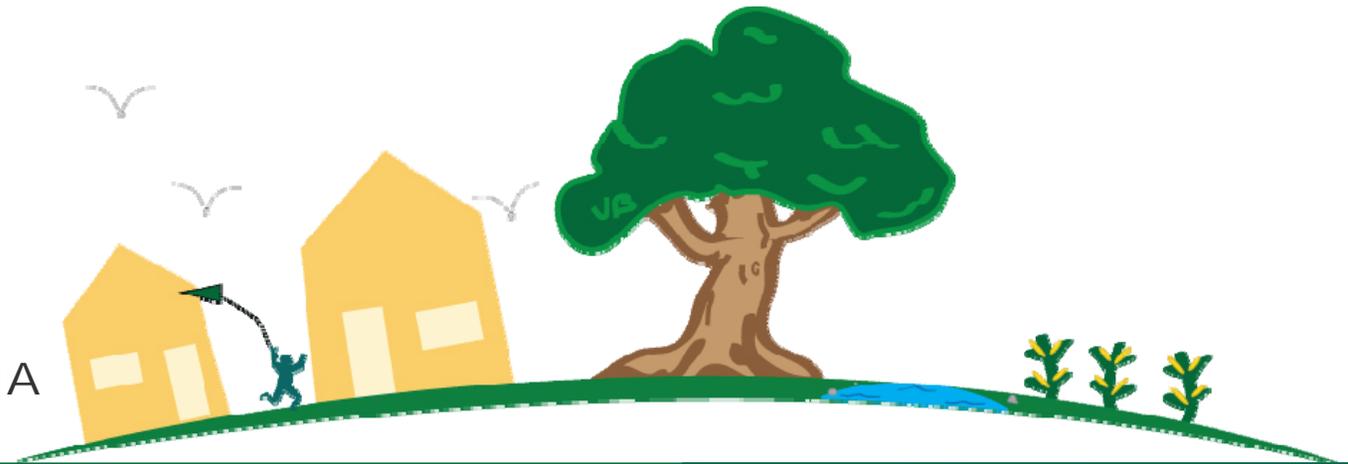


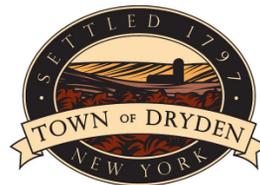
HAMLET OF VARNA



# Community Development Plan

Town of Dryden, New York

An amendment to the Town of Dryden Comprehensive Plan (2005)



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# Part 1

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The Hamlet of Vama Community Development Plan



# INTRODUCTION



## **What is a hamlet?**

*Hamlets are small. The word hamlet is French in derivation, and 'ham' is a village, and 'let' is small. So, by definition of the word, a hamlet is a small village, but not a village proper in most respects.*

*This essentially means that it doesn't have a street network, it does have a defined edge with open space on the other side of the edge, and you can see the edge and the open space from practically any location in the hamlet.*

*It also assumes that it either has some economic base, or that it doesn't at all and is dependent upon some other economy. In other words, it might be the economic center of an agricultural economic base locally, or it may be completely dependent on economies centered on a different location.*

## HISTORY OF THE HAMLET

Varna was established in 1859 when farmers purchased properties to the east of Game Farm Road, built houses and settled together to form the community. Until the 1950's, Varna had all the components of a traditional village community: two churches, a post office, school, tavern, hotel, dance hall, grocery store and a carriage shop which was later converted to a garage and gas station.

In its early years, Varna consisted mostly of farm families and children. The first school was located on the corner of present-day Freese Road and Route 366, and was later moved across the street and operated as a "one-room school". In the late 1940s, the Varna school consolidated with the Ithaca City School District. The "tavern property" was located in the center of the hamlet at 922 Dryden Road. Drovers from the surrounding areas frequented the tavern, bringing their livestock to Varna and staying overnight before continuing over the Catskill Turnpike to Owego. Here, the animals were loaded onto rail cars bound for New York City.

Varna's industry consisted of two mills located along Fall Creek. The first was a sawmill located adjacent to where the hexagonal red barn is currently located. The other was a grist mill located down the road from the saw mill.

Around the 1950s, the hamlet experienced several changes. When the railroad that was used to connect the hamlet to larger communities and markets suspended service, the rail depot was privately purchased and converted into a small house. Other changes included the conversion of the hotel into apartments where it is currently located (Mt. Pleasant Road/ Route 366 intersection). The former post office was located across the street from the current Methodist Church. In the 1960s sewer and water were made available which enhanced the quality of life for residents of the community.

## PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

**The purpose of the Varna Community Development Plan is to serve as a guide for future development, provide opportunity for new uses, and improve the overall quality of life while protecting the character of the hamlet.**

The hamlet of Varna has experienced little growth and development since the 1950s, allowing it to retain its quiet, rural-village character. Located between the City of Ithaca and the Village of Dryden, Varna is a community that residents have come to describe as “rural”, “bucolic”, and “a family hamlet”. With a variety of modest homes, accessibility to nature, and caring residents, Varna is unique in that it provides the comfort of a small-town village with immediate access to the conveniences of a city. Its proximity to neighboring Cornell and Ithaca makes Varna a desirable community for students, professors and young professionals.

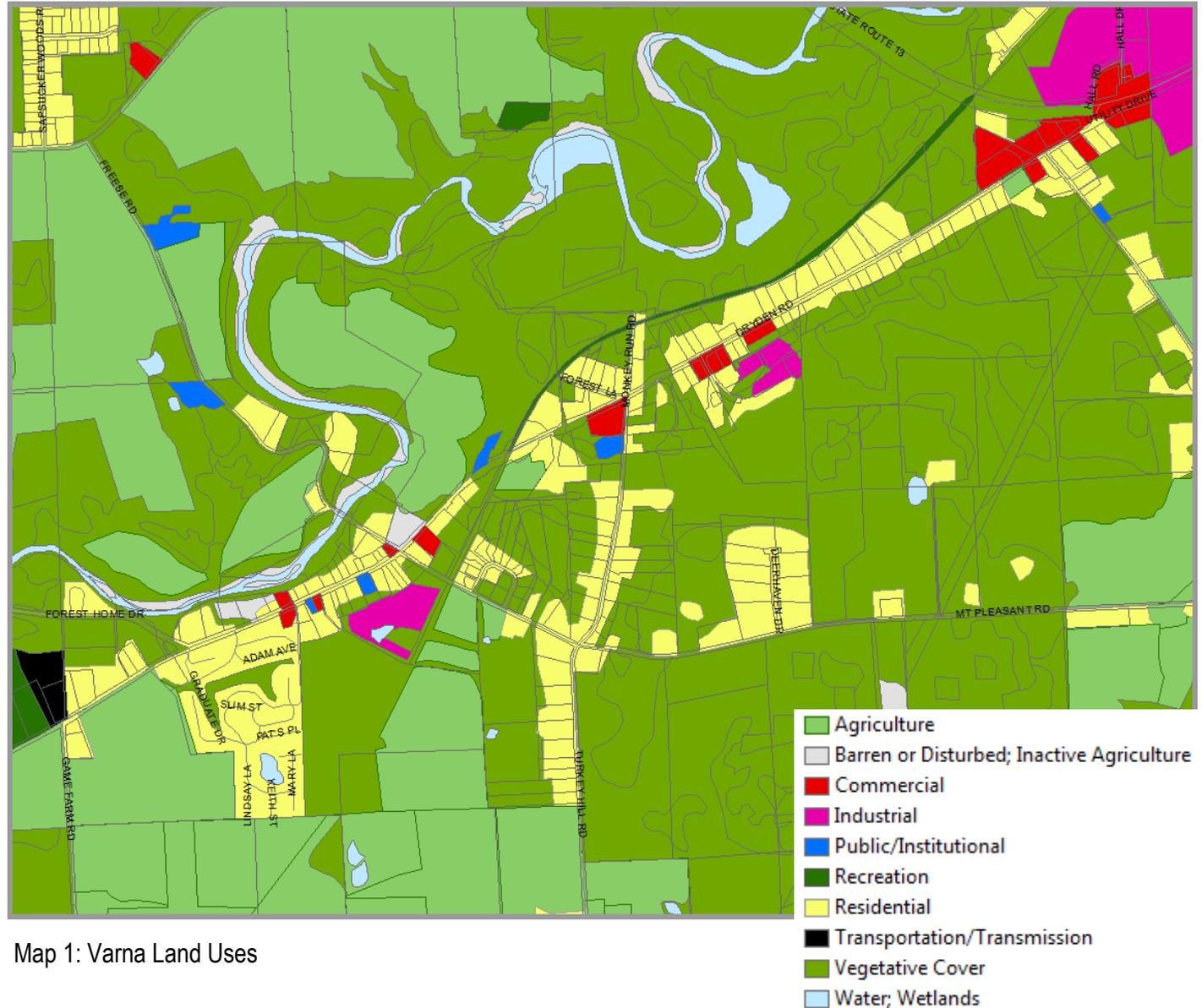
With increasing development pressure in the surrounding communities, it was recognized by the larger Dryden community that in order to maintain character, enhance the quality of life and encourage economic development in Varna, a plan was needed that would serve as an amendment to the 2005 Town of Dryden Comprehensive Plan along with appropriate changes to the town’s zoning law. The plan would provide residents, business owners, and developers with a more detailed vision for the future of the community, and provide for a more informed consideration of future development proposals.



Varna is a community that residents have come to describe as “rural”, “bucolic”, and “a family hamlet”.

## LAND USE

Varna contains nine land classifications as indicated on the Tompkins County Land Use Map. These classifications include agriculture, barren/disturbed land, commercial, industrial, institutional, recreation, residential, vegetative cover, and water/wetlands. While there is a range of land uses, the primary land use in Varna are residential in the core (along Route 366) and vegetative cover (surrounding Route 366).



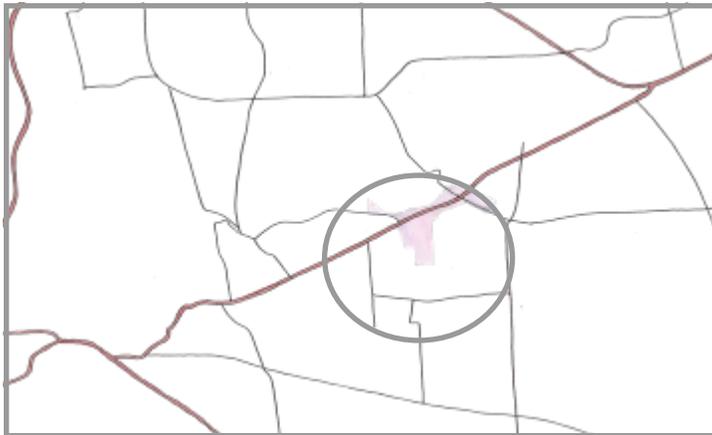
## REGIONAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The City of Ithaca developed as a hub for trade, commercial and enterprising purposes in the late 18th century. Based at the head of Cayuga Lake, Ithaca was the ideal place for early businesses and manufacturers to settle. The natural landscaped provided easy access to the Atlantic, the Mississippi, and Baltimore through its various lakes and streams. By 1810, Ithaca was a thriving village that consisted of a hotel, school house, tanners, blacksmiths, lawyers, and doctors. By the late 1860s, Cornell University, a land-grant college, was established as part of Ezra Cornell’s endowment and the State of New York’s Morrill Land Grant of 1862. One of the primary goals of establishing the institution was to promote agriculture and the mechanic arts. The proceeds of the land grant purchased by the State of New York was transferred to Cornell University, which resulted in thousands of acres for the school.



