

# TOWN OF FENNER

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION.....	4
02 PLANNING PROCESS.....	6
03 COMMUNITY CONTEXT.....	8
04 VISION STATEMENT.....	15
05 THE PLAN.....	17
SECTION 1: RENEWABLE ENERGY.....	18
SECTION 2: AGRICULTURE.....	22
SECTION 3: NATURAL RESOURCES.....	26
SECTION 4: TRANSPORTATION.....	29
SECTION 5: HOUSING.....	32
06 FUTURE LAND USE PLAN.....	34

## APPENDICES

A: SWOT ANALYSIS

B: MAPS

C: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

D: RELATED PLANS AND STUDIES

E: INVASIVE SPECIES, RARE PLANTS

OR ANIMALS, AND SIGNIFICANT

NATURAL COMMUNITIES

01

# INTRODUCTION





*Photo: Rick Bosworth*

## **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

This Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document for the future of the Town of Fenner. The Comprehensive Plan Committee has spent considerable effort hearing from as many Town residents as possible, writing a plan that will serve as a blueprint for Town decision making into the future. For this Plan to be a success, it will require both regular reference and action by Town officials and citizens.

This document has action items that will need proactive pursuit. In many cases, these actions will be led by the Town, and some actions will benefit from or will require partner participation from the County, non-profits, neighboring municipalities, and or residents. On page 17, comprehensive plan goals in each topic section are listed based on priority to better guide the Town and residents on issues to focus on. The Town, therefore, will include Comprehensive Plan review and updates as an agenda item on a regular basis for Town Board and Planning Board meetings.

# 02

## PLANNING PROCESS



## **THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS**

The Town of Fenner initiated the process for a new comprehensive plan in late 2021, spurred by community interest in reassessing the Town's position since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, and general concern that the document had become outdated. The Town formed the Comprehensive Plan committee and contacted the Madison County Planning Department for guidance on the process.

After several months of meetings, the committee sent a survey to Fenner residents in the summer of 2022, seeking input on several key issues facing the Town. In addition, the committee held a public meeting and discussion based forum on September 12, 2022 to allow for more public input.

From there, the committee developed a final draft for presentation to the Planning Board, and a final public comment hearing at a planning board meeting before adoption on June 21st, 2023.

# 03

## COMMUNITY

## CONTEXT

HISTORY	9
GEOGRAPHY	11
DEMOGRAPHICS	13



## HISTORY

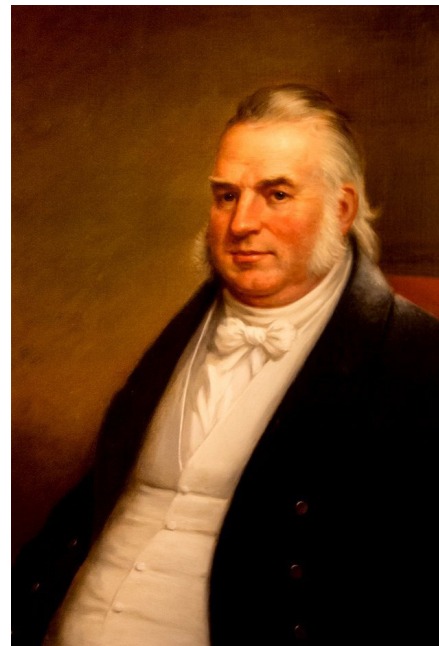
The Town of Fenner is located on the traditional homelands of the Oneida Nation, and are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Confederacy is an alliance of six sovereign nations and precedes the establishment of Madison County and Fenner, New York. The Oneida Nation homelands once occupied six million acres of land that stretched from the St. Lawrence River to the Susquehanna River.

Nichols Pond, a Madison County Park in Fenner, offers a scenic and peaceful picnic setting for the public to enjoy and was the site of a pre-colonial Oneida Haudenosaunee village. From the late 1800s to the 1970s, this location was thought to be the site of an AD 1615 battle between the Oneidas and the French, led by Samuel de Champlain and supported by Wendat (Huron) allies. However, archaeological research in the 70s suggested that the site was much older, dating to the mid-1400s. As a result, the debate continues over the events that transpired at the site. What is known is that the village was home to several hundred Oneida natives. The community was arranged with several longhouses and was surrounded by a palisade wall. Beyond the walls, community members cleared several acres of fields to grow corn, beans, and squash. As such, the history of agriculture in the Town goes back at least 600 years.



The Oneidas supported the Americans during the Revolutionary War, and the U.S. government granted them rights to their native land in 1783. However, in 1790, the first white settlers, veterans of the Revolutionary War, had moved from the Mohawk Valley onto Oneida land in modern-day Madison County.

The Hamlet of Perryville, which lies partly in three modern towns (Fenner, Sullivan, and Lincoln), was also first settled in the 1790s. Within ten years, Fenner and all other towns in what would become Madison County were seeing a steady influx of settlers, primarily from the Albany area and southern New England. Madison County formed from Chenango County in 1806, and migration into the County increased dramatically after the War of 1812. By the end of the decade, several dozen farms were established in the Town, and more were being created. In 1823, the Town of Fenner was officially formed from the Towns of Cazenovia and Smithfield and was named for Rhode Island Governor James Fenner, by former residents of New York State.



Significant social and economic change occurred in the 1800s in Fenner. Several sawmills and gristmills were established over the first three decades. Fenner Corners was considered the Town center in the nineteenth century, and several merchants, a post office, and a church were established. In 1827, New York abolished slavery, and Black residents of the Town were free to pursue their own livelihoods. With a stop on the Underground Railroad in nearby Peterboro, formerly enslaved Black southerners also began to move to the Town in the mid-1800s. At this time, a large number of immigrants, primarily from Ireland but also from Wales, England, France, and various German states began settling in Fenner. Many took jobs as laborers on farms with the goal of one day owning their own.

Fenner was economically diverse, with residents taking up various professions throughout the 1800s. Residents were shoemakers, blacksmiths, millers, milliners, coopers, carpenters, and manufacturers of essential oils. Agriculture, however, has continued to dominate the livelihood of Town residents since the beginning. At one time, Fenner was even considered the sheep raising capital of the United States. Farms were family-run, ranging in size from a few acres to almost 200 acres. Farm products were generally diverse and included oat, wheat, hay, potatoes, hops, and Hess barley, a variety invented in Fenner by early resident David Hess.

Farm products began to change in the late 1860s when dairy farming became the prominent agricultural enterprise. The dairy industry took off after the establishment of the first cheese factory in 1865 by William P. Lownesbury, located just east of Fenner Corners. His wife, Sarah, later ran the factory after his death. The factory was followed by one in Perryville, built in 1868 by Webster C. Hill, and eventually owned by Avery & Wadsworth; one on the mile strip, about three miles southeast of Perryville, built around 1868 by Myron S. Allen, and eventually owned by Avery & Wadsworth; one at the intersection of Wyss and South roads; and a fifth factory, whose location is unknown. The latter two were likely owned and operated by William Richards.

In the early twentieth century, cheese factories were replaced by milk depots and eventually by processing plants in nearby cities, as better methods for

transporting milk longer distances were invented. Despite these changes, dairy farming continues to remain critical to the Town. Most farms today have strong ties to those in the 1800s, either through direct family connections, the continued use of historic houses or barns, or the shared legacy of small family farming.





## GEOGRAPHY

The Town of Fenner is located in the northwest portion of Madison County and encompasses 31.1 square miles. It is bordered by the Towns of Lincoln and Sullivan to the north, the Town of Smithfield to the east, the Town of Nelson to the south, and the Town of Cazenovia to the west. There are no incorporated villages, but a portion of the hamlet of Perryville is located in Fenner.

The Town is transected north/south by Nelson Road (County Route 23) and east/west by Fenner/Cody Road (County Route 28). Oxbow Road (County Route 25) runs through the northeastern corner of the Town, while State Route 13 follows the western boundary. The Town does not have public water, sewer, or natural gas line services.

Topographically the Town is mainly a rolling upland with a large number of creeks and tributaries within its boundaries. The small Munger Brook tributary connects to Chittenango Creek, which forms a large part of the Town's western boundary. This north flowing water then descends down the 167 foot Chittenango Falls. The headwaters of Canaseraga Creek and a small branch of the Cowasselon Creek

called Clockville Creek, are both located in the northern portion of the Town. Lastly, a small tributary between Peterboro Road and Cody Road is a part of Oneida Creek (Figure 1).

The soil in Fenner is predominately gravelly loam and well adapted to crop and livestock farming. The underlying rock of the Town is mostly of the Hamilton group and contains limestone and shale. Limestone outcrops are located in the northern and northwestern parts of the Town. This limestone has been quarried commercially in the adjoining Towns of Sullivan and Lincoln, but there is no commercial quarry activity in Fenner.



