

Town of *FORT EDWARD*



Master Plan – 2018

Town of Fort Edward Master Plan 2018



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fort Edward's Master Plan is intended to guide public and private actions over the next ten years. The overall goal of the Master Plan is to create a balance of economic development, farmland, and open space. The plan is comprised of community identified goals and provides strategies through action items that will achieve those goals. The intention of this document is to help guide community decision-makers while weighing protection of natural irreplaceable features and much needed development. The Town's 2002 Master Plan is being updated to reflect progress and needs which have been identified through community planning workshops, planning and zoning board recommendations, and recent growth experienced.

The Character of Fort Edward has been shaped by its strategic location. Throughout hundreds of years, the Town has benefitted from the Hudson River, functioning rail service, the Champlain Canal, and Route 4 to move people, supplies and products to the region and beyond. Stunning vistas and fertile soils have helped to maintain the agricultural history of Fort Edward and Washington County. Skilled labor forces have attracted and grown industry to help stabilize the tax base and encourage home ownership. The Town also boasts commercial areas in the Village and north along Route 4. Recent investment in these areas has made the Town more attractive to young families, ensuring future sustainable growth.

VISION STATEMENT – 10 year future snapshot description

The Town of Fort Edward is the region's example of balanced development with a strong housing market, bustling Route 4 commercial corridor, active agricultural operations, and a dynamic industrial sector. Each project is designed to ensure cherished resources are protected and enhanced, while essential development continues to occur throughout the Town.

Description of the Town of Fort Edward Master Plan:

Several major elements went into the 2002 Town of Fort Edward Master Plan which include a description, background information, and a statement of goals, objectives and recommendation for each element. The 2018 document serves to update these where needed, add new goals, and remove goals that have been achieved since the adoption of the 2002 plan. It should be clear that the entire Hudson River dredging project was developed, the facility constructed, removal work performed and the facility dismantled since the 2002 Master Plan was written and adopted.

That said, many goals and needs have been identified through other community planning initiatives such as the Northeast Industrial and Commercial Development Plan (2014), the Downtown Renaissance Plan (2013), and the Rogers Island Visioning Plan (2011) which are strong documents that should be used in conjunction with this Master Plan update.

It is important to note that this Plan reflects the entire Town which in some instances includes the Village. Over the past decade the two municipalities have worked together to accomplish many beneficial projects due to joint planning. These plans were written to include public contribution and therefore reflect common goals. To be clear, the Village has its own plans for zoning and identified priority projects in which the Town is not involved but does support. Those are not discussed in detail in this document; however, they are found in the Downtown Renaissance Plan (2013), the Rogers Island Visioning Plan (2009) and the Village Master Plan (2006).

Elements contained in the 2018 Town of Fort Edward Master Plan update include:

- Community and Municipal Resources
- Economic Development
- Agriculture (new to 2018 update)
- Transportation
- Culture, History and Education
- Recreation
- Environmental Features
- Land Use
- Implementation

HISTORY OF THE TOWN

- Crafted by Historian Paul McCarty

The area today known as Fort Edward has a unique and storied past. Originally known to Native Americans as 'The Great Carrying Place', Fort Edward has a geography which straddles two major important water routes. The Hudson River forms the western boundary of the Town of Fort Edward situated in the central portion of Washington County, New York which was originally called Charlotte County under British rule prior to 1783. The northern boundary of the town is part of the Champlain Valley Watershed. These two water routes made travel by canoe possible, which meant an easy north south passage. It also set Fort Edward up to be the location of several fortifications beginning in 1709. In that period during Queen Anne's War, a small stockade was erected here. Although it was shortly abandoned, the site would be occupied again by John Henry Lydius known as 'The Dutchman from Albany' in 1732.

In 1755, the need for a fortification by the British was called for and the construction of Fort Lyman began around the former Lydius trading post. Renamed to Fort Edward in September of 1755, William Johnson named Fort Edward after Edward Augustus, the Duke of York and Albany, grandson of George II and brother of King George III.

Fort Edward became a staging ground for the construction of Fort William Henry and Fort George in Lake George. During the French war it received notoriety as the third largest city in North America in the 1750's when during the height of the war; nearly 20,000 troops were stationed here. The fort was garrisoned until 1766 when it was shut down. Subsequently, it was ordered demolished by the British government with local individuals using it as a source of building material.

The community's oldest building; 'The Old Fort House' was actually built from the recycled building materials of Fort Edward. During the Revolutionary War period, the Old Fort House was surrounded by a picket and occupied by both the British and Patriot forces during the conflict. John Burgoyne and other British officers occupied the structure during the Burgoyne Campaign. The Baroness Fredericka Von Riedesel memorialized her stay in a book of her travels with Burgoyne's army.

During the period of invasion, the community suffered the accidental death of a young girl named Jane McCrea. Although now it is believed that her death was caused by friendly fire, the local populace believed that the British employ of Native Americans and their custom of taking scalps to be barbaric. This served to bolster the patrol cause and it is believed help to lead to Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga.

It was realized that this area would be an excellent location for a canal from our French & Indian and Revolutionary war visitors. The position between the Hudson River Valley and the Champlain valley made this possible. In the 1760's, the first real settlement would take place with the settlers coming for the Argyle Patent. Settlers came from Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as Scotland. Initially, agriculture was the chief goal, but that would change.

Change was brought about by the building of the Champlain Canal. Realizing the extent of change to come, people in the town petitioned for a separate town from Argyle with the help of a group of people from the southern end of the town in a hamlet called Fort Miller, named for a French & Indian War fortification build on the west side of the Hudson River.

Water power utilizing the Hudson River and its tributaries provided power to new small industries. The Champlain Canal provided a way to move goods out and bring material in for processing at mills. Paper making began here with the Howland Brothers in the late 1830's, a tradition which still continues today with Irving Tissue which basically occupies the original mill sites.

Unfortunately, the great resources which helped to create the town and village also caused to make its growth slow. The canal, railroad and river sometimes caused impediments for growth of our neighborhoods because utilities needed for living could not be provide, such as water lines, electrical power, natural gas lines and fire protection.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In April 2000, the total population of the Town of Fort Edward was 5,892 persons. In 2011 the US Census Bureau reported 10,205 persons now reside in Fort Edward. This significant increase has occurred despite losing many of the aging populace identified in 2002. This shift reflects younger families moving into Fort Edward and retirees selling large homes to downsize. Not to be left out is identifying the increase in the number of 3-generation families. This dynamic family structure supports each generation in the home and has a positive impact on the community as a whole.

In 2002, Fort Edward was comprised mostly of white households. Since then the community has experienced significant growth in minority populations. This pattern has led to an increase in the variety of goods, products and services available in the area.