Map 2:  
Regional  
Settlement  
Patterns

Cornell University continued to acquire lands throughout the region and state for research in the agricultural, natural sciences, and forestry fields. One such area was Cornell Plantations, botanical gardens and plantation acres, which was developed beginning in the mid-19th century. The greater Plantations area today consists of over 40 different nature preserves and more than 4,300 acres.



Map 3: Varna  
Road Network

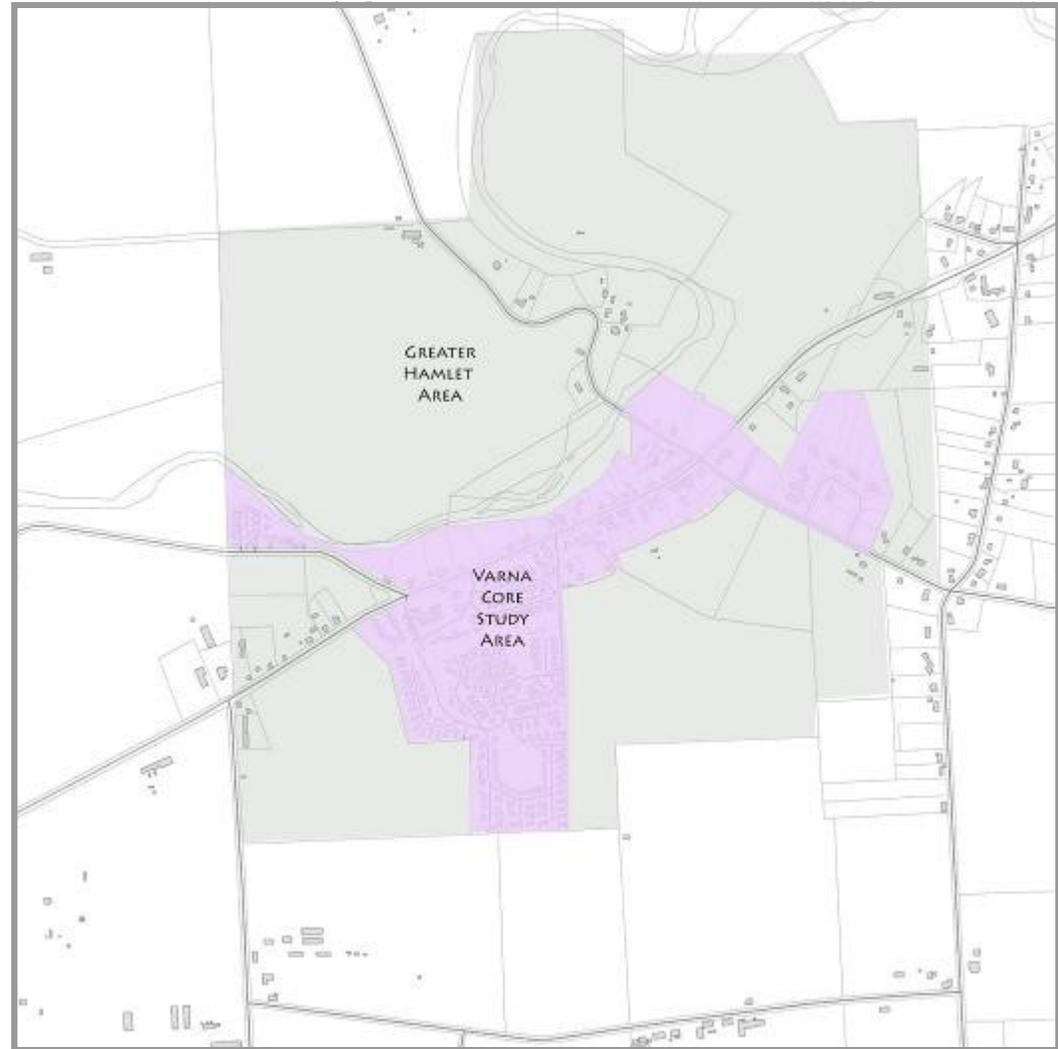
The establishment of these areas heavily influenced where growth and development would occur. With Monkey Run Preserve, one of Cornell’s natural areas, to the north and Cornell research lands to the south, development continued to occur along a linear path east. This path is now a major thoroughfare, State Route 366 (left).

Varna’s unique location, surrounded by natural and agricultural areas, leaves Varna “landlocked”; there is little room for new, sprawl development.

## HAMLET STUDY AREA

The greater Varna hamlet area includes a total of 562 acres. This area ranges from clusters of commercial uses to single-family residences, natural areas and agricultural fields. The map right shows the boundaries of the greater Varna area which follow from Game Farm Road to the southwest, ¼ mile past the single-lane railroad bridge to the north, Turkey Hill Road to the southeast, and ¼ mile past the railroad bridge along Route 366 to the northeast to the State DOT signage designating the hamlet area.

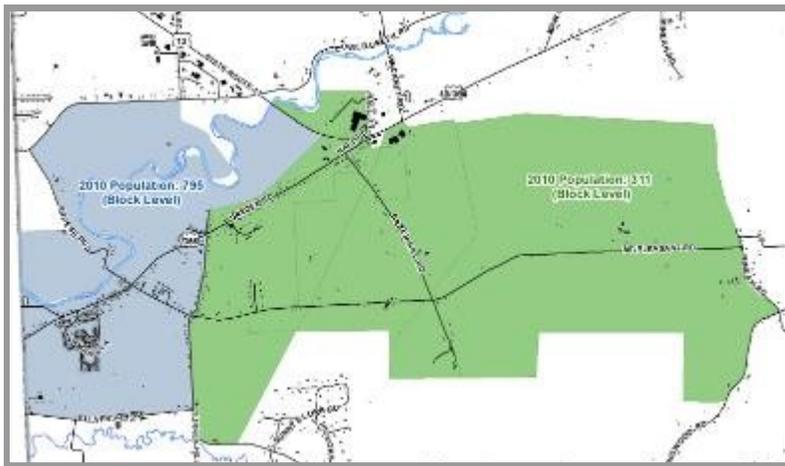
The core study area was established upon completion of an existing conditions analysis and a Character Area Assessment. The core study area is the area of Varna where development is concentrated as indicated in the regional analysis (Map 4) and building pattern map as part of the existing conditions analysis (Map 6).



Map 4: Hamlet Study Area

## POPULATION

According to the 2010 Census, the population of the study area is 795 (collected at the Census block level). An additional area to the east that extends to Pleasant Hollow Road and remote from the core of Varna has a population of 311. The housing stock in Varna is comprised of single-family, condominium, apartment and manufactured housing units. While there is a mix of housing types, single-family units are the primary type of residence. Currently there are 290 single-family units in the study area followed by 258 manufactured housing units, 118 apartments, and 16 duplexes (located in Observatory Circle).



Map 5: Population in and around Varna

## HOUSING & BUILDING FORM

As indicated in Map 6, the hamlet has an irregular building pattern. Adjacent to the study area, buildings are of similar size, form and irregularly positioned on lot—a common characteristic of hamlets.

At this scale, however, it is observed that the houses in the study area (purple) are closer together with minimal separation between them. As you move away from the study area, there is more of a gap in the fabric, suggesting that the hamlet takes on a “village-like” characteristic of buildings close together fronting a yard or other public space. This is characteristic of the historic hamlet pattern that pre-dates the modern housing movement (as visually identified in Observatory Circle).



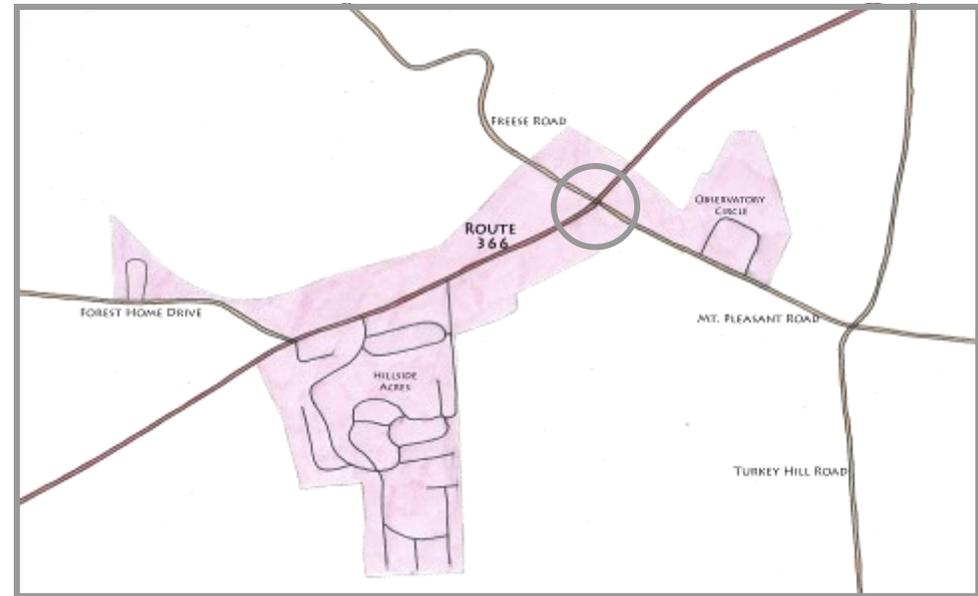
Map 6: Building Patterns

## NETWORK

Route 366 is the central spine of Varna, serving as the only northeast/southwest connection that runs through the hamlet. The Freese Road/Mt. Pleasant Road intersection further serves as a connector to the surrounding area. There are minimal side roads and streets in and around the study area, as the majority of housing and development is located along Route 366. There is opportunity for a new network of small-scale residential streets, pedestrian pathways, and bike paths that can be connected to adjacent development.

## EXISTING TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

Capacity analysis was conducted at the Route 366 intersection with Mt. Pleasant & Freese Roads. The results indicate that the intersection operates at a Level of Service (LOS) “A” (free flow of traffic) on the Route 366 approaches to the intersection during both peak hours. The Mt. Pleasant approach operates at LOS “F” (congestion) and “D” (steady traffic at high density) during the AM and PM peak hours respectively while the Freese Road approach operates at LOS “C” (steady but limited) and “D” (steady traffic at high density) during the AM and PM peak hours respectively. While some minor growth in traffic volumes is anticipated on all approaches to the intersection, no improvements (e.g. traffic signal, lane widening) are warranted from a capacity standpoint.



Map 7: Varna Road Network



The intersection of Freese Road/Mt. Pleasant Road and Route 366.