Photo: Scott Ingmire

# MAP 1: HYDROLOGY

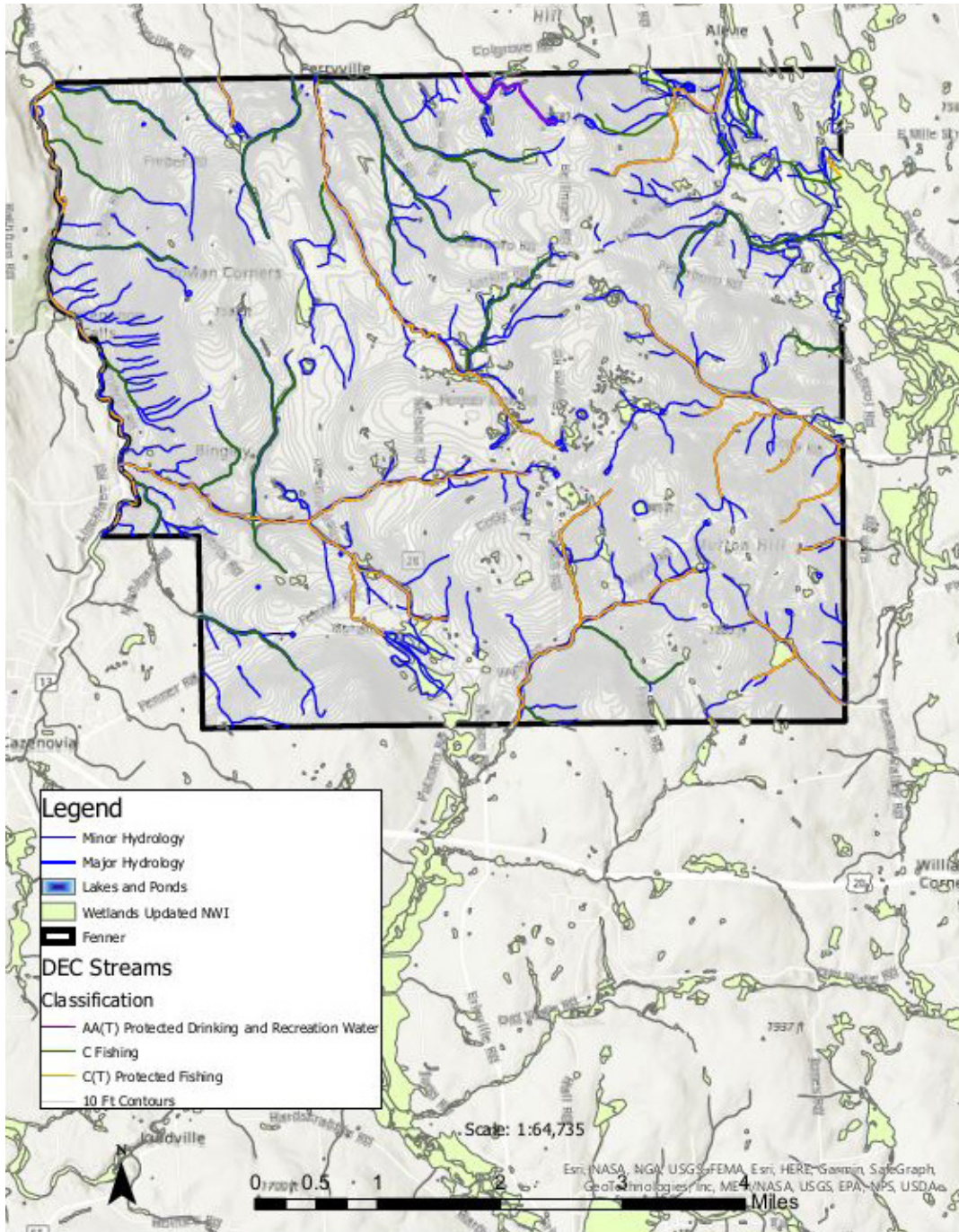


Figure 1



# DEMOGRAPHICS

\*For a more detailed demographic analysis, please refer to the appendix.

## POPULATION

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, Fenner’s total population is 1,668. Fenner lost 58 people (a percent change of -3.4%) since 2010. In the last 40 years, the Town experienced it’s largest growth specifically between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 2). A population increase in 2010 and a decrease in 2020 is a similar trend found in many other villages and towns in Madison County (Table 1). However, Fenner’s population change between 2010 and 2020 is significantly less compared to other towns in the County.

Not included in the US Census is the Amish population, which in recent years has increased. It is estimated that in 2019 28 Amish families were living in Fenner.

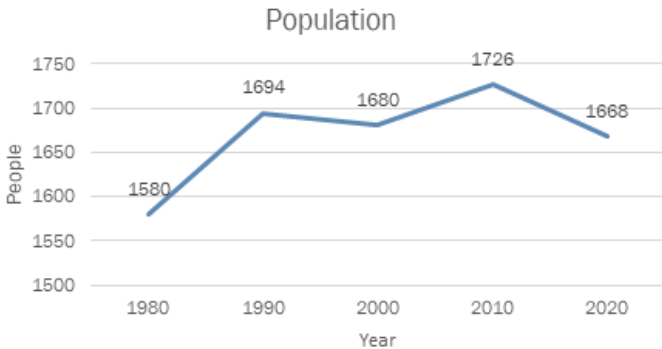


Figure 2: Population over decades (Source: 2020 Decennial Survey).

Town	2010	2020	2010-2020 % Change
Fenner	1726	1668	-3.4%
Town of Cazenovia	7086	6740	-4.9%
Eaton	5255	4284	-18.5%
Lincoln	2012	1802	-10.4%
Smithfield	1288	1127	-12.5%
Madison County	73442	68016	-7.40%

Table 1: Population change in Towns surrounding Fenner (Source: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Survey).

## AGE

Broadly, in 2020, the 45 to 64 age bracket is the largest in Fenner (32.5%), followed by 24 and under (27.1%), 25 to 44 (22.5%), and lastly 65 and over (17.95%) (Figure 3). Fenner’s median age is 45.3, and for comparison, Madison County’s is 42.3.

Resident Age, 2020

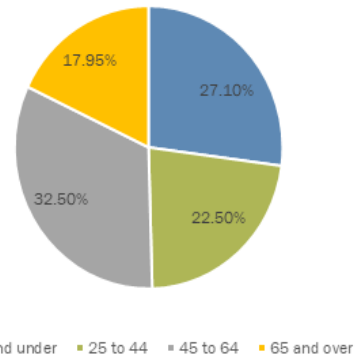


Figure 3: Age of residents (Source: 2020 American Community Survey).

Between 2000 and 2020 an important age trend is identified. Between 2000 and 2010, both those 24 years and younger and 65 years and older increased in percentage. However, between 2010 and 2020, Fenner lost 10% of the population that is 24 years and younger and gained 9% of those 65 years and older (Figure 4). Residents 25 to 44 decreased by 3%, and residents 45 to 64 increased by 3.7% between 2010 and 2020 (Figure 5).

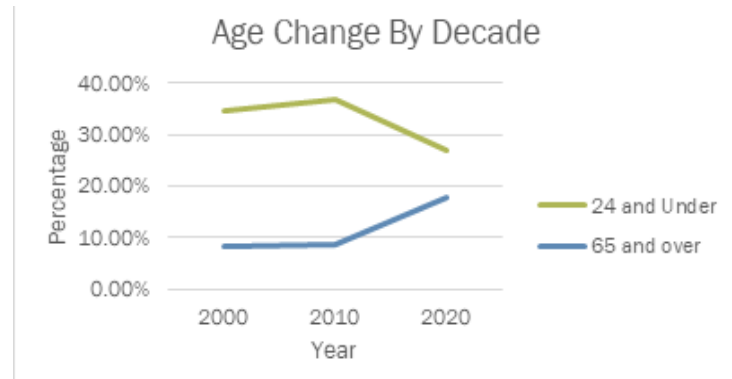


Figure 4: Assessment of specific cohorts during the past 20 years (Source: 2000 Decennial Survey, and 2010/2020 American Community Survey).

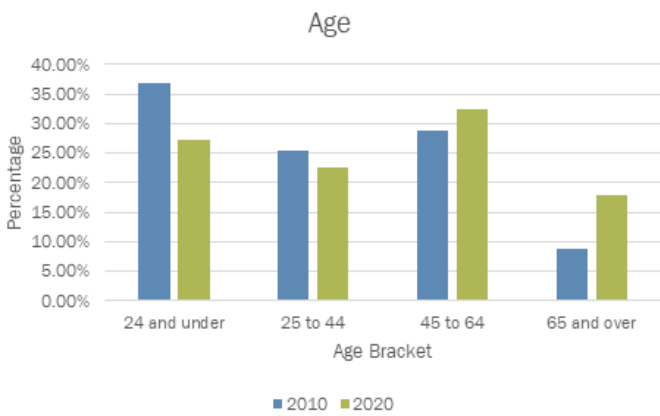


Figure 5: A comparison of age cohorts between 2010 and 2020 (Source: 2010/2020 American Community Survey).

## INCOME

According to the 2020 5-year American Community Survey, the median household income is \$64,861. This figure is higher than the County’s (\$61,176) but not the State’s (\$71,117).

The Town has the second lowest median income when compared to nearby municipalities. However, it’s median income is higher than the County (Figure 6).

