
I. Introduction

A. Town of Herkimer Profile

The Town of Herkimer is located in southcentral Herkimer County in the heart of the very distressed Mohawk Valley region. The Town (excluding the Village of Herkimer which it encompasses) has a population of 2,464 and includes 985 housing units. Of the 985 units, 829 are owner occupied, 101 are renter occupied, and 55 are vacant.

The Town is a very rural community characterized by farmlands, forested land, and generally low density residential uses. Most of the housing in the Town is single family, permanent structures and mobile homes on farmland and large lot, rural properties. The “East Herkimer” area of the Town adjacent to the Village includes a small enclave of more densely developed one family homes, an elementary school, a BOCES operation, and a large industrial complex recently purchased by Herkimer Distribution, LLC. This 460,000 square foot industrial site was the original site of the Mohawk Data Sciences Corporation and, prior to its recent sale, was owned by Guilford Mills, who employed over 500 people on site before downsizing and closing in 2002.

Two major transportation routes extend through the Town. State Route 5 is a major east/west road through the Town, County and Mohawk Valley region. This highway connects the Town to Little Falls and points east, and Utica and points west. Route 28 is the major north/south route in the region, and connects the Southern Tier and Cooperstown area to the south with the Adirondack State Park to the north. Interchange 30 of the New York State Thruway is located in the adjacent Village of Herkimer.

B. The Need for a *Community Development Strategic Plan*

The Town believes it is important to develop a *Community Development Strategic Plan* that will guide the use of Small Cities and other Federal, State and local resources in the areas of housing, economic development, and infrastructure. The closure of Guilford Mills is a prime example of the need for planning in the Town. This large industrial complex was, unfortunately, forced to develop its own sewage treatment plant many years ago, and this situation has had a negative impact on the businesses that have occupied the

site. Extending public sewer service to the complex would have greatly improved the viability and affordability of this prime industrial property.

The Town has increasing housing and economic development needs, but limited expertise in dealing with these needs and insufficient local resources to address the needs comprehensively. The Town needs to utilize available Federal, State and local resources in an effective manner. Town officials believe a *Community Development Strategic Plan* is a critical first step in identifying needs, setting priorities, and taking action to improve the community and helping all of its residents.

In a recently completed Community Needs Survey, developing a Strategic Plan was identified as the Town's highest priority need and project.

C. Anticipated Benefits of the *Community Development Strategic Plan*

While many neighboring communities have undertaken community development projects, used Federal and State funds, and gained a basic knowledge of local needs and how particular programs can help address these needs, the Town of Herkimer has no such experience.

It has been over 40 years since the Town went through any kind of planning process to determine needs, priorities, or improvement actions and this effort is long overdue.

The preparation of this *Community Development Strategic Plan* has given the Town the opportunity to undertake a citizen participation process, gather data from a variety of sources, undertake appropriate surveys, formulate solutions to problems, identify and respond to community improvement opportunities, and improve the quality of life in the Town. The *Community Development Strategic Plan* has helped the Town prioritize needs and create a plan of action that will help the Town to focus its resources, guide Town efforts in obtaining Federal and State funds, and undertake initiatives that address the Town's most critical needs.

IV. Community Development Strategic Plan

A. Introduction and Background

The Town of Herkimer has undertaken a number of actions to determine community development needs and identify and prioritize improvement projects. These actions include:

- Solicitation of potential projects from Town officials, Planning Board, and consultants;
- Completion of a windshield survey of housing and general infrastructure conditions on a Town-wide basis;
- Completion of a Town-wide mailing survey (including a random sampling of Village residents) to identify projects and relative priorities;
- Completion of a Town-wide survey of property owners to determine interest in participating in a housing rehabilitation program; and
- Review of proposed needs and projects at public meetings.

In the paragraphs that follow, a variety of improvement projects are identified that will enable the Town to improve its housing, economic, and public infrastructure conditions and the overall quality of life.

Proposed projects are illustrated on the Projects and Activities Map. The list of projects is not intended to be all inclusive or static. New ideas and opportunities will present themselves in the future, and the *Community Development Strategic Plan* should be amended as appropriate.

B. Community Development Projects and Initiatives

1. Housing

+ a. **Town-wide Housing Rehabilitation Program**

A housing condition survey indicates a minimum of 30 percent of the housing structures in the Town are substandard. A second survey of Town residents indicates at least 65 low income homeowners desire to participate in a housing rehabilitation program that would help them eliminate threats to their health and safety.

Of 179 households responding to a Town survey, 166 or 93 percent supported the implementation of a Town-wide Housing Rehabilitation Program. In a separate survey on community needs, 60 percent of 322 respondents give a high priority to implementation of a Town-wide Housing Rehabilitation Program in the Town.

A multi-year, non-targeted Town-wide Housing Rehabilitation Program is proposed to address the needs of low income, owner occupied households. Implementation of this program will require follow-up efforts to the initial survey to ensure households with low incomes and severe needs will be assisted, and to fully document Town needs.

