



2. Context & Challenges

FRAMEWORK *for* REGIONAL GROWTH

This chapter of the Framework offers an overview of the planning-related issues facing the region as it enters the early years of the 21st Century. Provided are a review of the regulatory and organizational con-

text for regional planning, a review of the region's context, development history and demographics, and summaries of challenges addressed in subsequent chapters.

2.1 CENTRAL PLACE IN THE REGION

Although the counties do not directly influence patterns of development and public investment beyond their borders, understanding the region's place in the Western New York and Bi-National regions is important.

Bi-National Context. Erie and Niagara Counties occupy a strategic position at the center of a dynamic region. As emphasized in recent reports by Niagara Bi-National Region Economic Roundtable and the Urban Design Project/Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the counties benefit from their location in the middle of an internationally significant regional community and marketplace extending over 3,700 square miles from Toronto to Rochester and home to 3.2 million people.

According to the Roundtable report, the border location presents a host of advantages:

- access within a half-days drive to half of the U.S. and Canadian populations;
- the presence of industry leaders in information technology and data process, banking and financial services, telecommunications, automotive manufacturing, and food processing;
- a cluster of over 60 colleges and universities with enrolment of more than 300,000 students; and
- a unique and often under appreciated collection of significant historic and natural resources and cultural events and activities.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Figure 1. The region's Bi-National context.



Western New York. Erie and Niagara Counties serve as the urban centers of an eight county region referred to as Western New York. The region includes Erie and Niagara Counties and the surrounding counties of Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Wyoming, Genesee, Allegany,

and Orleans. With the exceptions of Wyoming and Orleans County, the region has experienced a drop in population over the last decade with declines most pronounced in Erie and Chautauqua County.

Table 1. Western New York Population Change, 1990-2000

	1990	2000	% Chg 90-2000	
			#	%
Allegany County	50,470	49,927	-543	-1%
Cattaraugus County	84,234	83,955	-279	0%
Chautauqua County	141,895	139,750	-2,145	-2%
Erie County	968,532	950,265	-18,267	-2%
Genesee County	60,060	60,370	310	1%
Niagara County	220,756	219,846	-910	0%
Orleans County	41,846	44,171	2,325	6%
Wyoming County	42,507	43,424	917	2%
Western New York	1,610,300	1,591,708	-18,592	-1%

Source: US Census Bureau

2.2 INFLUENCE BUT LITTLE DIRECT CONTROL

In New York State, traditional planning authority resides with municipal government. While New York State public authorities and counties have opportunities to influence regional patterns of growth and development in several important ways, their power to directly affect land use and development is limited.

The state's Municipal Home Rule, City, Town, and Village Laws delegate the power to regulate land use and authorize land subdivision to municipal governments. In the Erie-Niagara Region, such powers are exercised by 64 independent municipal governments—the 3 cities, 25 towns, and 16 villages in Erie County and the 3 cities, 12 towns, and 5 villages in Niagara County. Counties have the ability to review and comment on many local land use decisions, but not the authority to approve or disapprove proposals.

Though counties are not delegated authority to directly regulate land use, their exercise of other powers has an important influence on regional patterns of growth and development. As reported in John Nolan's *Well Grounded: Using Local Land Use Authority to Achieve Smart Growth*, state law provides for the following:

- General Municipal Law Section 239-c empowers counties to create and fund county planning boards or, in conjunction with

other counties or municipalities, regional planning councils;

- General Municipal Law Section 239-c(3) authorizes county planning boards to conduct planning and research activity and to adopt a comprehensive plan;
- General Municipal Law Section 239-c(3) authorizes the county planning board to recommend to local governments how those municipalities should zone certain lands;
- General Municipal Law Section 239-c(3) also authorizes county planning boards to provide technical services, including the drafting of comprehensive plans and land use regulations, to local governments. (Additionally, this section provides counties with the authority to enter into intermunicipal agreements with local governments to perform on behalf of a city, town or village ministerial functions related to land use planning and regulation);
- General Municipal Law Section 239-e authorizes counties to adopt official maps showing present and proposed county roads, rights of way, and facilities, and to restrict private construction on lands proposed for public facilities. (The county official map can serve as the official map of a municipality that has failed to adopt one).
- General Municipal Law Sections 239-m and 239-n require local governments to refer certain land use matters to county or

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

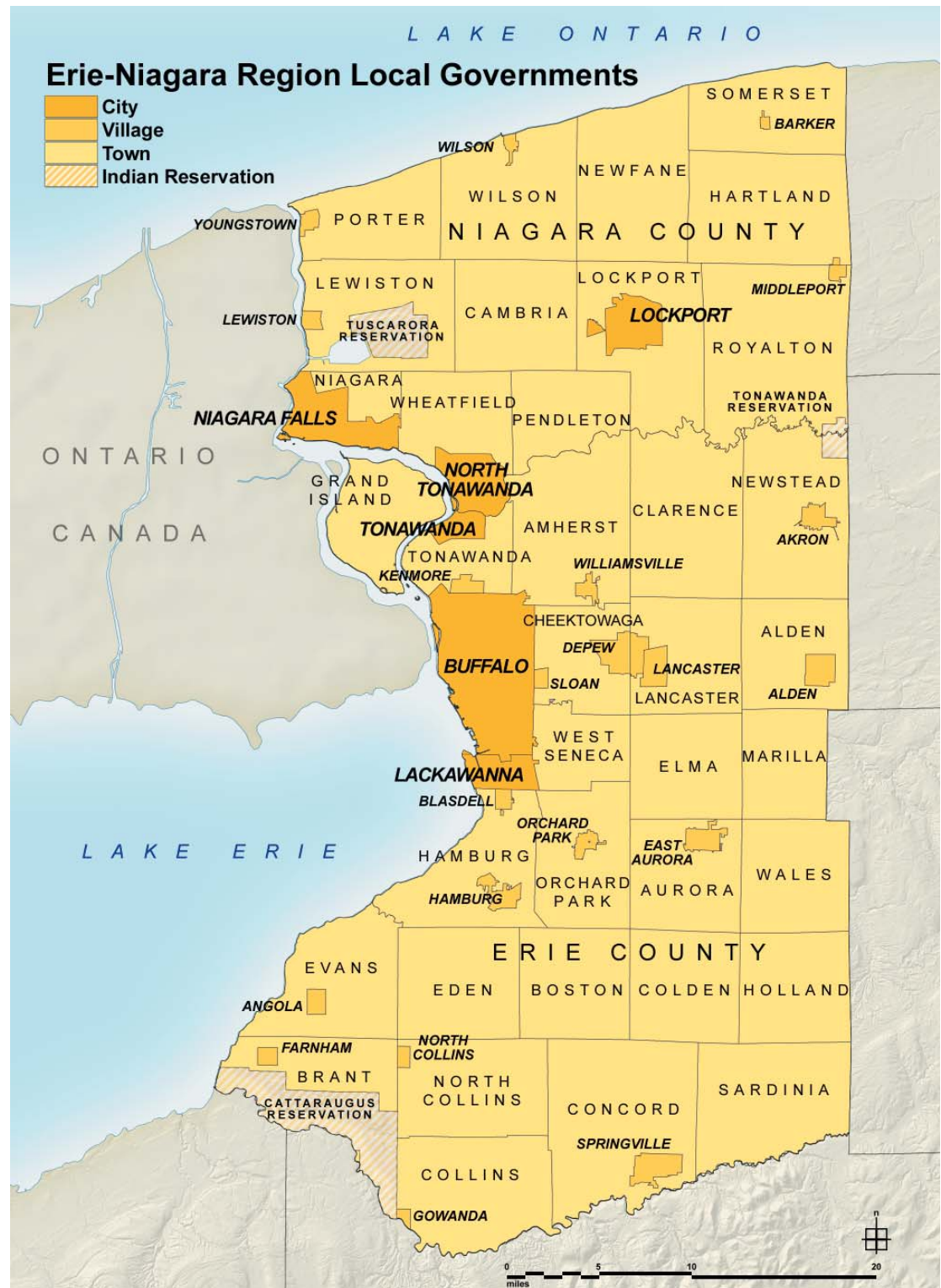


Figure 2. Erie-Niagara Region local governments and reservations.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

regional planning board in their area before taking final action on them;