## EXISTING TRAFFIC VOLUME

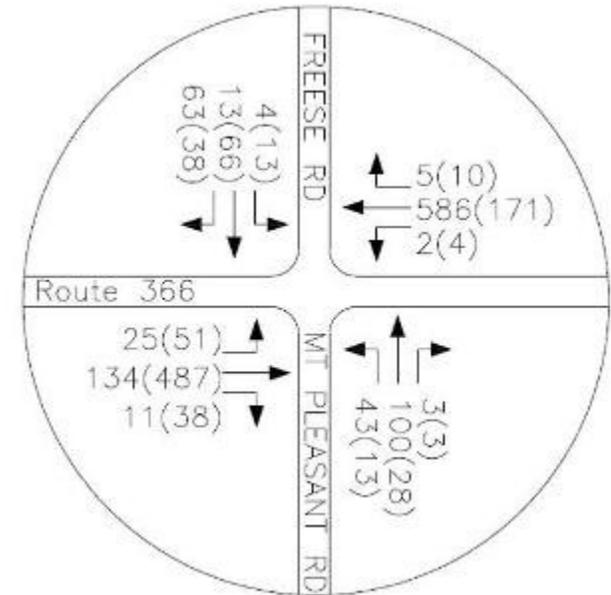
Vehicular turning movement counts were performed to establish baseline traffic conditions on Route 366 at the intersection with Mt. Pleasant and Freese Roads. Counts were completed at the intersection on Thursday, April 28, 2011 between the hours of 7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM. The peak hour turning movement counts are illustrated in the figure right.

In addition to turning movement counts, average daily traffic volume data and speed data were also obtained along Route 366 within the Hamlet of Varna. The figure right shows the results of the speed study and the average daily traffic along the corridor. The speed limit varies throughout the corridor from 40 mph to the west of Varna, 30 mph within Varna, to 45 mph east of Varna. The results of the speed study indicate that speeds approaching the Hamlet from the west are approximately 40 mph, approaching from the east are approximately 45 mph, and within the Hamlet where the speed limit is 30 mph the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile travel speed is 38-39 mph in each direction.

## ACCIDENT ANALYSIS

Accident summaries of the most recent three years of data (December 2007 through December 2010) were provided to the consultant by the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles. Only reportable accidents, that is, those in which either injury or damage of at least \$1,000 occurred, were included in the review.

A total of 34 accidents occurred throughout the study area over the three-year review period. Fifteen (15) of the 34 accidents occurred at the Mt. Pleasant/Freese Road intersection. Six of the fifteen accidents were right angle collisions. This may be due to excessive speed of vehicles on Route 366 as they enter or exit the Hamlet and/or sight distance issues for vehicles exiting Freese Road.



Turning movement counts were conducted to determine baseline traffic conditions.

## COMMUNITY AMENITIES

While there is limited service amenities (retail, restaurant, convenience, office, etc.), a small commercial node is located near the intersection of Mt. Pleasant Road and Route 366, and sparsely located east and west along Route 366. Such businesses include:

- Restaurants (Antlers);
- Auto Repair (Bell's Auto Care and Varna Auto);
- Professional Offices (Strebel Financial Management);
- Hotels (Embassy Inn); and
- Service Amenities (Savage Creek Hair Salon and Prolawn landscaping)

There are several retail businesses two miles east of the hamlet including Treeforms, The Orchid Place, AAA, and the Plantations Restaurant. East Hill Plaza, a suburban shopping center located two miles west of the hamlet, offers convenience services such as a grocery store, café, laundry facilities, and pharmacy.

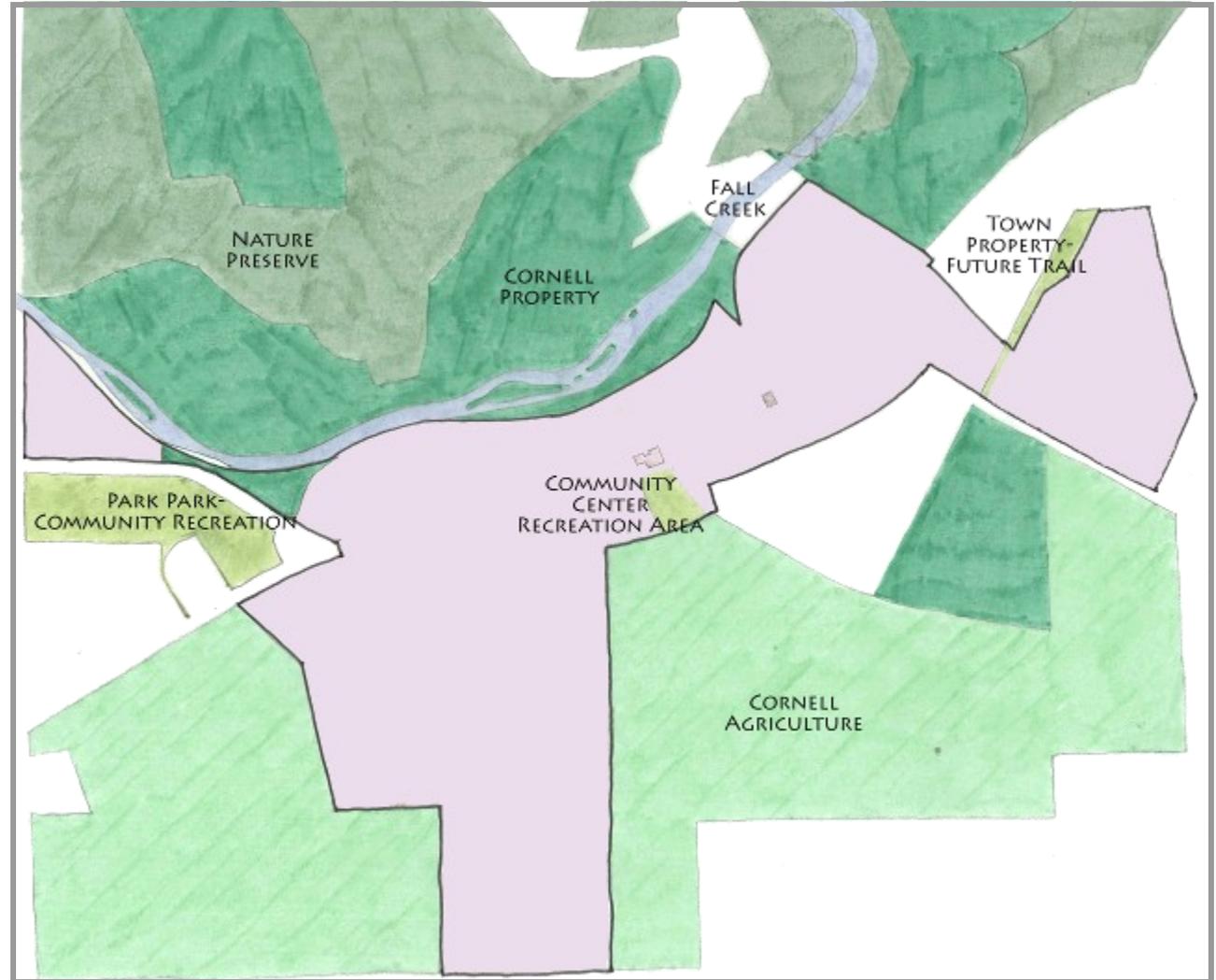
Varna retains several community resources including the Varna Community Center (established in 1949) and the Varna Fire Company (established circa 1950) which provide public safety, community organizing, recreation opportunities, and public meeting space. The Community Center was developed around a need for a space that could accommodate a range of activities. Scout troops were organized along with 4H, Home Bureau, a summer playschool, and a senior citizens group. Several of these activities continue today and others, such as the youth programs, are being reintroduced by the Varna Community Association (VCA) which runs and maintains the Center. During the recent past, the VCA has raised funds to renovate the building, build a community playground and a trail linking the Center to the Hillside Acres Trailer Park.



The Varna Community Center provides an important space for community functions and events.

## NATURAL AREAS & OPEN SPACE

The hamlet is surrounded by open space which provides for outdoor recreation as well as conservation areas. Park Park, the only public park, is located at the corner of Route 366 and Forest Home Drive and consists of small hiking trails. An undeveloped, proposed multi-use trail runs along the old railroad right-of-way. This future trail will connect Varna to a larger trail system in Ithaca and Dryden and provide an off road alternative for commuting to Cornell University. Cornell University also maintains undeveloped forested areas and experimental fields all around the hamlet. Cornell Plantations including the Fall Creek Natural Area is next to the study area.



Map 8: Natural Areas and Open Space surrounding Varna

## CHARACTER AREAS

Character areas are specific geographic regions within the study area that have unique or special characteristics, that have the potential to evolve and that require special attention due to unique development issues. Findings from the assessment resulted in ten character areas which helped establish the basis for the general hamlet plan. (see Map 9)

### CHARACTER AREAS:

- Agriculture
- Conventional
- Development Opportunities
- Natural Areas
- Parks and Trails
- Residential Redevelopment Area
- Traditional
- Gateways
- Primary Gateway Routes
- Secondary Gateway Routes
- Primary Rural Scenic Corridor
- Secondary Rural Scenic Corridor



Map 9: Varna Character Areas

# CHARACTER AREA DESCRIPTIONS

## **GATEWAYS**

Gateways, or entrance corridors, are points along the roadway at which motorists and pedestrians gain a sense of arrival into the Hamlet. These impressions are often characterized by a change in landscape, the built environment, or by signs or unique structures. There are four gateways that help define the boundary of Varna: (1) Railroad Bridge- Route 366; (2) Change in Development- Route 366; (3) Bridge on Freese Road; (4) Railroad tracks on Mt. Pleasant Road.

## **GATEWAY ROUTES**

Gateway routes are streets that are heavily traveled and serve as entrances to and through the Hamlet. These routes link major employment and business areas together, and are used regularly by a large number of residents and visitors. These routes further present a visual impression of the Hamlet's character– the built form, landscape, and unique features. There are two gateway routes in the Hamlet– one primary (Route 366) and one secondary route (Mt. Pleasant Road-Freese Road).



The single-lane former railroad bridge serves as a gateway into the Varna community.

## DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

There are several areas within the Hamlet that are vacant and underutilized. These sites are favorable for infill development, as they have immediate access to major roads and existing infrastructure. Through redevelopment, these sites can provide for new, desirable uses while enhancing the existing traditional neighborhood. There are two primary underutilized sites in the Hamlet:

1. The intersection of Route 366 and Freese Road (right);

2. Varna II, LLC parcel adjacent to the old railroad bed.



## RESIDENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT

The residential redevelopment areas exist along the north side of Route 366, and along Freese Road (to the edge of the bridge). This area is comprised of most of its original housing stock, but the conditions of these properties are worsening due to low rates of homeownership, absentee owners, and rental units.

## TRADITIONAL

The Hamlet of Varna contains a small area along the east side of Route 366 that reflects the characteristics of a traditional neighborhood. The United Methodist Church of Varna and Lifestyle Properties offices provide a recognizable center to the community, and are in close proximity of residential homes. There are a diverse number of residential homes that were a standard in the United States from colonial times until the 1940s. The houses are oriented towards the street and retain human-scale dimensions— minimal distance between the front of the house and street, pedestrian-oriented, and manicured landscapes and gardens.



## CONVENTIONAL

The Hamlet contains a variety of conventional residential housing units. These units include new multi-family dwellings, apartment complexes, modular units, mobile homes, and single-family homes. Conventional housing is located throughout the hamlet; specifically focused in the Mt. Pleasant Road area and along Route 366 towards the Town line.