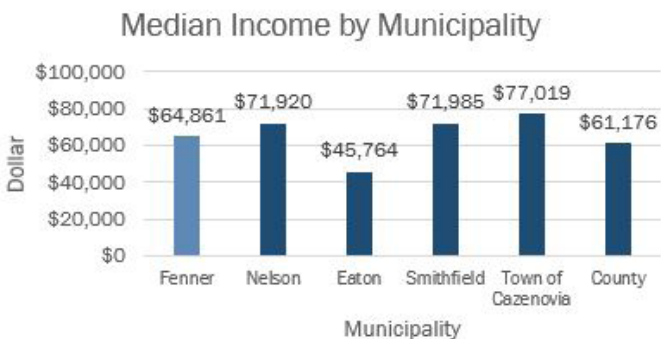


Figure 6: Surrounding municipal income for comparison (Source: 2020 American Community Survey).

## HOUSING

Fenner’s homeowner vacancy rate is 1.4%, and rental vacancy rate is 0% (80 vacant units). As a result housing availability is low. With low housing availability, the pressure to build may become greater in the future due to suburban sprawl from the Syracuse region.

The Town has a significant amount of older housing, with 176 homes built in 1939 or earlier (Figure 7). Homogeneous and aging homes are a common concern found in not only Fenner but in many other upstate communities. An older housing stock can result in hidden costs associated with owning a home and may create a financial burden in the future.

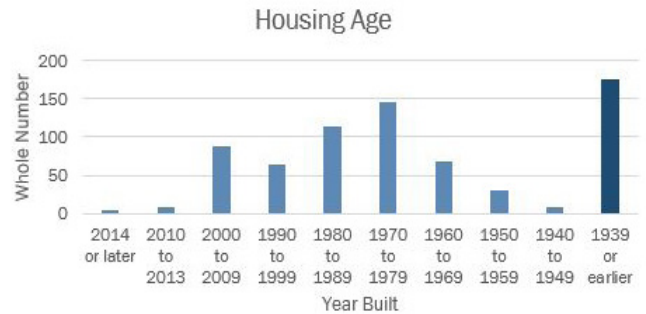


Figure 7: Age of housing stock in Fenner (Source: 2020 American Community Survey).

Overall, 83% of housing units are single-family detached structures, and 10.7% are mobile homes.

Affordable housing is critical for physical, mental, and financial health and stability. A house or apartment is considered affordable if a mortgage or rent costs less than or equal to 30% of the household’s income. In 2010 34.7% of homeowners were spending 30% or more of their income on their mortgage. Comparatively, in 2020, 23.9% of homeowners were paying a mortgage that is more than 30% of their income, resulting in improved affordability.

# 04

## VISION

## STATEMENT



*Photo: Town of Fenner*

## **A VISION STATEMENT OF OUR COMMUNITY**

The Town of Fenner is known for its quiet, peaceful, rural character and rich farmland. Fenner’s citizens value protecting its surrounding natural resources, including its active farmland, scenic viewsheds, tributaries, and recreational land that benefits and supports the Town’s economic, social, and environmental vitality. Given these important resources, the community strives to strike a balance between protecting and preserving active farmland and mitigating negative impacts from suburban sprawl, and future large-scale commercial solar and wind pressure. Additionally, we envision a Town that provides a safe and accessible road network that allows residents to use alternative modes of transportation confidently.



# 05

## THE PLAN

RENEWABLE ENERGY	18
AGRICULTURE	22
NATURAL RESOURCES	26
TRANSPORTATION	29
HOUSING	32



Photo: Philip Rose



## **SECTION 1: RENEWABLE ENERGY**

New York State has begun to see an expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, namely commercial solar and wind development. Fenner is no stranger to this, home to an existing large-scale wind farm since 2001 and the Fenner Renewable Energy Education Center. However, given the ramp-up in renewable energy anticipated in the coming years, it is reasonable to expect an increasing interest in commercial scale renewable energy development in the Town.

The recent State addition of the 94-C permitting program to Article 10 increases the potential of future renewable energy projects and the speed of approval. Going forward, the permitting process of projects that are 25MW or greater (or, in some cases 20MW or greater) will be handled by the Office of Renewable Energy Siting, rather than the

Town of Fenner's local land use code and planning process. Therefore, technically speaking, Fenner's land use laws regarding such facilities would be moot.

With that said, the Town acknowledges that it is in the interest of both developers and the State review board to have clear documentation on behalf of the host communities, indicating a preference for siting and management of any such renewable energy projects. To that end, this Comprehensive Plan has extensively considered the potential of future projects in the Town and the overall impact on the community and common resources.

Commercial solar and wind threatens the community wide scenic viewshed resource, many of which are relatively undisturbed by suburban

development to date. The geography of Fenner's hills, combined with a high elevation, lends itself to some of the best views in Central New York. Improperly sited or screened commercial solar or wind facilities threaten the continuation of this public resource.

There are unique concerns in Fenner regarding the potential for the significant buildout of land for renewable energy systems, particularly industrial solar developments. Foremost is the loss of agricultural resources in a community that has maintained dozens of working farms on prime farmland. Even inactive farmland is at risk, particularly as acreage throughout the Town has returned to production with the influx of the Plains (Amish) community.

Residents recognize the impacts that large-scale solar will bring to agricultural land and scenic viewsheds as stated above. If a large-scale solar development is established, residents identified permanent land protection as a top mitigation strategy to include as a goal in the plan (highlighted under the natural resource section).

Other significant concerns include loss of habitat and forest cover, fence pollution, and solar panel saturation due to the intense land requirements of a larger-scale solar development. The interruption or loss of the overall agricultural character of the Town, both functionally and visually, is a major concern.

Another pressing issue is the addition of commercial wind turbines. The need to reassess the Town's wind law is critical to ensure the safety of residents and the environment are accounted for as technology changes and wind turbines are added. In the near future, a potential new large-scale wind development may be installed in Fenner consisting of 12 or more turbines. In order to produce more energy, new turbines are becoming larger and taller, resulting in the need for reassessment. Further, with additional turbines, protecting the Town's scenic viewsheds are critical. Lastly, the property value of homes may potentially drop in the future if located near this possible new addition.

Overall, the potential large-scale solar and current and future wind projects provide minimum energy benefits to the town. The energy produced goes to the New York State grid and is sold from there. However, residents would like electric rate compensation if NY State implements additional large-scale energy projects, as indicated in the Comprehensive Plan survey (Appendix C).

As a result, outlining zoning changes that address these concerns is an urgent priority since commercial solar developments are effectively banned in Fenner at the moment, and the Town's wind regulations are from 2000. We hope this planning process and subsequent changes to Fenner's land use laws will create a starting point for reasonable limitations to any future development under 94-C.



*Photo: Rick Bosworth*

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIONS**

**Goal 1: Adopt a solar ordinance that creates a local guideline for the siting of commercial/large-scale solar facilities.**

**Objective 1:** Account for land use saturation, protection of prime agricultural resources, viewsheds, and visual impacts when siting large-scale solar projects.

**Objective 2:** Identify appropriate setback requirements for the siting of commercial solar.

**Objective 3:** Create specific guidelines for projects located on farmland, including environmental monitoring and site management during construction. Also, identify site location(s) for topsoil that was removed for future restoration of a commercial solar site.

**Objective 4:** Provide regulations on long-term maintenance and management of solar projects.

**Objective 5:** Create comprehensive design guidelines for fencing, native plant, and tree screening to ensure proper protection of the Town's viewshed.

**Objective 6:** Provide detailed abandonment, site restoration, decommissioning, and bond plans and ensure an escrow is in place.

**Objective 7:** Work to identify and prioritize key land to protect from development and strive for legal easement protection.

**Objective 8:** Clearly state that topsoil must be kept on site if the project requires the removal of prime and or statewide important soils.

**Action for all objectives:** Use the Town's municipal lawyer to create a detailed and refined law by researching solar ordinance models created by other municipalities, NY State, and higher education institutions.

**Goal 2: Reevaluate the local wind ordinance and provide more detailed and specific regulations to ensure that the safety of residents and the environment are met, and the Town's rural and scenic characteristics are preserved.**

**Objective 1:** Reassess regulations such as setbacks, lot frontage, and lot depth due to the potential addition of new and taller wind turbines.

**Objective 2:** Reassess the allowed height of wind turbines as new technology creates taller and larger machines.

**Objective 3:** Modify the local land use law to include specific abatement, decommissioning, site restoration, and bond plans.

**Objective 4:** Create specific requirements for approval of commercial wind projects, such as safety and noise standards, environmental and visual effects, and the operation of equipment.

**Action for all objectives:** Use the Town's municipal lawyer to create a detailed and refined law by researching wind ordinance models created by other municipalities, NY State, and higher education institutions.

**Goal 3: Hire a consultant to review small and large-scale solar and wind projects.**

**Goal 4: Properly site solar and wind projects.**

**Objective 1:** Create a suitability analysis identifying potential solar siting locations.

**Action:** Work with the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation and the County to develop this assessment.

**Goal 4: Create a solar and wind energy board that follows current alternative energy trends, technology, land use laws, and activities globally, nationally, and in New York State.**



Goal 5: Work with solar companies to use technology that allows future developments to produce both energy and farm products like grain and corn.

Goal 6: Identify solutions that provides compensation to residents for electricity produced by potential large-scale commercial solar in the Town.



*Photo: Rick Bosworth*



## **SECTION 2: AGRICULTURE**

Fenner still identifies largely as an agricultural community. About 27% of the Comprehensive Plan Survey respondents actively farm, and the American Community Survey concluded that 9% of residents are employed in the agricultural field. The Amish have successfully revived or continued working on at risk farmland, and their presence has raised the visibility of agriculture within the community.