EDUCATION

Due to its geographical shape, the Town is served by several different school districts. Mostly, the Village residents attend Fort Edward Union Free School District. Town residents north of the Village attend Hudson Falls Central School District. Residents in the southern part of the Town attend either Greenwich Central School District or Schuylerville School District in Saratoga County. The eastern portion of the town attends Argyle Central School District. Although each school offers wonderful educational opportunities, this split causes an identity crisis in the Town. Residents often associate where they live with the school district.



COMMUNITY AND MUNICIPAL RESOURCES

The Town of Fort Edward was created in 1818 through a formal Act of Legislation and the first meeting was held on May 22, 1818. Today, the municipal offices of the Town and the Village are located in the combined Town/Village Hall on Broadway in the Village of Fort Edward.

A Supervisory form of government whereby a Town Supervisor is elected every two years to serve in office, governs the Town. The Town Board is comprised of the Supervisor and four Board members who serve four-year terms. The offices of the Clerk and the Town Justice are also subject to elections every four years. The Town's Highway Department is served by a Superintendent who is elected to four-year terms and several employees who are responsible for maintenance of Town roads and properties and undertake a broad range of other work throughout the Town. A Code Enforcement/Building Inspector is employed part-time for the administration and enforcement of building codes in the Town. The Town Assessor is appointed to a six-year term.

The Town Board meets once a month and conducts special workshop sessions on an as-needed basis. The Supervisor, with the approval of the Town Board, appoints members of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. These Boards meet monthly and can schedule special workshop sessions. The Planning Board's primary duties are to review and approve Subdivisions and Site Plans. The Zoning Board's primary duties are to rule on Use and Area Variances, and to review and approve Special Use Permits.

MUNICIPAL BUDGET

The Town's fiscal year runs from January 1 through December 31st. The tentative budget is presented no later than October 15th and includes all proposed expenditures for the coming year, as well as all proposed means of financing proposed expenditures. Public hearings are conducted for public input. The Board must adopt a budget by November 20th.

The actual expenses and total budget are used to determine the taxes to be raised in the coming year. The tax bills are mailed at the end of December with the receipts collected by the end of January.

REFUSE DISPOSAL

The Town Highway Department provides curbside trash removal to residents in the Town and Village. Trash stickers are available for sale in the Town Clerk's Office. There has been an increase in the number of private haulers providing pick-up service and a decline in garbage sticker sales has resulted.

SEWAGE DISPOSAL

The Town of Fort Edward's Uptown Commercial District and surrounding residential neighborhoods are now served by the newly expanded Washington County Sewer District. In the rural areas of the Town where sanitary sewers are not present, private septic systems are used. In particularly poor draining soils, specially engineered septic systems are necessary and can be quite costly to install. The Town is currently promoting and investigating the feasibility of establishing a new sewer district for some un-served areas of the Town.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

FIRE PROTECTION

The Fort Edward Fire District and Fire Department provide fire protection services to residents and businesses within the Town's border. While many volunteer fire departments have struggled to maintain adequate manpower, the Fort Edward Fire Department has been successful in its recruitment, training and retention members.

A system of fire hydrants throughout the Village and parts of the Town provides water flow to those areas in case of an emergency.



EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The Fort Edward Volunteer Rescue Squad provide emergency medical care and ambulatory services to people in the Town.

POLICE PROTECTION

The Town of Fort Edward does not have a paid police department, but is served by the Washington County Sheriff's Department, the NYS Police and partially served by the Village of Fort Edward Police Department.

WATER SUPPLY

Much of the water supply for residents and businesses in the Town come from individual wells and springs located on each property. There seems to be an adequate supply of suitable water in the Town with the exception being in the Durkeetown area where there can be a lack of water during dry summer months.

Water District 1 encompasses the more populated areas in the north area of the Town. Water is supplied through an inter-municipal agreement with the Village of Hudson Falls which is reselling water it receives from the Town of Queensbury. A large water tower is used for storage and pressure.

Water District 2 is south of the Village on Route 4 and extends down almost to Blackhouse Road. This water is supplied by the Village of Fort Edward through their reservoirs and water filtration plant.

Also to the south of the Village, the Town Board is considering the creation of Water District 3 which would provide safer and cleaner potable water than the aquifers currently used for wells. This proposed water district includes an area suitable for residential development which will help defray the hefty costs associated with this large of a project.

POWER UTILITIES

National Grid provides all residents in Fort Edward with electrical service for which supply can then be shopped. Natural gas service is provided by National Grid and available to many residents and businesses for which supply can then be shopped.

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

The Town of Fort Edward is served by Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, PrimeLink fiber optics, Spectrum cable and various satellite internet companies which are necessary in the many rural areas that do not have service.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Town has taken serious steps to prepare for responsible development by revising zoning, investing in infrastructure upgrades, and utilizing community planning initiatives to foster a business friendly environment.

Many priority projects to further advance the establishment of a strong commercial and industrial sector are identified in the Northeast Industrial and Commercial Redevelopment Strategy (2014) and the Downtown Renaissance Plan (2013). Both the Town and the Village are implementing these plans as the roadmaps to an economically healthy community.



Fort Edward Industrial Park and Intermodal Facility

AGRICULTURE

In particular, the southern portion of the town is considered Agricultural which reflects the dominant land use in Washington County. The fertile soils in this area make farming for grain, corn and livestock ideal. In recent years the Town has struggled with proposed high density residential subdivisions in this area. Poor zoning continues to make this less than desirable style of development a threat to the reduction of acres dedicated to Agriculture. Historically, dairy farms dominated the landscape but an increase in equine farms cannot be ignored.

Many of the Town's farmers are enrolled in a State Agricultural District (Washington County Agricultural District). Participation in this program is strictly voluntary and the districts are up for review every eight years. The Ag District program offers farmers certain property tax benefits, modifies any eminent domain proceedings within the district, limits local regulation of agricultural practices, and offers farmers some protection from private nuisance lawsuits regarding normal farming practices. The protections afforded are not absolute but offer some security to farmers that they will not be unreasonably challenged by the non-farming populace for undertaking daily farming activities.

The Town of Fort Edward has further strengthened the important role agriculture plays by passing a Right to Farm Law. This law was adopted several decades ago and should be reviewed for areas to be updated or strengthened.

TRANSPORTATION

There are approximately 60 miles of Town-owned roads, 28 miles of County roads, and 23 miles of State maintained roadways that comprise Fort Edward's road network.

US Route 4 and State Route 197 serve as the primary road network for reaching most destinations. Route 4 is a two-lane, commercial route that runs north to Vermont and south through Washington County. Due to its location along the majestic Hudson River, Route 4 provides a pleasant day-trip experience.