## **NATURAL AREAS**

Natural areas encompass varying levels of protected open space and environmentally sensitive lands. These areas include steep slopes, woodlands, wetlands, nature preserves, forested areas, and other ecologically significant areas that are not suitable for development. A natural area recognized in and around the study area is Monkey Run Preserve— owned and operated by Cornell University and part of the Cayuga Trail. The area is open to the public for outdoor recreation such as hiking, skiing, birding and canoeing along Fall Creek.



## **RURAL SCENIC**

Rural scenic corridors are open, undeveloped lands that parallel a major thoroughfare and have significant natural, historic, scenic or pastoral views. There are two rural scenic corridors in the Varna study area. Both corridors are located at the edge of a gateway, providing motorists and pedestrians an area of scenic quality prior to entering the residential and commercial mixed use area of the Hamlet..

## **AGRICULTURE**

An agriculture character area includes lands in an open, cultivated, or sparsely settled state that includes woodlands and farm lands. Agricultural lands encompass 150+ acres, and is the second largest character area in the Varna study area. These lands are owned and operated by Cornell University as part of the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station. There are eleven small farms that are part of the Campus Area Farms program; three of these farms are located in and around the study area.



## **PARKS & TRAILS**

The Hamlet consists of parks and several trails— both existing and proposed. Park Park is the only established park in the Hamlet, and is owned and maintained by the Town of Dryden. It consists of approximately 4.5 acres. The park has a small trail and open space, used for recreational purposes. There is a separate, well-established, “unofficial” trail located south of Route 366 along the existing rail-bed. The trail spans from Mt. Pleasant Road to Stevenson Road and terminates at Game Farm Road. It is currently used for leisure recreation and walking/jogging.

## SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

The map of existing conditions reveals the problems of the area, while displaying strengths and positive elements of the hamlet. (page 21)

As indicated on the graphic on page 21, there are key areas (shaded in gray) in the hamlet that are ideal for growth and can absorb future development. The surrounding nature preserves and active agricultural lands serve as a buffer to these areas, making them prime for infill and new development. These sites themselves are currently vacant, underutilized, and lacking investment. They are directly adjacent to or abut the strongest areas of the hamlet which are primarily residential. Having underutilized and vacant sites adjacent to a strong residential core can have a negative impact on the value, aesthetics, and quality of life for neighboring properties. At the same time, these sites are an opportunity for new uses such as more housing options, small-scale retail, and commercial which would help enhance the area.

The existing conditions map further reveals that there are few public spaces in the hamlet. Referred to as a “family hamlet” by its residents, there is a lack of parks, trails, pedestrian trails and recreation space. The underutilized and vacant sites provide the space that when developed, can incorporate public green spaces that will cater to a family and student community. Using this map, plans can be developed for those sites that are ideal for redevelopment, new, and infill development.

# MAP OF EXISTING CONDITIONS



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# Part 2

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The Hamlet of Vama Community Development Plan



Community participation was important in developing the plan. Monthly meetings with the Varna Advisory Committee, a group of local residents who volunteered to help provide insight into the Varna community, as well as directly from residents in the community formed the basis of participation efforts. Town staff engaged in a series of community outreach efforts where residents and business owners provided guidance, vision, and critical feedback. Consultants, elected and appointed officials also reached out to friends and associates in and around the community to gather opinions on the Varna area.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community survey was distributed to 423 Varna area residents and business owners. Town staff and the advisory committee developed survey questions around six areas: demographics, quality of life, transportation, streets, housing, and development.

The Town received 131 surveys back, resulting in a ~31% return rate. The survey results indicate that 40% of respondents have lived in Varna for more than twenty years. Over half of the respondents own their own home; however, 54% live in a house and 38% live in a mobile home or townhouse unit.

Respondents were asked open-ended questions pertaining to what they liked about living in Varna, what changes they would like to see, and their fears with change or development.

The results indicated that there is a strong sense of community in Varna, it is a good place to raise a family and it is a safe community to

live/work. Residents like Varna because it is in close proximity to Cornell and Ithaca.

The condition and aesthetics of the built environment, adequacy of facilities in addition to the levels of traffic, were areas of concern. Additional concerns were too much development, too fast and changing the character of the hamlet from a quaint, rural area to a transient, strip-development corridor with significant traffic. This plan strategically addresses those concerns by providing specific goals and objectives, a master plan with recommendations and guide for future development. Overall, the camaraderie built between neighbors and residents provides a strong foundation for any future changes to the hamlet.

## PUBLIC WORKSHOP

A public workshop was held on June 21, 2011 to engage residents in the design process. The purpose of the workshop was to determine what type of development they would like to see occur in different areas of the hamlet.

Attendees participated in two hands-on activities that focused on traffic on Route 366 and housing and development. Working with land use and transportation consultants, the groups drew on corridor maps to indicate where traffic calming measures were needed, issues of visibility and safety, and sidewalk/streetscape desirability. Using streetscape templates, participants were able to envision street and sidewalk alternatives.

To determine future housing and development needs/desires, Town planners created 3-D models of the community where participants could move and add buildings to create new development options. Pre-designed site plan templates further helped participants envision new opportunities. The results of the workshop helped the Town determine the type, scale and form of desired development which is outlined throughout the plan.



Residents and community members participated in a design workshop to determine desired future development.

## OPEN HOUSE

Planners held an open house on November, 2, 2011 to present the first draft plan to the public. Using results from the survey, workshop and summary of existing conditions, area plans were developed to determine what type of development the public would respond to and want in the hamlet. Consultants provided detailed transportation posters displaying opportunities along Route 366 including streetscape, intersection and median treatments. The public had the opportunity to provide written comments regarding each area plan and transportation options.

The area plans provide a foundation for what the community residents like, and the type of development they want to see. Each of these plans provide an alternative development scenario for building placement and the necessary spacing and coordination of facilities like sidewalks and street trees. These area plans helped inform and create the basis of the form elements of the Master Plan and zoning code amendments for the hamlet.



The November open house allowed residents to view and comment on the area plans that were designed to help guide future growth and development. in Varna.

## TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT THE COMMUNITY LIKED:

### FOREST HOME DRIVE



This example represents a townhouse development at 8du/acre. The emphasis of this site design is to provide ample conservation space for walking and hiking along Fall Creek, while maintaining the enclosed tree canopy along Forest Home Drive by setting the buildings away from the main road.

### VARNA HOLLOW



This example represents a townhouse development with community amenities at 6du/acre. The emphasis of this site design is to minimize development along Fall Creek while providing housing options and amenities that can serve multiple populations. These units could be for young professionals, students, or designed to help with the demand for senior housing.

## TRAILSIDE

This example represents a single-family home development with townhomes at 10du/acre. The emphasis of this site design is single-family homes with alleyways so that each building fronts green space, and accessible footpaths that connect to Route 366 and the Varna Trail. It also has amenities such as a small park and pond that also serves as stormwater detention area. This type of development is commonly referred to as Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND).



## VARNA COMMONS

This example represents a village green type development with open space at the center of the development with cottage homes, professional offices/businesses, and townhouses surrounding the green at 8du/acre (or developed as a PUD). The emphasis of this site design is to create a community center with open space and integrating foot paths as the focal point.



## GATEWAY PLAZA

This example represents a mixed-use development with green space developed as a Planned Unit Development (PUD). The emphasis of this site design is a mixed-uses on the first floor, residential or offices on the second floor, facing a park-like green on both corners. Surrounded by residential or office/commercial uses, this site is framed around the viewshed while maintaining a village-like feel.



## MEETINGS WITH BUSINESS OWNERS

Although primarily residential, there are several businesses that are located throughout the Route 366 corridor in Varna. These business owners have a vested interest in the growth and development in Varna as their businesses depend on local and regional patrons. These businesses are an integral part of the hamlet, and any growth or development will ultimately have an impact on their ability to operate in the community. To ensure their perspectives were reflected in the Varna Plan, Town planners met with business owners in stages to gauge input. The first meeting was to discuss the Character Area assessment as a group to determine the overall character of Varna from a business perspective. Following the creation of the draft area plans, planner's met with business owner's individually to discuss each plan and how their business would be impacted from the plan.

## SECTION SUMMARY

It was revealed through the public participation process that the character of Varna is that of a quaint, rural suburb bounded by an urbanized area. Varna affords a quality of life that has kept many residents in the area for years, while attracting new families, professionals and students. Quality of life in this context ranges from a low cost of living, proximity to city amenities, and a quiet, friendly atmosphere for families with caring and helpful neighbors.

Using information from stakeholder feedback, the area plans helped visualize and communicate opportunities for growth and development. The Varna community is already “made” in that it contains a pre-existing built environment where “place making” is unnecessary. Rather, it is essential to establish development controls that allow growth to occur in such a way where building footprints, new uses and amenities fit in to the existing fabric of Varna. The area plans represent just one type of development that fits the existing landscape. Using this form-based approach, the Varna plan helps preserve the quality of life and place of Varna, adding a new layer of character to the community.



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# Part 3

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The Hamlet of Vama Community Development Plan

## CHARACTER

### **Goal 1: Protect and enhance hamlet character.**

#### Objectives

- ↪ Define the character of Varna.
- ↪ Identify development scenarios, and designs that are in harmony with existing character.
- ↪ Identify redevelopment opportunities in harmony with existing character.
- ↪ Utilize existing infrastructure to potential without degrading or changing overall character.
- ↪ Create management tools that protect character, while allowing new development and redevelopment to move forward.
- ↪ Shift from current zoning to character zoning.

## TRANSPORTATION

### **Goal 2: Develop a transportation system that is balanced, safe, and equitable for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.**

#### Objectives

- ↪ Initiate Traffic Demand Management strategies to improve traffic and pedestrian safety and pedestrian and bicycle resources.
- ↪ Invest in the development and maintenance of new and existing trails.
- ↪ Create a sidewalk plan that provides a safe environment for pedestrians.
- ↪ Develop a plan to reorganize Route 366 including the addition and adjustment of sidewalks, bike lanes and primary/secondary streets.

# QUALITY OF LIFE

## Goal 3: Protect and improve the quality of life in the hamlet.

### Objectives

- ☞ Identify limits of development relative to traffic, bulk and density of buildings.
- ☞ Create landscape standards that are in keeping with a relaxed, quaint country hamlet i.e. low maintenance, basic landscape standards.
- ☞ Identify funding and organizational means for maintaining public green areas like street trees, gardens, etc.
- ☞ Initiate a Community Development Strategy and programs to improve community development within the hamlet including:
  - Community facilities (new and improvements).
  - Identify program opportunities for property improvements
  - Identify program opportunities within the hamlet to improve quality of life.
  - “Recreation” and other programming to improve community cohesiveness.



# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The character of any area is a culmination of years of decisions that result in a unique or particular feeling that an area evokes as a sense of place. Character can change dramatically over time, or even instantaneously. Often character changes over time with some properties deteriorating, while others are built new, or older buildings restored. Also, as buildings are removed, the space and sense of enclosure of a place changes, and the presence or absence of buildings, trees and other features of the landscape changes the character of that place.

