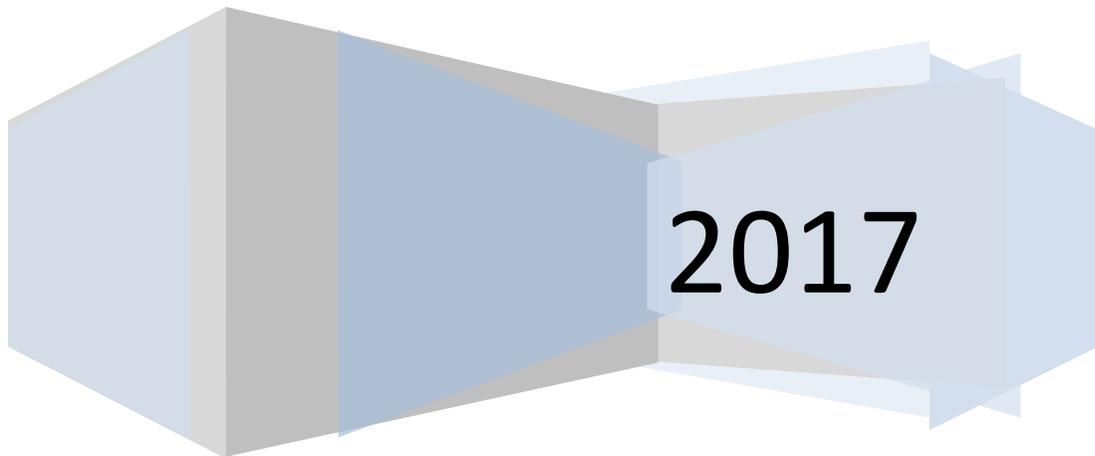


Town of Berkshire Comprehensive Plan



Berkshire Comprehensive Plan

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Foreword

The Town of Berkshire recognizes there are current and future issues that require planning and a strategic vision to insure a future that best protects the health and welfare of its residents. A comprehensive plan articulates goals and success strategies identified as critical to the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of a municipality. Municipalities that adopt comprehensive plans must ensure all land use regulations and actions follow the basic principles outlined in the plan. Community input is of great importance in determining relevant issues, concerns, values and priorities.

A town survey was distributed to all residents in 2014, and responses provided some valuable insight into issues significant to the respondents. Berkshire residents clearly value the rural character of the township and the lifestyle it provides. Protecting that rural environment, enhancing the beauty of neighborhoods, and preserving agricultural resources were identified as keys to maintaining the quality of life. Survey responses, input from the volunteer survey committee, input from town and county officials, and review of plans from neighboring communities were used by the Planning Board in preparing the Comprehensive Plan. The complete survey and analysis of responses is available on the town web site:

http://www.berkshireny.net/uploads/3/4/4/3/34433180/berkshire_town_survey_results_-_june_28_2014_-_final.pdf.

Implementation of this plan requires collaboration and support from the entire community. To be successful, town officials must report on the plan's progress regularly, update the plan routinely, and translate the goals into action items and follow through on those actions.

Community Demographics and Description

The Town of Berkshire is a rural community in northern Tioga County, in New York State's Southern Tier region. The 2010 census indicated a population of 1,412 within the boundaries consisting of 30.21 square miles and 17,443 acres. The town has a generally rugged topography with elevations from 1,000 to over 1,500 feet. Two principal valleys, formed by the East and West Branches of the Owego Creek, drain the area from north to south, entering the Susquehanna River in Owego. Berkshire has been referred to as "centrally isolated" - being 21 miles southeast of Ithaca, 30 miles northwest of Binghamton, 26 miles south of Cortland, and 16 miles north of the county seat in Owego. *

About a third of the population lives in the hamlet of Berkshire, approximately in the center of the township. In addition to the hamlet on New York State Route 38, the population also extends north and south on Route 38; to the east, known as "East Berkshire" primarily accessed by East Berkshire Rd; and to the west via Glen and Jewett Hill Roads. The closest neighboring population centers are the village of Newark Valley to the south and the hamlets of Richford to the north and Speedsville to the west. Bordering townships include Newark Valley, Richford, Candor, Lisle, Caroline, and Nanticoke. The population, with a median age of 42, is nearly evenly split between males and females. The median income is approximately \$51,500 and median home value is \$90,090. The median age of housing in Berkshire just over 40 years old and the vacancy rates of rented housing is 4.7% and owned housing is 0%. Additionally, there are zero housing structures with more than 10 units. This data could illustrate a need for multi-family rental housing.