State Route 197 is a two-lane road running west to east through the Town. The highway crosses Rogers Island and enters the Village of Fort Edward, intersecting with US Route 4. Route 197 then runs to the east toward Durkeetown and into the neighboring Town of Argyle.



There are several County owned and maintained roads throughout Fort Edward including Route 46 and Route 42. Some of these roads, such as South Ridge and North Ridge carry a considerable amount of traffic and require higher levels of maintenance. Others are roads that are more rural and are designed to carry limited amounts of traffic.

The Town owned roads vary in design and levels of usage depending upon the location. They do tend to be more difficult to maintain due to the fact that several of the local roads are unimproved dirt roads.

In general, the road system in Fort Edward provides adequate service and good circulation throughout the Town. This is demonstrated by an increasing amount of commuter and interstate truck traffic in most areas of the Town. The State and Federal highway network reaches most areas of the Town and where it does not, the County and Town road do. The NYS DOT Route 4 Rehabilitation Project completed in 2010 addressed serious traffic safety issues in the Uptown Commercial Corridor that were listed as concerns and action items in the 2002 Master Plan. Further safety minded decisions and investments were made by a private developer that agreed to install a traffic signal that is reducing the number of accidents occurring in this stretch of Route 4.

Alternatives to the road network are a series of excellent bike routes that run through the length of the Town like the Champlain Canalway Trail which follows sections of both the old and new canals; the State #9 Bike Route which travels along Route 4; and, the Feeder Canal Trail system that begins in Fort Edward and will take a traveler through Hudson Falls, Glens Falls, Queensbury and end at the south end of the Village of Lake George. These trails offer an experience whether exercising, commuting, or bird watching these routes have grown in importance and usage with every investment made into them. Enhancements to and extensions of these trails as well as the creation of others are priorities for the Town.

Fort Edward is fortunate to have passenger service to NYC, Montreal and Vermont available to board at the historic train station located on East Street. This structure is owned and maintained by the Fort Edward Local Development Corporation.



The rail lines are owned and operated by Canadian Pacific Rail and are used to ship materials, aggregate, lumber, fuel, finished products, etc. into and out of the Northeast corridor.

Also available to residents and visitors is bus service through Greater Glens Falls Transit. Both the Town and Village of Fort Edward pay to have this service to ensure an economic benefit and environmentally friendly commuting option is available to/from Hudson Falls, Glens Falls, Queensbury and Lake George.

CULTURE, HISTORY AND EDUCATION - Contribution from Historian Paul McCarty

A local library founded in 1913 by the Fort Edward Free Library Association survives and provides many children's' programs and activities.

The Fort Edward Historical Association founded in 1925 provides many programs and services to the community. In the late 1940's, the idea for a museum was firmly planted resulting in the opening of the 'Old Fort House' museum in July of 1953. The museum has served as a repository for local historical memorabilia from the Fort Edward area. Exhibits are held annually on special topics.

The centerpiece of the museum campus is the Old Fort House Museum, which is one of the area's oldest structures having been built and used continually since before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Other structures have been relocated to the museum campus from the surrounding area. They include a one room schoolhouse, a lawyer's office, a tollhouse/railroad station, a 19th century Washington County Fair building, and a colonial house. All of these buildings relocated to the site had been slated for demolition.



The museum also maintains a large archive of photographs, books, journals, periodicals on the surrounding community along with a large collection of historical artifacts, archaeological collections and other survey reports.

Because of the location between the Hudson River and the Champlain Barge Canal, it is hoped that a new facility for the preservation of these archival materials may be created getting them out of the flood plain. Historical records from the Town and Village of Fort Edward and the Rogers Island Visitor Center may be relocated together at a site in the northern portion of the Village of Fort Edward.

The Rogers Island Visitor Center houses some items relating to the PCB dredging project, which include a timber from the original fort and several anchors, artifacts from the Little Wood Creek project and the many years of archaeological digs on Rogers Island. All of these collections could be housed in a surplus school building above the flood plain.

Both the Old Fort House and the Rogers Island Visitor Center are operated on a seasonal basis. Although closed during the winter, part of each facility is still used by the community for different functions. The museum archive operates all year long; open on Wednesdays throughout the year. The Rogers Island Visitor Center helps to maintain the historic grounds recently acquired by the Town and Village of Fort Edward. New displays and walking trails are planned for the island in the future.



RECREATION

The Town has several different types of parks and recreational areas. The more traditional ball field and playground style is located in Mill Park located in Fort Miller.

Pocket park style pull-off areas are located along Route 4 on both the Champlain Canal side and the Big Pond side. Fishing and picnicking are popular here.

The Village boasts several parks and a fitness trail with 7 different workout stations.

The largest is Mullen Park which is home to the Summer Recreation Program, ball fields, basketball and tennis courts, and a beautiful playground.



Bradley Park on Rogers Island has a community pool and playground which are open during the summer months.

