



# 2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MONTOUR FALLS, NY



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# INTRODUCTION

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY

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## CONTEXT

### Location

The village of Montour Falls is located south of Seneca Lake and the village of Watkins Glen, split between the eastern border of the Town of Dix, and the western border of the Town of Montour. As the southern gateway to the Finger Lakes Region, the village is becoming an important destination center for residents and visitors of Schuyler County.

### History

The village of Montour Falls has a long history that predates even European settlers. The area that now encompasses Montour Falls was ruled by Queen Catharine Montour of the Seneca people, who lived between 1710 and 1804, approximately. Montour, who was of indigenous and French ancestry, served as an interpreter between the Seneca and European settlers. The area she presided over was a large producer of food and game, which was used to feed British soldiers during the Revolutionary War, with whom the Iroquois Confederacy aligned themselves.

The village was settled by non-native explorers in 1780, after Sullivan's Army (on the orders of General George Washington) drove out the native inhabitants of the area who were loyal to the British, including Queen Catharine Montour. In 1833, the Chemung Canal opened, running through the village. The village's growth was inextricably tied to its position on the canal, which linked Elmira to Seneca Lake and eventually to the Erie Canal. However, not long after its completion came the rise of railroads, diminishing the importance of water transit and thus, Montour Falls' importance in regional shipping trade.

In 1836 the village was incorporated as the village of Havana and in 1893 it became known as Montour Falls as it is called today. Prior to its incorporation, it was known at different points as Catharine's Town and Havana. Evidence of the village's attempts to secure the position of county seat when Schuyler County was formed in 1854 can be found in "The Glorious T"; Montour Falls' downtown area and fixture of the National Register of Historic Places. A handful of beautiful stone Greek revival buildings, once intended to be municipal county buildings, still stand and serve as storefronts and municipal village buildings.



*A painting of the Chemung Canal in Montour Falls. The canal fell out of use once railroads rose in prominence. Village Hall can be seen on the left hand side of the painting.  
Source: [www.villageofmontourfalls.com](http://www.villageofmontourfalls.com)*

## PROCESS

### Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan sets a vision for a community, based on input from residents, business owners, local government officials and other interested parties. It assesses the municipality's strengths and challenges; establishes the municipality's land use goals; and provides a roadmap for achieving those goals.

New York State does not mandate that municipalities have plans, but does require that local zoning ordinances be based on a comprehensive plan. The recommendations in the plan should guide the adoption of zoning laws or other local laws, policies and initiatives that enhance the well-being of residents and vitality of the community. Its recommendations should be implemented faithfully, as they represent public opinion, due to the extensive input process that accompanies the comprehensive planning process.

Laws derived from a comprehensive plan are distilled via a democratic process, lending them legitimacy because of the public's support for the comprehensive plan recommendations they are based on.

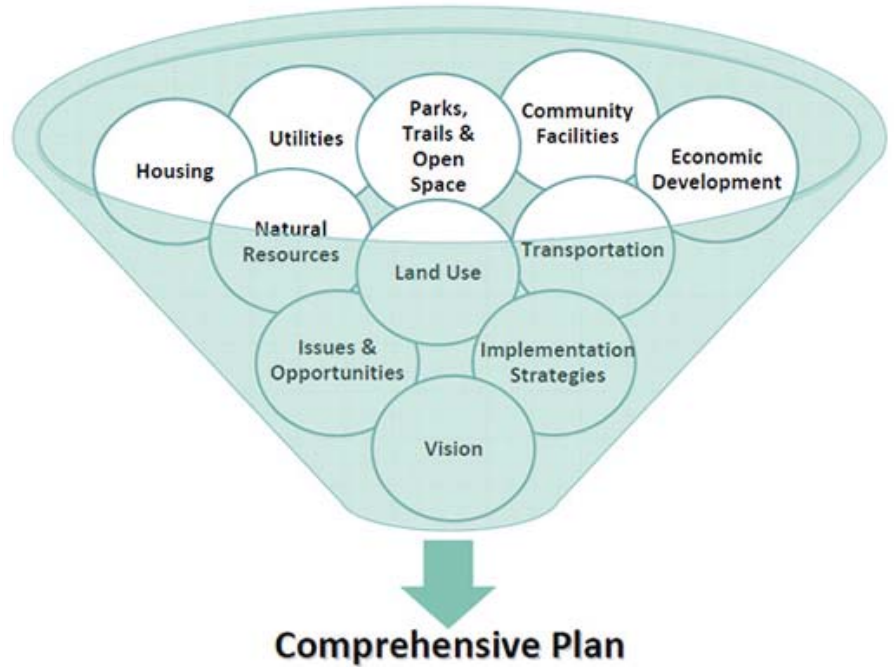
Although they are not enforceable, there is an important legal reason to have a comprehensive plan. When municipalities are confronted with land use decisions, they do stand up in court as evidence of what the public's desire for future development is. Of course if the plan is executed faithfully, this need should not arise.

### Background of Montour Falls 2016 Comprehensive Plan

In 2014, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board (STC) was awarded funding through the Cleaner, Greener Communities program of New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to write comprehensive plans and update zoning laws of select municipalities in Schuyler County. Around the same time, Montour Falls was beginning to revise the joint comprehensive plan it shared with the Town of Montour, which was written in 2008.

Most planners recommend that a municipality update its comprehensive plan every five to 10 years in order to incorporate the most recent US Census data and to remain relevant to the social, political and economic conditions in the municipality. In 2013, Montour Falls began revising the 2008 joint plan to better serve the village exclusively. This process coincided with STC's receipt of its NYSERDA grant. Instead of revising the old plan on its own, Montour Falls decided to work with STC under the NYSERDA grant to write a new comprehensive plan.

A steering committee of village residents and municipal leaders was formed to work with STC and oversee the comprehensive planning process. Potential steering committee members were nominated by the Planning Board. Nominees came from many areas in the village: business, education, community engagement, etc. Those who accepted the nomination were approved by



*New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) logo. STC obtained funding to write Montour Falls' 2016 comprehensive plan through a NYSERDA Cleaner, Greener Grant.*

the Village Board. In two instances, community members asked to be on the steering committee, and were also approved by the village Board.

Additionally, Schuyler County recently wrote its own comprehensive plan, which was adopted in May 2014. This NYSEERDA grant allows Montour Falls to write an up-to-date plan that is in accordance with the County-wide Comprehensive Plan as well as NYS cleaner greener principals.

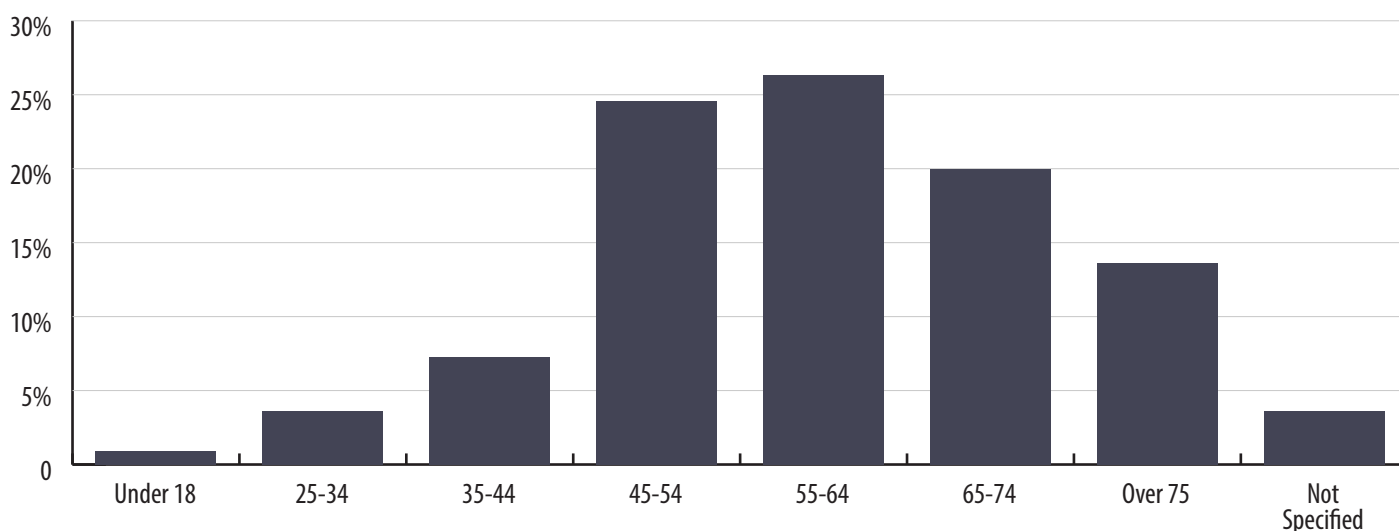
### Community Engagement

Gathering input from many village residents makes the comprehensive plan a resident-driven document, reflecting relevant issues and local expertise in Montour Falls. This is important for establishing the community’s desires for the future and methods for getting there. Broad support from the village on the comprehensive plan will also lead to greater and more successful implementation of the plan’s suggestions via zoning law and policy updates. The hopes the community has for the future (documented in the comprehensive plan), are more likely to become reality through enforceable legislation (zoning laws).

In July 2015, the steering committee and STC collaborated to create a survey to assess the issues residents felt were most important in the village. Paper surveys were mailed to all home owners and businesses in Montour Falls, and an online version of the survey went live on Montour Falls’ website on August 4, 2015. Collection of surveys ceased after September 7, 2015. In addition, two focus groups were hosted on August 6th.

### Survey

The survey enjoyed an impressive return rate of 26%, which is considered favorable for surveys such as this. One survey was mailed to each household and business in the village. A total of 425 surveys were mailed out, and 110 were returned. The village’s overall population also has a high concentration of residents age 50 and older (see Demographics), which was represented in the 88 of survey respondents age 45 and older. The low youth response rate is not surprising or uncommon for a community-wide survey, as copies were most often addressed to the adult home or business owner.



## INTRODUCTION

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At just over 80% of respondents, most survey participants identified themselves as village residents. The remaining 20% of respondents were business owners; came from nearby towns and villages; own property in Montour Falls; were seasonal residents; or chose not to disclose their residency.

### Respondents by Residency

Residency	# of Residents	% of Residents
Home & Business Owner	1	0.91%
I live in a nearby town/ village	2	1.82%
I own a home here, but I do not live here	9	8.18%
Seasonal Village Resident	2	1.82%
Village Resident	89	80.91%
Not Specified	7	6.36%
Grand Total	110	100%

In sum, because of the high response rate, coupled with the fact that mostly village residents filled out the survey, the survey can be said to be representative of the adult population of Montour Falls. Although residents under the age of 50 were underrepresented in the survey results, this is typical in community-wide surveys. Focus group responses and outside data will complement the survey to provide a more complete, objective view of the issues facing the village.

### Focus Groups

The focus group meetings held in August of 2015 received a less favorable rate of participation, however the input that was received was valuable and added to the overall community engagement process.

### Writing the Plan

STC analyzed the data obtained from the survey and focus groups. Together, the comprehensive plan steering committee and STC set about writing, reviewing, and revising the plan. The sections of the plan, goals and policies were determined by a mix of the responses gathered via the public process, and current best practices in land use planning applicable to a small village setting.

### Timeline

The comprehensive plan process was kicked off with the first steering committee meeting in May 2015. The steering committee worked together to design a survey instrument, review survey results and draft plan chapters throughout 2015. The draft plan was completed in January 2017.

### Adopting the Plan

Upon the plan's completion, it must be adopted by Montour Falls' Village Trustees. Once that happens, the village will adopt and update zoning laws and local laws that reflect the recommendations contained in the plan. This will ultimately accomplish the goals that residents and village officials created for the village over the next five to ten years. The comprehensive plan includes an implementation plan describing the recommended actions necessary to meet the plan's goals and objectives, and who should be responsible for pursuing those actions.

## COMMUNITY VISION

In March 2016, STC conducted a visioning activity with the steering committee. This activity had two parts.

### Part One: Design Guidelines

The first part assessed support for design guidelines and development of vacant lots into public space downtown. Committee members looked at three displays, each with two to three pictures. The pictures depicted how a structure or space currently looks, and how it could look or be used differently with the application of design guidelines or if it were redeveloped.

- The first display showed a car wash in the village as it is now, compared to a car wash in another municipality that has design guidelines. The second car wash is more aesthetically pleasing.
- The second display showed a storefront downtown. There were two pictures beneath this picture; one was that storefront redesigned to look very modern and the other was redesigned to look traditional, blending in with existing structures.
- The third display showed three options that could be installed in a vacant lot downtown: an outdoor restaurant, a farmer's market and a pocket park.