The land itself shows the most significant agricultural impact. Nearly 60% of land in Fenner is classified as agricultural, with about half of that being in active production. Based on the New York State property tax code classification, the most common agricultural land uses include vacant agricultural land (52.8%), the production of dairy products such as milk, butter, and cheese (27.4%), and the production of field crops (13%). A total of 116 properties claim the state agriculture exemption, and around 8,360 acres are defined as agricultural (just over half being vacant farmland). The result is a community in close proximity to agriculture, from farm fields spanning across the Town to farm stands with fresh produce.

Like any modern agricultural community, Fenner's agriculture and the natural soil resources that support it are fragile. While Fenner remains a rich and diverse area for agriculture, with a variety of products and farm sizes, much of this is subject to marginal changes in national and international markets and demographic changes. As the amount of cleared 'vacant farmland' in the Town implies, the agricultural economy has undergone significant change over the years.

The land that underpins agriculture in Madison County – not just quality soils but affordable and accessible farmland – are under threat. Residential development has and continues to chip away at these resources (Figure 8). Recently, the new threat of a large-scale commercial solar development poses a risk of widespread loss of farm acreage. As farmland disappears, so do farms, making it more difficult for remaining farms to operate. Thus, farmland requires significant attention in the Town, with an emphasis on identifying land that is unique or valuable as an agricultural resource, as well as taking steps to reduce general town-wide loss of land.



# MAP 2: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OVERTIME

TIME FRAME: 2000-2022

2000-2017

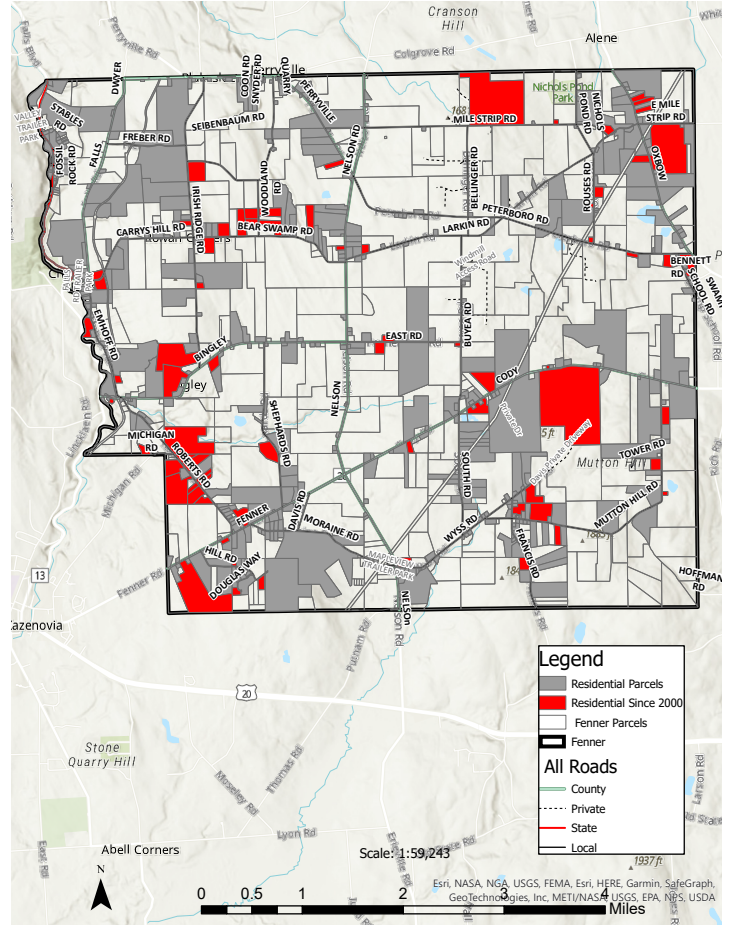
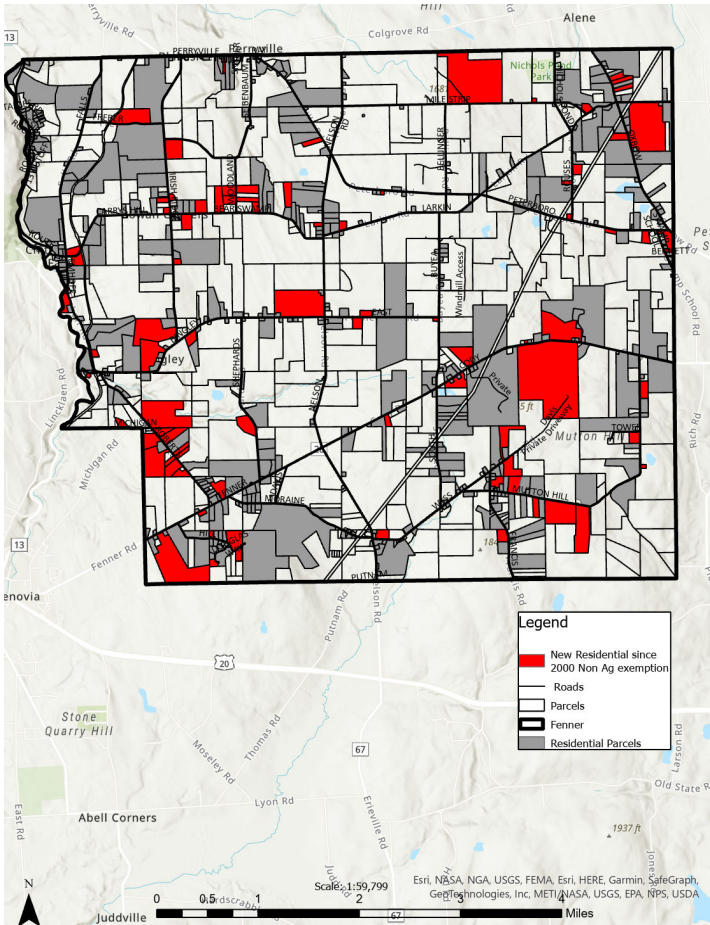


Figure 8 Note: Agriculturally Exempt properties are excluded from the data.



## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIONS

**Goal 1: Connect farmers to county-wide resources to ensure farmland is active in the future.**

**Objective 1:** Inform farmers of the support that the Cornell Cooperative Extension can provide.

**Objective 2:** Create an infographic to convey county-wide resources and ways to protect farmland in the future through conservation easements and other tools.

**Action 1:** Utilize the skill sets of the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation, the County Planning Department, and or the Cornell Cooperative Extension to create this document.

**Objective 3:** Inform farmers of resources like the Farmland Information Center and the New York Farmland for a New Generation Project.

**Goal 2: Host a dinner and training event that educates farmers, renters, and owners of large pieces of land on succession planning,**

conservation easements, and other resources, while connecting them to the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation and the Cornell Cooperative Extension.

**Goal 3a: Utilize farm friendly planning tools.**

**Objective 1:** Through the New York State Farmland Protection Planning Grant Program, create a Farmland Protection Plan that inventories and identifies important farmland, sets goals for its protection, and includes strategies for implementation.

**Action 1:** Inventory current Town farms and their use to holistically understand agriculture in the community.

**Objective 2:** Pursue NY State Farmland Protection Implementation Grants to implement activities stated in the completed Farmland Protection Plan.

**Objective 3:** Encourage farmers interested in making non-agricultural related income to create their own Farmland Master Plan.

**Goal 3b: Promote farm friendly zoning regulations that encourages economic growth.**

**Objective 1:** Thoroughly reassess farm related definitions, allowed uses, and missing definitions and uses that include but are not limited to those listed below:

**Action 1:** Define agriculture, horse boarding, and personal stable and incorporate these uses in respective zoning districts.

**Action 2:** Define agritourism businesses, it's specific regulations and allowed uses, and incorporate these uses in respective zoning districts.

**Action 3:** Define forms of direct farm marketing such as farm related businesses, CSAs, online sales and processing of farm commodities, and incorporate these uses in respective zoning districts.

**Action 4:** Consider adopting airbnb regulations that promotes agritourism and define it in the zoning code.

**Goal 4:** Preserve and protect farms from future development.

**Objective 1:** Analyze the town budget to determine if there is money to assist farmers in appraising their farms before pursuing conservation easement grants.

**Objective 2:** Pursue conservation easements on farms at risk of development.

**Action 1:** Develop a relationship and work with partners like the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation.

**Action 2:** With assistance from the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation, apply for the New York State Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program and the USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

**Objective 3:** Identify key agricultural resources for protection and craft land use laws that safeguard them from significant and irreversible development.

**Objective 4:** Survey farmers to broadly understand if they have a succession plan.

**Action:** Create a successful survey and outreach strategy with the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Madison County.

**Goal 5:** Improve the economic viability of farms.

**Objective 1:** Encourage farmers to participate in the Buy Madison Grown Local Program that advertises and promotes their farm products online.

**Objective 2:** Connect farmers with the Madison County Cornell Cooperative Extension Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator to find grants that can assist specific farm needs.

**Objective 3:** Participate in the USDA Conservation Stewardship Program to enhance natural resources and improve farm business operations.