The hamlet area of Varna does have a unique character, and the physical layout, and sense of enclosure are typical of a hamlet. As described in the book “Community Character” (Kendig, 2011) a hamlet has a defined boundary and you can often see the surrounding open space from almost any point in the hamlet area; there is no street pattern or grid, and buildings are arranged linearly along a main road with one or more crossroads. The buildings are well spaced lending to a feeling of openness, and there is a mix of uses scattered along the roadway. The hamlet of Varna very much fits this description with the only exception being the Hillside Acres mobile home park that does have its own road network, and due to the topography and pond creates a unique sense of place with narrow streets and closely placed buildings.

In another more rural setting, the hamlet may persist like this for years, with investment in the existing housing stock and other buildings being determined by shifts in population, and inheritance and restoration of buildings over time. The character would persist with only very slight

or minor changes and newer buildings would be few in number.

Varna, however, is situated in a place in the landscape that affords it more opportunity than a more isolated rural hamlet. The most obvious differences are bordering Cornell University, a large Ivy League school with large research centers within a mile or so of Varna as well as being located on a locally important transportation corridor, Route 366, and the presence of water and sewer infrastructure. Because Cornell’s facilities are not visually apparent from the hamlet, as well because of the agricultural mission of the university around the hamlet, the proximity of the university lends more to the rural feel of Varna than it’s suburban or urban reality. However, the presence of the university has also created a demand for rental housing that does have an effect on the character of Varna.

The water and sewer resources would not be likely in a rural hamlet distinctly separated from an urban area. However, Varna is included as part of the Ithaca Urbanized Area and the Town of Dryden is part owner of the water and sewer systems in the county. This has opened the door for increased density and development in Varna. However, this also creates fear among long-term residents that the character of the hamlet will be lost with new development that is focused on meeting the needs of the rental market.

Route 366 is a state route that passes through the hamlet of Varna. As described elsewhere in this report, the road comfortably carries 9,000 cars a day. At peak times this can cause some annoyance to

residents, and the sometimes higher speeds create a real safety concern for residents. Relative to character, the road and the volume combined with higher speeds affects the ability of this road to act as a linear public space. This is due primarily to the lack of sidewalks and the orientation of the highway to a rural corridor design, rather than a residential hamlet design.

Because of these three factors; the university, Route 366, and the water and sewer resources, the physical character of the hamlet is strong and well founded but is easily threatened by either minimum investment in rental housing, or investment in development beyond the current scale of the hamlet, which could cause a dramatic shift in character.

Under any scenario, the character of the hamlet will change. The primary purpose of this plan is to find the means for encouraging redevelopment and new development in the hamlet, but in a way that compliments, continues and improves upon the current character.



The physical character of the hamlet is easily threatened by either minimum investment in rental housing, or investment in development beyond the current scale of the hamlet.

## STUDIES TO DATE

### **C H A R A C T E R   A S S E S S M E N T**

Character areas are a type of spatial planning that can help guide planning, policy, and urban design standards for future development. Each character area is a planning sub-area within the hamlet that was derived from an assessment of design aspects, density, building typology, land use, surrounding uses, function, potential, constraints and planning issues.

Through on-site fieldwork, an assessment of existing maps, environmentally sensitive areas, and the 2005 Town of Dryden Comprehensive Plan, ten character areas were identified that highlight the local distinctiveness of Varna and the characteristics of the development and settlement patterns within the hamlet.

### **C U R R E N T   D E S I G N   G U I D E L I N E S**

The 2008 Commercial and Residential Design Guidelines were developed to inform developers and landowners of the expectation of the town boards when developing proposals. They were further incorporated into the Zoning Law upon adoption by requiring compliance with the design guidelines when the bulk and area requirements of the zoning law were varied to accommodate design in proposals.

The Commercial Design Guidelines included a special section on hamlets as a separate character area where “The design goal of the Village/ Hamlet Character Area is to strengthen a sense of place, relate buildings to a pleasant, pedestrian environment, and respect and celebrate the community’s heritage.” In addition to that goal statement, the following “building blocks” were described for the hamlet:

- ✦ *All parking should be located behind buildings, and never between the front of a building and the public street on which it fronts.*
  
- ✦ *Buildings should provide a primary street facing front entrance, in addition to any secondary entrances that provide access from parking areas located in the rear.*

- ✦ Structures should maintain consistent setbacks with respect to one another, particularly with respect to front yard setbacks. Proposed deviations from established setback patterns need to be justified by a compelling design goal that strengthens the Village/Hamlet character.
  - ✦ Whenever possible, shared parking should be provided between adjoining properties. This serves to limit the amount of parking required and to reduce the need for multiple curbcuts.
  - ✦ Where possible, on-street parking should be utilized to fulfill parking requirements and needs.
  - ✦ Where feasible, sidewalks should be provided. Landscaped buffer strips should be provided between sidewalks and streets.
  - ✦ Crosswalks, curb bulb-outs, appropriate signage, lighting, pedestrian crossing signals, and traffic lights should be provided to enhance the pedestrian realm.
  - ✦ Changes in pavement materials, texture, color and pattern should be utilized, especially at crosswalks.
  - ✦ Utilize street trees and planted medians.
  - ✦ Provide benches and other opportunities to sit and relax in public spaces.
  - ✦ New residential areas adjacent to Village/Hamlet centers should utilize a pedestrian friendly, compact and interconnected street pattern that is tied to the Village/Hamlet center.
  - ✦ New construction should be or appear to be a maximum of two stories in height. Additional commercial and residential uses are encouraged on second stories.
  - ✦ Ground floor commercial (office/retail) is encouraged along principal roads.
  - ✦ Shared mail boxes and newspaper delivery points should be encouraged.
  - ✦ Building façades should have ample windows that can be seen into, with darkly tinted windows discouraged.
  - ✦ Front porches may be used to create a strong rhythm and to provide shelter for pedestrians, as well as outdoor seating for restaurant uses.
  - ✦ Building character and scale should compliment and strengthen the Village/Hamlet character.
  - ✦ Existing, character-establishing structures should be incorporated into development plans, and/or adaptively reused, where feasible.
- These design guidelines are further refined in this plan to be used more specifically with a new zoning code that is specifically geared toward continuing character.

## **C O M P R E H E N S I V E   P L A N**

In 2005 the town adopted the Comprehensive Plan, which included extensive recommendations, especially for hamlet areas in the town. These informed the Commercial Design Guidelines, and as this plan is written the intent of those recommendations is continued.

However as a more detailed and design driven approach is taken, there is less apprehension because there is and will be less uncertainty about future development. Because of this, many of the specific recommendations will not apply in this plan and these transgressions will have to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan Amendments accompanying this plan.

The basic goals for development in the Comprehensive Plan include increasing the attractiveness of the area by offering a diversity of development options, including townhouses, duplexes, small multi-unit complexes, and mixed residential and commercial; encouraging home ownership; and regulating hamlet transformations so that the character of the community is maintained or shifts slowly, not in dramatic steps.

Many of the very specific recommendations have to do directly with continuing the character of a hamlet as described here. However, some of the recommendations do not fit with the public input of this plan, such as establishing on street parking along 366, and not allowing convenience stores. However, many of the recommendations follow the strategy as described in this plan and

the associated zoning amendments such as limiting lot coverage, and building height. The Comprehensive Plan also has many somewhat confusing recommendations on density and infrastructure. This plan is design driven, meaning that density of people and population will be limited by the lot coverage and building bulk regulations, thereby making unnecessary the need for overly strict density limitations. Density is related to character in the complete absence of other controls like lot coverage limits, and open space requirements, however fixed ratio density does nothing to guarantee character in an area. A density of one dwelling unit per acre may result in very large single family homes, which would be very much contrary to the current character of the hamlet.

## CURRENT ZONING LAW

The current zoning law does not include any specific provisions for hamlet development. However, the language in the current zoning law is sensitive to character, and the provisions for multi-family housing do attempt to mitigate for character with some success. However, the current regulations likely fall short in applying a village type density to too large an area. These rules were written prior to modern septic and water requirements, as well as municipal water and sewer being available and required for certain scales of development. This plan for Varna, as an extension of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, seeks to find a more current approach to guiding development in the hamlets. The flaw in the current rules was to apply village or suburban scale development across a vast rural area, which has been addressed in the 2011 zoning local law. This plan and associated zoning amendments seek to address development issues in Varna, where water and sewer are available as well as developable land. The differences in the current law and proposed amendments are discussed below in the tools section. However, with regard to character, as discussed above this plan will also explore other land use management tools other than regulations to protect character throughout the hamlet.



Current regulations likely fall short in applying a village-type density to too large an area

# TOOLS FOR CHARACTER PLANNING

## ZONING

### Current Zoning

The current zoning creates what can be referred to as auto-centric development, where surface parking consumes more land or footprint than the building intended to be served. The result is a very urban character for the lot, regardless of what the surrounding land uses might be, or the desired end product relative to character.

Taking the multi-family requirements in the R-C district where water and sewer are available as an example, it is easy to see what is meant by the term autocentric. Without belaboring the language in the law, if you assume 1,000 sq. feet per unit for two bedroom units and use that to total the footprint of the building, and add in the current parking requirement and setbacks for a one acre lot, a developer could build up to 15 units on one acre of land. However, because of the parking lot requirements, and the setbacks, these units would have to be in a two-story building. Also, the parking lot would be necessarily larger than the building, assuming a standard 9x18 ft. parking space, and 12 feet for each travel lane in the parking lot. This formula would probably allow for adequate stormwater management facilities on the same site since they can be located within a setback. It does achieve about 55% lot coverage, but the open space is consumed by parking, driveways and stormwater facilities. There is no balance for lawns and landscaping and this exercise does not even contemplate sidewalks. However, this does efficiently consume the entire lot and convert it to profitable purposes. This is certainly efficient conversion of land, but does little for character or community goals .

## **Character Zoning**

In order to accomplish development that does not detract from the character of Varna, that makes good use of opportunities, and overall maintains the positive aspects of the community, while hopefully providing the opportunity to fulfill community goals, several tools can be used as described in this section. Specific zoning tools involve regulating the bulk and area requirements of a site in order to create the places that are desired, and also give a very predictable approval path for both the developer and the community. The best way to ensure this is for the developer and the community to work together to align goals and outcomes. This requires leadership by the development interests to engage the community, and respect local plans and community goals and demonstrate that they are as committed to reaching them as they are making a profit. On the other hand, it is also the responsibility of the community to coordinate planning with the development community, and for residents to respect the rights of the developer, and their business..

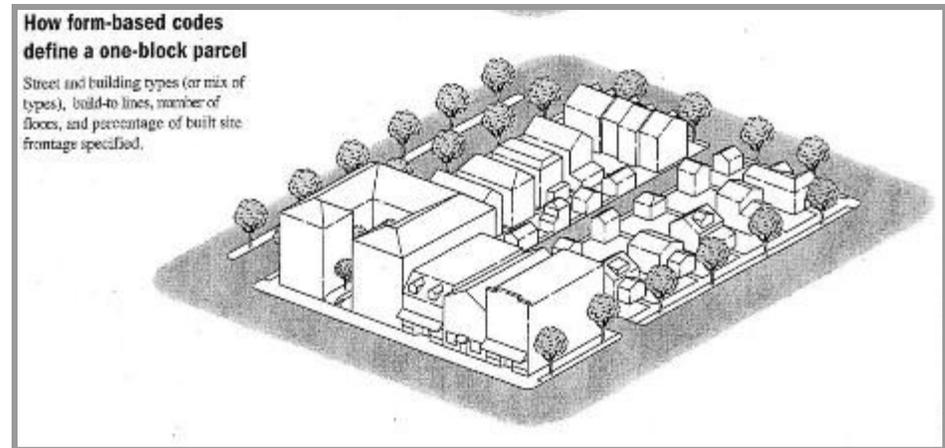
Zoning codes, design guidelines and standards help to insure that the approval process meets a community's standards for development, and serves the community in a positive way, rather than increasing costs over time, or lending to the deterioration of quality of life. These controls should still be a minimum standard, something that the development community should seek to not only meet, but to exceed in form and character and performance. The basic zoning tools that this plan proposes are: form based code elements, sustainable design, and performance zoning to fulfill the goals of this plan through new development and redevelopment.

