

Chapter 1: Introduction

I. The Comprehensive Plan

The Ulysses 2045 Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year vision and roadmap for Ulysses' future. The Comprehensive Plan guides Town decisions on where to focus new residential, commercial, and employment growth; how to best maintain the Town's rural character and agricultural heritage; where to make capital investments such as municipal water, stormwater management, parks, and other public facilities and services; how to adapt to a changing climate and preserve natural resources; and how to improve the multimodal transportation system. Ulysses 2045 is the framework for many of Ulysses' big-picture decisions on how to sustainably grow and improve the quality of life of its residents. It shapes how Ulysses will look, feel, and operate over time, and prepares the Town to face challenges and opportunities today and into the future, reflecting the collective values and future vision of the community.

Under Section 272-A of New York State's Town Law, (Consolidated Laws of New York Chapter 62 Article 16), towns are authorized to create and adopt comprehensive plans. Comprehensive plans are not laws, but rather a compilation of materials that identify goals, objectives, and policies that will facilitate the community's vision of itself in the future. The authority and responsibility of the Town to develop this long-range plan is one of the most important duties granted by the legislature to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of the Town, and to give due consideration to the needs of the people of the region of which the Town is a part.

While not required, State law identifies the following topics that may be included: regional needs, demographic trends, environmental and historic resources, utilities and infrastructure, housing and future housing needs, land uses, existing and proposed recreation facilities, locations of commercial and industrial facilities, and economic development strategies. Comprehensive plans are usually developed for a 15 to 20-year horizon with anticipated periodic updates made every 10 years. Less extensive revisions and updates may, and should, be incorporated into the comprehensive plan on an annual basis. Development regulations, such as zoning, must be reliant on and consistent with a local government's comprehensive plan, and in order to be eligible for numerous grants and loans from certain state infrastructure programs, comprehensive plans are required.

The Town adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1999 and adopted an updated Plan in 2009. This Comprehensive Plan periodic update builds on the previously adopted 2009 Comprehensive Plan, as many identified trends and issues remain relevant, and progresses the Town's long-range planning to be more in alignment with State guidance.

A. How to Use This Document

The Ulysses 2045 Comprehensive Plan guides the Town's development over about a twenty-year planning period and serves as a tool to assist the Town Board, Planning Board, Town staff, and others involved in making public infrastructure and land use decisions. It's a blueprint for the future character of the Town. It guides decisions on land use, transportation, housing, capital facilities, economic development, parks, and the natural and built environment. It identifies potential opportunities for

funding and establishes the basis for zoning and development regulations, and how the Town interprets and administers them.

The Comprehensive Plan starts with this introduction, explaining the purpose of this plan, states the overall vision for each element, summarizes the planning framework and process, and provides a broad demographic summary. The rest of the document is organized into elements or chapters.

There are nine elements: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Capital Facilities and Utilities, Environment and Natural Resources, Climate Change and Resiliency, Community Well-Being, and Built Environment.

Goals, objectives, and policies provide the means for Ulysses to grow and prosper, and maintain the unique character of the Town for current and future generations. Each Comprehensive Plan element contains goals, objectives, and policies that are numbered and labeled according to its respective element. Goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

Goals are desired outcomes or intended achievements.

Objectives are discrete pieces of work that the Town will take on to implement the Comprehensive Plan, usually with the intent to be completed within a designated time frame.

Policies establish guiding actions and commitment to these goals, provide the framework for future decision making, and authorize the regulations to implement them.

B. Use of Policies in All Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

Each element of the Comprehensive Plan includes objectives and policies that the Town should consider to realize the community's vision and goals, as outlined in the plan. It is not possible to implement all policies called for by the Comprehensive Plan simultaneously. Therefore, the Town government collectively, which includes the Town board, administration, individual departments, boards, and committees, will use the objectives and policies in the plan to guide work programs, budgets, capital improvement programs, and action programs. Over time, the Comprehensive Plan objectives and policies will be implemented as priorities dictate and resources allow. Occasionally, there will be a need to re-evaluate and amend objectives and policies as stated in the Comprehensive Plan as the community's priorities and values change.