- County Law Sections 250 et seq. authorizes counties to create water and sewer districts, condemn land for their projects, and create taxing districts to pay the capital and operating costs of the facilities;
- Public Health Law Section 1116(1) provides county health departments with binding authority to approve water facilities of proposed subdivisions within the county. (The law prohibits the sale of any subdivided lots until such approval is obtained);
- Soil and Water Conservation District Law Section 5 enables counties to create and assist soil and water conservation districts for the purpose of conserving soil and water resources, improving water quality, and preventing soil erosion and land inundation by floodwaters;
- A 1992 Informal Opinion of the Attorney General describes the authority counties have to assist in the planning, development and construction of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income persons.;
- Environmental Conservation Law Section 24-0501(4) and Section 34-0106 give counties authority to adopt, respectively, wetlands and coastal erosion regulations enforceable in municipalities that fail to adopt their own regulations in these areas;
- General Municipal Law Section 119-o(1) provides municipal corporations, including counties, with express statutory authority to enter into, amend, cancel, or terminate intermunicipal agreements for the performance of their respective functions, powers, and duties;
- General Municipal Law Section 119-u(2)(b), General City Law Section 20-g(2)(b), Town Law Section 284(2)(b), Village Law Section 7-741(2)(b), and County Law Section 239-d authorize municipalities to enter into intermunicipal agreements with counties to receive professional planning services and administrative assistance from county planning agencies;
- NYCRR, Title 6, Part 617, Sections 1, 11, and 12 defines the environmental authority of involved and interested agencies, including county governments under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR); and
- Article 47 of the Environmental Conservation Law authorizes counties to establish environmental management councils that are empowered, among other functions to maintain and inventory open space and natural resources, to recommend ecologically sound methods of planning to use the county's resources, and to assist in the review of proposals.

Communities in New York also have extensive authority to cooperate with one another to accomplish their land use objectives. State enabling legislation, Articles 12-B and 5-G of the New York State General Municipal Law,

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

provides authority for localities to undertake the following:

- create regional or metropolitan planning boards and joint-purpose municipal corporations;
- adopt multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plans, zoning laws, and land use regulations;
- combine local land use agencies; and
- enter into joint enforcement and monitoring programs.

State law also allows for counties and regional planning boards to review certain local actions, collaboratively administer programs and deliver public services, and provide technical assistance and advisory services to constituent municipalities.

State law also provides counties with the option to operate as charter counties under the County Charter Law. Under this law, Section 33 of the Municipal Home Rule Law,

counties may adopt charters to create unique administrative structures and programs and to adopt laws to meet their particular circumstances. (Erie County's adoption of a charter resulted in the creation of the county executive form of government. Niagara County is a non-charter county and, as such, operates under a county legislature.)

Unlike a non-charter county whose laws must be consistent with general state laws, a charter county has the authority to enact laws inconsistent with the general laws of the state but consistent with the state constitution. For example, as a charter county, Suffolk County allows its Planning Commission to veto town zoning changes, even though this directly conflicts with the provisions of General Municipal Law section 239-m. In Westchester County, the County passed a home rule law eliminating the requirement that local governments approve actions that were disapproved by the county planning board.

2.3 ABSENCE OF A REGIONAL PLATFORM

Since the early 1990s, when the Erie-Niagara Counties Regional Planning Board was dismantled, the region has not had a single, bi-county authorized platform to address regional planning, development and conservation issues. Although important regional work is done by a number of existing organizations and ad hoc partnerships, several important planning functions have fallen through the cracks.

In the last 10 years, several organizations have filled segments of the void left by the closure of the Regional Planning Board. The county legislatures jointly created the Erie Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP) to conduct special studies and administrate regional programs. The Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth's (ILGRG) State of the Region initiative and other research has elevated the quality of public debate around planning issues and the

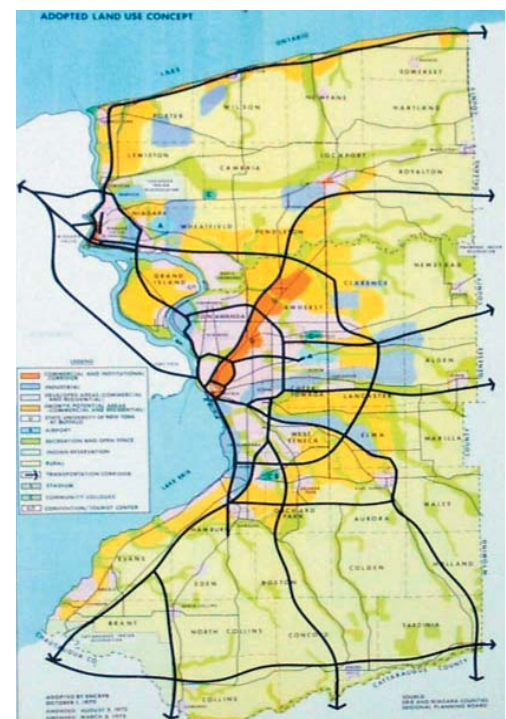
CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Western New York Regional Knowledge Network has become a valuable repository and clearinghouse for regional information.

Despite the success of these and other bi-county and multi-jurisdictional initiatives, the region's communities do not enjoy access to the full range of services and assistance available in other metropolitan areas. The Erie-Niagara region is one of a just a few metropolitan regions in the country without an active regional planning organization. Items not being accomplished include:

- coordination of bi-county planning initiatives and advocacy for region-wide planning, conservation and development programs and initiatives;
- provision of technical assistance including the preparation of model regulations and guidelines, training of local planning officials, preparation of special planning and design studies, assistance with grant-writing and program administration, and assistance with development review;
- coordination of the extension, improvement, and maintenance of regional utility and transportation systems;
- tracking, evaluation, and reporting of development and conservation activity and support for regional projections of population and employment; and
- education and awareness activities focused on planning, development and conservation issues, including research and reporting on issues of regional significance.

Figure 3. Land Use Concept Map from the last regional plan.



2.4 FEWER PEOPLE, MORE DEVELOPED AREA

A Century of Dramatic Change

Since the turn of the last century, the regional pattern of development has changed dramatically. As population doubled over the course of the 20th century, the pattern evolved from a loose network of relatively independent urban and agrarian centers into a single metropolitan region of interconnected communities.