Committee members placed one vote per display on the option they most favored for that setting. The results for each display showed that steering committee members favored buildings whose appearances were regulated by design guidelines:

- Car wash: all six committee members favored the car wash with design guidelines. None favored the current car wash.
- Storefront: all six committee members favored the traditional façade. None favored the modern façade.
- Vacant lot: four out of six committee members favored a pocket park. One voted for the outdoor restaurant and one voted for the farmer's market.

### Part Two: Hopes, Challenges, Solutions

In the second part, committee members recorded their hopes, challenges and solutions to those challenges in relation to the village of Montour Falls. Full responses can be found in Appendix A. The most frequently cited responses were:

- **Hopes:** maintain historic character of the village, attract new and diverse businesses to Main Street to create a vibrant downtown, make the village more walkable and accessible, and take measures to increase food security in the village (e.g. farmer's market, community gardens).
- **Challenges:** limited funding to carry out projects, property maintenance, and apathy.
- **Solutions:** completing highly successful and visible low-cost projects to establish a track record of excellence and provide momentum to future endeavors, increasing communication between village government and citizens, and adopting design guidelines and zoning ordinances to control new development

As these results and survey results show, Montour Falls residents wish to grow their village while still retaining its historic roots. Government and community capacity to mobilize behind projects is a hindrance that must be addressed. Although there are barriers to realizing the hopes of the community, there are also tangible and relevant solutions already being considered by community leaders.



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# 2



# DEMOGRAPHICS

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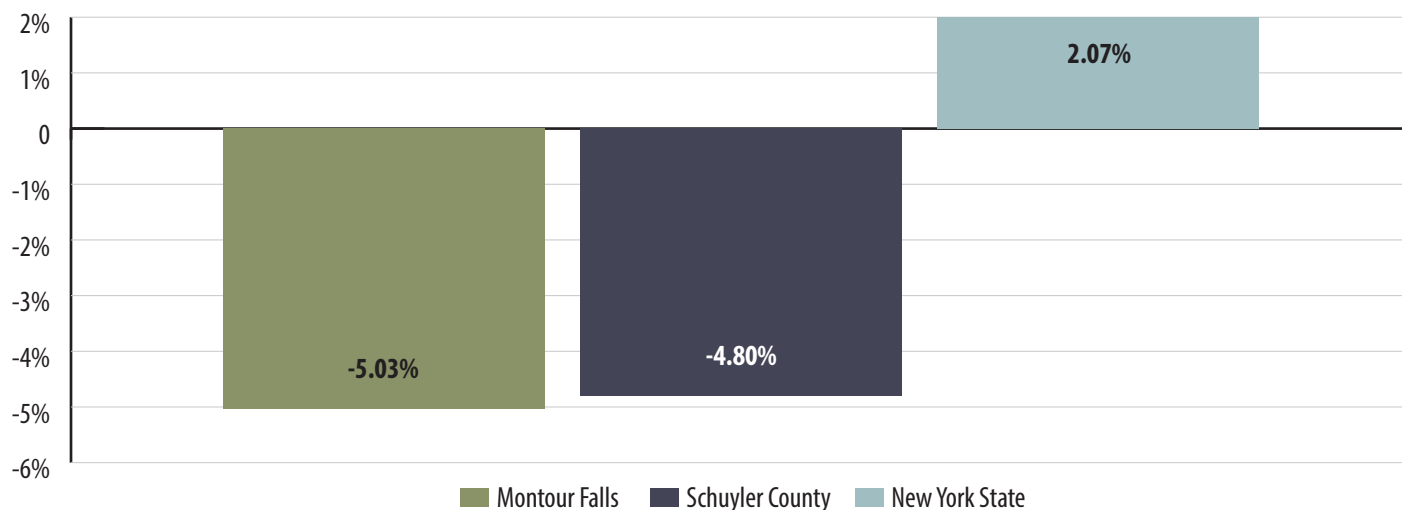
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## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

### Population Change

The total population of Montour Falls in 2010 was 1,711 people (US Census, 2010). This represents a 5.03% decrease in residents from the 2000 Census, which was measured at 1,797 (US Census, 2000). This trend was similar across Schuyler County in the same period, which saw a 4.08% decrease. New York State, however, saw a 2.07% increase in population between 2000 and 2010 (US Census, 2000).

Change in Population, 2000-2010

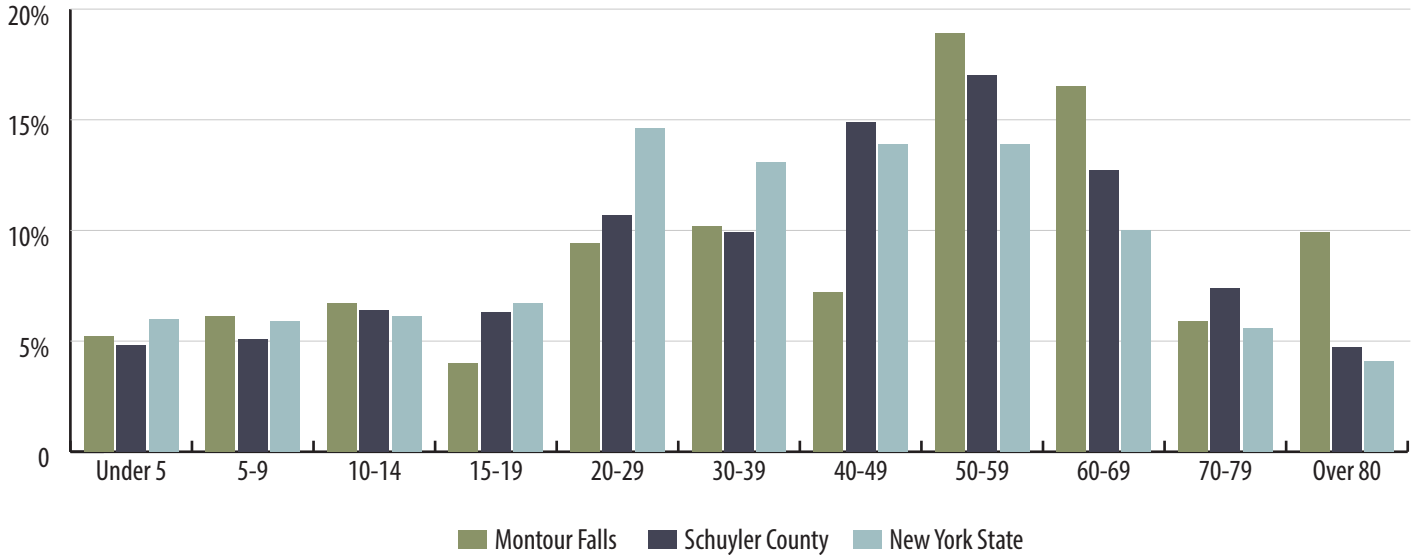


There are a number of economic development initiatives currently taking place in Schuyler County and in Montour Falls which are expected to bring new residents into the village in the next five to ten years. At The village level, developer Welliver is currently (as of 2016) building a business park in Montour Falls on the site of the former Shepard Niles facility. Most of the jobs created at the business park will be administrative in nature. A county-wide initiative, Project Seneca, is redeveloping the Seneca Lake waterfront. Economic development efforts from Project Seneca will lead to more businesses locating to the village and more jobs available in the area. Increased job opportunities will attract new residents and potentially retain existing ones, stabilizing or reversing population decline.

**Age**

Across New York State, the distribution of people in their 20s, 30s and 40s is relatively even. However, Montour Falls and Schuyler County have fewer residents in their 20s and 30s, with a larger portion of residents 50 years of age and older. The largest age group in the village are residents between 50 and 59 (19%), and over half of the population is over the age of 50. Furthermore, Montour Falls’ senior population is quite large; over ten percent of the population is over the age of 80.

**Population by Age, 2014**



*Montour Falls is an ideal location to age in place. It’s quaint downtown (pictured here) is close to residential neighborhoods and easily walkable, allowing older residents to independently access public transportation, goods and services.  
Photo Source: STC Planning Board*

Montour Falls’ large population of older adults might indicate that residents feel it is a good location to age in place. Aging in place refers to one’s ability to live independently in a residence of their choosing as they age, for as long as they are able. This could include their home of many years or a smaller apartment. As adults age, they require different services and means to access them.

Montour Falls is a convenient place to live for those who do not drive because it is walkable and close to bus lines (see Transportation chapter). It is also a scenic village with a small town feel, which was desirable for many survey respondents (see Introduction). Proximity to services and a welcoming, friendly community are desirable traits for aging in place.

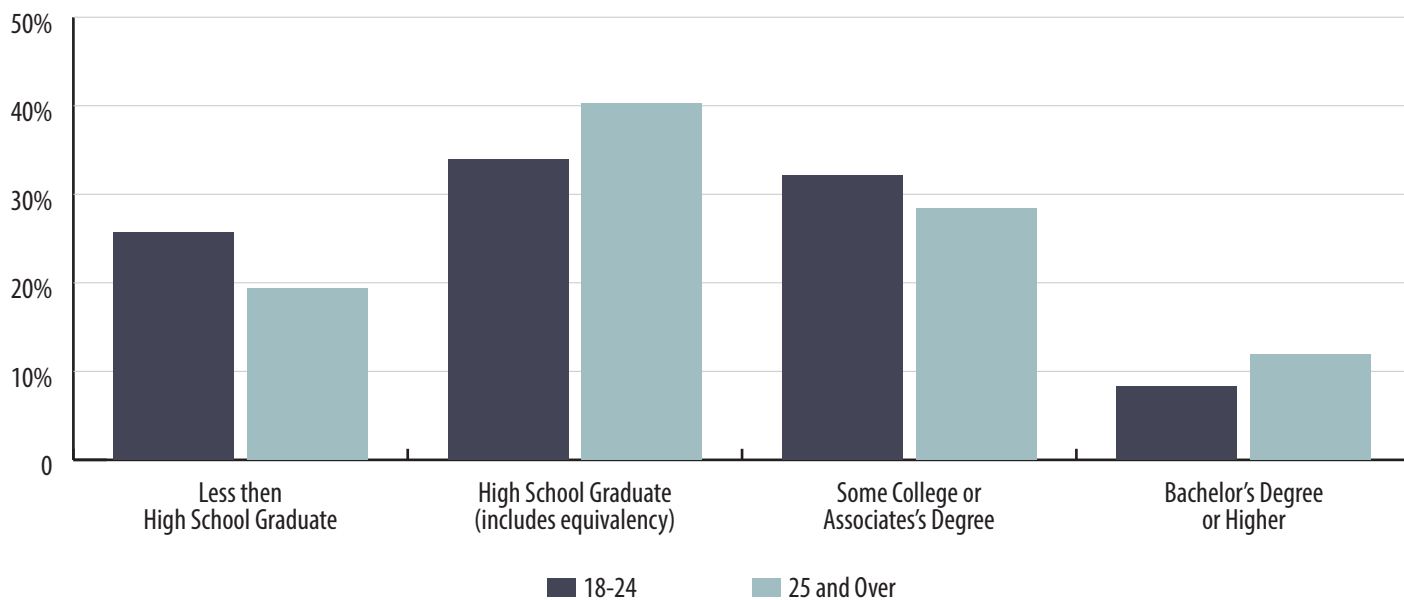
Because of these advantages, village residents over 50 may continue to want to age in place over the next ten to 20 years. Housing will be of particular concern for this population. Older adults often live on fixed incomes in retirement and have a decreased size of household, which makes affordable senior rental housing appealing. While senior living facilities do exist in Montour Falls, other models of quality, affordable housing that allow residents to age in place independently will also need to be considered for diverse interests and needs (see Housing chapter).



## Education

Eighty-one percent of Montour Falls residents age 18 and older have a high school degree or higher. Twelve percent of the population has a bachelor’s degree or higher (ACS, 2014). Young adults are less likely to be high school graduates, which may be due to the fact that some 18 year olds are still in high school. Young adults are more likely to have completed some college or an Associate’s degree (32% of the young adult cohort vs. 28% of the adult cohort), although they are less likely to have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (8% of the young adult cohort vs. 12% of the adult cohort).

**Educational Attainment by Age, 2014**



This may indicate that young people are beginning to pursue higher education to a greater degree than their parents and grandparents, but have not graduated from college yet. This trend could contribute to the low number of village residents in their 20s, as young people leave the area to go to college and do not return. Attracting and retaining that demographic post-high school and post-college can lead to population stabilization or increase. However, jobs must be available to attract them back.