**Goal 6:** Prepare farms for climate change impacts.

**Objective 1:** Direct concerned farmers to participate in the Cornell Climate Smart Farming program to increase economic resiliency and farm sustainability.

**Objective 2:** Inform farmers of the USDA Climate Stewardship Smart Agriculture and Forestry hub, which provides a suite of programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

**Goal 7:** Annually promote and encourage farmers to enroll in the Agricultural District program during the month of October.







## **SECTION 3:** **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Fenner is home to rolling hills containing rich and bountiful natural resources made abundantly clear by the Town's rich farmland, numerous creeks, Chittenango Falls, DEC classified wetlands (3,641.2 acres), and expansive open space with minimal development. However, as the negative impacts of residential sprawl from the Cazenovia and Syracuse area increases, the adverse impacts of climate change, and the potential of large-scale solar, the Town finds it critical to actively protect its natural resources for current and future generations.

As noted in the geography section of the Comprehensive Plan, Fenner is home to many productive creeks that branch off into the northern section of the County, like Chittenango, Canastota, and Canaseraga Creeks. Chittenango Creek is a DEC classified public fishing by right location for trout. Canastota Creek is a drinking water source and potential trout habitat, while Canaseraga Creek is suitable for fishing. With such a high-quality resource, the Town wants to protect the water that Fenner residents and downstream communities

use from agricultural pollution, runoff from impervious surfaces, and the effects of climate change.

Recreational trails and parks are not distinct natural resources. However, they are an essential part of the environment since they commonly protect the quality of surrounding natural resources. Nichols Pond County Park is one of the most well-known recreational locations to picnic, watch the wind turbines, hike, or enjoy the scenic views. Another known trail is the Link Trail, which is a part of the North Country Scenic Trail. Based on public input, the community felt that the Link Trail in Fenner could be improved and that its presence is not strongly felt.

Although these recreational trails will not be impacted by potential large-scale solar or suburban sprawl, Fenner's well-known viewsheds will. Therefore, the Town desires to identify viewshed locations and plan to protect them for future generations. The Comprehensive Plan survey also

supports this desire. Community members were asked what the Town should prioritize in the future. The survey results indicated a strong desire to protect viewsheds (51%) and create permanent land protection through conservation easements (57%).

The effects of climate change and suburban sprawl also impacts the natural resources found in the Town and are reflected in the Comprehensive Plan survey. The survey asked what potential impacts of climate change concern residents. The top three concerns were economic impacts on agriculture (74.24%), habitat disruption and invasives (68.94%), and changing precipitation patterns (68.18%).

Given these results, the Comprehensive Planning Committee decided it was important to research these climate change topics further and identify strategies to help mitigate these issues. Therefore, the agricultural section of the plan addresses agriculturally related climate change mitigation strategies, while the natural resources section discusses invasives (a list of invasives can be found in the appendix).



## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIONS

**Goal 1: Identify and protect natural, scenic, and open space resources that contribute to the Town's unique character.**

**Objective 1:** Work with the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation and potential landowners to protect open space and natural and scenic areas through conservation easements.

**Objective 2:** Develop a conservation subdivision land use law that encourages housing development to occur in a manner that preserves open space and farmland and prevents land fragmentation.

**Objective 3:** Create an Open Space Plan that sets long-range planning goals and objectives focusing on identifying and protecting key open space assets.

**Action 1: Create a Natural Resource and Open Space Inventory.**

**Action 2: Conduct a viewshed analysis to identify and preserve valued scenic, open space, and agricultural viewsheds.**

**Objective 4:** Identify and potentially construct a scenic overlook on the side of the road that allows residents to enjoy scenic vistas safely.

**Goal 2: Protect and mitigate threats to natural resources.**

**Objective 1:** Utilize New York State natural resource grants and assistance.

**Action 1: Proactively protect the Town's drinking water sources through the free technical assistance offered by New York State's Drinking Water Source Protection Program.**

**Action 2: Encourage awareness of and participation in forestry and woodlot management programs, including Cornell's Master Forest Owner Program and**

state forestry tax exemption 480-A to assist in preserving woodlots.

**Objective 2:** Support and engage in efforts that control the threat of invasive species.

**Action 1:** Educate the public on spotting and mitigating the spread of invasive species.

**Action 2:** Ensure the Town DPW properly identifies and disposes of invasive plant species and cleans machinery used in major Town projects, like roadside ditch cleaning.

**Objective 3:** Properly mow and reseed Town owned roadside ditches to prevent erosion and pollution and reduce the flow of water passing through the system at once during severe rainstorms.

**Objective 4:** Inventory important wetlands, water, and pollution sources to preserve water quality.

**Goal 3: Utilize and improve current recreational trails.**

**Objective 1:** Make residents aware of recreational resources like the Link Trail, historic trails, and the Ridges of Madison County bike trails.

**Action:** Utilize existing maps of the trails created by the Madison County Planning Department and advertise them on the Town's website.

**Objective 2:** Create potential Link Trail wayfinding signage at the small gravel parking lot on New York State Land to better inform residents of its location and presence.

**Action:** Work with New York State and the North Country Trail Association.

**Objective 3:** Protect future snowmobile trails from being rerouted due to development pressure through land use laws.

**Action:** Work with the Town attorney, landowners, and the snowmobile clubs.



*Photo: Town of Fenner*





## **SECTION 4: TRANSPORTATION**

Fenner is uniquely different from other rural upstate communities due to the diverse methods of transportation commonly used and its geographic setting. It is not abnormal to frequently see road walkers, bicyclists, and Amish buggies actively occupying road shoulders. Likewise, during the winter, snowmobiles often cross intersections. Geographically, Fenner has steep rolling hills and roads, with some that have unsafe blind spots and intersections.

Although various mobility methods are used, the most dominant are passenger vehicles and commercial trucks. Due to Fenner's unique geographic setting, its roads, like Fenner and Nelson Roads, are commonly used as pass-throughs for travelers getting to locations in Madison or Onondaga Counties. These are also the same roads frequented by road walkers, bicyclists, and Amish buggies.

Many community members voiced a concern regarding the safety of Amish buggies, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Commonly, vehicles frequently drive

over the speed limit, while bicyclists and road walkers use narrow road shoulders. In recent years, interactions specifically between motor vehicles and buggies have become more common, and in some cases deadly, in Madison County and New York State.

Not only is speeding a concern, but winter driving is another major problem due to steep roads and the lack of Town ownership of main roadways. It is not uncommon for passenger vehicles and commercial trucks to have difficulty driving within the Town's boundaries during snow events. Further, many of the major roads frequently used by motorists, such as Fenner and Nelson Roads, are owned by the County, making it challenging for the Town to maintain the roads themselves during hazardous conditions. Therefore, creating a safe setting for all transportation users is a major Town priority.

Lastly, since the Madison Transit bus system runs throughout the County, the Town inquired through the Comprehensive Plan survey if there was a demand or need for a bus. The survey indicated

that most residents within the past year didn't have difficulty getting somewhere because they could not drive themselves. Only 16% had to rely on a family member or friend for transportation once or twice in a year.



## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIONS

**Goal 1:** Improve the safety of residents who use alternative modes of transportation.

**Objective 1:** Hire a civil engineer to study the Town's roadways and shoulders and determine the most appropriate traffic calming and shoulder safety solutions.

**Objective 2:** Create a road and shoulder map and inventory.

**Action 1:** Highlight road and shoulder conditions, measure the width of shoulders, and create a priority list to inform the Town and residents where potential road and shoulder improvements are needed.

**Action 2:** Implement a pedestrian study inventorying the number and type of users using roads and shoulders.

**Objective 3:** Potentially implement bicycle or buggy signs in highly used areas if not present.

**Objective 4:** Encourage road walkers and bicyclists to wear reflective vests or jackets at night.

**Objective 5:** Create a bicycle, pedestrian, and buggy safety campaign similar to the "Look Twice Save a Life" Program.

**Action 1:** Develop unique signage to display on lawns similar to the "Look Twice Save a Life campaign."

**Action 2:** Use state resources and information to develop safety outreach materials.

**Action 3:** Create print and digital materials for mailing and the town website to inform residents of the campaign.

**Action 4:** Utilize County departments and the Central New York Regional Planning Board to assist in developing and delivering the education campaign and outreach materials.

**Goal 2:** Improve and maintain roadways and shoulders for all transportation users.

**Objective 1:** Use civil engineers to assist in potential road improvements.

**Action 1:** Determine the potential to add a traffic light at the intersection of Cody, Fenner, and Nelson roads.

**Action 2:** Study and identify dangerous roads and intersections that are hilly and or have poor lines of sight, such as Nelson, Cody, and Bear Swamp roads, and determine possible design solutions.

**Objective 2:** Inquire if the Amish are willing to use a manure catcher to reduce the amount of horse fecal matter on the roads and shoulders.

**Objective 3:** Work with the Madison County Highway Department to find a solution regarding better roadway maintenance in the winter and during snow storms.

**Goal 3:** Reduce speeding traffic throughout the Town.

**Objective 1:** Maintain a strong relationship with the County Sheriff and the State police to monitor and enforce the speed limit on major roads.

**Objective 2:** Coordinate with New York State DOT and strategically place radar speed signs (driver feedback signs) on major roads to encourage motorists to follow the speed limit.