- **19th Century Settlement.** As illustrated in historic maps, the region's early settlements were established at strategic locations on the region's rivers, lakes, and the evolving network of canal, rail, and surface travel routes. The earliest settlements developed as compact centers of commerce, industry, and culture with relatively dense neighborhoods surrounding mixed-use cores. By 1900, the region's population reached 500,000, with residents clustered in early settlements and on small farmsteads distributed across rural areas.
- **1900-1940: Early 20th Century Compact Development.** During the early years of the 20th century, the region's population boom continued—from 1900 to 1940, the combined populations of the counties increased by 88%, from 509,000 to 958,000. Growth during this period was accommodated in compact extensions to traditional settlements, including early 20th century suburbs with a mix of housing types; industrial, civic and institutional districts; and neighborhood-serving commercial centers and corridors.
- **1940-1960: Mid Century Suburban Expansion.** The region's mid-twentieth century suburban neighborhoods developed to meet rising demand for housing following World War II. From 1940 to 1960, the region added 348,000 residents and reached a total population of just over 1.3 million. The post war population boom coupled with flight from inner-city neighborhoods fueled the development of numerous new neighborhoods built at lower densities than older neighborhoods and with less direct access to central business districts and traditional commercial corridors. The region also witnessed the first wave of suburban commercial development—strips of commercial uses along major roads with buildings set back from the road, front-yard parking, and minimal provisions for pedestrians.
- **1960-2000: Late Century Growth & Decline, Continued Expansion.** Suburban areas continued to expand through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s despite an overall decline in population. Between 1960 and 2000, the region lost 137,000 residents or 10.5% of its total population, with cities and villages experiencing significant losses. Late-century development followed conventional suburban patterns with curvilinear streets, segregated commercial and residential uses, few interconnections between adjacent neighborhoods, and little diversity in housing. Newer neighborhoods are served by commercial, civic, and institutional uses

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

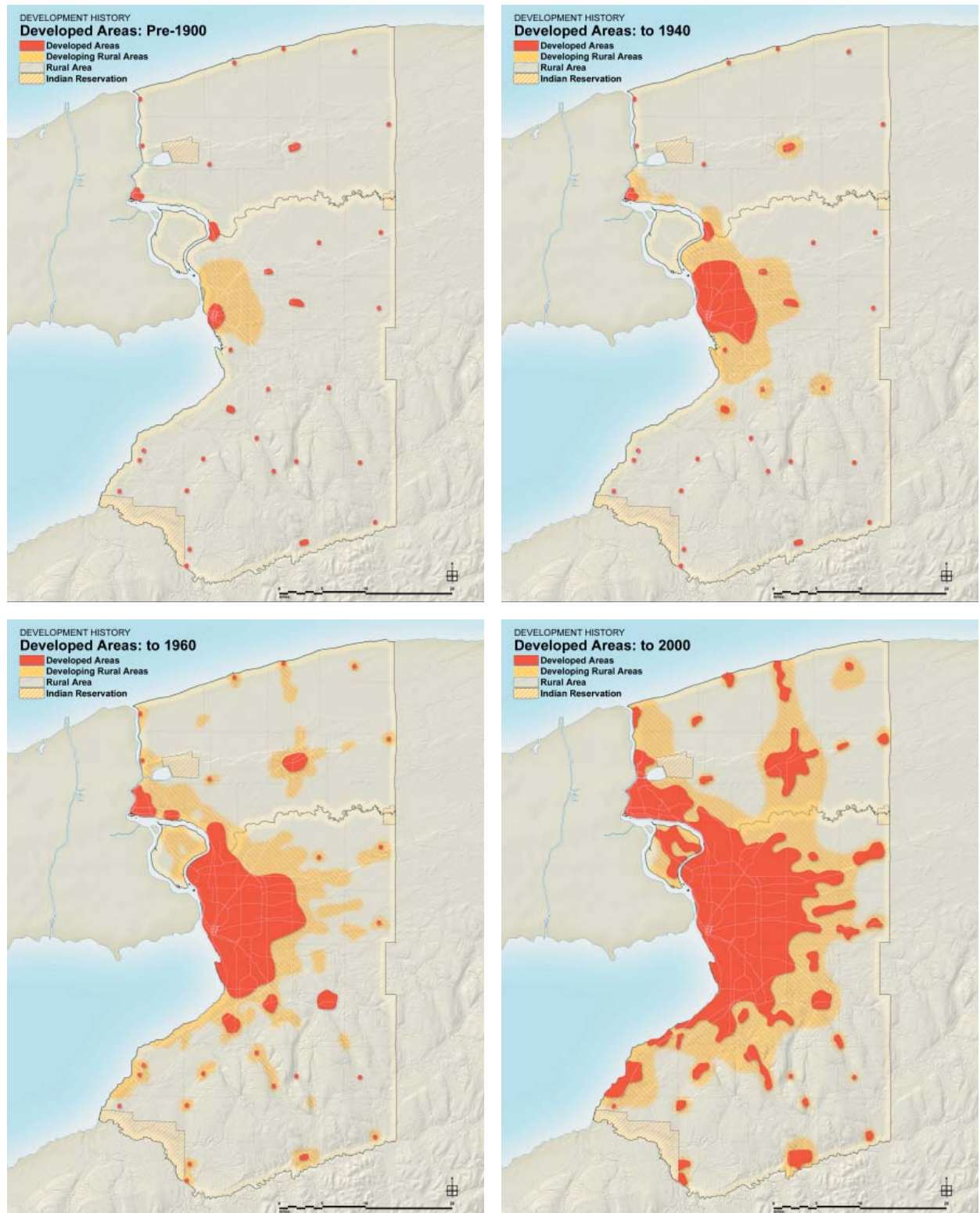


Figure 4. Maps illustrating the expansion of the region's developed areas. (The HOK Planning Group)

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Table 2. Population Change by Development Era, 1900-1940, 1940-1960, and 1960-2000

	1900 #	1940 #	% 00-40	1960 #	% 40-60	2000 #	% 60-00
Erie County	433,686	798,377	84.09%	1,064,688	33.36%	950,265	-10.75%
Niagara County	74,961	160,110	113.59%	242,269	51.31%	219,846	-9.26%
Region	508,647	958,487	88.44%	1,306,957	36.36%	1,170,111	-10.47%

Source: US Census Bureau.

lining major roads. Unlike traditional commercial districts, with mixed uses and buildings oriented towards public sidewalks, this new form development tends to be less dense, less well connected to adjacent neighborhoods and commercial areas, and more reliant on automobile travel for access.

Little Growth, Lots of Sprawl

In the last half of the 20th Century, the region's urbanized area (as defined by the US Census Bureau) nearly tripled in size, expanding from 123 square miles in 1950 to 367 square miles in 2000. Despite only a modest increase in population over the same 50 year period, a little over 7 percent, residential, commercial, and institutional uses spread outward from the region's traditional centers to occupy large areas of the Towns of Niagara, Lockport and Wheatfield in Niagara County and Amherst, Clarence, Lancaster, Orchard Park, and Hamburg in Erie County.

During the last two decades, expansion of the urbanized area has occurred at a pace much greater than the rates of change in popula-

tion and households. Since 1980, the region's urbanized area increased 38 percent, while households increased by only 5.5% and population declined by 5.8%.

The increase in number of households is due to a drop in average household sizes over the past 20 years. Though this phenomenon of fewer people per household contributes to higher demand for housing, it doesn't fully explain the pace and extent of the urbanized area's expansion.

