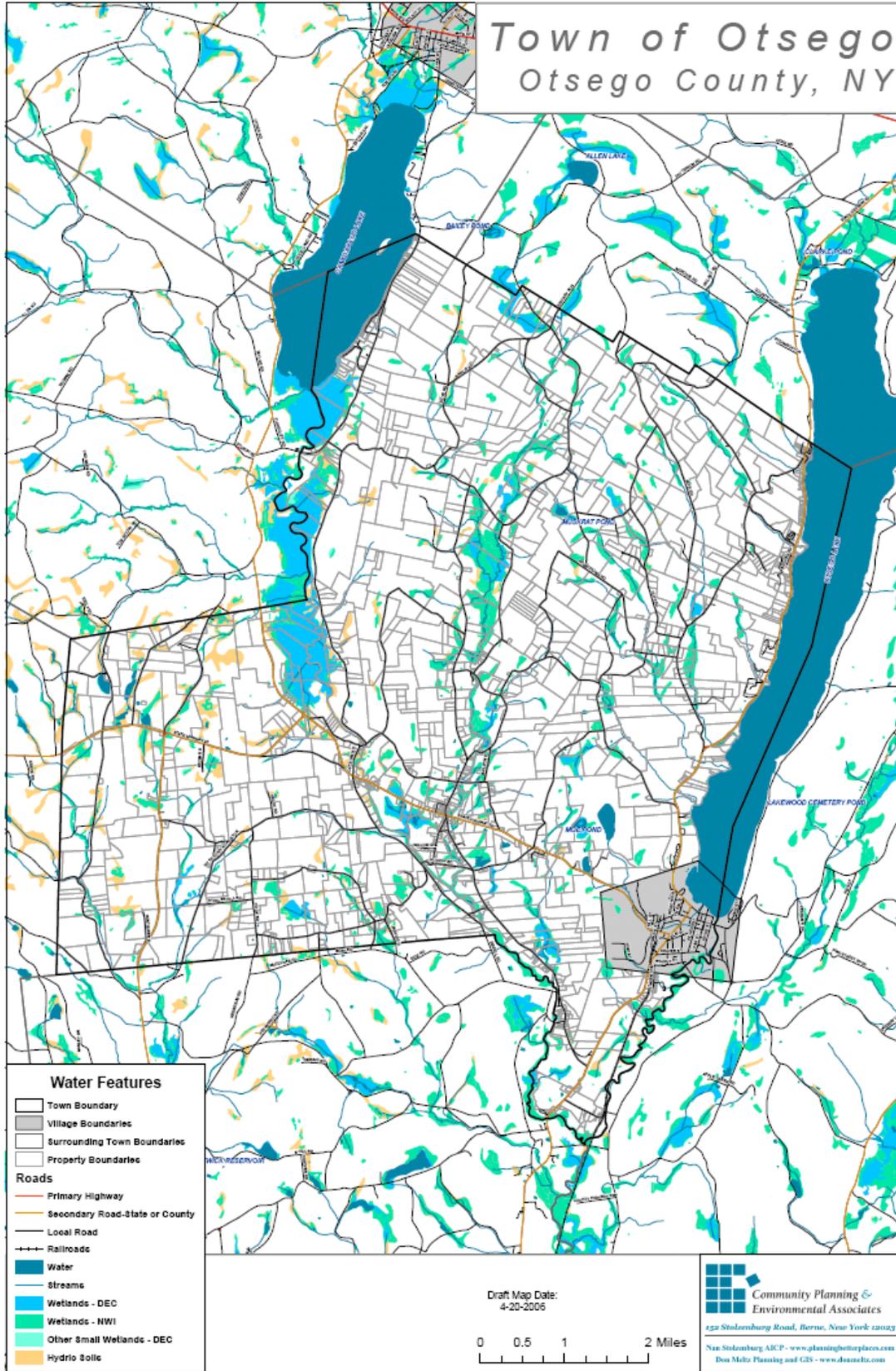
Additional maps are found in Appendix G (Ancillary Maps).