**Objective 3:** Audit the number of speed limit signs on the roads, note the distance between them, and work with New York State DOT to potentially add more where appropriate.

**Goal 4:** Ensure adequate safety for automobiles and recreational vehicles that use Town roads.

**Objective 1:** Create strict ATV and RTV regulations relating to the allowed time they can be used on roads and what roads can be crossed.

**Action:** Draft standards by utilizing the town attorney and identify examples from New York state communities.

**Objective 2:** Work with New York State DOT and respective snowmobile clubs to implement additional snowmobile signage if needed.

**Action 1:** Locate and identify the location of snowmobile road crossings and ensure adequate signage is present, especially on Cody Road.

**Action 2:** Ensure the proper placement of snowmobile crossing signs on roads if a large-scale commercial solar site alters snowmobile routes in the future.

**Objective 3:** Make residents aware of snowmobile

road intersections via a digital map on the Town's website and a printed map for mailing.

**Action 1:** Work with the Madison County Planning Department to make specific maps.

**Goal 5:** Audit the number of transportation signs to guarantee road sign clutter is not present, especially as they are potentially added in the future.







## SECTION 5: HOUSING

Housing development in Fenner has been large lot, suburban-style, single-family homes for decades, and that trend is continuing. The relatively low cost of land, combined with pressures on the housing market and existing land use laws, will continue to create bit-part development in Fenner. Further, the Town will experience more suburbanization, particularly in the western areas.

As this pattern continues, there is a distinct threat to Fenner's unique qualities, many of which the survey revealed. There was a clear theme when asking residents what they liked most about living in Fenner. 151 respondents commonly expressed phrases such as, "beautiful countryside, rural agricultural community, landscape, lack of development and traffic, and open space." Community members also noted that residential development that conserves open space for habitat and agriculture was a strong priority. While the impact of residential development may not be as immediate as commercial solar development, there is potential to make just as drastic an impact on the landscape over time. Continued suburban

residential development of this type that has dominated housing development over the past decades in Fenner is simply not compatible with the characteristics of the Town that residents cherish.

Therefore, the Town should strive to recognize this threat and move to protect land from residential development. The first option would be to work with a land trust (most likely the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation) to protect in perpetuity unique and at-risk parcels from development.

The other method is to address shortcomings in Fenner's land use law that currently prevents housing from being built in more land-efficient patterns. This can be addressed by allowing and encouraging the use of conservation subdivisions, decreasing minimum lot sizes, or changing the Town's zoning to allow denser development in certain areas. The general idea is to conserve Fenner's character by capturing more of the eventual residential development in a smaller area. It is a common misconception that making large minimum lot sizes preserves open space. However,



the result is large suburban homes spread throughout the landscape, which would represent a significant change to Fenner's character. Social changes such as the increased ability for remote work and the potential for population growth in CNY due to the relocation of Micron, could see an increase in development in Fenner, raising the urgency of the issue.

Of the housing challenges facing the community, by far the biggest identified through the survey process was housing in disrepair. Homes in disrepair are a trending issue in the area, as homeowners struggle with older homes that are expensive to maintain and often need significant investment. With high home ownership rates, it is likely that this is an affordability issue. Nearly 70% of residents said housing in disrepair was an issue in the community, while over 35% said housing affordability was an issue.

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIONS**

**Goal 1: Revise the Town zoning to better allow for land conservation during residential development.**

**Objective 1:** Establish conservation subdivision guidelines so that future subdivided parcels set aside land for conservation and increases the density of newer developments.

**Objective 2:** Reduce the minimum lot size and consider allowing denser development in select areas, such as the border of Cazenovia.

**Objective 3:** Consider fixed ratio zoning or density averaging to protect ag land while allowing farmers to subdivide.

**Goal 2: Protect key areas from development.**

**Objective 1:** Identify and preserve at-risk or unique land from development.

**Action 1: Work with the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation.**

**Goal 3: Clearly define home businesses in the land use code and reevaluate which districts they are allowed in.**

**Goal 4: Identify Airbnb regulations from other rural municipalities and consider including them in the zoning code to promote agritourism.**

**Goal 5: Actively seek out affordable housing funding that addresses needed home repairs.**

**Goal 6: Ensure future housing developments are sustainable.**

**Objective 1:** Require all new developments follow LEED and Energy Star programs.

**Action 1: Modify the municipal code.**

# 06

## FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

INTRODUCTION	35
EXISTING LAND USE & ZONING	36
CURRENT ZONING	38
FUTURE LAND USE GOALS	39
FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES	39



## **FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Land Use can be described as the human use of land and represents a particular location's economic, social, and environmental activities. A future land use map acts as a fundamental building block that provides a vision of where the town wants to be. Further, it acts as a guide that summarizes the goals and objectives addressed in this Comprehensive Plan and helps the community achieve its vision statement.

Fenner's landscape is changing based on regional and statewide pressures, including suburban sprawl and potential large-scale renewable energy siting. For Fenner to preserve its agricultural heritage, scenic vistas, natural resources, and open and recreational spaces, the Town needs to proactively plan for its land area. Without a future land use map, Fenner's sense of place and what makes the community unique has the potential to dramatically change. As a result, Fenner's future land use map builds upon current and possible future land use patterns.

### **WHAT IS A FUTURE LAND USE MAP?**

- A graphic illustration depicting a community's desired future and land use preferences based on plan goals.
- Commonly describes general land uses, the intent of the land uses, and physical characteristics.
- Serves as a useful decision-making tool to guide zoning, development, and infrastructure decisions.

### **WHAT IT IS NOT**

- A zoning map.
- A set of legal regulations.
- A tool to assess a specific parcel's land use.

## EXISTING LAND USE AND ZONING

The overall land use in Fenner is dominated by agriculture (43.1%), residential development (30.2%), and vacant land (25.6%) (Table 2). According to New York State, vacant land is land that is not in use, is in temporary use, or lacks permanent improvement. The remaining 2% of land collectively consists of “public parks, wild, forested, and conservation lands,” “public services,” “recreation and entertainment,” and “community services.”

Property Class	Parcels	Acres	Percent in Acres
Agriculture	125	8359.3	43.1%
Residential	574	5861.3	30.2%
Vacant Land	294	4973.5	25.6%
Commercial	8	49.6	0.3%
Recreation & Entertainment	6	34.3	0.2%
Community Services	11	10.6	0.05%
Industrial	0	0.0	0.0%
Public Services	4	6.3	0.03%
Wild, forested, conserva	2	95.3	0.49%
Total	1024	19390.1	100.0%

Table 2: Current land use, Fenner (Source: 2022 Madison County Real Property Parcel data).

Fenner is a rural farm-based community. Based on the Town’s real property classification code, 125 parcels are broadly classified as agricultural, resulting in a total of 8,359.3 acres (Table 3). Specifically, the most common property class type is vacant agricultural land (Table 3). New York State defines vacant agricultural land as, “Land used as part of an operating farm. It does not have living accommodations... It’s usually found when an operating farm is made up of a number of contiguous parcels.” Dairy Farms are the second largest agricultural property type, followed by field crops (13%).

Agricultural Property Class	Parcels	Acres	Percent in Acres
Agricultural Vacant Land	91	4410.1	52.8%
Livestock and Products	2	323.0	3.9%
Dairy Products: Milk, Butter, and	16	2290.0	27.4%
Cattles, Calves, Hogs	1	69.3	0.83%
Horse Farms	2	145.8	1.7%
Field Crops	12	1115.6	13%
Apples, Pears, Peaches, Cherries	1	5.5	0.07%
Total	125	8359.3	100.0%

Table 3: Agricultural land use, Fenner (Source: 2022 Madison County Real Property parcel data).

Properties claiming the agricultural assessment are another way of understanding agriculture in the Town. Working farms can receive an agricultural tax assessment that eases the property tax burden on those farms. There are roughly 116 properties claiming the agricultural assessment and equates to 7,194.7 acres. The total assessed value of these parcels is \$14,147,600.00.

In recent years the Amish population has increased in the Town and County. This has positively led to several farms returning to working production that may have otherwise been vulnerable to development.

Fenner is one of the many towns in Madison County that is experiencing creeping residential development from the Cazenovia and Syracuse areas, as indicated by the numerous parcels classified as residential in the southwestern corner of the Town’s land use map (Figure 9). Broadly, of all the property classes, residential is the second highest land use (Table 4). When specifically assessing residential property classes in more detail, it is determined that rural residential with acreage makes up the greatest number of residential parcels (67.6%), followed by single-family year-round residences (19%).

Residential Property Class	Parcels	Acres	Percent in Acres
Single family year-round residence	394	1114.1	19.0%
Two family year-round residence	6	13.5	0.23%
Rural residence with acreage	114	3964.0	67.6%
Primary residential, also used in agricultural production	2	230.1	3.9%
Seasonal residences	6	32.7	0.56%
Mobile Home	44	332.9	5.7%
Multiple Mobile Homes	2	26.0	0.44%
Multi-Structure Residential	5	115.4	1.97%
Multiple Residences	1	32.5	0.56%
Total	574	5861.3	100.0%

Table 4: Residential property class, Fenner (Source 2022 Madison County Real Property parcel data).