An important research document prepared by the Brookings Institution in December 2003 entitled *Vacating the City: An Analysis of New Homes vs. New Households* cites that in the 1990s housing construction exceeded household growth by nearly four to one. The report stresses that the more new housing occurs without household growth the greater the abandonment of units within inner city areas. This is occurring in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

Baby Boomer Downsizing

A looming issue within the region over the next ten years is the possible value decline of

Table 3. Changes in Population, Households and Urbanized Area, 1980-2000

	1980 #	1990 #	2000 #	1980-2000 # chg	% chg
Population (total persons)	1,242,826	1,189,340	1,170,111	-72,715	-5.85%
Households	445,193	460,324	469,719	24,526	5.51%
Urbanized Area (square miles)	266	286	367	101	37.97%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1980-2000.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

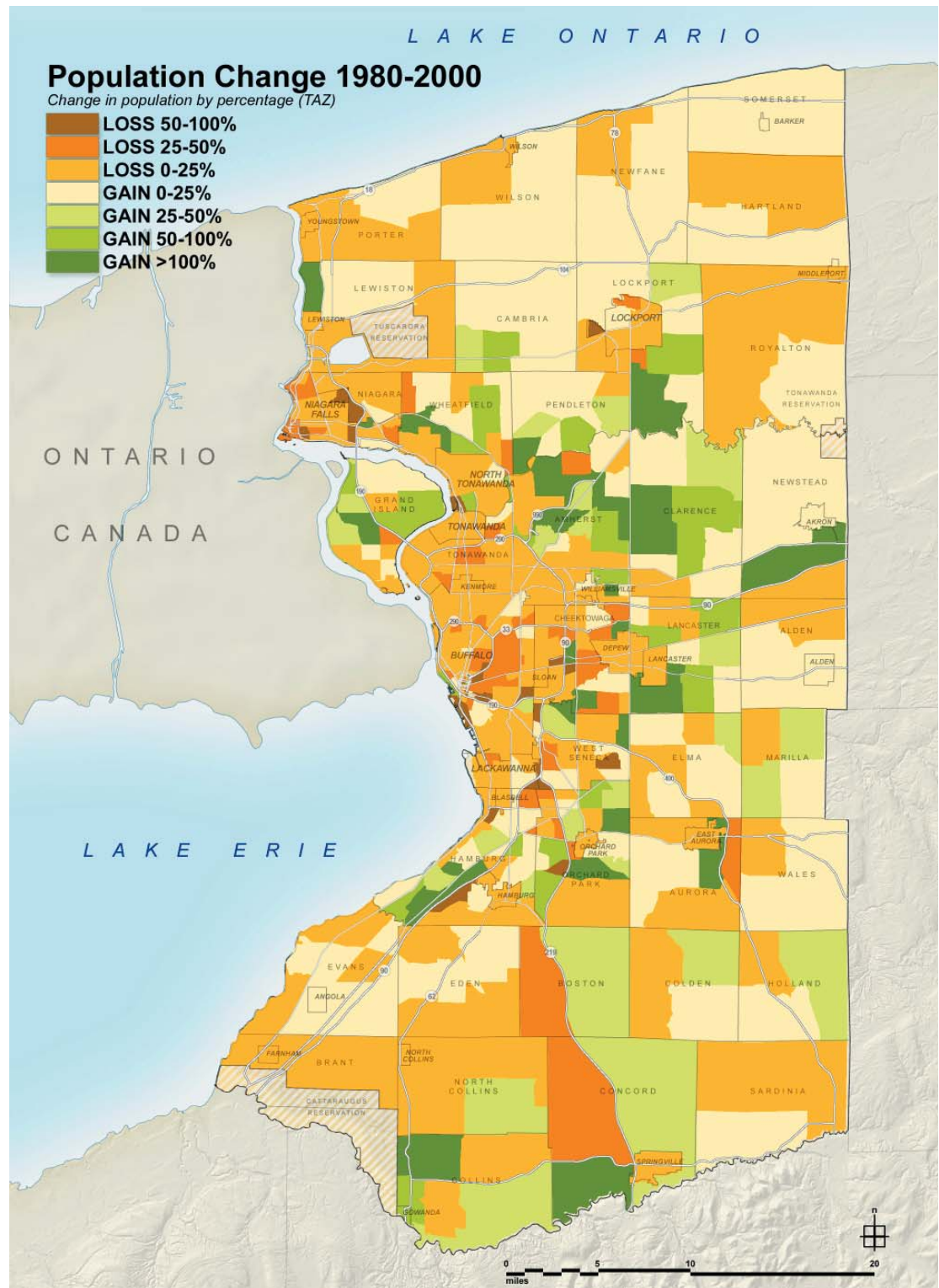


Figure 5. Change in population from 1980 to 2000. (Census Bureau and GBNRTC)

large, newer homes in the developing area. This could result from a desire to downsize by existing homeowners as their household size decreases and there is an increase in homes available for sale. Weaker demand for the large homes due to a declining market base and rising gas prices could stress the property tax base within developing communities over the next ten- to fifteen-year period.

2.5 DECLINING DENSITY & DISINVESTMENT

The progressive shift of population and households from the region's traditional urban and rural centers is having a direct effect on the livability and economic vitality of the region's older communities. Where population and household decline is greatest, housing values are dropping, demand for retail and commercial services is eroding, and in the most extreme cases, housing stock is deteriorating and being abandoned.

Development Density

In the region's urban and suburban communities, household densities vary greatly—from

5 or more households per acre (3,200 or more households per square mile) in the most densely settled areas to 1 household per acre (640 households per square mile) in the least densely settled. Density tends to correspond to the age of development, with the earliest settled residential areas in Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport and their first ring suburbs having the highest densities and the more recently developed areas having the lowest. In terms of individual localities, the City of Buffalo tops the list with just over 3,500 housing units per square mile, the villages of Williamsville and Sloan are next with a little over 2,000 per square mile each, and Niagara Falls ranks fourth most dense with 1,980 per square mile.

Change in Households by Area

To better understand the broad patterns of disinvestment and development in the last 20 years, changes in the regional distribution of households were analyzed using U.S. Census data and the geographic Policy Areas described in Chapter 3. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of households in the region's Developed Areas increased

Table 4. Change in Households by Area, 1980-2000

	1980	1990	2000	Chg 1980-2000	
	#	#	#	#	%
Developed Area					
Erie County	323,048	328,287	325,199	2,151	0.7%
Niagara County	59,839	61,594	60,465	626	1.0%
Developed Area	382,887	389,881	385,664	2,777	0.7%
Rural Area					
Erie County	42,114	47,732	55,674	13,560	32.2%
Niagara County	20,530	23,094	27,381	6,851	33.4%
Rural Area	62,644	70,826	83,055	20,411	32.6%

Source: US Census Bureau, GBNRTC, the HOK Planning Group.