## Form-Based Codes

Form based codes have become very popular as an antidote to typical zoning codes. This type of code is more concerned with the size and appearance of new development and how it creates a sense of place, and performs rather than only regulating uses. It is more concerned with the form of the development, than with arbitrary rules that create homogenic sprawl forms. Form based codes require a strong understanding of the appropriate character of the area they are being applied, and the goals of the community i.e. what the form should be. To gain this type of understanding is one of the purposes of this plan.

Form based codes can be applied to practically any planning level or type. The purpose of the form based code is to ensure that certain public resources are predictably protected during the course of development. For example, rather than requiring sidewalks or pedestrian facilities as typical zoning codes do, the sidewalk or a street cross section is very specific as to where the sidewalk will be, how far from the curb, and include street trees etc. Rather than a setback line, form based codes often have a build-to line, where building edges must align, and those buildings must have entrances on the sidewalk side of the building as well as the parking lot, and a certain percentage of windows on the façade etc. Form based codes are much more predictive with respect to character and the place that will result from the development, and therefore if created through a thorough planning

process meet with much less public opposition. Developers tend to like form-based codes because they know exactly what is required, and the conversation does not focus on use of the property, but rather the public aspects of the development.



Source: <http://land8lounge.com>

## **Performance Zoning**

Performance in zoning, or building, codes focus on the performance of a project rather than specifications. A good example of performance zoning is included in the recently adopted zoning local law relative to open space and density. The law requires 70 percent of a site in open space for multi-family development. Rather than specifying elaborate site requirements like setbacks, or frontage, the law simply requires a certain level of performance, which combined with a specific definition of open space works to create an intended result, without overly restricting the creativity of the developer to meet the performance standard.

In this plan, many of the performance measures are in the landscape standards and design guidelines. These require projects to meet a minimum standard of landscaping and building design, but are not specific as to how this is achieved.

A newer performance measure of performance zoning which many municipalities are considering is sustainability which blends site characteristics with building performance as well as the site's placement in the landscape and ability to utilize public transportation, as well as transportation alternatives to the automobile. Sustainability measures can further be combined with incentive zoning, rewarding projects with increased density or as a lower cost option to other incentives. One of the benefits of sustainability performance measures is that they build value into the

development at the point of sale and initial building, so that features like solar panels, or district geothermal heating can be incorporated into the building designs, at a lower cost and initial investment.

Additional performance measures like sustainability, or open space resources can also be used to balance additional density or development intensity, like relief from maximum height of buildings.

## LANDSCAPE STANDARDS

Landscape standards require of projects that a certain base level of landscaping will be installed as a result of construction or site development. This ensures that properties maintain a minimum appearance that is consistent with the character of the area. These standards can be conditions of an approval, or a required element of a site plan review, or both.

Landscape elements will vary depending on the location within the hamlet. The hamlet is surrounded by natural areas, agriculture and densely wooded areas. It is important that any new type of landscaping (whether streetscape, residential, commercial) reflects the rural, pastoral feel of the hamlet and the unique features of the site. For example, landscaping along Forest Home Drive should reflect the feel of the area- densely wooded and shaded. Appropriate landscaping for this area would be shrubs used to create “room” like features, as well as native woodland wildflowers. By using native vegetation for landscaping that compliments the existing, natural landscape, maintenance will be minimal.

## REDEVELOPMENT

Redevelopment in a community is often a double-edged sword. It involves either the repurposing, or restoration of existing buildings or built sites for a new life either as the same use, or often for a new use. On the other hand redevelopment is most often associated with tearing down existing buildings in some state of disrepair, and construction of new buildings. The risk is that the new construction will not provide the same or even similar character to the community.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development strategies are those programs and policies that seek to improve the community proactively. Community development involves a wide range of program options from façade improvement to housing grants. They also may support recreation activities, or the construction and maintenance of a recreation center.

Community development programs can be funded by a variety of means. These can include simple budget line items, but often use special tax districts to raise money for improvements to a certain area like Varna.

Often community development programs are funded by grants, both public and private. For example this plan is a form of community development and uses funding from both the town and Cornell University.

### Planned Unit Developments

Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) are a common tool in zoning laws to create a coordinated multi-faceted or phased development. These are used to create a development that although consistent with use and density are not bound, or cannot be accomplished, due to the area and bulk rules that are often found in a zoning code. PUDs are a very useful tool.



Planned Unit Developments allow for flexibility in design and a range of recreation, housing, and mobility options.

### LEED Neighborhood Development (LEED ND)

LEED Neighborhood Development is a rating system designed primarily for the development of green neighborhoods, as well as those that perform well in terms of smart growth, urbanism and green building. Entire neighborhoods, portions, or multiple neighborhoods can qualify for LEED ND certification. The rankings scale, similar to that of LEED certification by the US Building Council, has four rankings: Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Unlike LEED certification that focuses on the performance of a building, LEED ND certification is based on the performance of a neighborhood. Emphasis is placed on site selection, design, and construction elements and the way these relate to the surrounding community and region. This holistic approach to development can move beyond the “greening” of one building to an entire neighborhood, benefiting the community in multiple ways.

A neighborhood that has achieved a LEED ND certification is recognized as having a standard for quality of life, natural environment, and overall good health. They have vibrant streetscapes complete with a multi-modal transportation system, pedestrian pathways, character and have a mixed-use urban form.



LEED Neighborhood Development is a holistic approach to neighborhood planning. Current development trends are autocentric (top), and need to incorporate human-scaled elements such as sidewalks, compact building types (bottom photograph).

### **Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND)**

Traditional Neighborhood Design is a comprehensive planning strategy that integrates public and private uses within a defined space. TND communities contain a mix of uses including educational, commercial, and civic facilities that are interconnected by pedestrian pathways, streets and lanes designated for pedestrians and cyclists. These multi-modal communities encourage walking and biking, and provide safe routes to do so. Public space is central in TND communities where buildings and houses front common green space. Often, one or several pedestrian paths circulate throughout the community. Service allies provide “back” access to garages and public services such as trash pick-up. This keeps houses fronting the streets, rather than garages. The main streets are also kept at a minimum width in effort to keep houses and neighbors closer together.



Traditional Neighborhood Designs are designed with a focus on the pedestrian, and green spaces for recreation and leisure. These communities are connected through multi-purpose pedestrian pathways, while alley's provide access for motorists and public services.

This section provides an overview and vision for the Route 366 corridor—an east-west highway that is owned and maintained by the New York State Department of Transportation.

Predominantly rural in nature, the Varna community must capitalize on its history of being a village-like walkable community to ensure future plans cater to multimodal transit users.

The 366 corridor serves as a primary connection between points east of Varna including Dryden and Cortland to the Ithaca area. The road supports significant through commuter traffic to Cornell University and Ithaca College, as well as pedestrians that walk or bike to these neighboring locations. The road contains two lanes, with a 5 ft shoulder absent of bike lanes or sidewalks. There are several bus stops within the Varna corridor that serves TCAT users.

These conditions have a significant impact on resident's perceptions of the volume and safety of this route. Studies indicate that it is not necessary to reduce traffic volume, widen travel lanes, or introduce traffic signals, as traffic flows well during peak travel times including the intersection of Mt. Pleasant Road/Freese Road/Route 366.

In response to this reality, the Town envisions a Route 366 that serves as a multimodal corridor where the pedestrian has priority; a streetscaped sidewalk, well-marked crosswalks, landscaped medians, and appropriate lighting. This corridor will increasingly provide access to the City of Ithaca as the major activity center in the region. It is critical to ensure that the transit environment is seamless and cohesive, with safe pedestrian routes, established public transit stations and ease of access for automobile users.



Route 366 serves as the primary connection to surrounding urban areas

# TOOLS FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

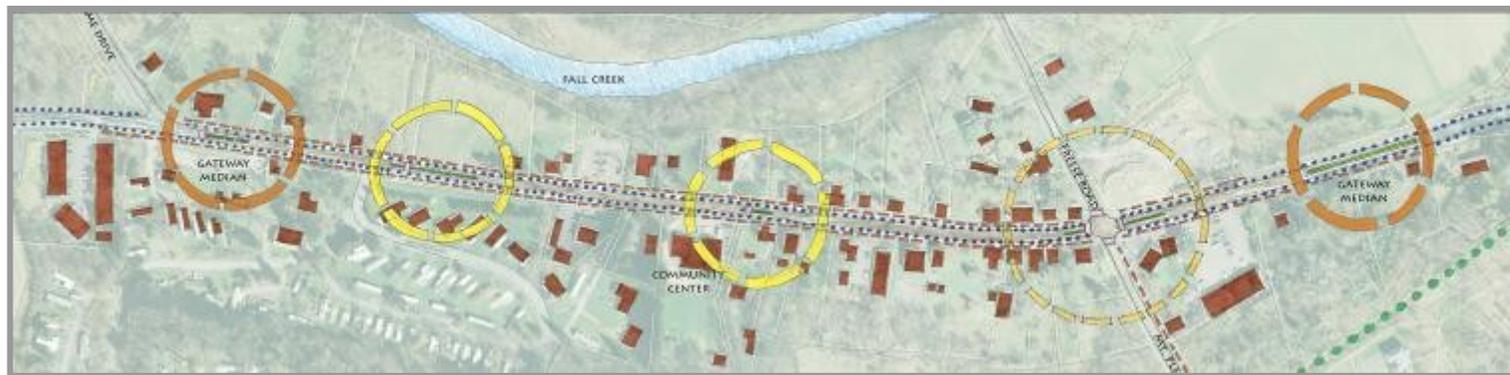
## TRAFFIC CALMING

“Traffic Calming” is a key organizing principle for the transportation recommendations in Varna. The primary objectives of traffic calming are: to reduce vehicle speed, to reduce traffic volumes, and to reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. Depending on the situation, one, two, or all three of these objectives can be addressed by the inclusion in the roadway system of features that will alter driving habits to the benefit of non-motorized users of the system. Traffic calming techniques can be:

- passive, such as a speed trailer telling the driver how fast he is going;
- psychological, such as narrowing the roadway by the use of pavement markings; or
- physical, such as roadway closures or diverters to reduce volume, or roundabouts, speed bumps/tables, or curb extensions to reduce speed.