# MAP 3: LAND USE

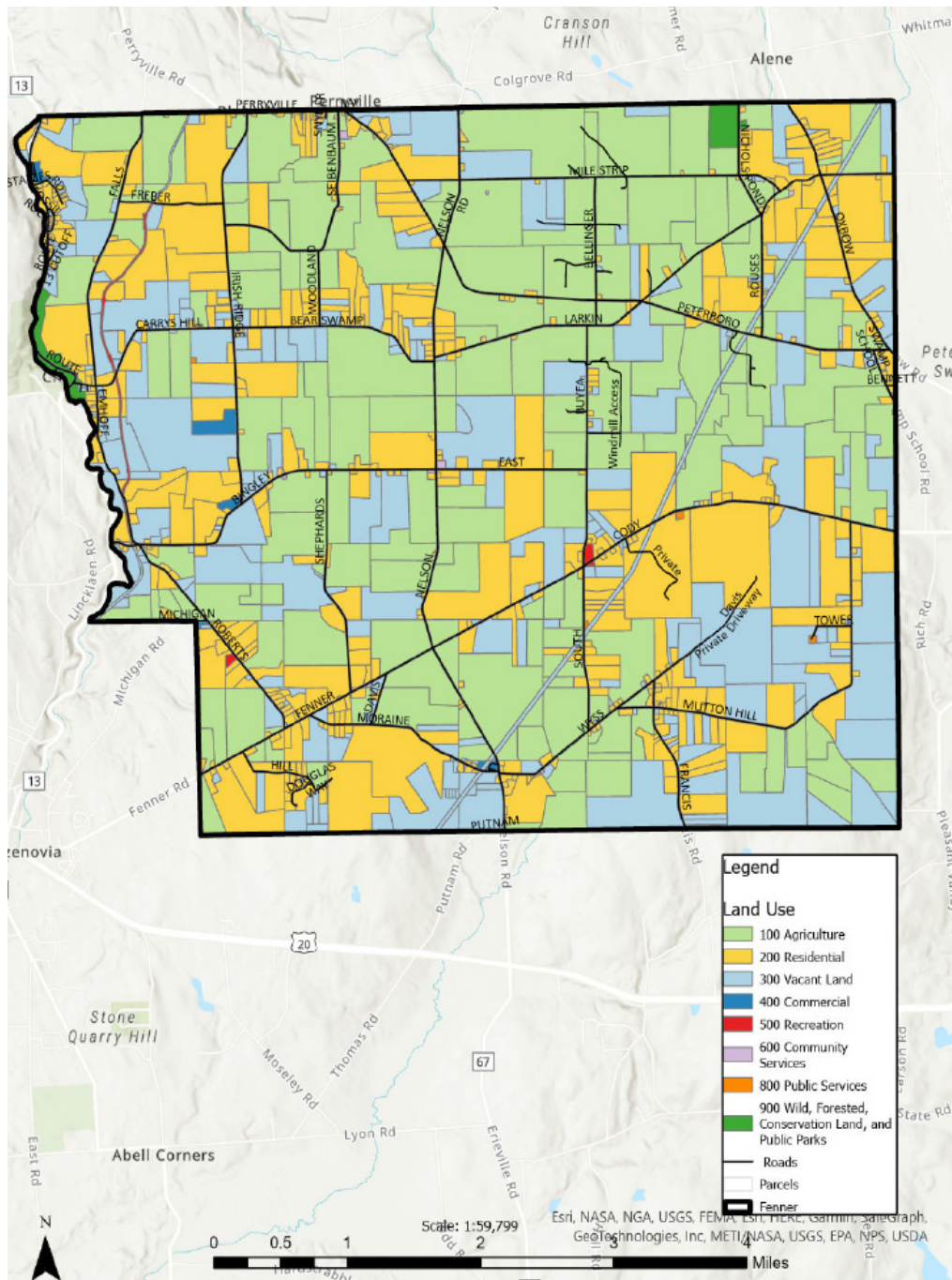


Figure 9

## CURRENT ZONING

The Town of Fenner’s current zoning was adopted in 1997 and comprises three zones: districts A, B, and C (Figure 10).

District A characteristics: The intent of the district is to provide built-up housing near the road that preserves the farmland behind it and the Town’s rural character. One and two-family houses, farm, and farm buildings are allowed principal uses. Recreational assets and home businesses require a special-use permit.

District B characteristics: The purpose of this district is similar to District A, except mobile homes are allowed. Home businesses are allowed as an accessory use.

District C: This zone fosters solar and wind energy while preserving farmland and adjoining settlements. The principal uses allowed are the same as District B, and home businesses are allowed as an accessory use.

## MAP 4: ZONING

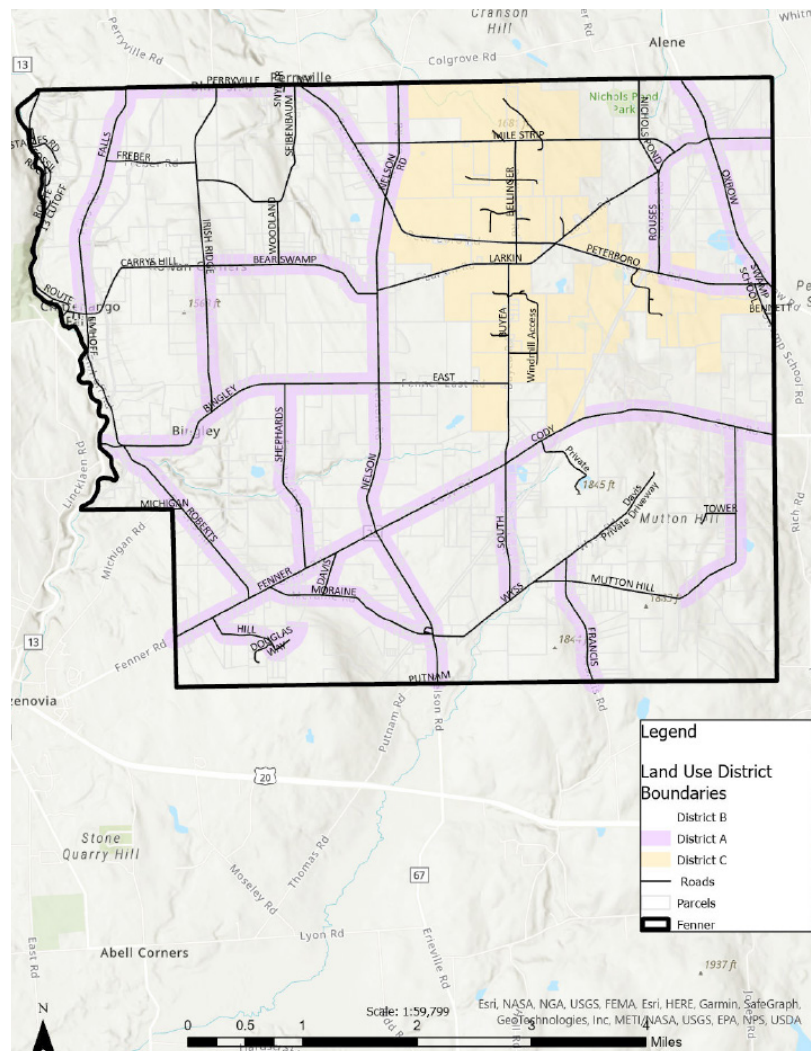


Figure 10

## **FUTURE LAND USE GOALS**

- Preserve farmland and open space as the dominant land use in the Town and foster economic vitality.
- Preserve natural resources including farmland, prime soil, open space, hydrological assets, woodland, flora and fauna habitat, etc.
- Conserve farmland and natural resources by allowing denser housing through conservation subdivisions in areas of the Town where there is housing pressure from Cazenovia and the greater Syracuse area.
- Allow for small-scale solar developments on unproductive farmland that benefit residents.

## **FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES**

Fenner’s future land use map contains three color-coded categories expressing future intended land use (Figure 11). The three color coded categories include agriculture, conservation residential, and open space and environmental preservation. Each category highlights the intent and allowed uses, and the location of each category is highlighted on the Future Land Use map.

### **AGRICULTURE**

#### **INTENT**

Agriculture is the largest existing land use and consists of active farms, open space, and rural residential uses. Fenner desires to continue to preserve farmland for agricultural and open space purposes so that it’s rural character and economic vitality are maintained. Agricultural land should not serve as a placeholder for other types of development that causes irreversible change.

#### **USES**

Agricultural land uses will dominate, and non-farm uses will be restricted. Agricultural land

uses include but aren’t limited to agricultural businesses, farmsteads, direct farm marketing, agri-tourism, and related operations permitted by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. In addition, home occupations that support farming are allowed.

The siting of housing developments should minimize the consumption of prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance. Woodlots, wetlands, and hydrological resources should continue to be preserved. Large-scale residential developments and subdivisions with large lot sizes should not be permitted, since it creates suburban sprawl and reduces agricultural vitality. A future home that supports agricultural operations on the land is allowed with a special use permit. If desired, parcel owners can implement conservation or fixed ratio subdivisions with a special use permit.

Lastly, small-scale solar development on farmland that is not productive is allowed. Small-scale solar less than 5 megawatts can be used to support farm operations or can be sold back to the grid. Minimum solar and wind siting should occur.