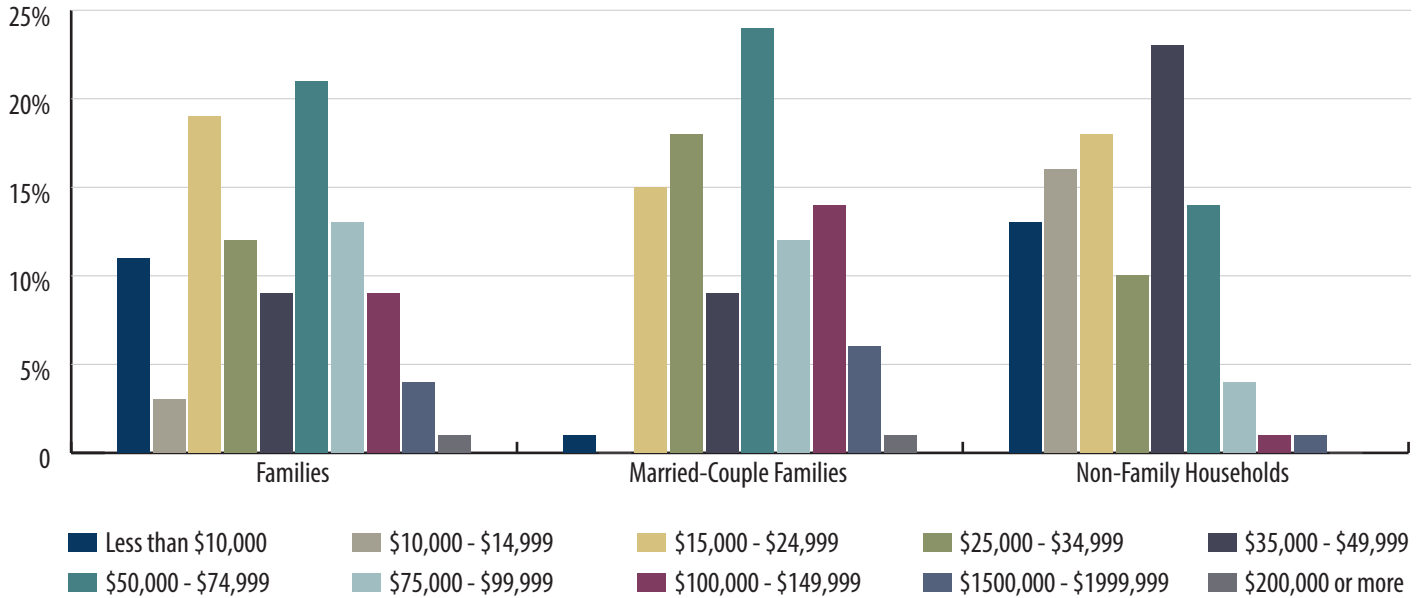
## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Income & Poverty

The median household income for the village of Montour Falls is \$34,803 (ACS, 2014). This is lower than the median household income for New York State, which is \$58,687 and that of Schuyler County, which is \$49,225 (ACS, 2014). There are differences in the incomes of different types of households, as well.

The greatest percentage of family households makes \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year. Married-couple families also fall most frequently into this income category. The largest income category for non-family households was \$35,000 to \$49,999. Non-family households also have incomes below \$25,000 in greater numbers than do married or unmarried family households.

#### Income by Household Type, 2014



This is unsurprising, as non-family households include young people who are early in their careers and have a lower earning potential, as well as retired people who live on fixed incomes. Families, especially married-couple families, are more likely to have two earners in the household, increasing household income.

The income of a household alone is not enough information to determine whether or not a household is considered to be in poverty. The poverty line is the income threshold established by the federal government for a household of a particular size (e.g. how many members live in the household), which determines whether or not that household is considered “in poverty”. Approximately 21% of Montour Falls’ residents live below the poverty line. That means that they earn less than the poverty threshold established for their households. This is quite high, by contrast; Schuyler County has a poverty rate of 10% and New York State’s is 12%.

The village should consider its residents’ diversity of income when pursuing community and economic development initiatives. Balancing new jobs, the skills of the population and the need for economic growth will yield more sustainable economic development for all residents. Stable jobs and housing allow people to connect to their communities more easily; spending money at local businesses, participating in local government or civic associations, etc. Investing in residents’ most basic needs will allow them to contribute to and be engaged in other endeavors to improve the village down the road.

## Employment

The unemployment rate in Montour Falls is 12%. Montour Falls’ unemployment rate is higher than that of New York State (9%), as well as Schuyler County (6%). Bringing more jobs to the village will help improve the unemployment rate in Montour Falls. Given that only 12% of the population over 18 has a Bachelor’s degree or higher, the village should be mindful to balance the types of businesses it brings to the village, so that the current 12% of unemployed residents will find employment with the establishment of new businesses.

Despite the local unemployment rate, Montour Falls has the advantage of being home to a handful of relatively large employers. Some of the most notable are Schuyler County Hospital which has approximately 435 employees, and the Schuyler County Human Services Complex, which employs about 150. The New York State Fire Academy also calls Montour Falls home. At the time of writing this plan, the local developer Welliver has plans to develop a business park at the former Shepard Niles site.

These institutions each perform unique services, ranging from health care to higher education. This variety of industries draws many types of employees: doctors, nurses, educators, student affairs workers, public administrators, emergency management personnel, clerical and office staff, maintenance staff, etc. Having a diverse workforce and employers is beneficial because it insulates the village to some extent from changes in the economy or a particular industry.



*Schuyler Hospital is a large employer located in Montour Falls. It began as the first aid station for Shepard Niles Crane and Hoist Corporation and is still operating today.*

## COMMUNITY VALUES

### Why People Move to Montour Falls

The survey mailed to village residents and businesses asked participants to identify their reasons for moving to Montour Falls. Participants could select all reasons that applied from a provided list, or write their own personal reasons out. Out of 110 responses, participants identified 18 unique reasons for moving to Montour Falls.

Throughout the survey, residents expressed interest in new development; a grocery store, senior or multi-family housing complexes, etc. Balancing the small town environment that residents enjoy with new development is quite possible; particularly through infill development and the utilization of design guidelines (see Design Guidelines chapter) for new development in the village.

For those who work in Montour Falls, living there is convenient for obvious reasons; the small size and compact development make traveling between work and home quick and easy. Increasing connectivity between residential areas and downtown and improving pedestrian/ bicycle infrastructure (see Transportation chapter) will continue to make living in the village attractive for those employed in it.

**Survey Results: Reasons for Moving to Montour Falls**

Reason	Count
Small Town Environment	30
Family	27
I work in the Area	25
I was born here	22
I work in Montour Falls	11

**Survey Results: Reasons for Staying in Montour Falls**

Reason	Count
I like living in the Finger Lakes	58
Small town environment	51
Family	48
It's a convenient location for work	34
Schools	8

**Survey Results: Top 5 Assets**

Reason	Count
Shequaga Falls	49
Small Town Atmosphere	30
Natural Beauty	21
Proximity to businesses, activities, recreation & natural environment	20
People	17

**Survey Results: Top 5 Challenges**

Reason	Count
Lack of Jobs	24
Taxes	23
Lack of Business Activity	23
Attracting New Businesses	21
Blighted Properties	19

**Why People Stay in Montour Falls**

The survey also asked participants to identify their reasons for staying in Montour Falls. Participants identified 16 unique reasons for staying in Montour Falls out of 110 survey responses.

Montour Falls' location provides convenient access to the Southern Tier and the rest of the Finger Lakes Region. Increasing access from the village to the rest of the region may increase attractiveness for current residents. This could include enhancing the connectivity between the Catharine Valley Trail and The village center (see Transportation chapter). This has the dual benefit of bringing tourism to the area that doesn't compromise the small town character of the village.

Family and schools are also important to village residents. These positives can be expanded upon by providing more programming for children and families in the village (see Municipal and Community Services chapter).

**Greatest Assets**

When asked on the survey to list what they thought were Montour Falls' three greatest assets, village residents identified 65 unique assets out of 110 responses.

The natural beauty of the village, particularly Shequaga Falls, is a unique and indispensable asset. Preserving their scenic beauty will provide village residents with a high quality of life (see Natural Resources chapter), and can generate a sustainable tourism industry for the village (see Downtown and Economic Development chapter).

**Greatest Challenges**

Survey participants also listed what they thought were the village's three greatest challenges. In this exercise, 110 participants identified 84 unique challenges.

Job availability, business activity and the attraction of businesses are woven tightly together. Since Montour Falls struggles with each, efforts must be made to address the root cause; bringing new businesses to the village. More businesses will create more job opportunities and increase the goods and services available within the village. New employees will require quality, affordable housing, though. Therefore, blighted properties are not only a public safety issue, but an economic development issue.

Although the survey respondents indicated dissatisfaction with their taxes, the village of Montour Falls provides a wide array of services for the taxes paid by residents. A discussion of village taxes can be found in the Municipal and Community Services chapter.



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# MUNICIPAL & COMMUNITY SERVICES

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY



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## CURRENT MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Residents of the village of Montour Falls receive a number of municipal services. Some of these are provided by the village, while others are provided through the county or shared service agreements. The services available to Montour Falls’ residents are:

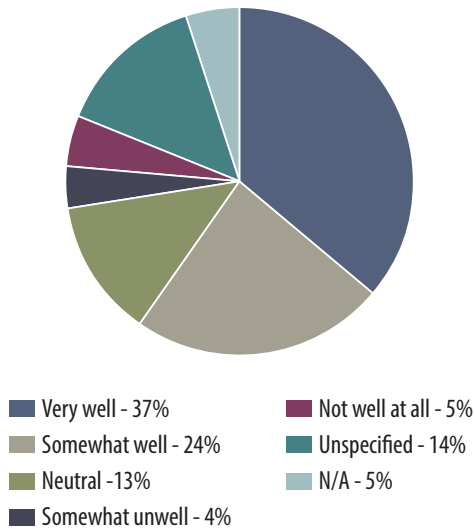
- Emergency Services (ambulance, fire, police)
- Water and Sewer
- Recycling
- Snow Removal
- Brush Collection
- Street Lighting

### Village-Provided Municipal Services

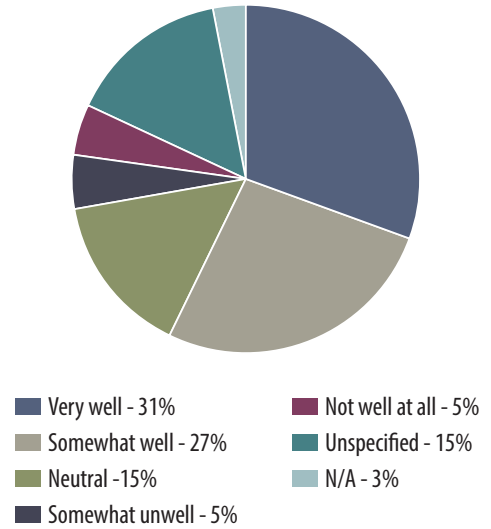
The Village of Montour Falls provides water and sewer, recycling, snow removal, brush collection and street lighting. Montour Falls has a Department of Public Works (DPW), which maintains water and sewer services, performs street maintenance, and tends to the cemetery and marina. Montour Falls DPW is made up of five full-time employees, with additional employees in the summer. Employees include one superintendent, one foreman who oversees street maintenance and water and wastewater personnel.

According to the survey, there is a high level of satisfaction with services provided by DPW. Respondents reported the highest satisfaction with leaf and brush collection and snow removal services. The percent of respondents who felt somewhat or very well-served by these services were 61% for leaf and brush services and 58% for snow removal services.