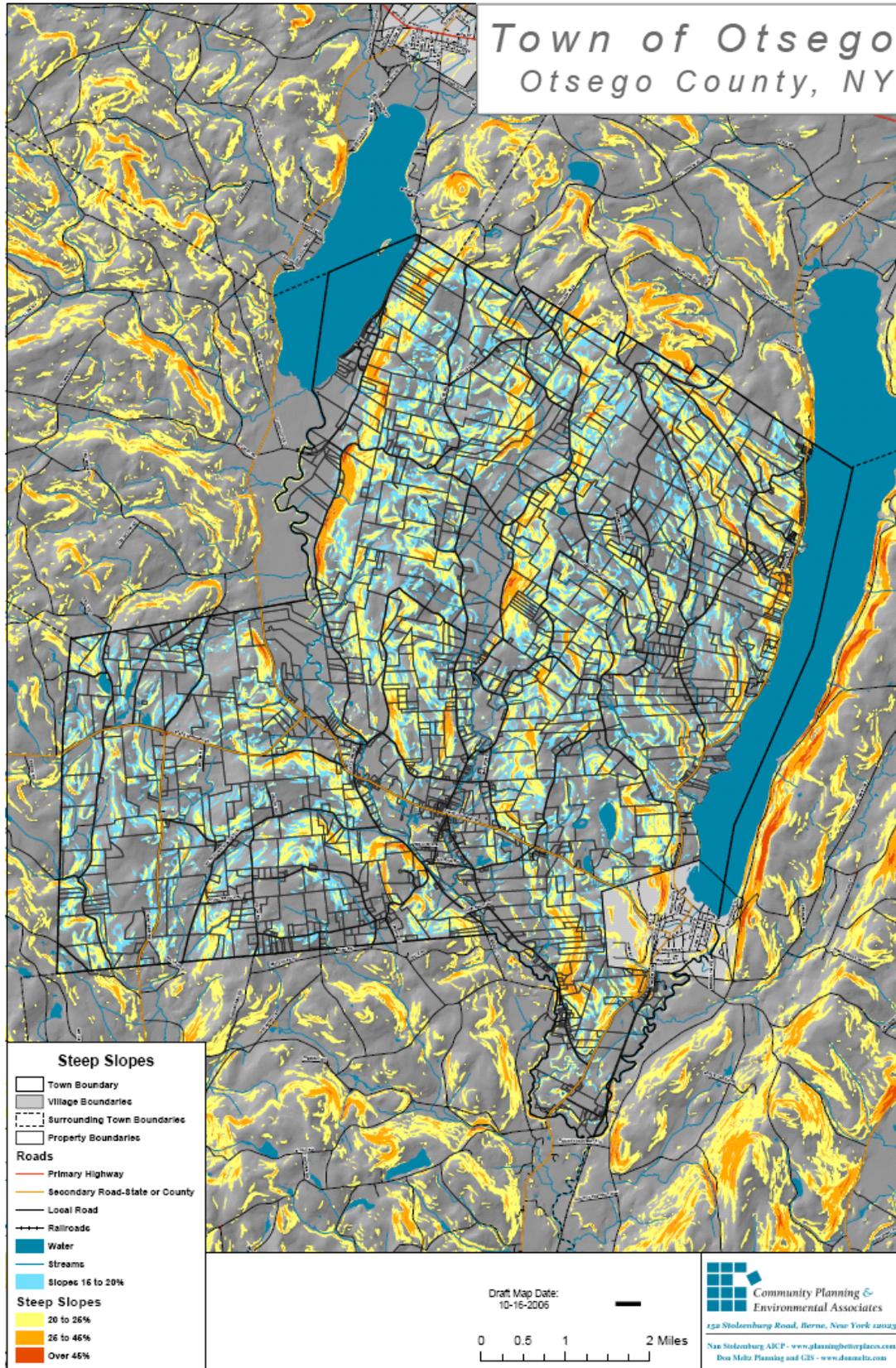
Map 1. Current Land Use Districts. Delineates existing Town districts.