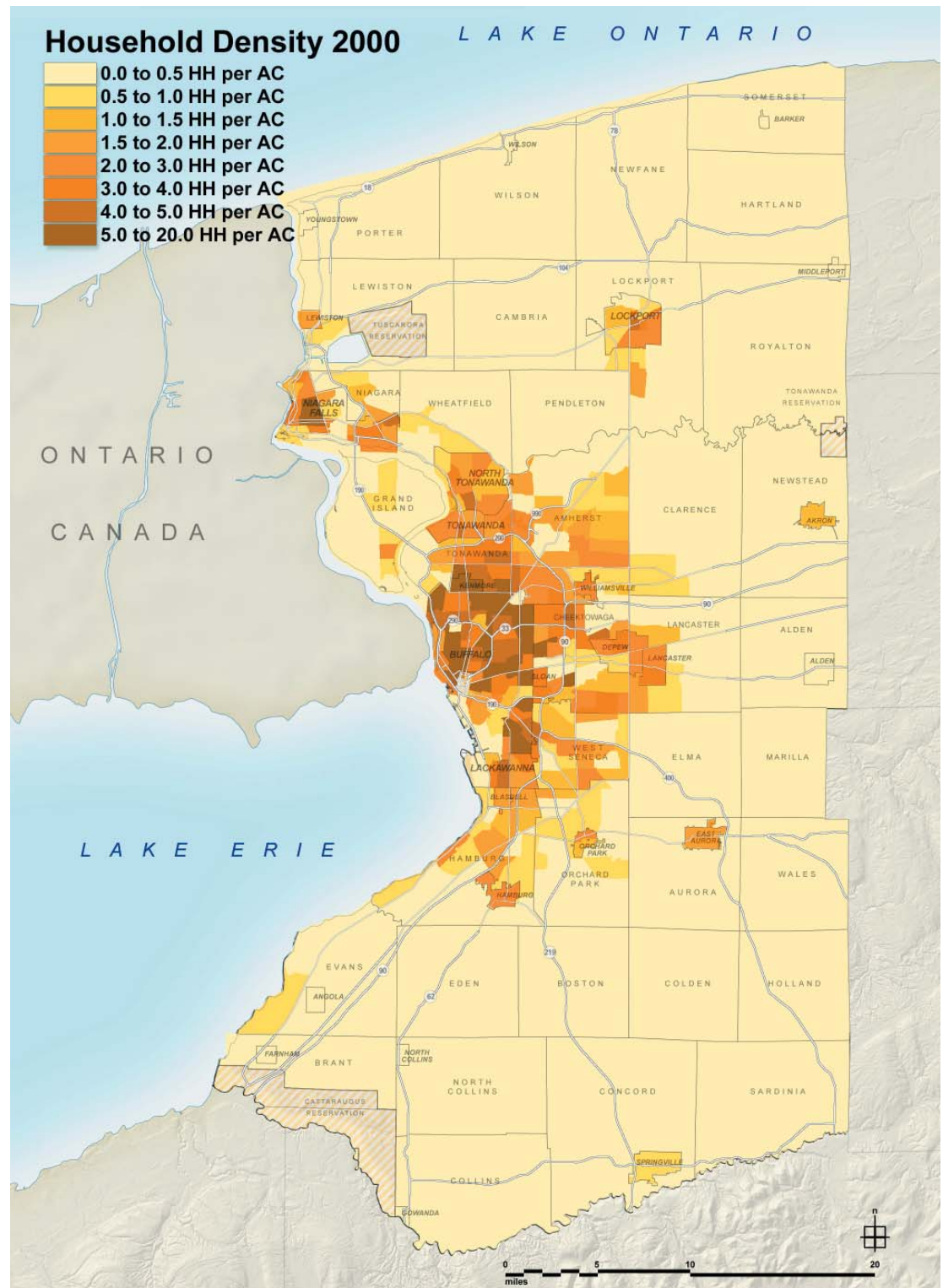


Figure 6. Household density in 2000. (Census Bureau and GBNRTC)

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

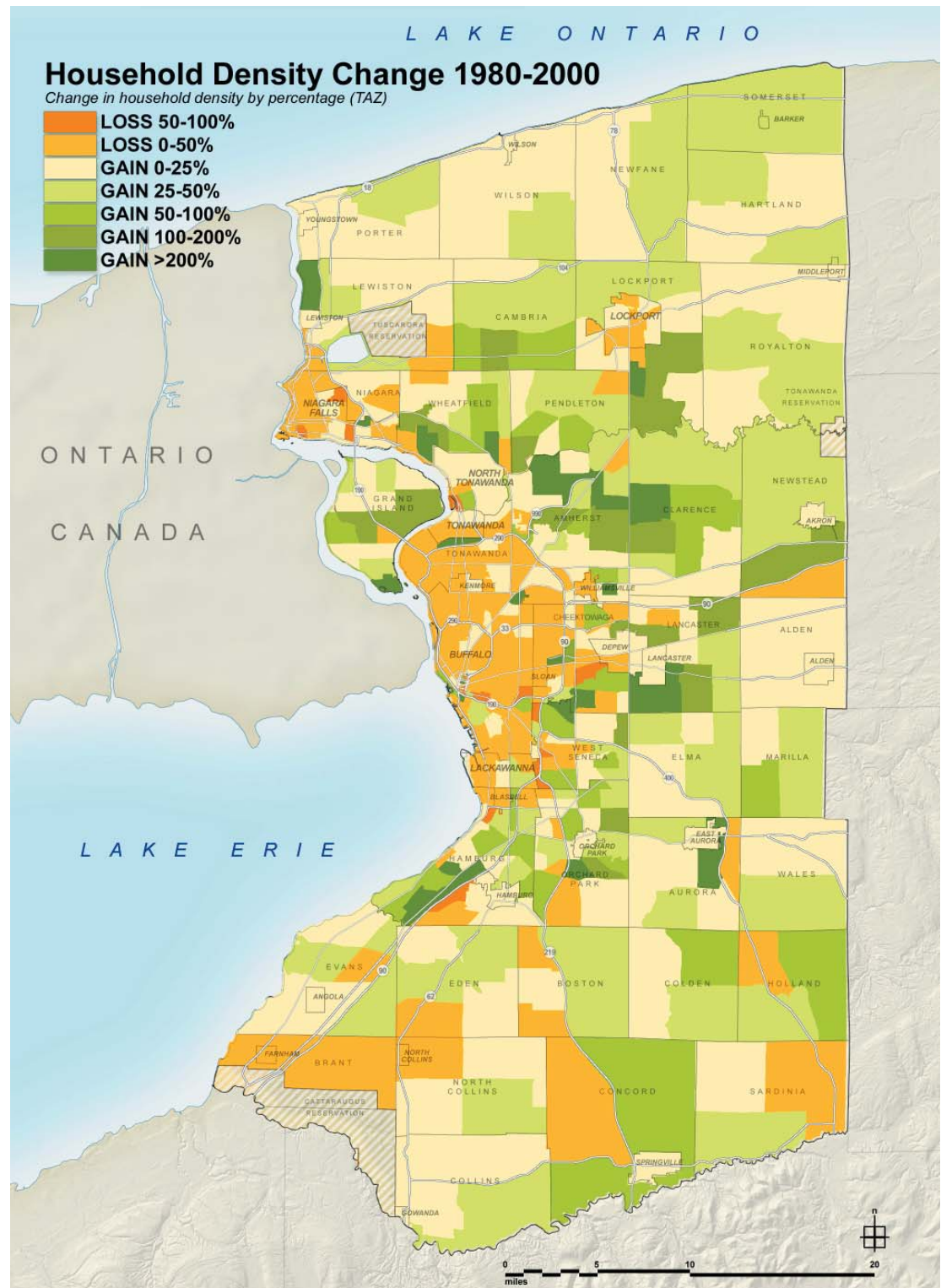


Figure 7. Change in household density from 1980 to 2000. (Census Bureau and GBNRTC)

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

by little more than 0.5% while the number in the regional Developing and Rural Areas increased by 40% and 23% respectively. As indicated in Figures 6 and 7, areas experiencing the fastest increases are located along the boundary between the fringe of developed areas. Areas with increases in density of 5% or more above the regional average include portions of the towns of Wheatfield and Lockport in Niagara County, and areas of the towns of Amherst, Clarence, Cheektowaga, Lancaster, Orchard Park, and Hamburg in Erie County. These areas are the region's most recently built neighborhoods with relatively low overall densities.