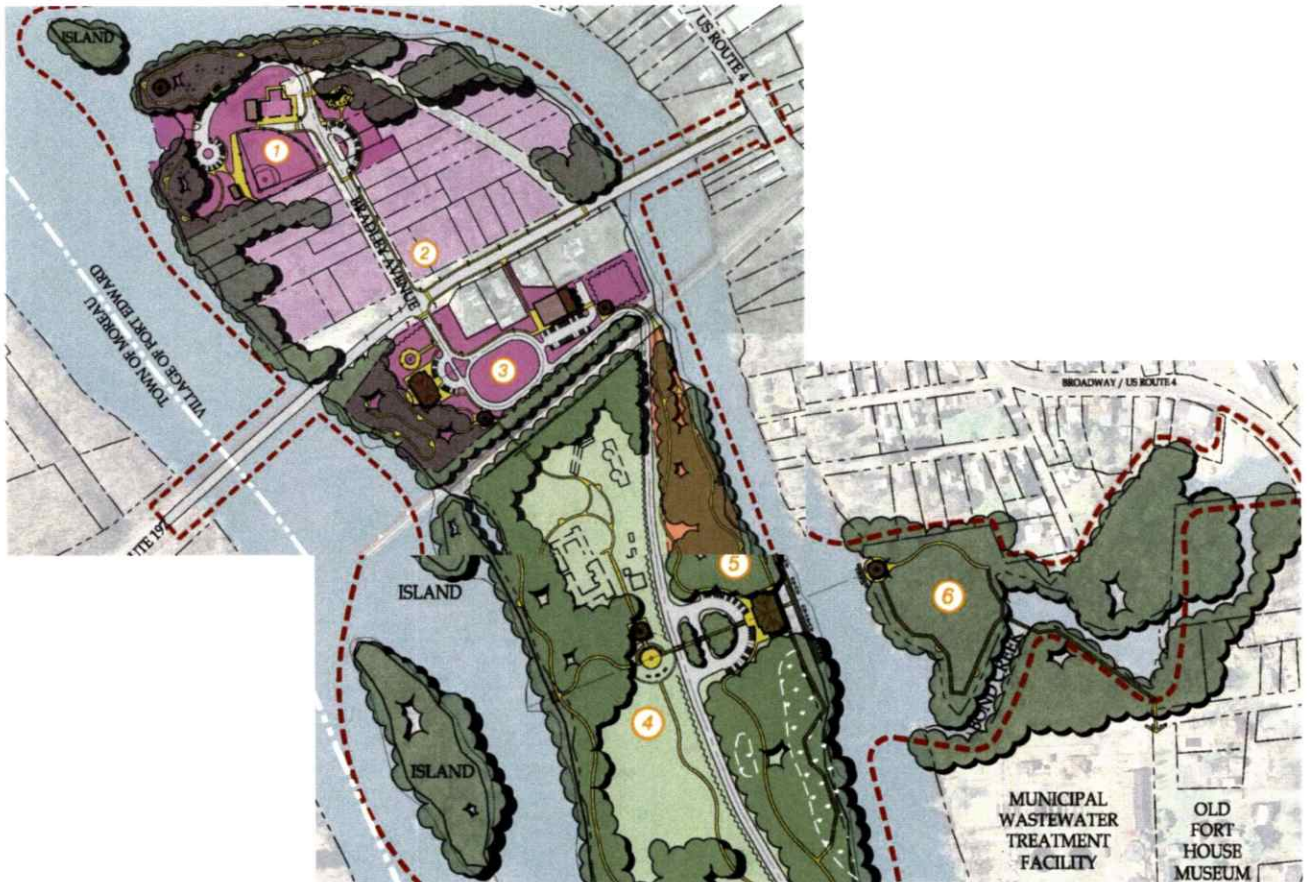


Also in the Village is the Fort Edward Yacht Basin and Underwood Park. This park is used by residents and visitors year round for events, large and small.

Boaters are hosted by the Village with free water and electric for up to two nights. There are bathrooms and showers available during the canal season. Fishing is popular off the north end of the wall.

Rogers Island is historically significant and through a Village and Town partnership 37 acres were purchased to preserve the historical integrity of the island and to develop an interactive series of exhibits that would provide visitors the opportunity to learn about the military significance of the island and the region.

The Rogers Island Visioning Plan is complete with recommended action items and priority projects specific to each section of the island. Seen below are the vision plans for the island and its connection to Bond Creek.



ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

The Town of Fort Edward is located approximately 10 miles southeast of the City of Glens Falls in the Hudson River Valley. Open space and scenic vistas are bountiful in the southern and western areas of the Town and they help attract new residents and visitors. The ridgelines for the Adirondack, Green, and White Mountains surround the town with spectacular views.



Photo by Darlene DeVoe 2017

TOPOGRAPHY

Topography in the Town of Fort Edward is relatively level. East of Route 4, the land is mostly flat with moderate rolling hills. Farther to the east, bordering the Town of Argyle, the elevations rise, and slopes in excess of 10 – 15% can be found.

GEOLOGY and SOILS

The Town of Fort Edward was an area affected by repeated glaciations during the Pleistocene era. Some of the soils in the area, such as the Nassau and Bernardston soils, were formed from glacial deposits were subsequently modified by lake and stream deposits. Many of these more recent alluvial (sediment) deposits are comprised of material from the underlying bedrock of the region. The bedrock is primarily made up of Ordovician limestone, shale, sandstone and dolostone. The main soil groups in the Town of Fort Edward, the Vergennes and Kingsbury soils were formed from these lake deposits and stream terraces. Soil formation is an ongoing process; therefore, there are soils in the Town that have formed more recent alluvial deposits (Hamlin, Teel and Limerick soils).

WATER RESOURCES

Water resources are the focus of environmental protection efforts in the Town of Fort Edward for several reasons. Well water is the sources of drinking water for the majority of residents, so groundwater protection is of utmost concern. This is especially true for the areas of Fort Miller and Durkeetown.



Water quality is also an important part of the effort to protect and enhance rural character and wildlife habitat. Maintaining natural storm water retention areas and natural hydrologic cycles are important elements of the storm water management and flood control efforts. In short, the quality of water resources directly affects the quality of life for all residents.

Water resource protection is concerned with surface waters such as rivers, creeks, wetlands, floodplains, and subsurface or groundwater such as aquifers. These elements are interrelated. For example, the boundaries of floodplains and wetlands overlap in many areas.

The analysis of water recharge areas highlights the interrelationship of the various water resources and draws attention to groundwater vulnerability. Groundwater discharge areas are

typically the narrow areas close to lakes, creeks and wetlands where there is a natural outflow of water from the saturated zone below. Groundwater recharge areas are locations where water moves from the surface into the saturated zone below, thereby replenishing the groundwater supply. This groundwater is stored in underground beds of sand and gravel called aquifers.

Theoretically, every area that is not a discharge area is a recharge area. However, some areas serve a more critical recharge function. More restrictive land use controls or prohibitions of certain land uses would be appropriate in these areas. The Town of Fort Edward should consider conducting further studies of groundwater recharge areas with the goal of developing a policy for their protection. The policy should be implemented through the Zoning Ordinance and other related land use regulations.

Groundwater protection must also address the operational features of land uses. Groundwater contamination is most frequently the result of leaking septic systems, improper floor drains, improper storage of hazardous substances, including road salt, leaking underground petroleum storage tanks, condensation from air emissions and improper waste disposal. Many of these avenues of contamination can be addressed in site plan review. The Zoning Ordinance should require full disclosure (locations of tanks, floor drains and connections, etc) and the best available technology to alleviate potential impact.

The Zoning Ordinance should also reflect the desire to minimize the impact of development on surface runoff. Buildings and pavement increase the amount of impervious surface and amount, and rate of storm water runoff, while diminishing the ability of water to percolate into the ground and replenish the groundwater supply. These conditions can also increase the potential for floods in certain areas. The Town should establish as a criteria under site plan review, that a minimum amount of land area be paved for new development proposals.

FLOODPLAINS and STREAMS

The Hudson River is the dominant feature in the Town of Fort Edward. It flows north south and forms the western boundary of the Town. The Moses Kill, Bond Creek, Dead Creek, Black House Creek and Slocum Creek all collect waters of the area and drain into the Hudson River. Throughout the Town of Fort Edward, both a 100 and 500-year floodplain can be found along the river. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Flood Insurance Program have delineated these boundaries. Flooding has occurred in the past where meadows and pastures, adjacent to the river, have been under water, causing some limited damage to property.



Floodplains, the low-lying areas adjacent to rivers, streams and lakes are important considerations in land use planning. The 100-year floodplain is defined as an area at an elevation with a one percent chance of flooding occurring within any year. FEMA generally defines floodplain boundaries based on the official FEMA maps.