In Varna, we are primarily concerned with reducing speed and reducing vehicular conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists. The goal is to create a clear distinction about the role and function of this roadway – NYS Route 366 – for the approximately two-thirds of a mile that it traverses the heart of the hamlet. Outside of the hamlet it is, and should remain, a Rural Highway. However, within the heart of the hamlet, NYS Route 366 should function as a “Main Street” for Varna. Actual vehicular speed should not exceed 30 mph and pedestrians and bicyclists should have clearly identified spaces in the transportation network.

As shown on the transportation concepts map (below), there are three types of location in Varna where specific traffic calming treatments are proposed – at the gateways, at mid-block crossings, and at the intersection of Freese Road / Mt. Pleasant Road with NYS Route 366.



## GATEWAY TREATMENTS

There are two main gateways to the Hamlet of Varna on NYS Route 366, Mt. Pleasant Rd. and Freese Rd as described in the Character Area descriptions. At these locations, it is recommended that a raised, planted median be installed to send a clear signal to motorists that they are entering the hamlet and that they must slow down. Prior to the actual raised feature, pavement markings would taper the travel lanes toward either side of the median. Other physical elements introduced just prior to the median, such as the start of curbing and perhaps the introduction of pedestrian scaled street lights and/or street trees would help signal this change, making it more noticeable and less abrupt.

The raised medians at the gateways could include hardy, low maintenance grasses, ground cover or low plantings. If the town or a local group of volunteers would be willing to maintain them, more decorative plantings could be utilized as appropriate. In addition, the median could serve as the location for a “Welcome to Varna” sign unless there are other more visible locations elsewhere. For the western gateway, a crosswalk could be incorporated into the median (there is not a need for one at the eastern gateway). In this case, the median would also serve as a pedestrian refuge for people crossing the street.

In coordination with the installation of these gateway treatments, the NYSDOT should consider moving the start of the 30 mph speed zones to the tops of the hills at the east and west approaches to Varna.



Source: [www.experiencedryden.ca](http://www.experiencedryden.ca)

Gateway treatments help define the boundaries of a community.

## MID-BLOCK MEDIAN TREATMENTS

There are two locations between the western gateway and the intersection of NYS Route 366 with Freese Road / Mt. Pleasant Road where additional pedestrian crossings would make sense. These mid-block crossings are necessary to allow people to walk conveniently to/from the Varna Community Center, a westbound TCAT bus stop across from Varna Auto Service, and the Hillside Acres mobile home park. At each of these crosswalk locations, it is recommended that a raised median be incorporated to reaffirm the need for motorists to slow down and to provide a pedestrian refuge for people crossing the street.

In each of these examples, the median includes a slight jog that requires the pedestrian to look in the direction of oncoming traffic before crossing the second travel lane. This simple design feature adds an additional level of safety to the median's role as a pedestrian refuge. The median refuge should have a minimum width of six feet (6').



Mid-block median treatments are necessary for people walking across busy intersections and roads such as Route 366.

## INTERSECTION TREATMENTS

The intersection of NYS Route 366 with Freese Road / Mt. Pleasant Road is a concern for both vehicular and pedestrian safety. Though it does not yet meet the standard warrant for the introduction of a traffic light or require a capacity improvement such as the addition of turning lanes, some simple steps should be taken to enhance the safety and function of this intersection for all users.

In the short-term, the introduction of high visibility crosswalks on all four legs, combined with construction of raised medians on both Route 366 approaches to slow vehicular speed and limit access to/from adjoining parcels, would significantly enhance this intersection. In addition to making the intersection safer and more attractive for pedestrians, the speed reduction from the medians should improve safety for vehicles crossing or turning onto Route 366 from Freese Road or Mt. Pleasant Road. Removal of the residential structure on the northwest corner of the intersection, and ensuring that future redevelopment at the northeast and southeast quadrants steps away from the corner would improve sight distance issues that currently exist. Pedestrian scaled street lighting would further enhance visibility at night.

In the longer term, if vehicular accidents or pedestrian safety remain a concern, an intersection control beacon (flashing light – yellow on Route 366 and red on Freese and Mt. Pleasant Roads) could be added to the intersection; however this would not be the most aesthetically

pleasing solution for this historic hamlet. A better long-term solution for this intersection would be the construction of a single-lane roundabout. Roundabouts provide significant safety benefits because they slow traffic and reduce conflicting turning movements. They generally have greater capacity than signalized intersections and they perform better environmentally because of reduced idling time. Though the geometry of the Freese Road / Mt. Pleasant Road intersection is constraining, a preliminary analysis done for this study does indicate that a single-lane roundabout – capable of handling the largest tractor-trailer allowed on this highway - might work here with a modest amount of property acquisition at the corners (primarily on the east side of the intersection where redevelopment is anticipated).

## SIDEWALKS

As previously noted, a primary goal of the transportation recommendations for Varna is to improve the quality of life and the long-term vitality of the hamlet. With the addition of some new homes and small businesses, Varna could contain a nice concentration of people, activities, and services. Slowing traffic and creating safe and attractive pedestrian infrastructure connecting all of this together is the key to sustaining a vibrant social and economic environment here. The introduction of sidewalks to the hamlet is, therefore, absolutely essential.

It is recommended that sidewalks be installed on both sides of Route 366, approximately from gateway to gateway. At the western end of the hamlet core, sidewalks on the south side of NYS Route 366 should actually extend just past the gateway to the existing apartment complex at the bottom of the hill. At the eastern end of the hamlet core, sidewalks on the north side of NYS Route 366 could actually end a bit before the gateway in consideration of the lack of future development potential on adjoining lands (since much of this land is owned by Cornell University for agricultural research it will not be developed and so sidewalks are not necessary). The gateway to gateway stretch of the NYS Route 366 corridor is considered the priority in terms of necessary sidewalk construction. However, if funding is available, the Town of Dryden and NYSDOT could consider

extending the sidewalks further west to Game Farm Road and/or east beyond the old railroad bridge to the apartment complex and bus stop at the top of the hill.

Included with the design of the sidewalks would be curbs and a planting or amenity strip that would provide some separation between the sidewalk and the travel lanes. The planting or amenity strip could be a simple green (grass) area or it could also be a location for street trees and/or pedestrian scaled street lights. The width and function of the planting or amenity strip might need to vary from one location to another to accommodate the narrow right-of-way or close proximity of existing buildings. Design details will need to be worked out as the Varna-NYS Route 366 corridor project is advanced and funding alternatives are identified. Stormwater collection and retention will also need to be addressed during the design phase.

## BICYCLE LANE / SHARED LANE

As noted under the existing conditions, there is a notable presence of bicyclists on NYS Route 366 through the Hamlet of Varna. There are no dedicated facilities for bicycles in the hamlet, however the highway shoulder is fairly generous and in good condition in most places. As part of the package of transportation improvements proposed for the Varna-NYS Route 366 corridor project, it is recommended that clearly defined spaces for bicyclists be established.

Within the hamlet core, defined as the area between the gateways, it is understood that the state right-of-way (ROW) is quite narrow. Though exact dimensions will need to be surveyed in advance of the actual project design, based on information available from NYSDOT we have assumed a ROW width of 49.5 feet (three rods) in the hamlet core. With the addition of curbs and sidewalks in the hamlet core, a dedicated bicycle lane, though desirable, will probably not fit within the ROW. Instead, it is proposed that shared travel lanes be provided here. A 14 foot wide shared lane allows for both vehicular and bicycle travel. To convey to motorists and bicyclists the message that these lanes are intended to be shared, it is recommended that “sharrows” be stenciled on the pavement at appropriate intervals (see image of “sharrow” at right).

Outside of the hamlet core, with the likelihood of a wider right-of-way and no need for a formal sidewalk and curb, a 5 foot dedicated bicycle lane would be a useful addition. In general, the bike lane should continue west of Varna into Ithaca, and east of Varna to NYS Route 13.



“Sharrows” allow for a safe, designated space for cyclists. These markings indicate to motorists that there are multiple users of the road.

## TRAILS

In addition to improvements to Route 366, the Hamlet of Varna Community Development Plan identifies two off-road trail opportunities. The first is the Varna Trail, a proposed multi-use trail along the old railroad bed that runs through Varna. The trail will connect the East Ithaca Recreationway at Game Farm Road to NYS Route 13 in Varna. Money for the trail has been set aside as part of Cornell University's Transportation Impact Mitigation Strategies (TIMS) document, and work on the trail could begin in the near future. As part of its hamlet revitalization efforts, a separate sidewalk or a bicycle/pedestrian pathway could connect Mount Pleasant Road from Route 366 to the Varna Trail. This short connector would make it easier for trail users to access businesses in the hamlet and for residents of Varna to take advantage of the proposed rail trail.

A second trail proposal considers the opportunity for a walking/nature trail along the south side of Fall Creek in the hamlet. Running from Freese Road to Forest Home Drive, this proposed nature trail would make it easier for residents and visitors to explore the natural beauty of the Fall Creek corridor. Links to nearby nature trails on Cornell owned land could also be established to make this part of a larger network.



Multi-purpose trails are a key component for connectivity, accessibility and mobility to and around the Varna community.

## PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS

Pedestrian pathways offer many recreational and aesthetic opportunities in for a community. In addition to providing an important safety mechanism from biking on main roadways, pedestrian pathways serve as common public space that can improve the health and total quality of life in a neighborhood. Such pathways can be in the form of shared-use paths, multi-use paths, and hiking pedestrian paths designed for non-motorized use.

The expansion of a pedestrian pathway system can help connect neighborhoods and communities together, providing for a connective path that encourages walking, exercising, and a healthy lifestyle. It also provides a transportation alternative for those that do not have access to or own a motorized vehicle. This allows more residents to be independent, mobile, and integrated into the community, ultimately advancing its citizens quality of life.

Often, pedestrian pathways lead to increased environmental protection as they are used for low-impact recreation. There are numerous opportunities for pedestrian pathways in any community; from a greenway along a stream corridor, to an urban creekwalk, a canal path, to an abandoned railroad bed— pedestrian pathways can be incorporated into any community.



Pedestrian pathways provide for recreation and connectivity through a community.

## COMPLETE STREETS

Complete streets are designed to be a safe, accessible complete street for all users. Complete streets cater to all types of users including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, and transit riders. The streets are designed so that each user can move through the street safely with ease of crossing streets, walking to the store, or driving to work. Elements of complete streets include sidewalks, street trees, bike lanes, medians, and designated crosswalks.

Because communities differ in size and population, the type of street will vary. In urban areas, elements for complete streets would include shared bike, bus and car lanes, bus stops, median treatments, sidewalks and street furniture. In more rural areas, a complete street may be as simple as a raised sidewalk and crosswalks with textured pavement. It is necessary for each community to evaluate who the users are and what type of street will meet its needs.



A complete street in the heart of a village



A complete street in a rural community

Source: <http://driftlessbicycle.org.com>

# QUALITY OF LIFE ANALYSIS

Quality of Life is a term with broad meaning that refers to the collective quality of an individual or family's experience when living in an area. This is not difficult to measure although it isn't often done. It relates to myriad different issues. Those that are often measured are those that can be controlled by local groups and government such as services, recreational facilities, pedestrian mobility, environmental factors (air, noise, aesthetics, etc.) and public safety.

Varna is a diverse community as large, and larger, as many villages in upstate New York. Because it is unincorporated it has to rely on town and county services to provide those types of services that government has grown to be expected to provide. These include police and fire protection, recreation and parks, and land use controls and policies. The community has taken steps to address other community issues through the formation of the Varna Community Association, and their Center where public events are often held. This presents an advantage for local government to simply support and initiate programs through the Community Association.