Areas losing households include the region's most densely settled, inner city neighborhoods and the least densely settled rural village and town centers. The urban areas experiencing decline include neighborhoods in the cities of Buffalo,

Niagara Falls, Lockport, Tonawanda, and North Tonawanda along with others in the town of Niagara in Niagara County and Amherst, Cheektowaga and West Seneca in Erie County. Rural communities experiencing losses include the northernmost towns in Niagara County and the southern tier of towns in Erie County.

The consequences of these shifts in population and households for the region's older neighborhoods are obvious and serious: deterioration and abandonment hurts an area's ability to attract residential and commercial investment; property and sales tax revenues drop as property values decline and retail markets weaken; crime rates are highest in neighborhoods with concentrations of vacant and abandoned properties; and the people left behind tend to be those requiring the greatest amount of public assistance and services.

2.6 FIRST SUBURBS UNDER STRESS

Neighborhoods in the region's early suburban communities, those developed during the decades following World War II, are starting to experience challenges similar to those faced by older communities—declining population, aging housing, vacated and underutilized commercial buildings and sites, and deteriorating infrastructure.

In areas experiencing low or no population growth, neighborhoods with both high percentages of elderly residents and an aging stock of mid-century housing can be especially vulnerable to change. In the absence

of a very strong regional housing market, replacement demand for older housing can be weak. Even with inherent locational advantages, the perceived shortcomings of housing in many early suburban neighborhoods can be difficult to overcome.

Mid-20th century housing often lacks the amenities offered in newer properties—attached garages, new appliances and systems, large closets, and open floor plans—or provides the benefits of properties in historic settings—design character, construction quality, and neighborhood amenities. The neigh-

Figure 8. Abandoned Housing in the City of Buffalo



neighborhood context also is important. School quality, crime rates, conditions of public streets and parks, vitality of nearby commercial corridors all play a part. Even small signs of deferred maintenance in surrounding properties or a perceived shift in tenure (from owner to renter occupied) can affect a property's competitiveness in the market. Once an area's competitiveness declines, repositioning is difficult.

Early commercial corridors are at a similar disadvantage to properties in more newly developed areas. Accessibility, code compliance, parking deficiencies, and declining population and income put mid-century commercial properties in a difficult competitive position.

2.7 ABUNDANT LAND RESOURCES BUT FEW SITES READY FOR INVESTMENT

The availability of land and buildings to support growth and development is an important regional concern. To gauge availability at the regional scale, current land use and land cover data were evaluated to determine the area of undeveloped land without environmental constraints. To document the area of land ready for investment, the counties compiled lists and prepared maps showing sites requiring very little or no investment to support development.

Undeveloped Lands

A preliminary analysis of land use and land cover data resulted in the identification of

175,000 acres (274 square miles) of undeveloped land in the region, with approximately 55,000 falling within Niagara County and 120,000 falling within Erie County. For the purpose of this analysis, areas identified as undeveloped included the following:

- land outside areas identified as public parklands, cemeteries, quarries, wetlands, floodplains, or steep slopes;
- land outside of designated Agricultural Districts; and
- land not identified by HOK as residential, commercial or industrial in the land cover analysis.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

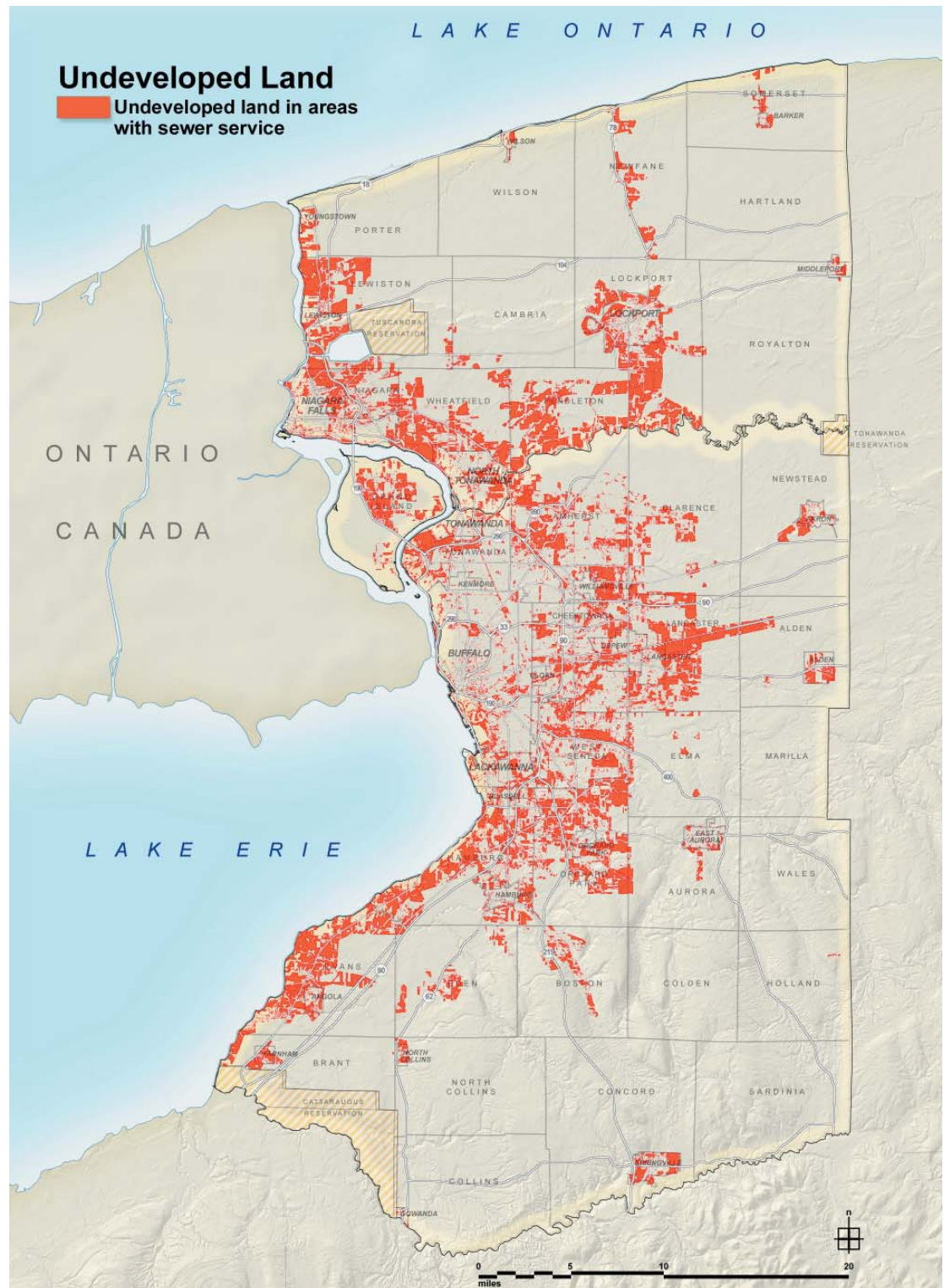


Figure 9. Undeveloped land in areas with sewer service. (The HOK Planning Group, 2005)

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Figure 10. Vacant retail along Transit Road.