Development within FEMA identified floodplains is restricted because they serve as water recharge areas, as water storage areas during periods of heavy rain or snow thaw, and because the likelihood of water damage to homes and businesses is great. Besides focusing attention on the danger associated with flooding, floodplain boundaries are good indicators of sensitive environmental areas. Thus, good efforts to restrict development in floodplains will usually have the added benefit of protecting other important natural resources and the hydrologic system.

In areas exposed to 100-year floods, according to FEMA Flood Insurance Program, new or substantially improved dwellings must have the lowest floor elevated to or above the base flood level. The purpose of these restrictions is to provide protection against the perils of flood losses and encourage sound land use by minimizing exposure of property to flood losses. Clearly, restriction on development in the floodplain is necessary not only in the interest of protecting the natural ecosystems, but also to protect life and property.

The Town should limit development within 100 feet of major streams through a land conservation overlay district. Development within 50 feet of streambeds should be prohibited. The wording of these regulations should be drafted to limit development in floodplains consistent with FEMA regulations.

WETLANDS

The Town of Fort Edward has many natural resources that should be preserved for future generations. Such resources include wetland areas, which provide a source of clean water by absorbing and filtering out pollutants that enter the water supply. Wetlands are able to hold extra water during flood events, thus reducing possible property damage downstream. They can serve as aquifer recharge areas, are habitats suitable for wildlife and provide recreational opportunities in the form of hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, bird watching, photography, etc. Due to their wide biological diversity, wetlands are also important areas for education and scientific research.

As indicated, some substantial wetland areas are located throughout the Town. The largest wetlands can be found north of the hamlet of Fort Miller to the east of Route 4, south of Duer Road near Anthony Road, south of Patterson Road, and east of Swamp Road between Route 197 and Route 46.

A series of smaller wetland areas are also scattered across Fort Edward, primarily in the southwestern and eastern parts of Town. They are not as significant as those previously mentioned, yet are equally important in the Town's efforts to preserve its natural resources. Not surprisingly, many of these are located within or adjacent to Agricultural Districts. Pressure for residential developments is growing in these areas and will continue. A review and revision of buildable lot sizes are urgently needed in these areas.

It is the policy of New York State, under the Freshwater Wetlands Act, to “Preserve, protect and conserve freshwater wetlands.” The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) classifies wetlands according to a system that establishes four separate classes according to their ability to perform wetland functions and provide benefits. They are identified as Class 1, 2, 3 or 4. Wetlands with Class 1 having the highest rank. To qualify for NYSDEC status as a regulated wetland, it must be a minimum of 12.4 acres in size. Any wetland smaller than this would fall under the jurisdiction of either the municipality or the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE). There are currently four NYSDEC regulated wetlands in the Town of Fort Edward and several other federally regulated wetlands.

Any proposed development that would affect wetlands meeting the minimum 12.4 acres size requirement must be reviewed by NYSDEC. The State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) also includes provisions for the Local and State review of development proposals that may affect freshwater wetlands. While there is not a specific local law to regulate smaller wetlands, the Town can control development through subdivision and site plan review, where applicable. The Town should consider adoption of a local wetlands ordinance as part of the zoning ordinance update to follow this Master Plan.

OPEN SPACE and SCENIC VISTAS

The major landscape features within the Town of Fort Edward consist mainly of the Hudson River Valley and a large, flat plain, punctuated by ridgelines toward the eastern edge of Town. This topography affords spectacular vistas along roadways and across other agricultural settings. These views are especially obvious along Route 4, south of the Village of Fort Edward, and along Hunter, Williams and Argyle Roads. The Champlain Canal is a scenic resource that can be viewed along US Route 4.



Photo by Darlene DeVoe 2017

A primary scenic location is the overlook above the Dead Creek area near Durkeetown. From the adjacent ridgeline, one can view the flat plains of Fort Edward to the north toward Hudson Falls, and to the south to Griffin Island on the Hudson River.

Aesthetic features of the Town include agricultural lands and those natural resources centered along the Hudson River. Largely, these form the backdrop onto which old and new building design and layout is set. The existing historic and agricultural features and the varied size and layout of lots for a significant part of the Town's aesthetic character.

The National Audubon Society of New York has designated a major portion of the Town is home to an Important Bird Area (IBA). The Washington County Grasslands is a very large area crossing into the Town of Argyle and the Town of Kingsbury. They encompass approximately 10,000 acres of grasslands, cultivated fields, small woodlots and wetlands. The Washington County Grasslands IBA is 2,000 acre core area within the Washington County Grasslands that are critical breeding and wintering habitat for the endangered Short-eared Owl and other threatened bird species. Audubon New York's IBA program began in 1997 and is used to identify critical bird breeding, migratory stopover, feeding and over-wintering areas throughout New York State.

The IBA program is a non-regulatory, voluntary conservation program to assist landowners in managing their property for the benefit of native bird species, other wildlife and their habitats.

Friends of the IBA is working with landowners and the NYSDEC to acquire property or property rights that restricts and/or prohibits development in order to protected through conservation efforts. The FIBA complete contribution to the Master Plan is included in this document for reference as Appendix C.

LAND USE

The Town of Fort Edward's predominate land use is Agricultural with single-family residences being the second most prevalent use. Though farming has changed, and many farms have gone out of business, much of the more productive acreage from those farms are owned or rented by active farmers with only a marginal amount reverted to woodlands, wetlands, or converted to residential use.

The Uptown Commercial Corridor is seeing new development like the new Market 32 grocery Store and reinvestment like the new McDonald's restaurant. There are some remaining dormant commercial locations waiting for new tenants but the transition from economic wasteland to an energetic district is well underway.

As this document is being prepared, General Electric is preparing to demolish their former manufacturing site on upper Broadway. With this industrial eye sore removed, the community will be strong regarding appropriate redevelopment of the 25+ acre site. Public workshops revealed the strong desire to keep industry out of this section of Route 4 and instead locate them in an appropriate Industrial Park, either located in the Fort Edward Industrial Park and Intermodal Facility or the Sullivan Parkway Industrial Park.

The Town of Fort Edward revised the Zoning Law for the north area after planning revealed deficiencies that prevented desired commercial development.



Photo by Darlene DeVoe 2017

The southern portion of the Town is mainly agriculture and residential which are the desired uses for this area. However, it is recognized that future development should be shaped by community vision and not poor planning. For this reason zoning revisions are recommended in the Implementation section of this document.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Town of Fort Edward is utilizing momentum gained during the past decade to launch into the next with clear vision, defined goals, solid strategies, and priority projects. This is only possible by having taken the time to evaluate where the Town is now. The following recommendations are a road map to Fort Edward 2028.