**Survey Results: How well are you served by leaf and brush collection services?**



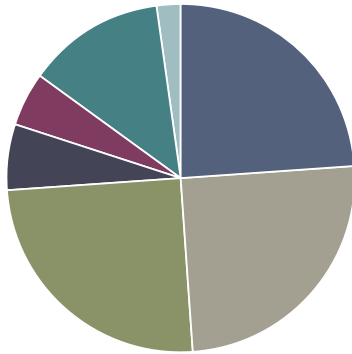
**Survey Results: How well are you served by snow removal services?**



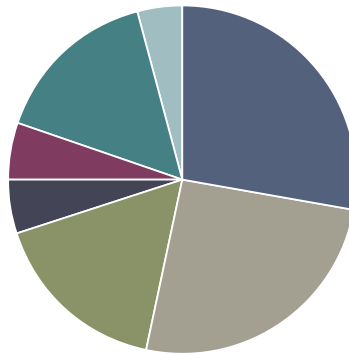
## MUNICIPAL & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Street lighting, recycling and water and sewer were also rated positively in terms of the current level of service provided. The percentage of participants who felt very or somewhat well-served by these services were: 49% for street lighting; 52% for recycling, and 51% for water and sewer services

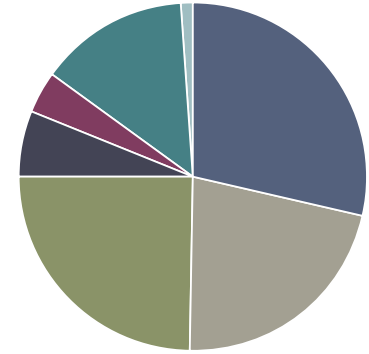
**Survey Results: How well are you served by street lighting services?**



**Survey Results: How well are you served by recycling services?**



**Survey Results: How well are you served by water and sewer services?**



Very well - 24%

Somewhat well - 25%

Neutral - 25%

Somewhat unwell - 6%

Not well at all - 5%

Unspecified - 13%

N/A - 2%

Very well - 27%

Somewhat well - 25%

Neutral - 16%

Somewhat unwell - 5%

Not well at all - 5%

Unspecified - 15%

N/A - 4%

Very well - 29%

Somewhat well - 22%

Neutral - 25%

Somewhat unwell - 6%

Not well at all - 4%

Unspecified - 14%

N/A - 1%

### Police Services

The village does not have a police force of its own. Law enforcement is provided primarily in the form of the Schuyler County Sheriff's Office, who patrols the entirety of Schuyler County, including Montour Falls. The village is also serviced by New York State police, which has a satellite station located at the Fire Academy. The satellite station provides 24/7 coverage to the county, including Montour Falls with at least one car.

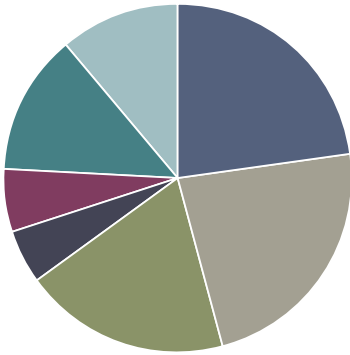
A total of 46% of respondents claimed to be very or somewhat well-served by police services in Montour Falls. Though 46% is by no means a small percentage, this is the lowest satisfaction rating of any currently-offered municipal service. Some participants would like to see a greater police presence in the village, judging by the 14% of participants who indicated that they would like to see police services added or improved, and would be willing to pay more in taxes for that service.

### Ambulance Services

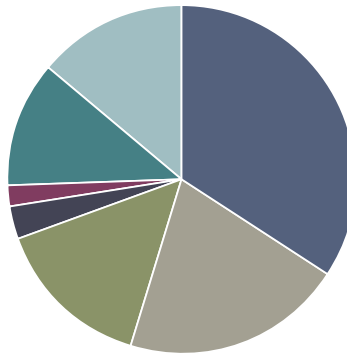
Across Schuyler County, ambulance services are provided by the Schuyler County Volunteer Ambulance Association (SCVAA), which is made up of a mix of paid and volunteer EMS personnel. SCVAA responds to approximately 2,000 calls per year across the county. It does not rely on local, state or federal aid; instead it relies on service contracts, insurance payments and donations.

A total of 56% of survey respondents claimed that they were very or somewhat well-served by ambulance services. A large portion of respondents said that ambulance services were, "not applicable" in the village, which could indicate that they were acknowledging that the village itself does not provide ambulance services. However, 67% of participants claimed that ambulance services are good the way they are. These responses may indicate that a change in services are not necessary, but wider advertisement of SVCAA's services may increase awareness.

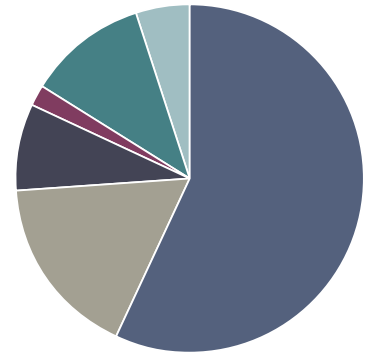
Survey Results: How well are you served by police services?



Survey Results: How well are you served by ambulance services?



Survey Results: How well are you served by fire services?



Fire Services

Fire services are provided by the Montour Falls Fire Department, which receives some funding from the village. It is a volunteer department, which serves approximately 4,500 Schuyler County residents over a 25-square mile area. Survey respondents viewed local fire services very positively; 74% felt very or somewhat well-served, and only 2% reported any dissatisfaction. Further, 75% of participants said fire services are good the way they are.



### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES

In the comprehensive plan survey, residents were asked to indicate how they would like to see municipal services change, in terms of both level of service and cost to taxpayers. To do this, they selected one of the following five responses for 22 unique municipal services (some currently offered and some not offered in Montour Falls) to indicate their desire for each particular service:

- I think this service is good the way it is
- I'd like to see this service added or improved, but I wouldn't like to pay more in taxes for it
- I would pay more taxes for this service to be added or improved
- I think this service should be scaled back
- I don't think this service needs to be provided

The responses to this question were largely consistent across all 22 categories. For most categories of municipal service, the majority of respondents indicated that the service is good the way it is. The second most-selected response for most categories was that participants would like to see the service added or improved, but wouldn't like to pay more in taxes for it. Many survey participants indicated elsewhere in the survey that they feel their current taxes are high, so this finding is unsurprising. However, some findings warrant further discussion.

#### Infrastructure

Only 22% of participants felt that sidewalk maintenance is good. 45% of participants would like to see sidewalk maintenance improved, but would not like to pay more in taxes, while 13% would be willing to pay more in taxes for this service to be improved. In many areas, especially residential ones, sidewalks are narrow, missing, uneven or very close to the road with minimal protection from automobiles. In a similar vein, only 35% of respondents indicated that road maintenance is good the way it is; another 35% would like to see road maintenance improved, but would not like to pay more in taxes. 12% of participants would be willing to pay more in taxes for this service.

Another infrastructure item that participants indicated that they would like to see improved at a high rate is drainage and storm water control. 37% of participants were satisfied with the current service, while 34% would like to see it improved, but wouldn't like to pay more in taxes. Another 8% of participants indicated that they would be willing to pay more in taxes to improve drainage and storm water control.



#### Code Enforcement

Survey responses indicated that residents support increases in building code and zoning enforcement. A total of 42% of respondents claimed that they felt current building code enforcement was good the way it is. This is in contrast to 20% of participants who would like to see the service improved without tax increases, and 14% of participants who would be willing to pay more in taxes for the service to be improved. This strong support for increased code enforcement in the village should be addressed.

Participants felt similarly about zoning enforcement, with 37% indicating that they were happy with current zoning enforcement. In this category, 23% of participants claimed they would like to see the service improved without tax increases, and 14% claimed they would be willing to pay more in taxes for zoning enforcement to be improved. These responses are not surprising, considering concerns raised elsewhere in survey responses, particularly regarding absentee landlords and property maintenance (see Housing chapter).



## Community Services

One of the most striking findings was that 22% of survey participants favor paying more in taxes to provide increase youth programming in Montour Falls. This category received, by far, the highest percentage of participants willing to pay more in taxes for a service. Only 15% of participants indicated that they felt that the current level of youth programming in the village is adequate. 37% of participants would like to see more youth programming, but would not like to see an increase in taxes for the service.

In other community services, only 32% of participants felt that the current level of activities for seniors was adequate. 31% of participants indicated that they would like to see the service improved but wouldn't like to pay more in taxes, while only 10% claimed they would be willing to pay more in taxes for increased senior activities.

Concerning library services, a total of 16% of participants claimed that they would pay more in taxes for this service to be improved. This category thus received the second highest percentage of participants willing to pay more in taxes for a service.

The Schuyler County Human Services Complex currently offers a number of educational and social youth and senior services, and is located in Montour Falls. By partnering with the county, the village and Montour Falls Memorial Library could leverage some of the resources housed at the Human Services Complex, expanding their reach to venues in Montour Falls.



## DECISION-MAKING, TAXATION & PLANNING

### Municipal Boards

#### Village Trustees

The Village Trustees sit on a board made up of five members; four elected trustees and the Mayor of The village of Montour Falls. Each of the four trustees has a term of four years, as does the mayor. The village Trustees' responsibilities include but are not limited to: adopting the annual village budget, as well as laws; creating or abolishing offices, committees and boards; and granting approval to appointments made by the Mayor to non-elected positions.

#### Zoning Board of Appeals

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is made up of five appointed members. The duration of each member's term is five years. ZBA members make land use decisions by interpreting local zoning ordinances and granting variances, where appropriate.

#### Planning Board

The Planning Board is made up of five appointed members. The duration of each member's term is five years. Planning Board members make land use decisions by means that include: reviewing and approving proposals for new development and accompanying site plans; issuing building permits; and granting special use permits.



### Special Committees

The only currently-operating special committee is the Comprehensive Planning Committee. The members of this committee were appointed by the Village Trustees in 2015 to work with STC in developing this comprehensive plan. Upon adoption of the plan, the committee will disband.

Special committees are an excellent opportunity for municipal governments to engage residents and experts in local government, sharing decision-making power and fostering civic spirit and village pride. Further, resident input and advice on special committees can foster creative solutions to improving municipal services without increasing taxes. The OFA (Office for Aging) Advisory Council is a special committee composed of Schuyler County Seniors and elected officials. Having both groups present allows residents to shed light on their experiences and elected officials to develop policy more closely based on resident needs. For these reasons, Montour Falls should consider establishing more special committees to address concerns or inquiries as they arise.

### Taxation

Municipal services in Montour Falls could not be possible without levying local property taxes to pay for them. Montour Falls' residents receive three property tax bills per year. One is for town and special district taxes. Because Montour Falls resides in both the Town of Dix and the Town of Montour, village residents pay a town tax as well. The special districts in Montour Falls are fire and library districts. The other two tax bills are for village taxes and for school taxes.

At the time of this comprehensive plan's creation, Montour Falls had the highest village taxes of the four villages in Schuyler County. While having high taxes is never ideal, one must consider three points. First, for a small village, Montour Falls provides an impressive number of services, as outlined in this chapter. Second, residents are quite happy with the services currently provided to them. Third, the Village Trustees set a tax rate which is slightly high in order to keep its debt load low. This measure helps village government to maintain Montour Falls' financial health in a sustainable way.

Montour Falls has a mutually beneficial relationship with both Montour and Dix. Montour Falls contributes 51% of the revenue required for Montour Falls Fire Department's operations, while Dix and Montour are responsible for the remaining 49%. The two towns and the village also have an informal, unwritten service agreement, wherein equipment is shared between the three municipalities.

### Capital Planning

Montour Falls does engage in capital planning activities, such as street maintenance and fire truck replacement. There are also some monies in reserve for capital improvements and emergency repairs to water and sewer systems. Further, there are reserve fund monies that have no specific dedication, but which the state allows the village to accumulate and use as necessary.

Although there are currently reserves of money available for capital projects, a more structured capital planning process would give the village a greater capacity to plan for capital improvements that seem far-off, and perhaps flexibility to handle capital purchases that come up suddenly.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICES

### Village Groups & Services

There are a number of community services and civic organizations that are located in Montour Falls. These organizations provide recreational, educational and opportunities for residents.

#### Montour Falls Fire Department

The local fire department has about 43 active volunteers. The department reports responding to 53 calls per year, with each call averaging 35 volunteers. In addition, for 59 years, the fire department has hosted an annual Fireman’s Festival and Parade in June.

#### Montour Falls Library

The local library features a number of programs and events available to residents of all ages. Morning programming is aimed towards young children and families. Evening activities include book clubs and story circles. The library also hosts a First Friday event, bringing musical performances for residents to enjoy each month.

#### Schuyler County Historical Society

The Schuyler County Historical Society serves the whole of Schuyler County, but its operation is located in Montour Falls, at the Brick Tavern Museum. This historic building contains the Historical Society’s exhibits of Schuyler County history, as well as a research center. The Brick Tavern Museum is open to members and non-members of the Historical Society. It hosts an annual Christmas Open House, and publishes a quarterly journal (“The Journal”) and newsletter (“The Vista”).