Local budgets to determine the town-wide tax base include costs for the fire district, the highway department and administrative functions (Town Board, Code Enforcement, Town Clerk, Town Justice, Dog Control, and Property Assessment). There are 42 miles of town roads to maintain, which requires equipment, buildings and road crews. Maintenance of the Town Hall and the baseball field as well as inactive cemetery care are also funded by town taxes.

* McEnteer, Thomas C., ed. *Seasons of Change: An Updated History of Tioga County New York* by Tioga County Authors. Owego, NY: Tioga County Legislature, 1990.

Community Demographics and Description (con't)

The town maintains a website containing pertinent town links and contact information, as well as a bulletin board located in front of the Town Hall. A town wide email list is maintained by a volunteer with approximately 200 email addresses. A quarterly newsletter is also published and sent to all residents (approximately 424 addresses and 166 email addresses).

The fire department and Congregational Church provide bulletin boards in front of their buildings to make announcements of community events. Legal notices are listed in the official newspaper *The Tioga County Courier* as required by state law.

Several operating family farms, mostly in dairy, comprise the agricultural sector. There are several small businesses and home based businesses as well as many local contractors operating within the community. A wholesale hardwood lumber business is the single largest employer in the town.

The Newark Valley Central School district provides public primary education. Many opportunities for higher education exist in Dryden, Ithaca, Cortland and Binghamton.

There are ample opportunities for residents to become involved in community service or local recreational groups such as school and church, The Berkshire Free Library, snowmobile & ATV clubs, fire and EMS services, youth clubs, Rod & Gun Club, Sr. Citizen Group, Community Hall Association, local government, and Helping Hands Food Pantry. Abundant natural resources provide locations for walking & hiking, biking, hunting, and fishing.

Vision

The Town of Berkshire has identified the following issues to be of primary importance to insure the town remains a safe, healthy place where current and future generations enjoy living.

Natural Resources

- Protect and preserve water quality and quantity
- Promote and safeguard the preservation of farmland soils
- Preserve air quality

Quality of Life

- Provide all residents and visitors with a sense of well-being by providing a safe, friendly environment
- Support activities and organizations that unite the community
- Support and promote activities for youth
- Protect the natural beauty of the Town and preserve it for future generations
- Conserve the small town identity of the community
- Protect the peaceful rural aspect of the town
- Maintain clean and attractive properties

Government, Services, and Infrastructure

- Develop proactive, transparent, and cost-effective local government

Economic Development

- Encourage economic activities geared towards recreation, tourism, small and home-based businesses, and small industry
- Support and encourage local business and agriculture

Vision (con't)

Land Use

- Manage the size and scale of commercial development
- Integrate economic development with the Town's infrastructure and natural resources
- Promote sustainable land use practices

Natural Resources

Protect Natural Resources – preserve, respect, and responsibly use what nature provides, including clean air and water, soil, forests, energy sources, and wildlife.

a) Water

- Work with appropriate agencies to develop policies to protect groundwater and surface water from contamination.
- Investigate the use of alternate wastewater treatment systems, such as clustered septic system or packaged plant, as a method of supporting increased density in select locations in the hamlet.
- Investigate development of a public water system that will provide town residents with an alternative to private wells as well as a hydrant system for enhanced fire protection.
- Participate in programs to better protect the town from flood hazards.
- Work with the State, other agencies and property owners to develop programs to maintain streambeds to reduce erosion and gravel deposition. Utilize existing natural features for protecting groundwater quality such as the installation of riparian corridors.
- Work with County, State and Regional agencies to protect quality and quantity of water in the East and West branches of Owego Creek.
- Prioritize residential water use over business and industrial water use.

b) Energy Sources

- Support development of residential and municipal renewable/alternative energy sources and conservation programs.
- Inform landowners on legal, societal, and environmental impacts of energy development projects on their lands.

c) Environment and Air Quality

- Collaborate with agencies such as NYS Department of Environmental Research (DEC) and New York State Forest Owners' Association to protect the beauty of our forests and timber resources and encourage sustainable forestry practices.
- Support protection of endangered or threatened species and their habitat.

Natural Resources (con't)

- Communicate as necessary to make residents aware of actions that are hazardous to air, soil and water quality.
- Support NYS DEC efforts to combat invasive species.

d) Recreational Use

- Support and encourage recreational activities that utilize Berkshire's natural resources, such as fishing, hunting, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and off-road trail riding.
- Investigate creation of a park and ride for snowmobilers at the town highway building or the Town Hall.