COMMUNITY AND MUNICIPAL RESOURCES

GOAL:

To provide quality services while keeping taxes low

STRATEGIES:

- Continuously evaluate whether the Public or Private sector is meeting a need more efficiently to determine short and long term investment
- Continue to work with other municipalities to share costs, materials and/or manpower
- Planning for and budgeting expensive infrastructure improvements will save tax dollars on emergency repairs.

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Prepare and evaluate a cost-benefit analysis on refuse collection service that will consider the service provided at what financial cost, whether Private hauler competition can be used to residents and business owners advantage by Requesting Proposals from Haulers to select the lowest bidders, and by charging Private Haulers a fee to operate within the municipal borders.
- Continue the process of forming Water District #3 to relieve residents from hard water issues
- Seek Federal and State grant funding to make investments in infrastructure

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL:

To create an economically diverse and vibrant Town through responsible development that encourages investment in existing properties and expands the tax base while conserving open space that is highly valued by residents

Redevelopment Concept – Route 4 Area



Key Elements:

- Retail/Commercial along Route 4 and Truck Route
- Connected parking areas
- Pedestrian / bike Connections
- Access Road from Route 4 to Burgoyne
- School Remains
- Residential (higher density) behind school

ELM - HUDSON GROUP / CT SCALE

STRATEGIES:

- Review Zoning Laws to ensure lot sizes and uses are in-line with the community priorities outlined in Town planning documents
- Promote a balanced approach to Residential, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Public Spaces development
- Keep Fort Edward involved in the Capital Region Economic Development Council and other State and Federal Agency Roundtable discussions
- Promote the Town and Village as a tourist destination

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Task the Planning Board and Zoning Board with review of Zoning Laws and prepare recommendations for the Town Board to consider
- Appoint representatives to the Hudson-Hoosick River Partnership, the Senior Center, the Champlain Canalway Trail Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, etc and prepare a summary report for the monthly Town Board meeting
- Seek collaboration and funding assistance for infrastructure improvements that will attract new businesses
- Invest in marketing for the Town and Village to grow the tourism industry. Potentially focus on scenic tours, boating, bicycling, bird watching, military history, architectural and agricultural tours.

AGRICULTURE (Section new to 2018 update)



Photo by Darlene DeVoe 2017

GOAL:

Protect and enhance lands within Fort Edward which are environmentally significant and to minimize adverse impacts that development may have on the land, air, water quality, natural habitats, unique land formations and scenic resources that are what makes Fort Edward Agricultural lands highly desirable.

STRATEGIES:

- Support farm development
- Encourage land stewardship practices
- Promote the advantages of local farming as a career

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Review the current Right to Farm Law and revise
- Continue active support of the Washington County Agricultural Districts
- Revise zoning south of the Village to discourage overdevelopment in the Grasslands or Important Bird Area

TRANSPORTATION



GOAL:

Develop and/or maintain a variety of transportation systems and routes which will encourage residents and visitors to explore and experience all that Fort Edward has to offer.

STRATEGIES:

- Invest in and maintain an adequate network of roads, trails and sidewalks which provide for safe and efficient mobility for a variety of users, including motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.
- As a Complete Streets community, the Town has the ability ensure the desires of its residents are represented during the planning, design and construction of major County, State or Federal transportation projects. Always have a seat filled at the table.

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Continue to work with the other communities on the Champlain Canalway Trail committee to develop the Fort Edward connections through the Village and the Industrial Park to Kingsbury
- * ➤ Maintain a rating system of street conditions and other needs (sidewalks, storm drains, trees and overgrowth) to continue maintenance and repair of the Town's roadways through proper planning and execution
- Utilize Code Enforcement measures to educate landowners on the liabilities and penalties they face when their sidewalk is in poor condition or not cleared

CULTURE, HISTORY and EDUCATION

GOAL:

Preserve and protect the rich history of the Town of Fort Edward for current and future generations to learn and enjoy



STRATEGIES:

- Encourage protection and restoration of existing structures, where possible, to maintain the historic character of the Town
- Require new construction and additions to historic structures be compatible with the existing historical architecture and layout on the structure and in the neighborhood
- Foster the preservation, protection and enhancement of the unique historical areas of the Town like historic Fort Miller and Rogers Island
- Protect archived materials

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Task the Planning and Zoning Boards with the review of existing Zoning Laws to determine the strength and weaknesses to achieving the stated goal of preserving and protecting historical features and assets
- Consider creating a Historic Preservation Ordinance that will develop standards, procedures and equitable enforcement policies to protect historic structures and resources
- Acquire the surplus school annex building and move the records from the Town and Village Building, the Old Fort House Museum, the Historical Association and the Rogers Island Visitors Center to ensure their safe keeping from their current location either in or adjacent to the FEMA designated flood plain.

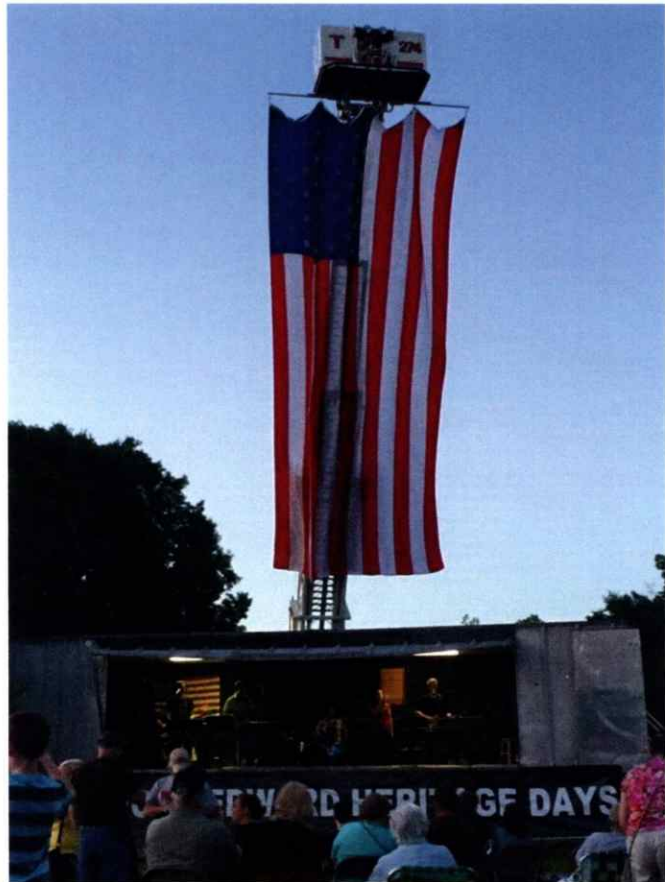
RECREATION

GOAL:

To provide a high quality of life for residents through recreational opportunities

STRATEGIES:

- Improve access to and opportunities for passive recreational use of natural areas such as the Champlain Canal and the Hudson River shoreline.
- Support the strong summer recreation program with exciting activities and trips
- Require park investments be made with recreational fees paid by developers



PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Add a small craft boat launch near the Bradley Beach area on Rogers Island
- Repair or replace the community pool
- Install bicycle rental stations on Rogers Island and in the Yacht Basin
- Permit community groups to hold events on municipal owned property

ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES



Photo by Darlene DeVoe 2017

GOAL:

To protect what many consider to be the most valuable asset of Fort Edward, the open space and scenic vistas.