The Town shall maintain discretion in determining how the policies of the Comprehensive Plan are to be interpreted and implemented. The Comprehensive Plan shall not commit the Town to actions that are not fiscally sustainable over time.

C. Element Summaries

All elements of the Comprehensive Plan are interrelated. No one element should be reviewed in isolation. As a result, there are goals and policies that overlap between the elements described below. In **Appendix XX** there is a matrix that references the various nexus.

- Land Use is a description of the overall development pattern and character of the area to inform and guide future investment and development. The Town is comprised of mostly agricultural and rural or low-density residential development. The Comprehensive Plan provides guidance for potential residential growth located along existing or planned municipal water infrastructure, and a few targeted areas of compact mixed-use and commercial development, which are primarily on major corridors with key transportation connections.
- Housing addresses the types of homes, the variety of homes that are accessible to individuals and families, and promotes the addition of dwellings that are safe and healthy, affordable, and resource efficient.
- Economic Development explains opportunities to grow and enhance local business and to sustainably plan and build upon future potential employment options.
- Transportation addresses future desires of the regional transportation system through respective goals, objectives, and policies. The Comprehensive Plan envisions creating safe and healthy connections for people to work, live, and play. In order to achieve this vision, the plan gives insights into current conditions relating to mobility, accessibility to transit, health and environmental impacts, and regulatory impacts.
- Capital Facilities and Utilities describes the infrastructure needed to support current and future development, essential public facilities, economic development, facilities management, and inventory of facilities. It also helps guide future capital projects and financing strategies.
- Environment and Natural Resources addresses the natural environment and resources in the Town, including streams, wetlands, soil maps, geologically hazardous areas/steep slopes, open space, and Cayuga Lake.
- Climate Change and Resiliency addresses and analyzes ways to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resiliency to, and avoid the adverse impacts of, climate change, including ways to reduce localized greenhouse gas emissions and avoid creating or worsening localized climate impacts to vulnerable populations and overburdened communities.
- Community Well-Being examines existing social and recreational programs and describes the importance of having a safe and healthy place to enhance the well-being of residents to meet essential human needs.
- Built Environment describes the integration of building and site design to promote human and environmental health and safety, that fits into the community. It establishes links between building and site design, streets and the public realm; historic and cultural resources and scenic viewshed preservation; integration of nature into the built environment; and energy and resource efficient neighborhoods and buildings.

II. Planning Background

A. Town, County, and Regional Plans

The following adopted plans provide specific details and actions for many of the policy areas addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Each has its own set of goals, objectives, policies, and implementable elements. These plans are valued partners in the growth and development of the Town and are referenced here to avoid duplicating information in each applicable element of the Comp Plan.

- 2022 Tompkins County Resiliency and Recovery Plan
- 2018 Town of Ulysses Natural Resource Inventory
- 2009 Town of Ulysses Comprehensive Plan
- 2013 Town of Ulysses Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
- 2008 Route 96 Corridor Management Study
- 2001 Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway Corridor Management Study

There are additional plans that impact the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan maintained by other agencies, including Tompkins County, the Village of Trumansburg, New York State Parks and Historic Preservation, the Trumansburg School District, and the Ithaca City School District.

B. Tompkins County- Countywide Planning Policies

The purpose of the Countywide Planning Policies is to express a regional vision and help measure consistency of local plans. The 2015 Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the County Legislature in 2015 and underwent a five-year review in 2019, leading to the adoption of action Items to continue its implementation. This plan outlines a vision for the County's future, guided by principles that prioritize sustainability, intergovernmental cooperation, and efficient public investment. These principles aim to ensure the well-being of current and future generations, address regional challenges through collaborative efforts, and optimize the use of taxpayer resources in infrastructure development. The plan includes policies for the economy, housing, transportation, natural resources, water resources, energy and greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation, healthy communities, and development patterns.