Quality of Life

Foster an environment that provides a friendly and safe community while encouraging recreational activity and cultural events that are entertaining and educational.

a) Natural Beauty & Rural Character

- Maintain the beauty of a small rural town and protect natural resources, landscapes and natural views.
- Encourage a visually appealing and pedestrian-friendly downtown that attracts businesses and new residents.

b) Sense of Community

- Support the efforts of individuals and community organizations that work to promote community spirit and enhance the quality of life for residents.
- Foster a stronger sense of community by supporting events like craft fairs, town picnics, flea markets, the Berkshire Senior Citizens, the Blueberry Festival, Library events, and youth activities.
- Identify and financially support programs that may allow seniors to remain in the community (aging in place).
- Encourage volunteerism to help with Fire and EMS services, the Berkshire Community Association, Berkshire Free Library, Northern Tioga Neighbors Helping Neighbors, town-wide committees, roadside clean up, etc.
- Improve community communication methods.
- Encourage availability of a local clothing drop-off container to help Tioga County thrift shops provide free/low cost clothing to residents.

c) Public Health and Safety

- Work with the Tioga County Sheriff and NYS police to provide routine but non-predictable patrols.
- Provide support for those in need of health services.
- Encourage drug prevention and awareness programs.

Quality of Life (con't)

- Replace or add new sidewalks for a more walkable community and make the effort to keep them clear at all times.
- Provide access to training on home and fire safety.
- Encourage homeowners to perform radon testing.

d) Housing

- Encourage converting unused homes to housing/rental units to attract new residents and encourage young adults to stay local.
- Establish and provide literature explaining resident expectations; resources available to new homeowners and renters such as recycling, refuse disposal, town newsletter, town-wide email list, town meetings, etc.
- Seek development opportunities for multi-unit senior housing.
- Explore funding opportunities to assist land owners with land and home improvements.

e) Youth Activities and Other Recreation

- Promote programs that provide area youth with learning and employment opportunities.
- Increase recreational opportunities for youth and all age groups.
- Enhance and support the promotion of cultural events. Work with The Tioga County Council of the Arts, or other organizations, to bring plays, bands and other forms of entertainment to the Community Hall.
- Advertise and support local school activities and fund raisers.
- Provide funding to make the baseball field more usable and enhance central town space for more recreational uses.

f) Community Projects and Events

- Pursue grants and other revenue sources to assist with community projects such as:
 - Development of a community playground
 - Creation of a walking trail

Quality of Life (con't)

- Development of the town-owned parcel east of the town hall into a nature trail or preserve, picnic ground, or fishing access.
- Consider creation of community garden spaces

Government, Services, and Infrastructure

a) Leadership

- Outline short and long-term plans to determine needs, examine priorities, and review costs in order to develop longer range spending forecasts.
- Ensure all elected and appointed Town officials have sufficient training to properly perform the functions of their offices.
- Develop a handbook that outlines duties, responsibilities, standard operating procedures and obligations of all elected and appointed officials and employees.
- Investigate potential consolidation and sharing of services, equipment and personnel with neighboring communities to reduce costs and maintain high levels of service.
- Ensure the supervisor assigns each member of the Town Board to work directly with a specific town government issue (Justice, Highway , Planning Board, Public Relations, Facilities, etc) and publicize those assignments. Assignments should be made in the annual organizational meeting.

b) Emergency Services

- Insure adequate fire and emergency services are available to all residents.
- Participate with the Tioga County Emergency Management Office coordinator, the Berkshire Fire Department and EMS, Berkshire Community Association, and the Newark Valley School District to develop an appropriate disaster emergency response plan.
- Encourage the Town Board to work collaboratively with the Board of Fire Commissioners to develop total tax burden forecasts for town residents.
- Designate the Highway Superintendent to work with Tioga County Soil and Water Conservation District to develop and maintain the Tioga County Multi-Jurisdictional Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. ⁽¹⁾
- Develop and follow the town-specific disaster recovery plan to complement the Tioga County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). ⁽²⁾

Government, Services, and Infrastructure – (con't)

c) Transportation and Infrastructure

- Develop a 5- and 10-year capital expenditure plan that addresses road system maintenance and improvement and equipment replacement.
- Hold an annual town-wide clean-up day.
- Work with NYSEG and NYDOT to upgrade street lighting for all lights in the hamlet.
- Explore and develop up-to-date and efficient use of energy solutions in town buildings and services.
- Request the Tioga County IDA install railroad crossing lights on East Berkshire Road and Brown Road.
- Work with Tioga County to insure rail line is well maintained and operable.
- Work with local and regional agencies to provide public transportation.
- Assign the Highway Department to create an inventory of road sign locations and insure signage is appropriate and effective.