STRATEGIES:

- Review Zoning Laws to ensure proposed development is designed and constructed in a manner that supports the protection of open space
- Consider developing an Open Space Plan
- Educate the public about these areas being more than just pretty and that protection of them is essential because they allow important biological resources and wildlife habitats to remain intact and healthy.

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Task the Planning Board and Zoning Board with the review of current Local Zoning Laws and to make recommendations for changes that will support the protection of Open Space. For example, amending the zoning requirements to allow for use of conservation subdivisions in order to preserve open space.
- Support the efforts of the Friends of the Important Bird Area to provide areas for bird watching that do not threaten the endangered birds that call the IBA home.
- Partner with Cornell Cooperative Extension to hold a class on how farming and open space preservation share common goals. This class can be held in school and at community group meetings.

LAND USE

*See Zoning Maps in Appendix A

GOAL:

To have a balance of development which includes preserving agricultural lands, protecting scenic vistas and wildlife habitat, encouraging industrial and manufacturing activities in appropriate locations such as the Industrial Parks, while carefully managing Residential and Commercial growth to prevent sprawl and instead encourage reuse of dormant or abandoned properties

STRATEGIES:

- Ensure Zoning Laws will support the goals listed in this Master Plan, the Northeast Commercial and Industrial Development Strategy, the Downtown Renaissance Plan, and the Rogers Island Visioning Plan.
- Encourage future development that is of quality design, will meet long-term population needs, and will lead to fiscal stability of the community.
- Conserve or enhance areas, sites and structures of special architectural or historic value
- Favor land uses that environmentally sensitive, have few negative impacts, and discourage those uses that put the Town's environmental priorities at risk.

PRIORITY PROJECTS:

- Revise subdivision and zoning regulations to meet the Town's future development needs while including a goal and purpose statement for each zoning district to help guide decision makers in the future.
- Determine acceptable density impacts of various types of development and provide the Planning Board with tools necessary to be flexible in order to mitigate potential environmental impact. An example of this is Conservation Subdivisions or Clustering.
- Develop a stand-alone law, or incorporate into the zoning ordinance, regulations that address the demolition of buildings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current state of the Town of Fort Edward is solid and growing in all sectors. Although a major industrial giant closed in 2017 the Town is working with the Industrial Park Owners and the Fort Edward Local Development Corporation to market and develop available property which will help stabilize the tax base and continue the activity in the housing market.

Commercial development received a major boost of confidence by having Market 32 build their first ground-up store here. This has spurred other major commercial investments to be made. The Town and its development partners will work with businesses to locate and thrive in Fort Edward.

Being true stewards of the rich agricultural operations, the preservationists of the stunning vistas, and protectors of the wildlife habitat is an enormous responsibility that the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals do not take lightly. Continued training will help officials understand their roles and the laws as they are ever evolving.

Being mindful of those all-important Quality of Life components that make Fort Edward great is the key to attracting families to the community. Parks, outdoor activities, water sports, restaurants, museums, coffee houses, taverns, etc are all suggestions from area students when asked what would make them consider staying in the area. This should be a consideration by every member of the Board as they weigh decisions made now that will shape who Fort Edward is and the opportunities available for the next generation.

This Master Plan is considered a living document which means it should be continuously referenced, reviewed and revised to ensure the Community identified goals are met and whenever possible exceeded. A complete review and revision should begin within 8 years to ensure the next 10 year plan will build off of this 2018 update seamlessly.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

617.20
Appendix B
Short Environmental Assessment Form

Instructions for Completing

Part 1 - Project Information. The applicant or project sponsor is responsible for the completion of Part 1. Responses become part of the application for approval or funding, are subject to public review, and may be subject to further verification. Complete Part 1 based on information currently available. If additional research or investigation would be needed to fully respond to any item, please answer as thoroughly as possible based on current information.

Complete all items in Part 1. You may also provide any additional information which you believe will be needed by or useful to the lead agency; attach additional pages as necessary to supplement any item.

Part 1 - Project and Sponsor Information			
Name of Action or Project:			
Project Location (describe, and attach a location map):			
Brief Description of Proposed Action:			
Name of Applicant or Sponsor:		Telephone:	
		E-Mail:	
Address:			
City/PO:		State:	Zip Code:
1. Does the proposed action only involve the legislative adoption of a plan, local law, ordinance, administrative rule, or regulation? If Yes, attach a narrative description of the intent of the proposed action and the environmental resources that may be affected in the municipality and proceed to Part 2. If no, continue to question 2.			NO <input type="checkbox"/>
			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does the proposed action require a permit, approval or funding from any other governmental Agency? If Yes, list agency(s) name and permit or approval:			NO <input type="checkbox"/>
			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
3.a. Total acreage of the site of the proposed action? _____ acres			
b. Total acreage to be physically disturbed? _____ acres			
c. Total acreage (project site and any contiguous properties) owned or controlled by the applicant or project sponsor? _____ acres			
4. Check all land uses that occur on, adjoining and near the proposed action.			
<input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural (non-agriculture) <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Residential (suburban)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Forest <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> Aquatic <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Parkland			