Approximately 50% or 84,000 acres (131 square miles) of the total land identified as undeveloped exists within areas served by public sewer. As a point of reference, this is ten times the area of the City of Niagara Falls, which has a population of 55,000, and nearly three times the area of Amherst, which has a population of 117,000. If developed at a modest gross density of 3 dwelling unit per acre, this area could accommodate over 250,000 homes or a population of over 500,000.

It's also important to note that the assessment summarized above does not include vacant buildings, for which there is no region-wide inventory. In Buffalo alone, according to the city's Comprehensive Plan, 22,854 or 15.7% of the city's housing units were vacant or abandoned in 2000. According to the Plan, there were "10,170 vacant residential lots and 8,684 abandoned structures, leaving the city with a substantial clearance and reconfiguration problem."

Investment-Ready Sites

The counties have identified only 2,220 acres of land available for industrial and commercial development and only 9 of the 38 individual sites identified are more than 100 acres. These properties include vacant sites in existing industrial parks like the Vantage International Business Park in Niagara County and urban sites like the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. With another 2,000 acres expected to come on-line in the next 3 to 5 years, the portfolio of investment sites improves but remains a concern. While the lists offers options for potential investors, local economic development officials are working to both improve the market position of many sites on the list and expand the region's portfolio of properties available for larger-scale commercial and industrial development.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Table 5. Sites Available for Industrial and Commercial Investment, 2006

<i>Site Location/Name</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Available Acres</i>
College Park	Amherst	25
Crosspoint Business Park	Amherst	100
Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus	Buffalo	10
Central Park Plaza	Buffalo	10
Northland Commerce Center	Buffalo	10
Steel Fields Industrial Site	Buffalo	90
Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park	Buffalo	20
Airbourne Business Park	Cheektowaga	60
Commerce Green Industrial Park	East Aurora	20
Eden Industrial Park	Eden	5
Ravenwood Park North	Hamburg	20
Albright Court/Amadori Site	Lackawanna	24
Transit Road at Exit 49	Lancaster	70
WNY Commerce Center	Lancaster	117
Adelphia Vacant Land	Lewiston	35
Pletcher Road Site	Lewiston	23
6764 South Transit Road	Lockport	50
Oakhurst Street	Lockport	26
Town of Lockport Industrial Park	Lockport	104
Whiting Industrial Park	Newstead	20
3401 Military Road	Niagara	26
47th Street	Niagara Falls	74
Highland/Hyde Park Business Park	Niagara Falls	17
Johnson Property	Niagara Falls	36
Roblin Steel	North Tonawanda	24
OP Commerce Center	Orchard Park	40
Quaker Centre	Orchard Park	30
Campbell Blvd at Pendleton Center	Pendleton	13
Lewiston Porter Industrial Park	Porter	42
Colvin Woods Business Park	Tonawanda	15
River Road - Isle View	Tonawanda	100
Lancaster Village Industrial Park	Village of Lancaster	10
North America Center	West Seneca	220
Forest City Property -Commercial	Wheatfield	155
Forest City Property - Industrial	Wheatfield	210
Summit Business Park	Wheatfield	187
Vantage International Pointe	Wheatfield	75
Woodlands East	Wheatfield	120
<i>Total Region</i>		<i>2,233</i>

Source: Erie and Niagara Counties, 2006.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Table 6. Sites Being Prepared for Investment Including Browfields, 2006

<i>Site Location/Name</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Acres being Prepared for Investment</i>
Muir Woods	Amherst	300
Steelfields	Buffalo	140
Kuglers Junkyard	Cambria	17
Walden Commerce Exchange	Cheektowaga	35
Bethlehem/Mittal Steel Site	City of Lackawanna	300
Dussault Foundry	City of Lockport	6
Spaulding Fibre	City of Tonawanda	45
Grand Island Commerce Center	Grand Island	150
TriCon Property	Lewiston	224
Porter Road Brownfield Site	Niagara Falls	48
Durez Property	North Tonawanda	58
Eden Site	Town of Eden	20
Evans Airport Site	Town of Evans	130
Camp Road Uniland Site	Town of Hamburg	70
Lake Erie Industrial Park	Town of Hamburg	144
Lancaster Rail	Town of Lancaster	120
North Youngmann Commerce Center	Town of Tonawanda	90
River Road	Town of Tonawanda	100
<i>Total Region</i>		<i>1,997</i>

Source: Erie and Niagara Counties, 2006.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Figure 11. Despite population decline, congestion has worsened on many of the region's arterials.



2.8 FEWER PEOPLE, MORE MILES TRAVELED

Regional settlement patterns strongly influence travel behavior. The density, distribution, and interconnectedness of land uses affects a host of individual travel decisions, from mode of travel to number and length of individual trips. These decisions, in turn, affect the region's livability, environmental quality, and economy.

As reported in recent research on environmental quality in Western New York, the number of miles traveled by area residents has increased substantially in the past 10-15 years. As reported in the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth's State of the Region report, the average number of daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by each person in Western New York increased 50% between 1984 and 1999, from 10 VMT per capita to 15, with Erie and Niagara Counties registering sharp increases between 1997 and 1999.

Although several factors besides development patterns contribute to the per capita rise in VMT, including drops in household sizes

and fluctuations in gas prices, the combined effects of declining densities in the developed area, low density, single use development in rural areas, and fragmentation of employment centers have increased the region's reliance on motor vehicles, placing ever greater stress on the existing road network. The emerging pattern is especially difficult to serve with public transit, thus decreasing mobility for the transportation disadvantaged and limiting the ability of residents of close-in neighborhoods to access jobs and services in suburban locations.

Increases in VMT also result in greater stress on the environment. Pollution from motor vehicles contributes to declines in air quality, paved surfaces increase urban runoff and threaten water quality, and transportation infrastructure can fragment agricultural and forested lands and wildlife habitat. In addition, higher levels of congestion on the region's arterial roads limit both the attractiveness of traditional centers like Williamsville and the revitalization potential of older strip commercial areas.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