#### Other Community Organizations and Services

There are far too many groups and services located in or utilized by Montour Falls residents to comprehensively discuss in this plan. Groups other than those outlined above include, but certainly are not limited to:

- Chemung Valley Soccer Association (CVSA)
- Fire Academy
- Humane Society
- Marina
- Masons Lodge
- Montour Falls Housing Authority
- Moose Lodge
- My Place Daycare facility



*A photo of Montour Falls Fire Department’s ladder truck. The first fire department formed in the village in 1837. It still keeps the community of Montour Falls and beyond safe.  
Photo Source: [www.montourfallsfire.org](http://www.montourfallsfire.org)*



*Since 1904, Montour Falls Memorial Library has been housed in a Greek Revival building built in 1864. It belongs to the “Glorious T” Historical District, making it of both intellectual, historical and cultural significance for the village.  
Photo Source: STC Regional Planning Board*



*The Schuyler County Historical Society is housed in the Brick Tavern Museum. The structure was built in 1828 and is the oldest brick structure in Schuyler County. It is now a museum with two floors of exhibits.  
Photo Source: [www.schuylerhistory.org](http://www.schuylerhistory.org).*

### County Services

There are a number of community groups and services available in Montour Falls which are provided by Schuyler County, based out of the Schuyler County Human Services Complex.

#### Cornell Cooperative Extension

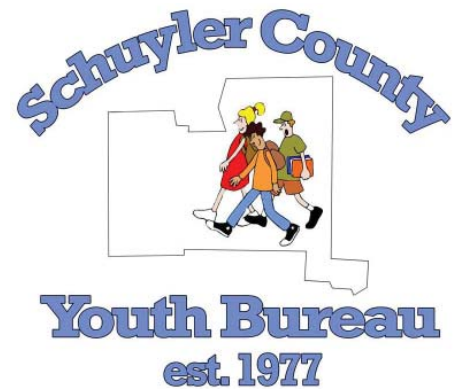
Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) offers a wide variety of programs for youth, families and adults, alike. Their program areas are 4-H; agriculture; energy; the environment; food and nutrition; gardening; and home and family. Schuyler County residents, including those who live in Montour Falls, can attend workshops and classes held by CCE, and obtain other educational resources related to their programming areas.



**Cornell University**  
Cooperative Extension  
Schuyler County

#### Schuyler County Youth Bureau

The Youth Bureau serves youth up to the age of 21, including the general population, those considered at risk, and those with special needs. The Bureau operates a Summer Youth Employment Program that runs from June to August. It also organizes Youth Court, where juveniles who have committed misdemeanors, violations or infractions are given a trial by their peers. Their peers are 7th through 12th graders from Schuyler County who take on all roles in the courtroom under the supervision of the Youth Court Coordinator. Youth are also invited to serve on the Youth Board.



The Youth Bureau also operates the Family Play and Resource Center in the Human Services Complex. It is a drop-in center for parents and children with an emphasis on children between the ages of two and five. The Center and its staff promote positive interactions between parents and children, facilitating developmentally appropriate play and providing educational resources.

#### Office for the Aging

The Office for the Aging (OFA) provides many resources for Schuyler County seniors. Programming ranges from social to educational to financial to health-related. Some programs include energy conservation education; caregiver support programs; in-home assistance; health and wellness classes; nutrition assistance; a phone pal program; safe driving courses; and much more.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *1. Pursue funding for and implementing Complete Streets projects to support increases in sidewalk maintenance and road maintenance.*

Village residents voice strong support for increased sidewalk maintenance and road maintenance within the village. Complete Streets are roadways designed to take all modes of transportation into consideration; including walking, biking, driving and navigating with a visual or physical disability. Survey results indicated that residents feel that walking is an easy way to get around the village but are dissatisfied with the condition of existing sidewalks. Complete Streets projects provide an opportunity to make roadways safer, more pleasant, more attractive and more convenient for residents and visitors alike, while simultaneously improving the condition of roads and sidewalks.

Grant funding is available for Complete Streets projects from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), and should be considered. Pursuing Complete Streets funding would be beneficial for the village. Should grant funding not be feasible for such improvements, there was support expressed in the survey that residents would be willing to pay more for sidewalk and road maintenance. Small improvements to the streetscape can be made on a relatively low budget such as painting bike lanes. These small improvements may be better funded by tax increases than large, costlier projects such as installing new sidewalks, speed tables, street trees, etc. Supplementing more expensive treatments with grant funding would reduce the tax burden faced by residents.

Complete Streets projects do not have to be village-wide; they can be quite targeted. The village of Canton, New York reconstructed its Main Street corridor, which is only one mile in length to improve access to cyclists and pedestrians in the downtown area and improve traffic flow.

### *2. Strengthen relationship between village government, Schuyler County Youth Bureau, county-wide community organizations and village community organizations in order to build capacity to deliver youth-oriented programming in Montour Falls.*

Increasing youth programming available in the village should be a priority, given the strong interest expressed by survey respondents. There are venues in the village that already host youth activities, such as the Montour Falls Library and the Family Play and Resource Center located in the Schuyler County Human Services Complex.

Partnerships are a cost-effective route for extending the reach of currently-offered programs. In Schuyler County, public transportation is offered as the result of a partnership between the Arc of Schuyler. The Arc of Schuyler had operated a transit service for its own clients for about thirty years, until partnering with Schuyler County to bring its services to all county residents in 2010. Between 2010 and 2015, ridership tripled as a result of the partnership.

Linking current activities and organizations has the potential to cultivate the positive effects they are already providing for Montour Falls' youth. Some such currently offered programs include book clubs at Montour Falls Library and 4-H. Schuyler County Historical Society and Montour Falls Fire Department are local organizations that may be able to hold one-off or recurring events with financial or personnel support provided by partnerships. CVSA is a youth soccer league which holds practices and games in Montour Falls, as well, and may be an activity that needs wider advertisement in the village.

### *3. Consider offering property tax abatements to daycare providers seeking to locate in the village.*

Montour Falls is home to the only daycare facility in Schuyler County, which is an immense asset. However, a greater level of child care will be necessary if the population increases; especially if there are increases or desired increases in young professionals and young families. Convenient, high-quality child care is beneficial to both parents and children. Increasing the number of daycare providers can be accomplished either through expansions of current services or the addition of other childcare providers. The village can ease this expansion by providing property tax abatements for for-profit providers seeking to locate or expand within the village. Providing more daycare services in the village will work in tandem with non-profit partnerships to provide children with opportunities for positive development and future success throughout their early years.



#### ***4. Strengthen relationship between village government, Schuylar County Office for Aging, assisted living centers, county-wide community organizations and village community organizations in order to build capacity to deliver programming for seniors in Montour Falls.***

Survey respondents indicated that they are favorable to increases in programming for seniors within the village. As with youth services, partnering with the county can strengthen and expand the reach of existing programs and services for seniors, of which there are many. Venues in the village, such as the Montour Falls Memorial Library and Montour Falls Fire Department, are easily accessible and have the potential to be used for social gatherings, health and wellness classes, and other educational events.

Engaging youth and seniors together can also be beneficial; it can be a way to enhance generational respect and understanding. Steering committee members suggested bringing together juveniles convicted of crimes in the Youth Bureau's Youth Court and senior residents of the village. A similar program called Community Labor Experience and Responsibility (CLEAR) operates out of California's Ventura Youth Correctional Facility. Youth receive clearance to work with community organizations to fulfill community service requirements, including visiting senior homes. The residents of the homes receive the benefit of having visitors, while youth gain the opportunity to serve their community.

#### ***5. Develop a capital planning process for the Village of Montour Falls.***

Although Montour Falls currently engages in some capital planning, steering committee members expressed interest in developing greater capacity and establishing a more standard process for doing so. Capital planning is planning for the replacement and improvement of capital assets such as machinery and equipment. It will be necessary to engage key stakeholders in the capital planning process, especially department heads. Stakeholders will help to take inventory of what the village currently owns; when its useful life will expire; what it will cost to replace or repair; and how replacements and repairs will be funded. There are a number of resources to help municipalities begin the capital planning process, including the Office of the New York State Comptroller, regional planning boards and local and regional engineering firms; the latter two provide trainings on this topic to municipalities.

#### ***6. Increase participation and engagement in local government by creating more special committees and working groups for citizens to join.***

Citizen engagement in local government is important, as it contributes to the democratic decision-making process. There are currently opportunities for Montour Falls to serve on village boards, but out of the four existing boards, only one is not on an appointment basis. This may limit those who are currently outside of local government and politics' opportunities to get involved.

Forming committees or working groups dedicated solely particular problems may be beneficial for 1) engaging new residents in a more targeted area of interest, and 2) finding creative solutions to challenges facing the village through a diverse set of minds. For example, the Transportation chapter recommends forming one such working group on transportation. This group would draw members who are knowledgeable and passionate about transportation increases the group's ability to effectively problem-solve in that area and to effectively communicate with the public on that topic. Another committee worth considering is, upon completion of the comprehensive plan, transform the steering committee into an implementation committee.

# 4



# TRANSPORTATION

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY

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## COMMUTING PATTERNS

### Mode of Transportation to Work

The majority of survey respondents (72%) travel to work by personal automobile. Another 20% indicated that travel to work is not applicable for them which may indicate that many respondents are retirement age and no longer work. Only 2% of respondents indicated that they bike to work and only 1% claimed that they walk to work. These findings are confirmed by the American Community Survey (ACS), which reports virtually the same percentages.

### Commute Time to Work

One reason for the high level of use of personal automobiles to get to work could be that residents live too far from their jobs to reasonably walk or bike every day. According to ACS data, over half of village residents have commute to work that is over 10 minutes, and roughly one third have a commute that is longer than 25 minutes (2014). Although a 10-minute commute by car does not seem long, it is often a greater distance than a person could comfortably walk or bike, which may contribute to the high rate of personal car use identified by survey respondents.

Given that roughly two thirds of Montour Falls residents have a daily commute under 25 minutes, this indicates that many residents work in the village, in the nearby Schuyler County villages of Watkins Glen and Odessa, and in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions, in cities such as Corning and Elmira.

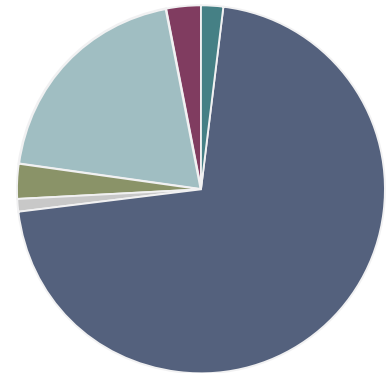
Given the level of regional dispersion of jobs, there is a strong need to evaluate both the public and regional transportation networks. Increasing connectivity within and between these areas, particularly between dense pockets of development in Schuyler, Steuben, Chemung and Tompkins Counties, may well suit the needs of those in Montour Falls and beyond.

### Vehicles Available

Another reason for the high usage of personal automobiles by survey respondents is simply that vehicles are readily available to most village residents. According to ACS data, 11% of residents did not have access to a vehicle at all (2014). Almost half of the population (46%) has access to one vehicle, and 42% has access to two or more.

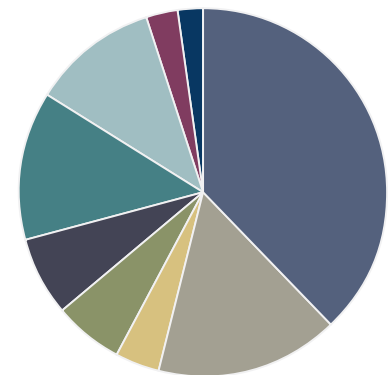
A high rate of vehicle ownership could indicate that owning a vehicle is the most favored or convenient option for transportation if one lives in Montour Falls. However, those that do not have access to a vehicle must choose between the remaining transportation options.