5. Is the proposed action, a. A permitted use under the zoning regulations?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Consistent with the adopted comprehensive plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is the proposed action consistent with the predominant character of the existing built or natural landscape?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Is the site of the proposed action located in, or does it adjoin, a state listed Critical Environmental Area? If Yes, identify: _____	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
8. a. Will the proposed action result in a substantial increase in traffic above present levels?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
b. Are public transportation service(s) available at or near the site of the proposed action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c. Are any pedestrian accommodations or bicycle routes available on or near site of the proposed action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9. Does the proposed action meet or exceed the state energy code requirements? If the proposed action will exceed requirements, describe design features and technologies: _____	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Will the proposed action connect to an existing public/private water supply? If No, describe method for providing potable water: _____	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Will the proposed action connect to existing wastewater utilities? If No, describe method for providing wastewater treatment: _____	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
12. a. Does the site contain a structure that is listed on either the State or National Register of Historic Places?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
b. Is the proposed action located in an archeological sensitive area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13. a. Does any portion of the site of the proposed action, or lands adjoining the proposed action, contain wetlands or other waterbodies regulated by a federal, state or local agency?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
b. Would the proposed action physically alter, or encroach into, any existing wetland or waterbody? If Yes, identify the wetland or waterbody and extent of alterations in square feet or acres: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14. Identify the typical habitat types that occur on, or are likely to be found on the project site. Check all that apply: <input type="checkbox"/> Shoreline <input type="checkbox"/> Forest <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural/grasslands <input type="checkbox"/> Early mid-successional <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban			
15. Does the site of the proposed action contain any species of animal, or associated habitats, listed by the State or Federal government as threatened or endangered?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
16. Is the project site located in the 100 year flood plain?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
17. Will the proposed action create storm water discharge, either from point or non-point sources? If Yes, a. Will storm water discharges flow to adjacent properties? <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES b. Will storm water discharges be directed to established conveyance systems (runoff and storm drains)? If Yes, briefly describe: <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES _____	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	

18. Does the proposed action include construction or other activities that result in the impoundment of water or other liquids (e.g. retention pond, waste lagoon, dam)? If Yes, explain purpose and size: _____	NO	YES
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Has the site of the proposed action or an adjoining property been the location of an active or closed solid waste management facility? If Yes, describe: _____	NO	YES
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Has the site of the proposed action or an adjoining property been the subject of remediation (ongoing or completed) for hazardous waste? If Yes, describe: _____	NO	YES
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I AFFIRM THAT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE IS TRUE AND ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE		
Applicant/sponsor name: _____		Date: _____
Signature: _____		

Part 2 - Impact Assessment. The Lead Agency is responsible for the completion of Part 2. Answer all of the following questions in Part 2 using the information contained in Part 1 and other materials submitted by the project sponsor or otherwise available to the reviewer. When answering the questions the reviewer should be guided by the concept "Have my responses been reasonable considering the scale and context of the proposed action?"

	No, or small impact may occur	Moderate to large impact may occur
1. Will the proposed action create a material conflict with an adopted land use plan or zoning regulations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Will the proposed action result in a change in the use or intensity of use of land?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Will the proposed action impair the character or quality of the existing community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Will the proposed action have an impact on the environmental characteristics that caused the establishment of a Critical Environmental Area (CEA)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Will the proposed action result in an adverse change in the existing level of traffic or affect existing infrastructure for mass transit, biking or walkway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Will the proposed action cause an increase in the use of energy and it fails to incorporate reasonably available energy conservation or renewable energy opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Will the proposed action impact existing:		
a. public / private water supplies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. public / private wastewater treatment utilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Will the proposed action impair the character or quality of important historic, archaeological, architectural or aesthetic resources?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Will the proposed action result in an adverse change to natural resources (e.g., wetlands, waterbodies, groundwater, air quality, flora and fauna)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	No, or small impact may occur	Moderate to large impact may occur
10. Will the proposed action result in an increase in the potential for erosion, flooding or drainage problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Will the proposed action create a hazard to environmental resources or human health?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 3 - Determination of significance. The Lead Agency is responsible for the completion of Part 3. For every question in Part 2 that was answered "moderate to large impact may occur", or if there is a need to explain why a particular element of the proposed action may or will not result in a significant adverse environmental impact, please complete Part 3. Part 3 should, in sufficient detail, identify the impact, including any measures or design elements that have been included by the project sponsor to avoid or reduce impacts. Part 3 should also explain how the lead agency determined that the impact may or will not be significant. Each potential impact should be assessed considering its setting, probability of occurring, duration, irreversibility, geographic scope and magnitude. Also consider the potential for short-term, long-term and cumulative impacts.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Check this box if you have determined, based on the information and analysis above, and any supporting documentation, that the proposed action may result in one or more potentially large or significant adverse impacts and an environmental impact statement is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check this box if you have determined, based on the information and analysis above, and any supporting documentation, that the proposed action will not result in any significant adverse environmental impacts.
<div> <div>Name of Lead Agency</div> <div>Date</div> </div>	
<div> <div>Print or Type Name of Responsible Officer in Lead Agency</div> <div>Title of Responsible Officer</div> </div>	
<div> <div>Signature of Responsible Officer in Lead Agency</div> <div>Signature of Preparer (if different from Responsible Officer)</div> </div>	

PRINT

APPENDIX C

Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA, Inc.
P.O. Box 82
Fort Edward, NY 12828
(518) 499-0012 www.ibafriends.org www.winterraptorfest.com



11/27/2017

OPEN SPACE IN FORT EDWARD, NY
RE: Town of Fort Edward Master Plan

The Town of Fort Edward's open space lies primarily within the Washington County Grasslands. These grasslands provide land for agriculture and vital wildlife habitat for endangered, threatened and rapidly declining grassland birds. Grasslands also provide ecosystem services such as cleaner air, carbon storage and nontoxic control of crop pests. They contribute to the town's scenic beauty, preserve its rural heritage and enhance the quality of life for everyone.

The Washington County Grasslands Important Bird Area, or IBA, is a 2,000-acre core area of the Washington County Grasslands that lies within the Towns of Fort Edward, Argyle and Kingsbury. It provides important habitat for 10 of 11 of NY's grassland bird "species of greatest conservation need" and is listed in the state's Open Space Plan as a regional conservation priority. The area is critical to the survival of Short-eared owls in New York State. Conserving this unique habitat for NY's endangered and at-risk grassland birds offers multiple benefits for human residents, including unique opportunities for economic development!

Bird watching is the number one form of wildlife associated outdoor recreation in the U.S. It contributes over \$46 billion a year to the U.S. economy and \$1.6 billion in New York State. The Washington County Grasslands IBA draws thousands of visitors every year, but this is just a fraction of its potential. Friends of the IBA (FIBA) and DEC have already begun building the infrastructure needed to support sustainable birding tourism, from DEC's trail and viewing platform to FIBA's universally accessible Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area. More work is planned for 2018 as additional lands are conserved. Most importantly, we are moving forward with plans for a Birding Center.

FIBA and DEC are exploring a public – nonprofit partnership to develop the Center. Features will include a bird viewing gallery, learning room(s), meeting room, offices, exhibits, etc. It will serve as an anchor destination for Fort Edward, Washington County and the surrounding region. We expect to create at least a dozen jobs directly and dozens more indirectly as new businesses spring up to serve the tens of thousands of visitors drawn to the area every year. We hope you will support this vital project and the conservation efforts that have led to it.

Sincerely,

Laurie LaFond
Executive Director

Mark Dilanni
President

Friends of the IBA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust conserving critical habitat for New York's endangered, threatened and at-risk grassland birds. We are committed to ensuring our work to protect the birds benefits local communities.