### **CONSERVATION RESIDENTIAL**

#### **INTENT**

The purpose of the conservation residential district is to allow denser housing that conserves open space and agriculture through conservation subdivisions and fixed ratio zoning, which avoids suburban sprawl and potential regional housing impacts from Micron. Houses will be single-family detached units. Future subdivisions should protect, conserve, and be consistent with the rural character of Fenner. Specifically, new developments should conserve open land and natural resources such as steep slopes, streams, floodplains, wetlands, prime farmland, and wooded areas by setting them aside from development.

The conservation residential land use is ideal in areas where some residential housing has developed or in locations where it is likely to occur. For example, housing developments are encroaching in the southwestern section of the Town due to its proximity to the Village of Cazenovia.

The Hamlet of Perryville may also benefit from conservation subdivisions and fixed ratio zoning. Historically, hamlets were centers of social and economic growth, so naturally, housing should be sited in this location if needed. Lastly, smaller lots would be beneficial along the northwestern corner of Route 13, which borders the Town of Cazenovia

## **ZONING CHARACTERISTICS**

### **CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION**

Generally, lots are intended to be small with the majority of the land preserved for farmland, natural, or historically important resources. The potential minimum lot size is  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre or smaller but may change depending on soil and sewer accommodations of the subdivided site. At least 50% of the lot should conserve the natural resources that reside on it. Typically, no roads are allowed on the conserved area. Depending on the number of lots, lot size, natural setting, and utility access, sewage disposal systems may be located in the conserved area to accommodate public health and safety.

### **FIXED RATIO SUBDIVISION ZONING**

Fixed ratio zoning is a useful tool for landowners who want to sell only a portion of their farmland without creating large subdivisions and fragmenting quality farmland. This type of subdivision sets a maximum lot size for non-agricultural uses and controls the number of subdivided lots coming from the parent tract of land, as a means to prevent land fragmentation. For example, a farmer owns a 125-acre parcel and wants to subdivide one lot for every ten acres of land, resulting in 12.5 acres of subdivided land. If the maximum lot size is one acre, then the farmer will have 12 one-acre lots that consume only 12 acres of land.

## **USES**

- Conservation subdivision: single-family detached homes.
- Fixed ratio subdivision: single-family detached homes

## **OPEN SPACE**

## **AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION**

### **INTENT**

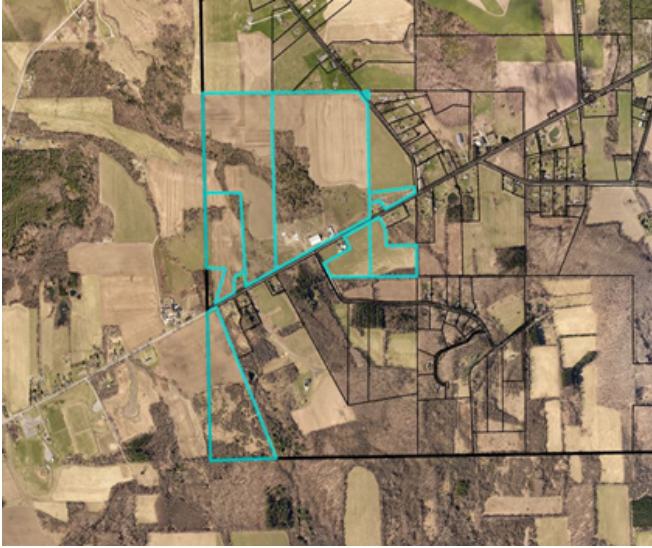
The Open Space and Environmental Preservation land use centers around land already preserved or should be preserved, given current development patterns and natural resources. Steep slopes greater than 15%, wetlands, woodlots, and significant waterways are natural constraints that serve as important barriers from development and contribute to a healthy environment. Development should be kept to a minimum or completely avoided in these areas.

Preserving agricultural land where feasible is also a priority since farmland in Fenner has a high risk of development conversion and commonly contains rich soils and excellent crop yields. Farmland also contributes to Fenner's exceptional scenic and open space viewsheds. Although farmland is not actively identified on the map as the open space and environmental preservation land use type, farmers are encouraged to conserve their land and work with the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation.

### **CURRENTLY PROTECTED LAND**

Currently protected land: Located on the southwestern Town boundary between Fenner and the Village of Cazenovia, the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation recently protected large agricultural parcels through conservation easements (highlighted blue in the image below). The Cazenovia Preservation Foundation owns and protects a portion of Chittenango Creek in the Town of Cazenovia. Chittenango Falls State Park and the creek that resides within the state boundaries are also protected and preserved for all to enjoy.





## **FUTURE PROTECTION**

Major tributaries such as Chittenango Creek in Fenner will be protected under this land use due to its environmental quality. Steep slopes are also common on the western side of the Town and are protected in order to reduce erosion, flooding, and sedimentation of nearby creeks. A large wetland also borders the eastern side of Fenner on Oxbow Road, resulting in its protection. As stated above, protecting farms through conservation easements are a priority.

## **USES**

- Protected farmland through conservation easements.
- Park and recreational space.
- Environmentally significant resources (wetlands, significant hydrological resources, steep slopes, etc).

# MAP 5: FUTURE LAND USE

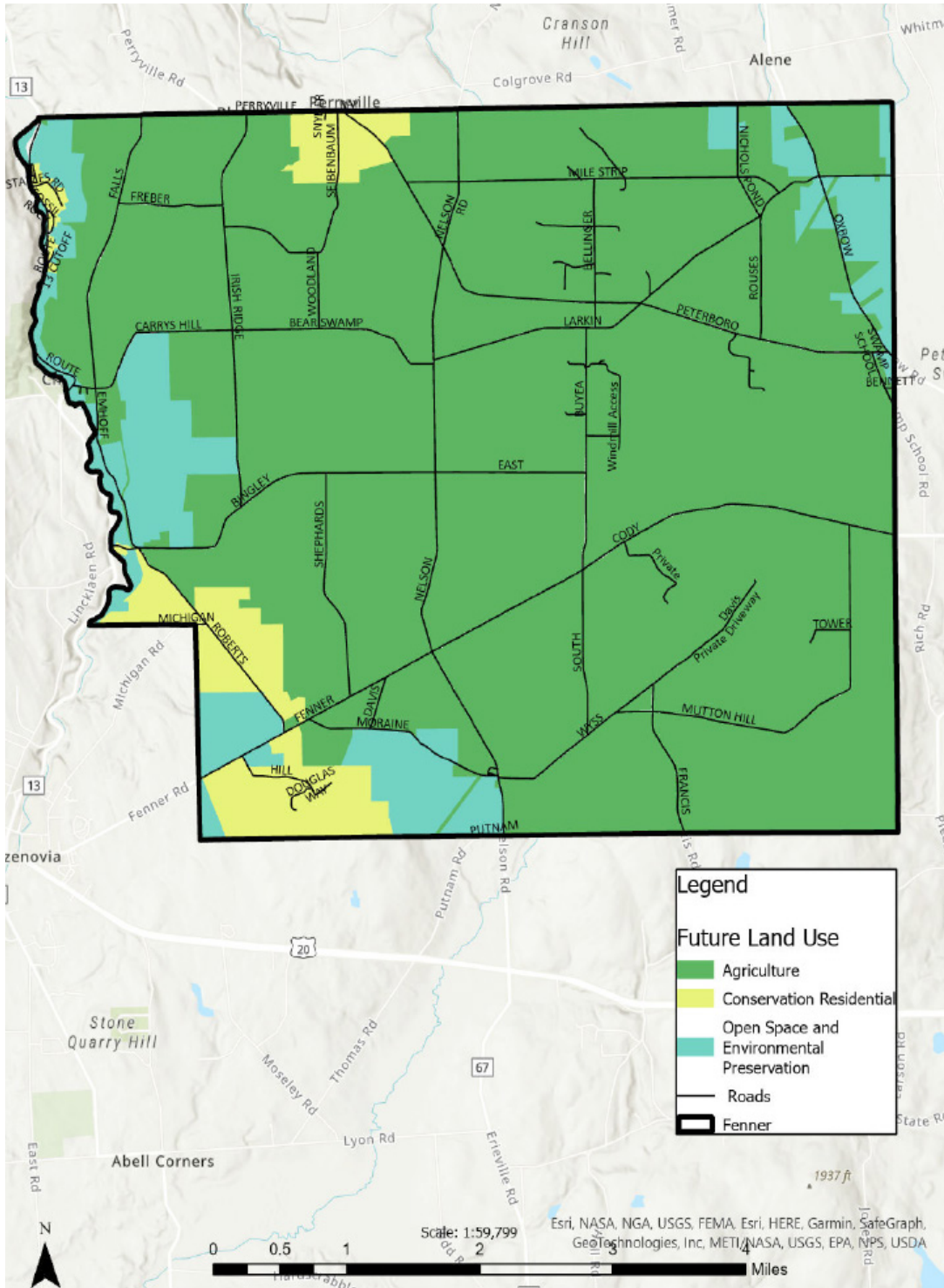


Figure 11

# APPENDICES

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & RESOURCES

A: SWOT ANALYSIS

B: MAPS

C: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

D: RELATED PLANS AND STUDIES

E: INVASIVE SPECIES, RARE PLANTS OR  
ANIMALS, AND SIGNIFICANT  
NATURAL COMMUNITIES