Total estimated cost: \$1,200,000.

f b. **Code Enforcement**

Improved property maintenance and attention to health and safety and blighting conditions are important to maintaining the Town's housing stock over the long term. Active and effective code enforcement is critical to maintaining a safe and attractive housing and living environment in the Town.

Strong enforcement and strengthening of property maintenance codes should be considered in future years.

Total estimated cost: Annual budget for Codes Enforcer.

c. *Expanded Residential Development*

The Town of Herkimer has effectively absorbed subdivision growth as well as the construction of single family homes along existing roadways over the past 30 years. The encouragement of additional residential development was favored by almost two-thirds of the respondents to a recent Community Needs Survey distributed by the Town.

New housing development will help stabilize and grow the tax base in the years ahead. It will also contribute positively to the quality of life and economic development in the area by providing housing for prospective employees of new and existing businesses.

Efforts to support residential development might include installation of water and sewer lines, and rezoning areas to accommodate growth. A current subdivision proposal off lower Steuben Hill Road has these needs.

The need and desire for expanded residential development, however, should not compromise the need to maintain a high quality rural environment and preserve the Town's scenic character. Quality Site Plan Review and a focus on small subdivision developments will help ensure that new development is done in an environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing manner.

Total estimated cost: Minimal.

2. Economic Development

a. *Assistance to Local Businesses*

Providing assistance in the form of loans and/or grants to local industries is generally the responsibility of County, regional, and State economic development agencies. Towns such as Herkimer, however, can work cooperatively with these larger, more experienced agencies by sponsoring applications for assistance where appropriate, outreaching to local businesses, and encouraging and supporting economic development initiatives that will help businesses in the Town.

One action that should be considered by the Town is an examination of codes and the permitting process to streamline

the process for local businesses. The Town, perhaps in conjunction with the Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce, should also consider the feasibility of lessening the cost of energy purchase and/or delivery by and to local businesses.

Finally, the Town, perhaps in concert with the Herkimer County IDA, should inventory local businesses and produce a website of goods and services available. This website could be linked to the Chamber of Commerce website.

Total estimated cost: Minimal.

b. Accommodating Home-Based Businesses

The Town has seen an increase in the number of home-based businesses in recent years. While these businesses contribute to economic development and benefit entrepreneurs, the Town needs to insure these businesses do not negatively impact the quality of life in the community. Signage, parking, and land use issues accompany home-based businesses. The Town should include home-based businesses as part of the business inventory effort identified above, quantify the number of such businesses in Town, and determine whether or not any limits or guidelines need to be considered, or whether actions that encourage such businesses should be undertaken.

Total estimated cost: Minimal.

3. Public Facilities and Improvements

a. Improvements to Community Park

Community Park is the Town of Herkimer's only recreation facility. Improvements are critically needed to this 40 year old park to meet recreation needs and demands, and to insure long range access to the park. The following improvements are proposed and recommended:

- Reconstruction of two ballfields to improve drainage and deteriorated playing conditions;
- Addition of lighting to the Park's existing tennis courts;

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- Construction of a second picnic pavilion with added picnic tables, a new concession facility, and handicapped accessible rest rooms;
 - Construction of a bandstand to accommodate concerts and other civic events;
 - Relocation and improvement of children's play facilities; and
 - Construction of new parking facilities for 30 cars.

The proposed improvements will upgrade heavily utilized facilities and ensure facilities can be accessed in the future. Parking improvements are critically needed to compensate for the loss of land currently used for parking upon sale of the former East Herkimer Elementary School, which currently provides most of the park's parking.

Total estimated cost: \$250,000.

+ **b. *Development of a West Canada Creek Recreational Trail***

The Town of Herkimer has the opportunity to convert an abandoned former railroad right-of-way that extends along the west shore of the West Canada Creek to a multi-purpose recreation trail.

The scope of this project would require working with the Village of Herkimer and the Town of Fairfield to construct a trail that would ultimately connect the Canalway Trail near NYS Thruway Interchange 30 with the Village of Middleville, a total distance of 8 miles.

The trail would service hikers and bikers in the spring, summer and fall, and could be used for cross-country skiing or possibly snowmobiling in the winter.

Total estimated cost: \$500,000 - \$1,000,000.

+ **c. *Development of New Town Hall Facilities***

Existing Town Hall facilities are located in leased space on North Prospect Street in the Village of Herkimer. These

facilities provide inadequate office and meeting space, and a new location is critically needed. The Town is currently considering the purchase of a 9,000 square foot building in the Village that could accommodate Town offices as well as a Community Center.

If current plans cannot be finalized, the Town should continue to seek out new locations for Town Hall and Community Center development.

Total estimated cost: \$300,000 - \$350,000.

✓ **d. Installation of Sanitary Sewer Lines**

There are currently no sanitary sewer lines serving any Town businesses or residential areas. Concentrated development areas in the Town (including the East Herkimer hamlet, the Petrie Development, and residences along Highland Avenue) have the need and potential for sewer service. The Highland Avenue area in particular has been identified as having significant septic and sewage disposal problems, and would benefit from connection to the Village's municipal sanitary sewer system.