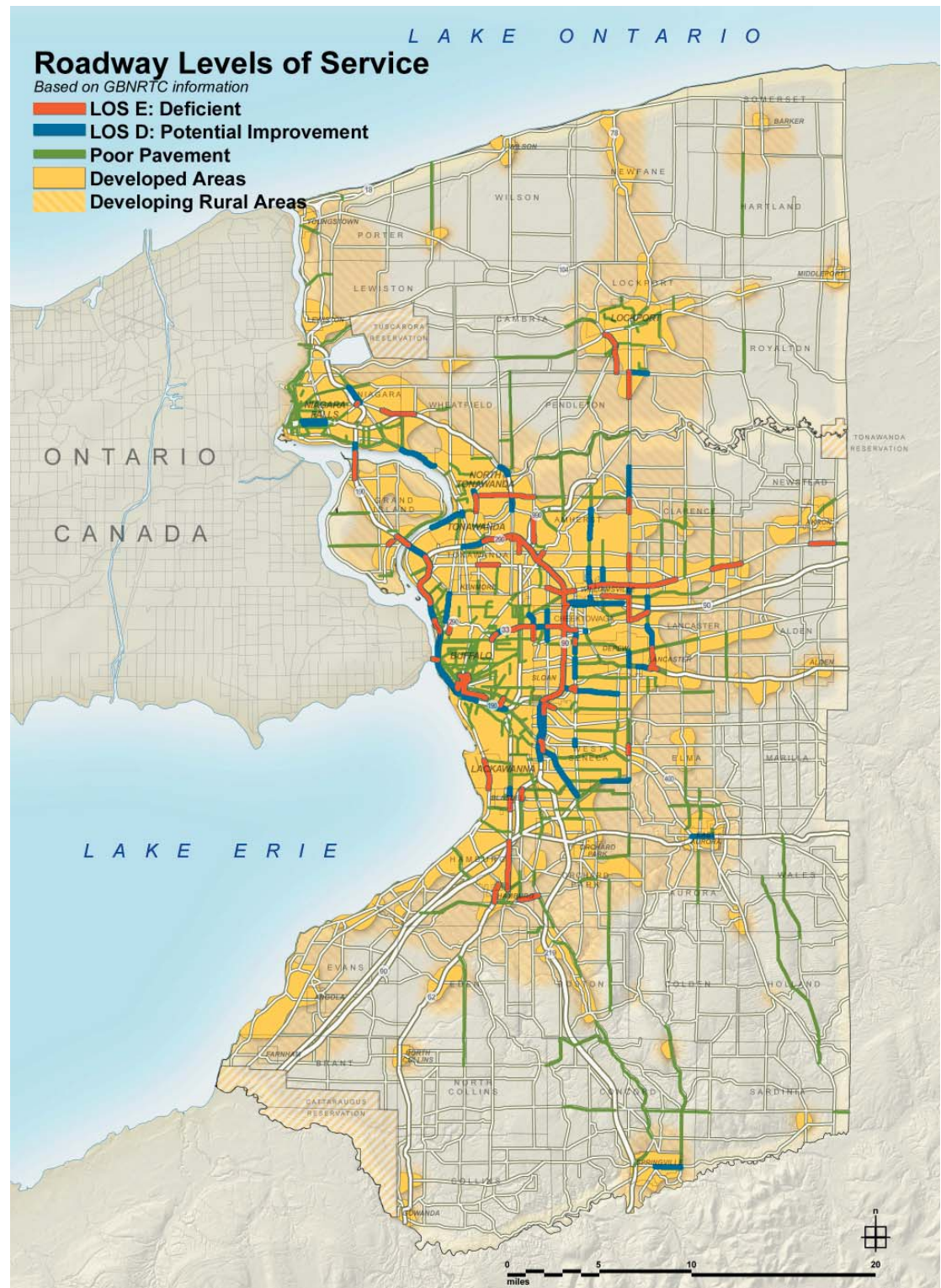


Figure 12. Roadway Levels of Service. (GBNRTC 2004)

2.9 THREATS TO NATURAL SYSTEMS & LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS

The loss of rural, agricultural, and environmentally-sensitive lands has long been a matter of local, regional and state concern. As low density development moves into rural areas and brings with it higher levels of impervious surfaces, less forest cover, increased reliance on septic systems and wells, and longer commutes, the health and diversity of the region's most significant and sensitive resources is threatened. Without careful management, the region places at risk the region's best agricultural lands, major riparian corridors, wetlands, floodplains, and forests. While topographic challenges and distance to employment centers historically have protected rural areas from rapid urbanization, current trends may upset this balance. Farming is not as stable a source of income as it once was and many people seem willing to trade longer commutes for larger lots and newer homes in rural and developing areas.

According to a 1993 study by the American Farmland Trust, the number of farms in New York State decreased 70% between 1950 and 1992, with the acreage of land in farms dropping approximately 50%. The Erie-Niagara region has experienced similar rates of change. As reported in the 1997 Census of Agriculture, the number of farms dropped by a little over 20% between 1987 and 1997, and 42,069 acres (or 65 square miles) of farmland was converted to other use. To put this in perspective, this loss is just under the combined area of the cities of Buffalo (52.5 square miles) and Niagara Falls (16.8 square miles).

The loss of agricultural lands and the associated effects on rural economies and landscapes warrants attention for several reasons. Agriculture plays an important role in the region's and state's economies, contributing directly through sales, job creation, support

Table 7. Change in Number of Farms and Farm Acreage, 1987-1997

	1987		1997		% Chg 87-97	
	# of Farms	Farm Acres	# of Farms	Farm Acres	# of Farms	Farm Acres
Erie County	1,201	166,121	973	143,234	-18.98%	-13.78%
Niagara County	923	146,537	687	127,355	-25.57%	-13.09%
Region	2,124	312,658	1,660	270,589	-21.85%	-13.46%
New York State	37,743	8,416,228	31,757	7,254,470	-15.86%	-13.80%

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 1997 Census of Agriculture.

Note: Land in farmland includes all land operated by farms, including active and idle cropland, livestock acreage, pasture, and conservation lands on farm properties.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Figure 13. Subdivision activity in Erie County's rural area.



services and businesses, and secondarily through markets for processing and agricultural and heritage tourism.

Agriculture also generates very low levels of demand on public services and infrastructure. A series of studies conducted in the communities across the state show that agricultural lands have a positive fiscal impact. These studies show that for every dollar of public

revenue generated by properties in agricultural use, only 17 to 74 cents of costs are incurred to provide the same property with public infrastructure and services. Well-managed, privately held agricultural land also has environmental and social benefits—providing food and cover for wildlife, conserving environmentally sensitive lands, and maintaining scenic, cultural and historic landscapes.

Table 8. Comparisons of Revenue-to-Expenditure Ratios for New York Communities

Community	Residential including Farmhouses	Commercial & Industrial	Working & Open Farmland	Source
Amenia	1 : 1.23	1 : 0.25	1 : 0.17	Bucknall, 1989
Beekman	1 : 1.12	1 : 0.18	1 : 0.48	American Farmland Trust, 1989
Dix	1 : 1.51	1 : 0.27	1 : 0.31	Schuyler Co. League of Women Voters, 1993
Farmington	1 : 1.22	1 : 0.27	1 : 0.72	Kinsman et al., 1991
Fishkill	1 : 1.23	1 : 0.31	1 : 0.74	Bucknall, 1989
Hector	1 : 1.30	1 : 0.15	1 : 0.28	Schuyler Co. League of Women Voters, 1993
Kinderhook	1 : 1.05	1 : 0.21	1 : 0.17	Concerned Citizens of Kinderhook, 1996
Montour	1 : 1.50	1 : 0.28	1 : 0.29	Schuyler Co. League of Women Voters, 1992
Northeast	1 : 1.36	1 : 0.29	1 : 0.21	American Farmland Trust, 1989
Reading	1 : 1.88	1 : 0.26	1 : 0.32	Schuyler Co. League of Women Voters, 1992
Red Hook	1 : 1.11	1 : 0.20	1 : 0.22	Bucknall, 1989

Source: *Cost of Community Services Studies, American Farmland Trust, November 2002.*