Primary Transportation to Work



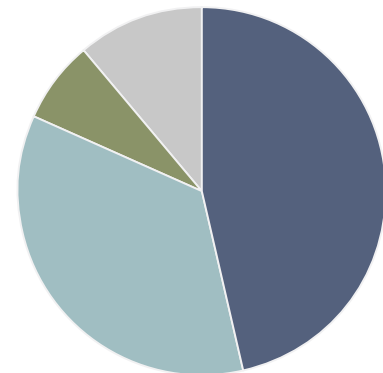
Legend for Primary Transportation to Work: Biking - 2%, Personal Automobile - 72%, Walking - 1%, Other - 3%, Not Applicable - 20%, Blank - 3%

Commute Time to Work, 2014



Legend for Commute Time to Work, 2014: Less than 10 Minutes - 38%, 10-14 Minutes - 16%, 15-19 Minutes - 4%, 20-24 Minutes - 6%, 25-29 Minutes - 7%, 30-34 Minutes - 13%, 35-44 Minutes - 11%, 45-59 Minutes - 3%, 60 or More Minutes - 2%

Vehicles Available per Household, 2014



Legend for Vehicles Available per Household, 2014: One Vehicle Available - 46%, Two Vehicle Available - 35%, No Vehicle Available - 11%, Three of More Vehicle Available - 7%



Although the reason for 11% of households lacking access to a vehicle is unknown, it indicates that alternate modes of transportation need to be made more accessible within the village, and between the village and other municipalities. Despite the density of the village and proximity to Watkins Glen, another area of density, the existing public transit routes between and within these locations may not be adequate. Further, although one's daily commute to work may be bikable in terms of distance, the infrastructure and amenities along one's route may not be favorable to biking.

### Public Transportation

Although no survey respondents claimed that they use public transit as part of their daily work commutes, public transit is available in Schuyler County, with routes that stop in Montour Falls. Schuyler County Transit is the only county-wide public transportation system. It is operated by the Arc of Schuyler County, under a contract with the county (which also funds it), and is thus available to all Schuyler residents.

#### Current Schuyler County Transit Services

Schuyler County Transit has three year-round routes and one summer route. Routes run Monday through Friday, from approximately 7:30am to 5:30pm. The summer route only runs from July to September. Two year-round routes and the summer route pass through Montour Falls:

- The **Fixed Route** connects Montour Falls to the other three villages in Schuyler County, with five stops in Montour Falls (two on the Schuyler Hospital Complex, one at Main and Montour Streets, one at the Human Services Complex, and one on Broadway Street). Routes 1A (Watkins Glen to Odessa) and 1B (Odessa to Watkins Glen) each pass through Montour Falls seven times a day.
- The **Corning Connections Route** connects Montour Falls to Corning, with one stop at the Human Services Complex. The route passes through Montour Falls on the way to Corning three times a day.
- The **Seasonal Summer Route** follows the same route as the Fixed Route, with three additional stops. Two of those additional stops are in Montour Falls, at Havana Glen and the Raymond Street Apartment Complex. Routes 1A (Watkins Glen to Odessa) and 1B (Odessa to Watkins Glen) each pass through Montour Falls seven times a day.

For residents that live  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile or further from the fixed route, the Dial-a-Ride service is available. This service is available on Mondays and Fridays with advanced notice, and transports residents from beyond the fixed route to Watkins Glen or Montour Falls. Schuyler County Transit also coordinates Mobility Management and Transportation Link-Line services for passengers with transportation needs not addressed by regularly scheduled routes or Dial-a-Ride accommodations.

#### Barriers to Schuyler County Transit Services

Although there are a number of bus stops in Montour Falls, Schuyler County Transit's limited hours and days of operation may make it difficult for some riders to access its services. Extending the daily hours of operation to later in the day (between 6pm and 8pm) might make using these services more feasible for those that live or work in Montour Falls. Adding services on Saturdays and Sundays would also facilitate use of public transportation by those who do not have traditional Monday through Friday jobs, such as retail or food workers. An expansion of services will require additional funding. Service arrangements such as local and regional partnerships and funding sources state and federal transportation grants should be considered before service expansion occurs to ensure sustainable public transit services.



*A Schuyler County Transit bus. Schuyler County Transit operates four routes; three of which pass through the village of Montour Falls and two of which have multiple stops in the village, multiple times a day. Despite the availability of stops in the village, there are still barriers to ridership.*

*Photo Source: [www.schuylercountytransit.org](http://www.schuylercountytransit.org).*



Furthermore, while the connections between Schuyler County’s villages are well established, it is harder to access other areas in Schuyler County, or the greater Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions on a daily basis via Schuyler County Transit’s services alone. Partnering with other county and regional transportation services to provide more routes between Schuyler County and Steuben, Chemung and Tompkins Counties may be a cost-effective and efficient way to increase accessibility to the public transportation system.

## PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUTING IN MONTOUR FALLS

### Safety of Commuting

Residents’ perception of the safety of various modes of transportation may influence their decision whether or not to utilize them. A question regarding safety on the survey distributed to Montour Falls residents did not yield data from which conclusions about the local perception of transportation safety could be drawn. Many respondents chose not to answer the question.

There may be legitimate safety concerns associated with certain modes of transportation, such as a lack of bike lanes, lack of crosswalks, or bus stops positioned along particularly busy intersections. If they exist in a community, addressing these safety concerns through policies and changes to infrastructure may increase perceived safety. This may ultimately lead to usage of a variety of types of transportation in the village, beyond the current heavy favoritism of personal automobiles.

### Ease of Commuting

There was a question on the village resident survey that asked respondents about the ease of commuting using various modes of transportation. Similar to the question regarding transportation safety, this question did not produce usable data.

The built environment may contribute to how easy it is for people to travel by different types of transportation. For example, the compact and relatively dense nature of the village make it easy to get around by bike; everything is just a short trip away. However, without bicycle infrastructure such as bike racks, shared road signs, bike lanes or signage for bicycle routes such as the Catharine Valley Trail, bicyclists may feel inconvenienced. Likewise, perceptions of safety may also be related to the built environment (see Safety of Commuting above).



*The paint has worn away at this crosswalk on Main Street, reducing its visibility. Repainting fading crosswalks is cost-effective and enhances visibility. Easily-distinguishable crosswalks alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians and make it safer for them to cross the street.  
Source: STC Planning Board.*



*Bicycle racks are necessary for cyclists just as public parking is necessary for automobile drivers. With nowhere to park a bike, cyclists may choose not to ride downtown because it is inconvenient to do so. Installing bike racks is thus an important measure in increasing bicycle activity downtown. As this photo demonstrates, bicycle racks can do double duty as both parking and as public art, adding a sense of place to the streetscape.  
Photo Source: [www.sierraclub.typepad.com](http://www.sierraclub.typepad.com).*

### Common Traffic-related Issues

Another question on the resident survey asked participants to describe areas of the village in which they felt there was a traffic problem of some type. Fifty-nine unique responses to this question were given by 65 respondents. The top five most-cited complaints were:

1. Congestion due to the traffic light at the intersection of NYS Routes 14 and 224 and the Citgo gas station
2. Traffic and congestion due to buses and cars of visitors parked to see Shequaga Falls on S. Genesee Street
3. Noise from trucks and motorcycles traveling through The village
4. Speeding cars on S. Genesee Street
5. Trucks on NYS Route 14 causing noise and shaking building

Congestion and traffic are not only inconvenient for drivers, but can be potentially dangerous for pedestrians. Traffic-calming measures such as speed tables, crosswalks and accompanying signage use physical and visual cues to alert drivers to areas with heavy pedestrian foot traffic, encouraging them to reduce speed. Street trees can also slow traffic by narrowing the visual field, causing drivers to slow down and be more observant.

Effectively-managed traffic is important for the residents and businesses of a municipality in getting people where they need to go. Intersections that are routinely congested may be reimagined as traffic circles, which both calm traffic and move it along fluidly. Alternatively, turning lanes and accompanying turning signals may be added in places where they needed or taken away in places where they are underutilized.

Tractor trailers pose a problem for the Finger Lakes Region as a whole. To avoid tolls on Interstate 90, tractor trailers use state roads that run through the region, including through Schuyler County and Montour Falls. Many counties across the Finger Lakes Region are working to address this issue with New York State, voicing similar concerns to the ones expressed by survey respondents. The state and Finger Lakes counties are currently looking for a creative solution, and Montour Falls should support these efforts. Residents are able to submit comments and recommendations to New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and to their New York State Assembly representatives.

### Parking

Given that a majority of the survey sample claims to navigate primarily by automobile, parking is a relevant issue for village residents. When asked in the survey whether or not participants felt that there was enough parking in the downtown area of Montour Falls, 68% said that they felt there was enough. Another 35% of participants felt that there was too little parking, while only 1% felt that there was too much.

The quantity of parking is thus not a particularly big issue within the village of Montour Falls, and adding additional parking is unnecessary for the current demand. Should demand increase, there are a number of streets with off-street parking that intersect Main Street and two municipal parking lots behind Jerlando's Pizzeria and at the corner Owego and Main Streets. Proper signage along Main Street alerting downtown visitors to these parking options would not only address increased parking demand, but would also increase foot traffic in the downtown area.

Survey respondents and steering committee members cited the layout of downtown parking as an issue. They claimed it is not easy to back out of the diagonal parking spots on Main Street. In summer or fall 2016, the Village Board will be repainting parking spots and is considering replacing the diagonal spots with parallel ones. This measure would eliminate only six spots, and has so far been well-received by the business community.



## WALKABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

### Why is Walkability Important?

Walkability is important for municipalities of all sizes. There are a number of reasons why walkability is important, and how it can benefit a municipality. Some of these reasons include, but are not limited to:

- Walkable villages are more vibrant and lively, populating the downtown area with residents and visitors patronizing businesses.
- Walkable downtowns allow for more opportunities for businesses to entice customers before they enter the store, through means such as signage or outdoor merchandise displays. This can draw customers in more easily than if they were driving past.
- Increased opportunities for walking within the village are beneficial to the health of residents.
- Decreased reliance on automobiles can contribute to improved air quality. Pollutants from automobiles can negatively affect anyone, but have a more potent effect on those with respiratory illnesses such as asthma, children and senior citizens.



*A walkable street in the City of Burlingame, California. Wide sidewalks accommodate ample foot traffic; outdoor signs and window displays provide rhythm and benches allow pedestrians to rest. Source: [www.plannerdan.com](http://www.plannerdan.com)*

### What does it mean to be Walkable?

#### Adequate Sidewalk Width

There are a number of factors that encompass walkability. Probably the most basic criterion is the presence and quality of the walkway. Survey respondents lamented narrow width of sidewalks in certain parts of the village. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), sidewalks should be at minimum five feet across. This is wide enough to comfortably accommodate pedestrians walking two abreast, and for people with disabilities. This width can be widened to a minimum of eight feet in areas that receive heavy foot traffic or in front of storefronts with outdoor displays.

#### Safety & Handicap Accessibility

Survey respondents also indicated some sections of sidewalk within the village are cracked and uneven. Even sidewalks contribute to the safety of pedestrians, reducing the risk of tripping and falling. Smooth surfaces are also important in making sidewalks accessible to those using wheelchairs. Further on the topic of accessibility, curb cuts should be placed directly facing one another at intersections for those using wheelchairs to safely exit the sidewalk and cross the street in as direct a route as possible. Curb cuts accompanied by tactile paving, such as truncated domes, increase sidewalk accessibility for visually impaired pedestrians.



*Truncated domes on a curb cut provide guidance to the visually impaired and traction to pedestrians when sidewalks are icy  
Photo Source: [www.philly.curbed.com](http://www.philly.curbed.com).*



### Connectivity

Another issue that was highlighted by the survey results was that sidewalks are missing altogether in some parts of the village; particularly in residential areas. The presence of a network of pedestrian walkways contributes to a practical and important facet of walkability: connectivity and pedestrian safety.

Connectivity can simply be described as linkages between places. Walkable places provide convenient, direct, purposeful and pleasant linkages between a wide array of locations. Including quality sidewalks in residential areas is important, as they provide links between people's homes, downtown businesses and nature. The idea is to provide pedestrians with a destination to walk to. Linkages feeding to the Catharine Valley Trail from downtown and residential neighborhoods should also be prioritized, as it connects Montour Falls to the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes Region as a whole.

### Amenities

The more pleasant a walking path is the more likely people are to want to walk on it. Simply having a sidewalk is the bare minimum, but other amenities should be considered to make the experience of walking enjoyable and engaging. Some amenities to consider adding to sidewalks and streetscapes include but are certainly not limited to:

- Street trees- provide shade to pedestrians; serve as a barrier between pedestrians and traffic; help to calm traffic
- Waste receptacles- with convenient and designated spots for waste, the sidewalks, roads and storm drains may be cleaner as pedestrians are less likely to litter
- Benches- allow pedestrians to stop for a rest if they get tired; serve as a place for people to eat lunch or socialize
- Public art- creates a sense of place and identity; transforms walking from a utilitarian means of transportation to an exciting sensory experience



*Bicyclists bike on the Catharine Valley Trail. Improving linkages between the village, especially the downtown and the Catharine Valley Trail could have the economic benefit of drawing tourists into The village.*

*Photo Source: [www.nyparks.com](http://www.nyparks.com).*



*Street trees on Main Street in Montour Falls are both attractive and practical for pedestrians.*

*Photo Source: STC Regional Planning Board.*

### Current Walkability in Montour Falls

The existing pattern of development and existing attitudes about walking as a mode of transportation within the village provide a good starting point for creating a more walkable municipality for those of all ages, abilities and interests. The density of development in Montour Falls provides an excellent foundation for a walkable village. Proximity of residences, businesses, services and nature will make it easier to develop a network of deliberate walkable pathways through the village.