Sewer lines could be extended from the Highland/Beardslee area to include lower Steuben Hill Road and McKennan Road. A new subdivision in the Highland/Steuben Hill area is also appropriate for sewer service, and could be linked to sewer lines in the Mirror Lake area of the Village.

Total estimated cost: To be determined.

✦ **e. Installation of Second Water Line to East Herkimer**

Currently the hamlet of East Herkimer is serviced by a single eight (8) inch water line that is connected to the Village of Herkimer's municipal water system. To provide required redundancy and assist in providing for adequate fire protection, a second eight (8) inch line needs to be extended to the East Herkimer hamlet area along Route 5. Hangers for this second line currently exist under the Route 5 bridge.

Total estimated cost:

f. **Water Line Extension Along McKennan Road**

McKennan Road is densely developed with single family homes. The first two houses on Steuben Hill Road past Highland Avenue and approximately 20 homes along the southern portion of McKennan Road are part of a water district. This district can be extended to include the balance of McKennan Road. Houses along this road have the potential to be extended municipal water from the Village of Herkimer.

Total estimated cost:

g. **Gros Boulevard Water Line Expansion**

The waterline serving Gros Boulevard in East Herkimer is a six (6) inch diameter pipe that should be replaced with an eight (8) inch diameter line between Route 5 and Pine Grove Road.

Total estimated cost:

h. **Dry Hydrant Installation**

To better meet rural firefighting needs, the Town should identify locations for dry hydrant installation on a Town-wide basis. A detailed study to identify viable locations for the installation of dry hydrants on a Town-wide basis is recommended. A phased program of dry hydrant installation should implement the recommendations of the study.

Total estimated cost: \$10,000 - \$15,000 for study.

i. **Development of a Community Center**

The Village and Town of Herkimer have identified the need for a multi-purpose Community Center that would provide space for indoor recreation, meetings, civic organization meetings, and events. The former Masonic Lodge on North Main Street was once identified as a potential location for such a facility, but funding for rehabilitation could not be located before the building was sold for private development.

The Town should continue to evaluate Community Center development alternatives in concert with the Village to address this local need.

Total estimated cost: \$250,000 - \$500,000.

j. Road Improvements

Road conditions in the Town of Herkimer are, in general, exceptionally good. A review of road conditions indicates several projects, including shoulder erosion and drainage improvements, are needed along several roadways including Steuben Hill and Pine Grove Roads. A new guardrail is needed along Kast Hill Road. Widening and pavement markings would also improve narrow roadways.

Other improvements needed include an improved intersection at Oberle and Osbourne Hill Roads, and a new bridge on West End Road (County Route 7).

The Town currently evaluates road conditions on an annual basis, and improvements are made to conditions on the basis of annual priority. A long term plan of road improvements could assist in long range budget requirements.

*** k. Develop Picnic, Recreational and Fishing Facilities Along the Mohawk River/Erie Canal**

The Mohawk River and Erie Canal offer significant recreation opportunities for fishing access and park development. The Town should consider working with the Village to determine how existing facilities might be improved and new facilities added.

Total estimated cost: \$150,000 - \$300,000.

*** l. Develop Piper Road/Butts Bridge Area for Recreation**

Like the Mohawk River and Erie Canal, the West Canada Creek offers a variety of recreational opportunities. The feasibility of developing a Town Park in the Piper Road/Butts Bridge area along the eastern bank of the West Canada Creek should be pursued in terms of land availability, environmental concerns, and priority recreation improvements.

Since the Village controls property on the western side of the West Canada Creek, a mutual effort to examine the coordinated development of the Piper Road/Butts Bridge area for recreation would be appropriate.

Total estimated cost: \$500,000.

* **m. Develop a New Town Park**

A new Town Park with lighted ballfields, pavilion, playground facilities for children, and a bandstand is needed to complement the existing and heavily utilized Community Park.

Potential locations for this new park include Route 28 along the route of the proposed West Canada Creek Recreational Trail, the former Homogenous Metal site within the Village, and the Piper Road/Butts Bridge area.

Total estimated cost: \$500,000.

4. Other Projects and Initiatives

* **a. Update Town Laws and Codes**

Town laws and codes need to be consolidated in one location and examined to current relevancy and potential improvement.

* **b. Upgrade East Herkimer Fire Department Facilities**

The need for a new generator for use at the East Herkimer firehouse has been identified. This generator would allow the firehouse to serve as an emergency shelter - a facility that is totally lacking in the Town at the present time.

The Fire Department is also in need of a new training facility that could be used by other fire departments in the area as well.

Total estimated cost: \$50,000.

C. Priorities

The Town of Herkimer has considered several factors in determining a final project priority for *Strategic Plan* activities. These factors include:

- Input from residents obtained by survey;
- The opportunity to implement a project or activity with local or other funding; and