Varna has a very active community that through their own initiative and actions have taken steps at improving the hamlet. Community Development initiatives would further those efforts. Through the public meetings for this plan, and for community led plans, a variety of issues were raised that could be best addressed through community development initiatives. The issues identified are:



Source: <http://smallbusinessowner.com>

- Beautification/appearance of properties
- Home ownership
- Mobility

# TOOLS FOR QUALITY OF LIFE PLANNING

## BUSINESS INCUBATORS

Another area where Community Development approaches could be used to further community goals is furthering small business ventures. These would provide space or exposure to markets for local craftspeople, or other businesses that need help getting started in Varna. Often homegrown businesses that are a suitable fit for a hamlet face daunting costs in establishing their business, or moving beyond their home based business to a storefront, or revamping their home or other building to accommodate a business.



## FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS

The façade or face of buildings along Route 366 lend the most direct impression of people travelling through and who reside in Varna. Because many of the buildings are in disrepair, it may not be completely feasible to initiate a façade improvement program as the buildings likely have more issues than only the façade.

## RECYCLE PROPERTIES

As is typical of any community in upstate New York, the housing in Varna is varied, but is mostly older buildings and homes. Many of these are well maintained, but there are many very visible homes that have fallen into disrepair for a variety of reasons. Community Development initiatives could be used to help fund improvements and repairs to some of the homes that need it.

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# Part 4

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The Hamlet of Vama Community Development Plan

## EXISTING CONDITIONS





# FINAL MASTER PLAN



## MASTER PLAN

The literature limits the population of a hamlet to around 900 people, and village's proper start at around 1,500 people. Varna fits, for the most part, the basic characteristics of a hamlet, but because of the relatively large mobile home park (240 units) which has a conventional (i.e. no sidewalks, curvilinear pattern) road network, as well as the somewhat large number of rental units in the community, the population is around 1,100 people according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

Due to natural factors —steep slopes, agricultural fields and the Fall Creek floodplain, an edge is created that defines the hamlet center. Most importantly, it seems that this character type is what is most desired by the public to be maintained into the future. Public participation in this plan established a firm community consensus that the hamlet character is the desired end. On the other hand, there was also a desire for the return of some local services that did not require using the automobile. Fortunately, Varna has the population to support such services to a limited extent, which is subsidized by the higher traffic counts on Route 366. Unfortunately it does not have the pedestrian resources.

Using the discussion above, the general plan is to find the means for encouraging redevelopment and new development in the hamlet, but in a way that compliments and continues the current character. In order to do that, this plan proposes using a variety of tools:

- Hamlet Master Plan and Master Plan Recommendations
- Build-Out Analysis
- Design Guidelines and Landscape Standards
- Zoning Amendments

# MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

## PUBLIC SPACE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Create open space within “niches” in the hamlet.**

While there isn't significant room for a large central park (greater than 1-2 acres), there is opportunity to create pocket parks, a central green around the church, and open plazas along Route 366.

- **A series of small open and green spaces should be connected through pedestrian pathways.**

This can be accomplished through the completion of the Varna Trail, and multi-use paths that lead from Route 366 and connect with the Varna Trail.



This rendering of the Freese Rd./Mt. Pleasant Rd. intersection integrates green plazas, pocket parks, and pathways to create inviting public spaces

## STREET NETWORKS AND SIDEWALKS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement complete streets in Varna to the extent possible.
- Sidewalks, raised mid-block median treatments that provide a refuge for crossing pedestrians, and pavement markings that signal to motorists that pedestrians may be crossing should be implemented.
- To keep motorists from speeding, a roundabout at the intersection of Freese Rd./Mt. Pleasant Rd. can keep traffic flowing at the appropriate speed.
- By integrating a shared bike lane, cyclists and motorists will each have their designated lane which can help reduce the amount of accidents from bikes/cars intersecting in the roadway.
- Plantings including street trees and ground vegetation, as well as ornamental furniture and lampposts can help enhance the aesthetic quality of the street.



This pocket-like park continues a linear pedestrian pathway through a residential area. These pathways help create unique “places” within neighborhoods, and provide an opportunity to create recreation, meditation, and resting spaces.

## BUILDINGS AND FORM RECOMMENDATIONS

The new interconnected pedestrian pathways, trails, and sidewalks provides a network in which traditionally scaled houses should be built.

- Using Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) elements, a variety of single-family houses, townhouses, and duplexes to create quaint neighborhoods that fit into the landscape.
- Each new house or townhouse should face open, green space to encourage healthy, active living that is consistent with the existing character of the hamlet.
- A variety of setbacks will keep the landscape aesthetically interesting as well as consistent with historic lot patterns.
- Buildings should be human scale in that they make the average pedestrian feel safe and not overwhelmed by the height of the building, or the empty space between buildings.
- Buildings should be within close proximity of one another, with parking behind such structures. This can be accomplished using TND or form-based code design methods.



Single-family homes and townhomes face a linear park. The back of the unit faces an alley where parking and public services (i.e. garbage pick-up). The emphasis is on human-scaled buildings that are varied in size, type, and setback.

# BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

The purpose of the build-out analysis is to explore possible future development options when all the land is developed under the proposed zoning amendment and the master plan. The build-out analysis and zoning amendment will help the community grow without compromising the integrity of the landscape or the residents' values.

Area	Type of Building	Dimensions per Building		Number of Buildings		Total Square Feet		Number of Bedrooms per 1,000 sqft		Total Number of Bedrooms
Forest Home Drive	Townhouse	125' x 40' = 5,000 sqft	x	7	=	35,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	52
Varna Hollow	Townhouse	125' x 40' = 5,000 sqft	x	11	=	55,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	82
	Mixed-Use	70' x 40' = 2,800 sqft	x	3	=	8,400	/1,000 x	1.5	=	12.
Varna Commons	Mixed-Use	70' x 40' = 2,800 sqft	x	3	=	8,400	/1,000 x	1.5	=	12.
	Single-Family	30' x 40' = 1,200 sqft	x	24	=	28,800	/1,000 x	1.5	=	43
Trailside	Townhouse	100' x 40' = 4,000 sqft	x	4	=	16,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	24
	Single-Family	40' x 30' = 1,200 sqft	x	95	=	114,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	171
Gateway Plaza	Mixed-Use	200' x 50' = 10,000 sqft	x	1	=	10,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	15
	Mixed-Use	170' x 50' = 8,500 sqft	x	1	=	8,500	/1,000 x	1.5	=	12
	Mixed-Use	50' x 90' = 4,500 sqft	x	1	=	4,500	/1,000 x	1.5	=	6
	Mixed-Use	100' x 40' = 4,400 sqft	x	1	=	4,400	/1,000 x	1.5	=	6
	Townhouse	120' x 40' = 4,800 sqft	x	1	=	4,800	/1,000 x	1.5	=	7
	Townhouse	40' x 100' = 8,00 sqft	x	1	=	8,000	/1,000 x	1.5	=	12
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF BEDROOMS =</b>										<b>454</b>



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# Part 5

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The Hamlet of Vama Community Development Plan

# IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING

## ACTION ITEMS AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

### CIRCULATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Action Item	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategize to implement a complete street system in the study area along Route 366 which includes a sidewalk, bike lanes, and raised medians.</li> </ul>	1-2 Year Horizon (2012-2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a streetscape planting plan along Route 366 which includes street trees and ground cover, and installation of lighting and street furniture.</li> </ul>	1-2 Year Horizon (2012-2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement gateway treatments at the designated gateways in the hamlet.</li> </ul>	1-2 Year Horizon (2012-2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve bus stops by adding bus shelters and other accommodations for transit users on Route 366.</li> </ul>	1-2 Year Horizon (2012-2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize the Varna Trail and begin clearing of vegetation and pathway construction.</li> </ul>	1-2 Year Horizon (2012-2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore a central parking area to mitigate the demand for parking and encourage a walkable environment.</li> </ul>	3-5 Year Horizon (2015-2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With redevelopment, create multi-use pedestrian pathways that connect new development with existing open spaces, trails, and sidewalks.</li> </ul>	3-5 Year Horizon (2015-2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a roundabout at the Freese Rd./Mt. Pleasant Rd. intersection to ensure ease of traffic flow with additional development in the community.</li> </ul>	3-5 Year Horizon (2015-2017)

## PLANNING AND REDEVELOPMENT

Action Item	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a land acquisition strategy for the Town of Dryden to acquire vacant properties and under-utilized buildings to redevelop into public property or affordable housing.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an incentive package to stimulate private development in the prime redevelopment sites while furthering the goals and objectives of the community development plan.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage new housing in a range of densities and that will fit into the surrounding landscape and are consistent with the hamlet zone.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with property owners and developers to provide new buildings that replace vacant sites, buildings that are out of character with the hamlet, or buildings beyond repair and are possible threats the safety, health and welfare of the Varna residents.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to provide incentives to encourage adaptive reuse and preservation of older buildings, such as facade rehabilitation loans or grants as identified in the Funding section.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a list of incentives or a “development toolkit” for potential developers which would encourage infill development and redevelopment in the Varna study area.</li> </ul>	0-1 Year Horizon (2012-2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a mixed-use development and plaza at the intersection of Freese Rd./Mt. Pleasant Rd. The plaza should include outdoor dining and gathering spaces incorporated into the new mixed-use buildings.</li> </ul>	5-10+ Year Horizon (2017-2022)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redevelop areas that are vacant and underutilized that are identified as “prime” sites in the community development plan.</li> </ul>	5-10+ Year Horizon (2017-2022)

# FUNDING

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
<p>Neighborhood Stabilization Program (New York State Housing Finance Agency)</p>	<p>This grant provides subsidies to non-profit and local municipalities looking to buy and redevelop foreclosed, abandoned, or deteriorating properties. Once they are renovated and reconstructed, the properties are sold to low, moderate and middle-income families.</p>
<p>Design Connect (Cornell University Design Organization)</p>	<p>DesignConnect is a community design organization, staffed by Cornell University students, that provides pro bono design and planning services to local municipalities and non-profit organizations.</p>
<p>Community Development Block Grant (NYS Office of Community Renewal)</p>	<p>The NYS CDBG program provides financial assistance to eligible cities, towns, and villages with populations under 50,000 and counties with an area population under 200,000. The purpose of CDBG grants are to develop viable communities by providing safe, affordable housing as well as expanding economic opportunities primarily for persons of low and moderate income.</p>

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Main Street Grants (NYS Office of Community Renewal)	New York State provides financial assistance to communities in effort to strengthen the economic and social vitality of main streets and neighborhoods. Main Street grants help in in the revitalizing of main streets, specifically targeted at façade renovations, interior upgrades, and streetscape enhancements/improvements. This grant does not cover new construction.
Tax Increment Financing (TIF)	A method of public financing that is used for redevelopment, infrastructure, and community development projects that benefit the public. TIF's use future gains in taxes to subsidize current projects. Once complete, a public project often results in a higher tax that reflects the increased property value.



A before and after image of façade renovations . Main Street grants can provide funding to help “face lift” historic and deteriorated properties.

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