Furthermore, residents seem to recognize walking as a favorable means of transportation within the village. Approximately half of survey respondents indicated that they thought walking was very or somewhat safe, and again, approximately half of survey respondents claimed that it was very or somewhat easy to walk through the village.

Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents indicated that they would like to see sidewalk maintenance improved. However, sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the homeowner in Montour Falls, making it difficult for the village to address sidewalk maintenance directly. In early 2016, the village purchased a grinder to grind down uneven sidewalk edges, addressing some maintenance concerns. Beyond this, steering committee members indicated that a special sidewalk district could be an effective way for the village to regulate sidewalk maintenance.

At the time of writing this plan, the village also began the process of working with New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to do extensive work on Route 14. This work will provide the village an opportunity to look at the whole streetscape and reconstruct it or add new elements to be as walkable as possible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Make streetscape improvements that promote walkability and accessibility on the Main Street and Route 14 corridors.

More walkable paths through Montour Falls, especially through the downtown and business corridors, is good for the economic, social and physical well-being of the community. The village should consider installing sidewalks wide enough to accommodate two pedestrians at a time along the entire length of Main Street and Route 14 as it extends through the village. Newly installed sidewalks and existing sidewalks should be fitted with curb cuts and truncated domes placed facing crosswalks. Space in the streetscape within the right-of-way should also be reserved for street trees, public art and other amenities that make walking a more pleasant sensory experience. Complete Streets funding is available for such streetscape improvements through the New York State Department of Transportation. This and other similar funding streams should be pursued.



*A crosswalk at Main Street and Route 14 facilitates pedestrian passage across this busy intersection. Montour Falls' dense pattern of development means that businesses and residential neighborhoods are close to one another, increasing walkability.  
Photo Source: STC Regional Planning Board.*



*The current intersection of Main Street and Route 14. While there are elements of a complete street in place such as truncated domes, a crosswalk and sidewalks, these features do not continue for the whole length of both streets. Other elements can be added, such as street trees to slow traffic and bike lanes.  
Photo Source: STC Regional Planning Board.*



**2. Introduce traffic calming measures south of Cook Street on South Genesee Street.**



*Drawing of a speed table in a complete street. With 500 feet between them, speed tables can limit the operating speed of automobiles in residential neighborhoods like that along S. Genesee Street to 25 to 30mph.  
Source: [www.nacto.org](http://www.nacto.org).*

A number of survey participants cited speeding cars on South Genesee Street, south of the falls, as an issue. Speeding cars are dangerous for pedestrians, especially in residential neighborhoods such as South Genesee Street. While crosswalks are in place at the intersection of W. Main Street and South Genesee Street, further traffic calming measures, such as speed tables or bumps, can be implemented elsewhere along South Genesee Street to control automobile speed. The National Association of City Transit Officials (NACTO) says that speed tables are appropriate for residential streets where the posted speed limit is 25 to 30mph, which describes the characteristics of S. Genesee Street. NACTO advises placing speed tables no more than 500ft apart for a desired 85th percentile speed of 25 to 30mph.

**3. Prohibit temporary bus stops in front of Shequaga Falls.**

Survey respondents and steering committee members expressed concern at tour buses parking in front of Shequaga Falls on South Genesee Street. Because there is not adequate space to park a bus on the side of the street, it is very difficult to see around the buses when they stop at the falls and let tourists off to explore. Instead of allowing buses to park on the side of the road for a 15 to 20-minute stop, the village should adopt a local law that prohibits bus parking on the side of the road. Buses should instead be directed via signage to one of the municipal lots off of Main Street. This measure removes the visual blockage the buses cause, making South Genesee Street safer. It also forces buses to park closer to shops and businesses, giving tourists easier access to these locales and encouraging them to stop and patronize the businesses they pass on their way to view the falls.

**4. Implement infrastructure that increases bikability within the village, and which improves connections between the village and existing regional walking and bicycle trails.**



*Sharrows, pictured in white paint on the road, are an affordable and effective means of letting motorists that they are sharing the road with bicycles. Sharrows can be used when the road is too narrow for designated bike lanes.  
Photo Source: [www.mywheelsareturning.com](http://www.mywheelsareturning.com).*

As a whole, survey respondents indicated that although they feel that bicycling in the village is an easy way to get around, it is also a somewhat unsafe way to get around. Simple improvements to the streetscape and roadway can make the village much more bicycle friendly and thus, safe. For wide streets, adding painted bike lanes can give bicyclists a designated place to ride, distanced from automobiles. For streets that are too narrow to accommodate bike lanes, painted “sharrows” inform drivers that they are sharing the road with bicyclists, and to be aware of their presence.

Further, wayfinding signage directing bicyclists (and pedestrians) to existing bicycle routes such as the Catharine Valley Trail will increase connectivity within the region, and provide bicyclists and pedestrians safe transportation routes. Increasing the visibility of the Catherine Valley Trail to The village and vice versa could stimulate

tourist activity from the trail to spill over into The village, as cyclists are directed into The village downtown to have lunch or sight-see. Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP) grants available through New York State are one source of funding to consider for such improvements.

**5. Inform New York State Department of Transportation that there is a perceived congestion problem at the intersection of state routes 14 and 224, and ask for a study and/or response.**

Survey participants pointed to the intersection of Route 14 and Route 224 as a source of congestion and traffic. Many went a step further and implicated the traffic light at that intersection as the cause. The village should bring this concern to NYSDOT, which oversees these roads as state routes. NYSDOT will be able to evaluate the intersection and issue a response on its functionality, along with potential changes to the curb cuts at Citgo gas station or the light at the intersection.

**6. Create a village-wide public transportation work group to educate residents about public transportation options, and to partner with Schuyler County and the Arc of Schuyler to pursue grant funding for operating costs and capital improvements of Schuyler County Transit.**

Although its routes make multiple stops in Montour Falls, Schuyler County Transit's service is currently limited to three year-round routes running approximately nine hours a day, five days a week. Further, many residents do not use the services currently offered. Establishing a working group in Montour Falls to address public transit barriers as they relate to village residents may increase ridership. Residents may be unaware of the current scope of public transportation services and could perhaps benefit from education on what is available and how to use it. Further, the working group could partner with Schuyler County Transit and Schuyler County to assist in locating grants and writing proposals for both operating costs and capital improvements.

**7. Establish a bike share in the village.**

Southern Tier Bike League (STBL) currently operates three free bike share locations. One is located in Watkins Glen and two are located in Elmira. Participants can sign out a bicycle and a helmet and then sign it back in upon return. Expanding STBL's service to Montour Falls would be beneficial for village residents and tourists alike. The village public transportation work group could take this project on and work directly with STBL to establish another bike share.

Eleven percent of households in the village do not have access to a vehicle, but according to ACS data, over 90% of residents use a personal automobile to commute to work. This might indicate that those without automobiles have trouble finding work, and therefore do not have a job to commute to. A bike share is a low-cost transportation method for residents, which could facilitate commutes in the village and in Schuyler County.

Residents are not the only people who move through Montour Falls and Schuyler County; tourists do, as well. A bike share could increase use of the Catherine Valley Trail by tourists. Not everyone travels with a bike, but exploring the area on one may still be appealing.

**8. Explore the feasibility of a ride share or car share program in the village.**

Although walking, bicycling and public transit are affordable and practical modes of transportation for navigating within Montour Falls, it can be difficult to navigate outside of the village with them. The limited schedule and routes of Schuyler County Transit and inclement weather faced by the Finger Lakes Region in the winter make personal automobiles an ideal choice for many who work outside of the village. However, a sizable portion (11%) of residents do not have access to an automobile. Establishing a car share in the village could provide convenient, affordable automobile access to individuals who currently do not own their own vehicles. Car shares tend to be more popular with those in their 20s and 30s than older adults, as demonstrated by Ithaca, New York's car share program. The availability of a car share may be appealing to potential young professional residents. Feasibility of a car share in one is worth exploring to broaden residents' transportation options. The village Trustees might consider tasking the public transportation work group with developing a survey or focus groups to gauge resident interest and conduct research on car shares in small municipalities.

***9. Adopt a zoning law that requires all new commercial developments to install sidewalks on their property.***

In order to start filling in areas of the village that do not currently have sidewalks or which have damaged or inadequate sidewalks, the village can adopt a zoning law that requires all new businesses locating in the village to install or repair the sidewalk in front of their facility. The Town of Penfield, located in Monroe County, New York has a sidewalk policy that requires new developments or redevelopments/ renovations that exceeds 20% of the current square footage of the property to install or fix sidewalks on their property. Although this approach does not lead to overnight installation of new sidewalks, it does begin to tackle the problem of inadequate sidewalks at no cost to village residents.

***10. Consider providing attractive public restrooms near the downtown (bus friendly) parking area to encourage longer stays by both buses and visitors.***

A common complaint both evident in survey results and by residents was that tour buses will drive past the falls while idling their engines, while tourist snap pictures from the bus windows and doorways. Providing a designated bus parking space, along with a restroom would encourage buses to stop and park, allowing for tourist to exit the bus and visit businesses while on the way to view the falls.



# 5



# HOUSING

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY

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## HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

### Availability & Vacancy

According to 2014 ACS 5-year estimates, there are 882 housing units in Montour Falls. Of those, 824 units are occupied and 58 are vacant but not condemned, yielding only a 7% vacancy rate. For comparison, Schuyler County and New York State have vacancy rates of 18% and 11%, respectively. There is an even lower vacancy rate for rental units in the village at 2%. Schuyler County and New York State have rental vacancy rates of 6% and 4%, respectively.

Schuyler County as a whole is facing a shortage of rental units across the board. Schuyler County's 2007-2020 Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) identified a shortage of 395 rental units county-wide. With a vacancy rate of 2%, Montour Falls is in line with this trend. Many economists and housing market analysts consider a 5% vacancy rate for rental housing to be a natural equilibrium, meaning anything lower than 5% would be considered a low vacancy rate.

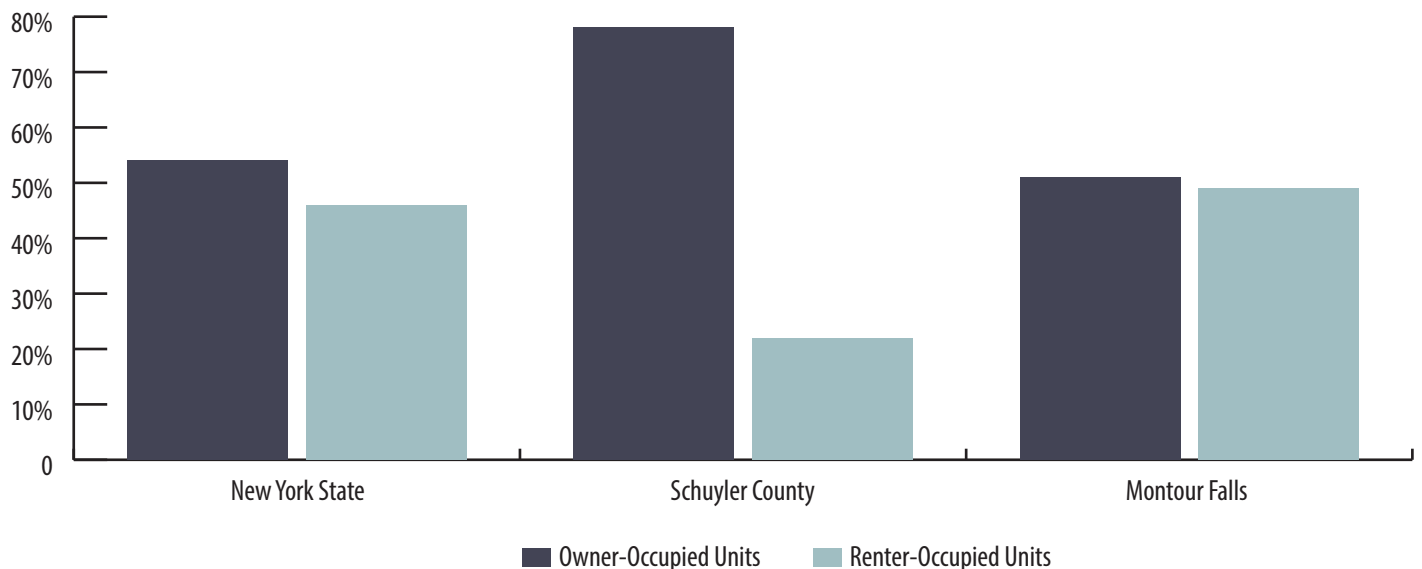
Year	Median Gross Rent	Median Gross Rent (Adjusted for 2014 rate of inflation)
2014	\$557.00	\$557.00
2013	\$538.00	\$546.73
2012	\$515.00	\$531.02
2011	\$529.00	\$556.74
2010	\$525.00	\$569.97
2009	\$496.00	\$547.32

There are other ways of estimating “tightness” of a housing market. If a market were tight, we would expect to see increases in rent over time even controlling for inflation. Indeed, this has been the case for Montour Falls' median gross rent since 2012. This finding coupled with the 5% rule of thumb indicates that Montour Falls is facing a tight rental housing market.