d) Communications

- Work with local suppliers and NYS to make high speed internet connection available to all residents.
- Utilize multiple media sources to provide more effective sharing of information, such as:
 - Local/Regional newspapers
 - Facebook /social media
 - Town website
 - Town newsletter
 - Cable TV bulletin board
 - Town e-mail
 - Centrally located bulletin board
- Develop a process to compile and distribute to residents opportunities of local, county, or state interest such as:
 - Volunteer needs of local organizations and projects such as; stream and highway cleanups, ballfield repairs, etc.

Government, Services, and Infrastructure – (con't)

- Energy assessment and savings programs
 - Recreational events
 - Job fairs
 - Produce accurate town board meeting agendas, minutes and financial reports and distribute them in a timely manner, via the town-wide e-mail and town website.
 - Schedule and publicize the annual organizational meeting agenda in an effort to get more residents involved in town affairs.
 - Provide all town forms electronically on the website.
- e) Code Enforcement
- Actively enforce local laws by supporting the Code Enforcement Officer to contact property owners to clean up properties of debris, disabled vehicles and trailers and properly maintain lawn and buildings.
 - Adequately compensate the CEO to insure effective enforcement of state and local laws. Continue to monitor town properties to:
 - Enforce the NYS Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Codes laws to ensure buildings are constructed safely
 - Condemn dangerous buildings
 - Help sustain property values by encouraging well-maintained residences and conversion of vacant or unmaintained properties into usable structures such as rental housing.
 - Ensure the Town Justice and Town Attorney fully cooperate with and support the Code Enforcement Officer in all compliance efforts.
 - Require the Code Enforcement Officer to provide the Town Board monthly reports of enforcement efforts.
 - Ensure residents are aware of expectations of following local and state laws and understand the role and responsibilities of the CEO regarding compliance.
 - All new construction within FEMA's Special Flood Hazard Area must comply with the Town of Berkshire's Flood Damage Prevention Regulations. ⁽³⁾

Economic Development

Expansion of local business to help support the financial burdens and yet preserve the rural character of the community.

a) Agriculture

- Encourage development of a farmer's market to provide residents access to locally grown crops.
- Support local agribusiness efforts.
- Monitor new development in an effort to preserve viable farmland.

b) Business

- Work with governmental economic agencies, and other organizations to provide support for regional industrial development goals and to support local business and business start-ups in the town.
- Support local entrepreneurs in the community by listing services available and encourage local use by residents.
- Seek out expertise and funding that will attract appropriate development.
- Investigate changing alcohol sales regulations to be more supportive of the growing craft beverage industry.

c) Rural Character

- Promote economic growth consistent with the rural character of the community.
- Monitor new development in an effort to preserve aquifer quality.
- Work with the Tioga County Tourism Office to promote the numerous opportunities for outdoor active recreation available in Berkshire.

Land Use

A desire to maintain a balance of individual property rights and development with protection of natural resources and the environment.

a) Open Space

- Encourage the protection of individual property rights with regards to development of land.
- Ensure that all new development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and is compatible with adjacent land uses through the applicability of the Site Plan Review local law and Site Plan Review procedure.
- Develop land-use recommendations that help preserve the mix of forested landscape and open land.
- Identify potential available land that may be suitable for commercial development in the future.

b) Agriculture

- Support and encourage all agricultural activities.
- Work with Tioga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tioga County Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP), and the local farm community to promote diversification of agricultural enterprises and to protect businesses associated with agriculture.

References

- 1) Tioga County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
<https://www.tiogacountyny.com/departments/emergency-management/>

- 2) Town of Berkshire Hazard Mitigation Plan
<https://www.tiogacountyny.com/media/1644/section-93-town-of-berkshire.pdf>

- 3) Berkshire Flood Damage Prevention Regulations
http://www.berkshireny.net/uploads/3/4/4/3/34433180/flood_damage_prevention_law.pdf

Proceedings

- a) Initial Public Hearing – Planning Board - September 5, 2017
- b) Tioga County Planning Board 239 Review - September 20, 2017
- c) Public Hearing – Berkshire Town Board – October, 18, 2017
- d) Adoption by Resolution – Berkshire Town Board - October 18, 2017
- e) This Comprehensive Plan will be monitored and evaluated, and will be updated periodically as needed.