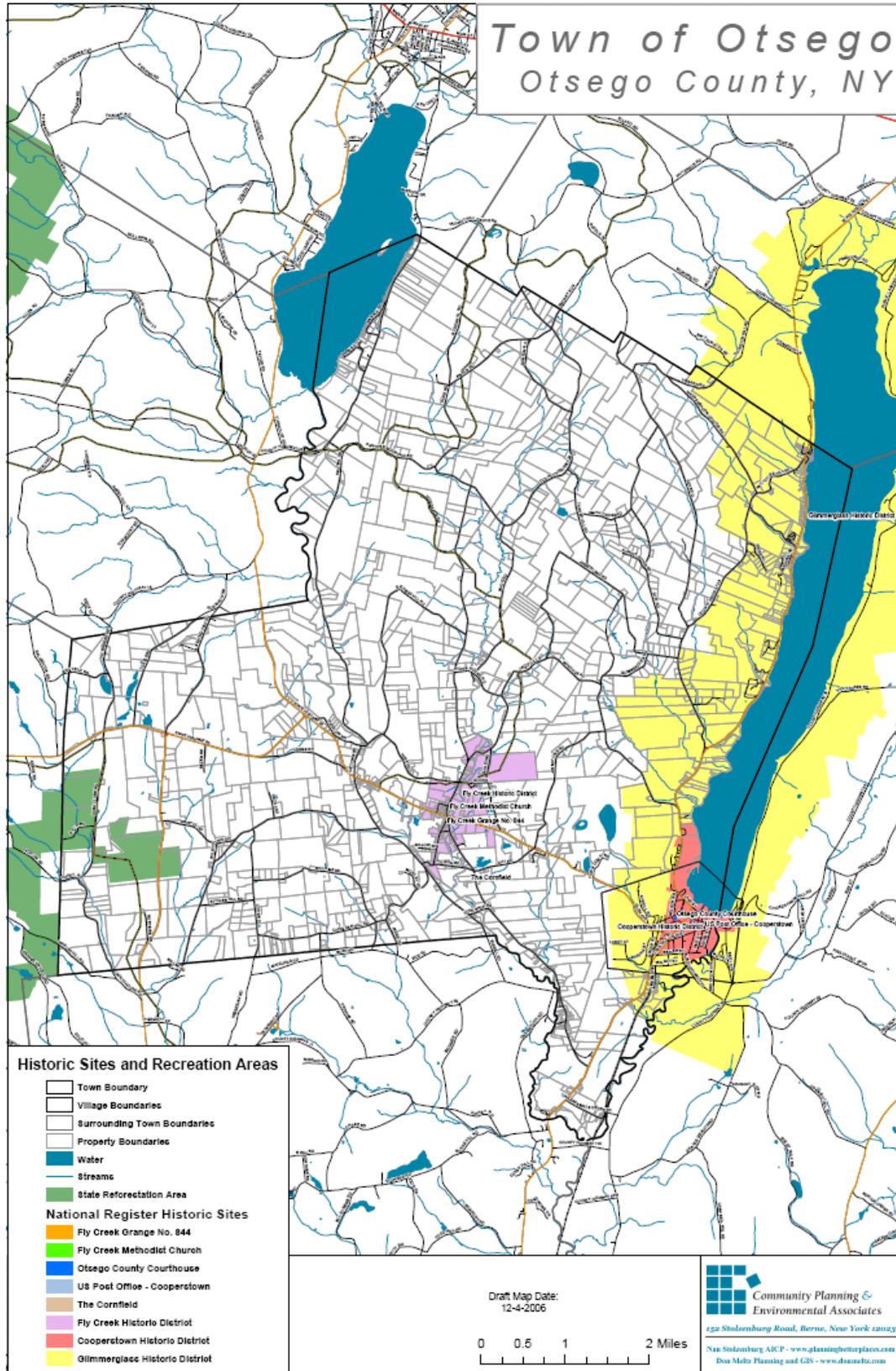
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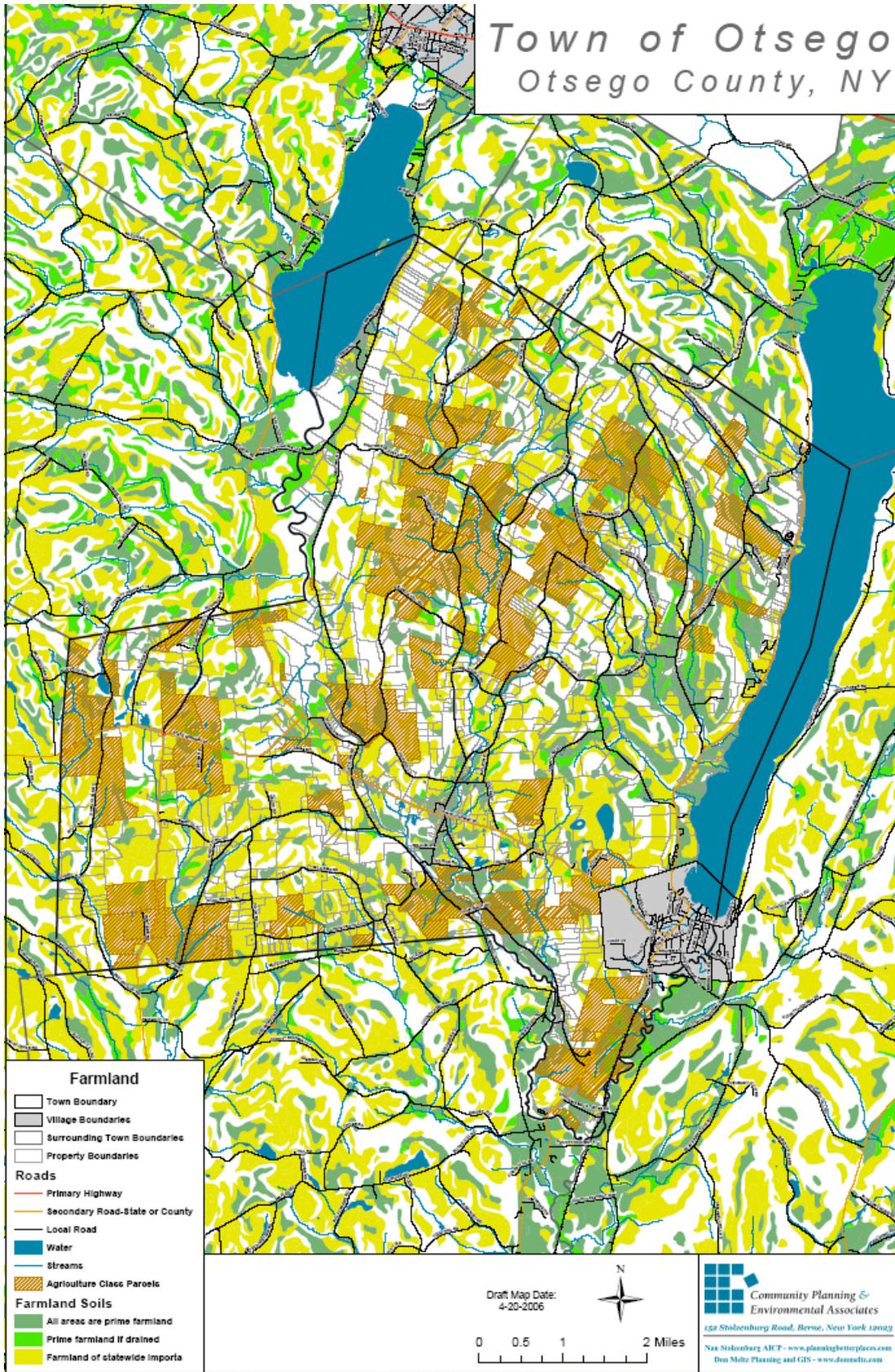
Map 3. Wetlands. Delineates the location and type of Town surficial water features and hydric soils.



Map 4. Steep Slopes. Delineates steep slope areas of Town at intervals of 15-25%, 25-45% and areas with slopes over 45%.



Map 5. Historic Sites and Recreation Areas. Delineates the location of Town significant historical and recreational sites.



Map 6. Agricultural Lands. Delineates the location of Town agricultural classed parcels of land as well as the location of all current the Otsego County Agricultural Districts.