C. Community Engagement

An active community involvement program is an essential part of the development of the Comprehensive Plan. Community outreach began with the development and guidance of the Public Participation Plan. The Town engaged with the community to talk with residents and hear firsthand the impacts of life in Ulysses for them, their families, and their neighbors.

Understanding our community is understanding where people live, work, and go to school, and learning what the public opinions are on current and future Town developments. This was accomplished by meeting with a host of people at numerous events and public meetings including, five public hearings, four focus groups, and two open house events since September 2024. Over the past year, the committee was also present at the Village of Trumansburg's Winterfest events held each December, and tabled at a Trumansburg Farmers Market event. During that time frame, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and Town Board held meetings, presentations, and discussions to discuss the Comprehensive Plan and to receive public comments. During community events, the committee shared updates about the plan and provided the opportunity for the public to engage with the committee in an informal setting.

The steering committee also developed a survey to capture a large population of the community that may not have the ability to engage in the events described above. The survey results, open house, focus group, and public hearing comments are provided in [Appendix x](#).

III. Ulysses 2045 Vision

Ulysses is a welcoming and engaged rural community in the Finger Lakes region. We care about our environment, quality of life, and the well-being of our residents. Our commitment to sustainable and regenerative practices reflects our desire to safeguard our natural resources, agricultural land, and beautiful lakeshore for future generations. We value our farmers and agricultural assets. We prioritize connecting our residents to each other and our community. We support creating welcoming community spaces where people of all ages and abilities can come together and feel a sense of belonging. We are committed to sustainable development that encourages growth yet protects our cherished small-town character and natural resources. We recognize the need for diverse housing options so that everyone can find a place to call home and remain a part of our community for years to come. We are dedicated to fostering economic development initiatives that uplift local businesses, expand services, and create job opportunities that equitably meet the needs of our community. We are proactive in climate change preparedness and take pride in being a resilient community that encourages sustainable practices to protect the environment.

IV. Demographic Overview

Demographics provides the Town with an understanding of community characteristics now and in the future. Demographic data can help the Town properly plan for present and future needs relating to various planning elements addressed in this document, such as parks and recreation, housing, infrastructure, and services. The demographics provided in this chapter summarizes the more detailed analysis provided in the Economic Development Chapter.

Population

Since 2010, the population of the Town has remained relatively stable, with only a small decrease (.01%).¹ Tompkins County saw a significant increase in population over the same period, growing by 4,010 individuals or 3.9%. The Southern Tier Region, on the other hand, saw a significant population decline, with a loss of 29,925 individuals or 4.5% of its total population. Over the next five years, the population in each geography is expected to decline, with the largest percentage loss in the Region, followed by the Town, then the County.

Though the population for the Town saw slight decreases since 2010, the number of households has increased by a greater amount, in part due to shrinking household sizes. The number of households in the Region has remained relatively stable, with only a small increase. Tompkins County saw significant increases in the number of households since 2010, adding 4,158 new households for a change of 10.7%. Over the next five years, the number of households is expected to remain relatively stable or increase slightly.

¹ Though the table shows a decrease of 6 individuals (0.1%), the small geography of the town means that this is more likely to be measurement error. The takeaway should instead be that there was a small decrease in population, rather than any numerical value that may be more accurate for larger geographies.

Demographic Fundamentals				
POPULATION				
	2010	2024	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	4,900	4,894	(6)	(0.1%)
Tompkins County	101,564	105,574	4,010	3.9%
Southern Tier Region	657,909	627,984	(29,925)	(4.5%)
PROJECTED POPULATION				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	4,894	4,830	(64)	(1.3%)
Tompkins County	105,574	105,463	(111)	(0.1%)
Southern Tier Region	627,984	616,581	(11,403)	(1.8%)
HOUSEHOLDS				
	2010	2024	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	2,138	2,218	80	3.7%
Tompkins County	38,967	43,125	4,158	10.7%
Southern Tier Region	265,154	265,281	127	0.0%
PROJECTED HOUSEHOLDS				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	2,218	2,235	17	0.8%
Tompkins County	43,125	44,298	1,173	2.7%
Southern Tier Region	265,281	266,721	1,440	0.5%

Source: Esri

Racial Composition

The majority of the Town is White (86.4%). The second largest racial group is two or more races (8.9%), followed by Hispanics (3.8%). Shares of each racial group follow the same ranking in the County and Region, though percentage amounts differ, with the County being the most racially diverse geography.

Racial Composition, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
White Alone	86.4%	73.1%	82.9%
Black Alone	1.9%	4.5%	4.2%
American Indian Alone	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Asian Alone	1.2%	10.6%	4.2%
Pacific Islander Alone	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	1.2%	2.9%	1.7%
Two or More Races	8.9%	8.5%	6.7%
Hispanic Origin	3.8%	7.0%	4.5%
Diversity Index	30.0	51.7	36.5

Source: Esri

Age Distribution

The largest share of the Town's population, 41.4% is over the age of 55, which is the highest of any geography. Similarly, the Town has the smallest proportion of residents aged 25 and younger, at 24.7% compared to 39.6% in the County and 31% in the Region. Each geography has a similar proportion of the population aged 25 to 55, ranging from 34% to 34.5%.

The median age in the Town is 47.8, significantly higher than both the County and the Region median ages of 31.8 and 41, respectively.

Age Distribution 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
0 - 4	4.4%	3.7%	4.7%
5 - 9	5.3%	3.7%	5.0%
10 - 14	5.5%	3.8%	5.3%
15 - 24	9.5%	28.4%	16.0%
25 - 34	9.9%	14.9%	12.1%
35 - 44	12.5%	10.4%	11.4%
45 - 54	11.6%	9.2%	10.9%
55 - 64	14.9%	9.7%	13.3%
65 - 74	15.4%	9.3%	12.0%
75 - 84	8.6%	4.9%	6.6%
85+	2.5%	1.9%	2.7%

Source: Esri

Household Income

Median household income in the Town is \$76,879 and is anticipated to increase by 9.1% to \$83,867 in 2029. The Town's median household income is just below that of the County, which is \$77,610. The Region's median household income is the lowest compared to Tompkins County and the Town at \$63,557, but is expected to increase the most, both by dollar and percent change. The average household income in the Town is \$100,921, which is significantly higher than the median household income.

Demographic Fundamentals				
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	\$76,879	\$83,867	\$6,988	9.1%
Tompkins County	\$77,610	\$86,334	\$8,724	11.2%
Southern Tier Region	\$63,557	\$72,528	\$8,971	14.1%

The Town has the lowest percentage of low-income households, with only 10.2% of households earning \$25,000 or less annually and about a quarter earning under \$50,000. In the County and Region, 19.2% of households earn below \$25,000. Just over a third (34%) of the Town's households are high-income earners, making \$100,000 or more each year. The County has a slightly higher percentage of households earning \$100,000 or more each year at 38.4%, and the Region has the lowest percentage at 30.3%.

Household Income Distribution 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
<\$15,000	5.1%	13.4%	11.0%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	5.1%	5.8%	8.2%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	3.3%	3.7%	7.3%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	12.3%	9.4%	12.3%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	22.3%	15.9%	17.8%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	17.9%	13.4%	13.1%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	19.4%	19.0%	16.5%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%
\$200,000+	8.3%	12.2%	6.7%

Source: Esri

Employment

The figure below shows the industry sector composition of Tompkins County. Overall, the county added 722 jobs since 2010, for a 1% increase.

The top industries are educational services, health care and social assistance, and government. Together, these three industries constitute 58.7% of the County's total jobs in 2024.

By job count, the industries that saw the largest growth since 2010 are educational services, health care and social assistance, and management of companies and enterprises. The industries that saw the largest decreases are government, retail trade, and manufacturing.