### Tenure

Montour Falls' rates of home ownership and renter occupancy are almost identical. Owner-occupied homes make up 51% of the occupied units in the village. Renter-occupied homes make up 49% of occupied units. The homeownership rate in Montour Falls is low compared to Schuyler County, which is 78%.

#### Housing Tenure, 2014



It is positive to have a mix of renters and homeowners in the village. Homeowners stabilize the population, are more likely to take measures that increase the property value of their homes, and are more likely to be active citizens in their communities. Renters, on the other hand, often represent new residents coming into the village who may be inclined to stay and purchase homes. Having an adequate supply and mix of rental housing can also attract a diverse range of household types, such as retirees and young families.

With a rental vacancy rate as low as 2% and a general vacancy rate of 7%, Montour Falls will clearly need more rental and for-purchase housing to accommodate increased residency. Therefore, it should encourage development of units intended for both potential homebuyers and renters. As new residents move into the village for newly-created jobs, they may want to rent before they commit to buying a home. Then, as the population is retained via their jobs, desirability of living in Montour Falls, and family ties, the homeownership rate will likely increase. Infill development on vacant lots and redeveloping second-story units in the downtown area should be priorities for new housing development. These measures work within current zoning ordinances and preserve the village's character by avoiding sprawling development.

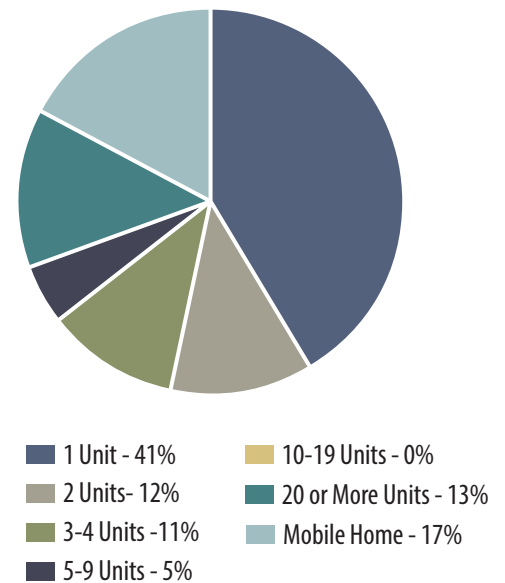
### Types of Units

The majority of homes (41%) in Montour Falls are single family, one-unit homes. Almost a fifth, 17% of housing structures are mobile homes. Twenty-eight percent of structures have between two and nine units.

Single-family homes are an excellent housing situation for families. However, their size and costs associated with maintaining and living in them may not be suitable for single individuals, young couples, low-income residents or senior residents. Their need for smaller and accessible space can be better met through two to three family units, multi-family complexes or apartment housing in the downtown area. Before breaking ground on new development, rehabilitating existing structures and building on vacant lots in the village should be considered.

Infill development will help Montour Falls retain its small town character, which survey respondents indicated is a very valuable asset (see Demographics). The Montour House and the Flats on Broadway represent successful rehabilitations of mixed-use structures. Infill and mixed-use development can satisfy housing needs and increase the livelihood of the downtown area by cutting down on sprawl. Sprawling housing development places residences further away from the downtown center, decreasing walkability and pedestrian activity in the downtown area, contributing to a less vibrant and active downtown.

Number of Units in Structure, 2014



New York State’s Main Street Program, which Montour Falls has previously received funds from, provides financial and technical assistance to municipalities for building renovations and streetscape enhancements with a focus on downtown and main street mixed-use development. Securing more funding through this program would contribute to infill and downtown development. Historic preservation is a huge consideration for historic districts or structures. In order to both meet future housing demands and maintain the traditional look and feel of downtown Montour Falls, The village should consider adopting historic design guidelines that pertain exclusively to buildings on the National Historic Register



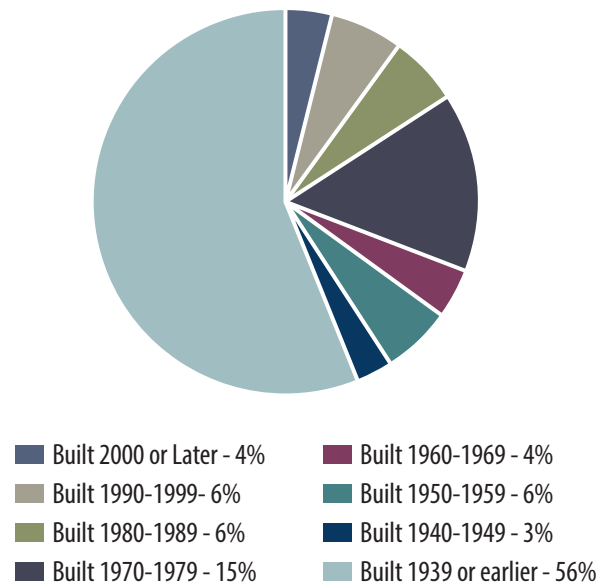
*The Montour House (left) and the Flats on Broadway (right) are both examples of rehabilitation of historic, mixed-use rental housing. This type of development prevents sprawl and preserves the historic character of the village.*  
 Photo Source: STC Planning Board (left), [www.nelsondevelopmentgroupllc.com](http://www.nelsondevelopmentgroupllc.com) (right).

**Age**

Most of the homes in Montour Falls (56%) were built in 1939 or earlier. Although it is not reflected in 2014 ACS data, there has been some housing built since 2009. Structures built between 1940 and 2009 are relatively evenly distributed, with one spike in development between 1970 and 1979, which accounts for 15% of housing structures. This means that, although there is some newer housing in the village, the majority of housing structures are historic. The architecture of a building or place is associated with its identity and sense of place. Historic architecture can establish a unique sense of place and build a strong sense of identity and pride.

Survey responses indicated a strong desire to maintain the historic façade, or face of a building, and character of structures in the village; 40% said it was very important and 30% said it was somewhat important. Therefore, measures to maintain and repair older housing stock should preserve the original character as much as possible. Nearly 50% of survey participants indicated that they would be very or somewhat favorable to achieving this by preserving the materials used on the exterior of the structure.

**Year Structure Built, 2014**



**Survey Results: Importance of Historic Preservation Measures**

	<b>Preservation of historic facades; character of structure</b>	<b>Preservation of materials on structure exterior</b>
Not at all important	4%	5%
Somewhat unimportant	6%	7%
Neutral	13%	22%
Somewhat important	30%	28%
Very important	40%	31%
(blank)	7%	7%

The current Design Guidelines which guide development in Montour Falls are guidelines, rather than requirements. New design guidelines which guide preservation of the historic character of structures can be found in the proposed Design Guidelines (Appendix C). These guidelines should serve as encouragement, but not requirement for new development or renovations. A second set of design guidelines for buildings (both homes and businesses) on the National Register of Historic Places should be formally adopted and enforced through the village Zoning Law.

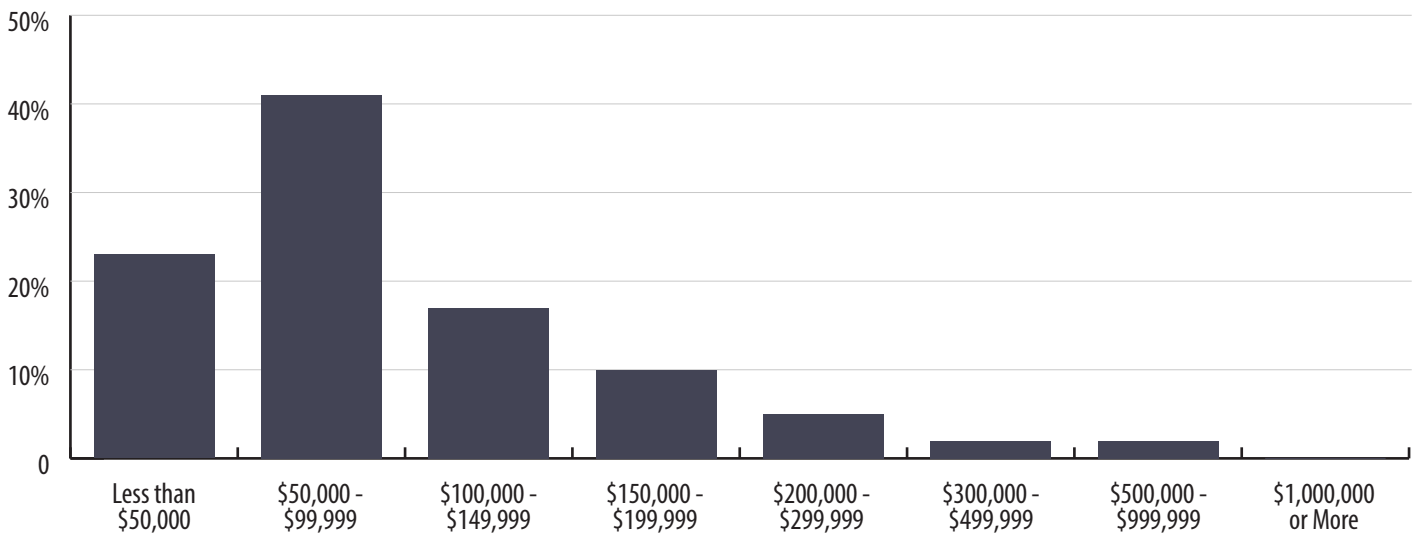


*At The Falls Bed & Breakfast, closed at the time of writing this plan, is one of the buildings that make up the Glorious T Historic District. In repurposing commercial and residential buildings, it is important to maintain their character.  
Source: www.thekings.com.*

**Housing Value**

The median housing value in Montour Falls is \$84,500. This is lower than the median housing value of Schuyler County as a whole, which is \$99,700. Over 40% of owner-occupied units are worth \$50,000- 99,000. Nearly a quarter of owner-occupied units are worth less than \$50,000 (23%). Only 9% of homes are worth more than \$200,000. Increasing property values would be beneficial to both the village and to residents. A number of approaches can be taken to do this.

**Value of Owner-Occupied Units, 2014**



Many cities, towns and villages are beginning to recognize the importance of green space in making themselves better places to live. Proximity to a park has been shown to increase property values. Parks are a desirable amenity for many, capable of helping to attract homebuyers to the village. Investing in green and open space can turn into a net return on investment and then some, as increased property values will lead to increased tax revenue for the village and an increased tax base.

The construction of parks was also supported by survey respondents; 36% felt that open and recreational space would be a good use of vacant lots in the village. This support, coupled with success elsewhere in improving property values and increasing municipal revenue, make this an attractive option for Montour Falls. Recommendations related to parks can be found in the Nature and Open Spaces Chapter.

Encouraging home ownership can also contribute to increased property values. Compared to renters, home owners are generally less transient. Since they will be living in their home long-term they are more likely to invest time and money into their properties, increasing their values.

Sometimes, homeowners, landlords and renters are not able to maintain their homes. When properties go without maintenance, it is the job of the local Code Enforcement Officer to issue a citation to the homeowner. One barrier that some homeowners face in maintaining their properties are finances. The New York State Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) both offer grant programs that offset the costs of home improvements such as weatherization. Connecting homeowners to these resources upon code citation could increase their capacity to respond to the citation and better maintain their homes, which will help maintain or increase property values.



*A pocket park is a small park, typically placed in a dense area to provide green space to the urban environment. Pocket parks are a pleasant refuge for local employees to have lunch, and have the added bonus of increasing commercial and residential property values.*

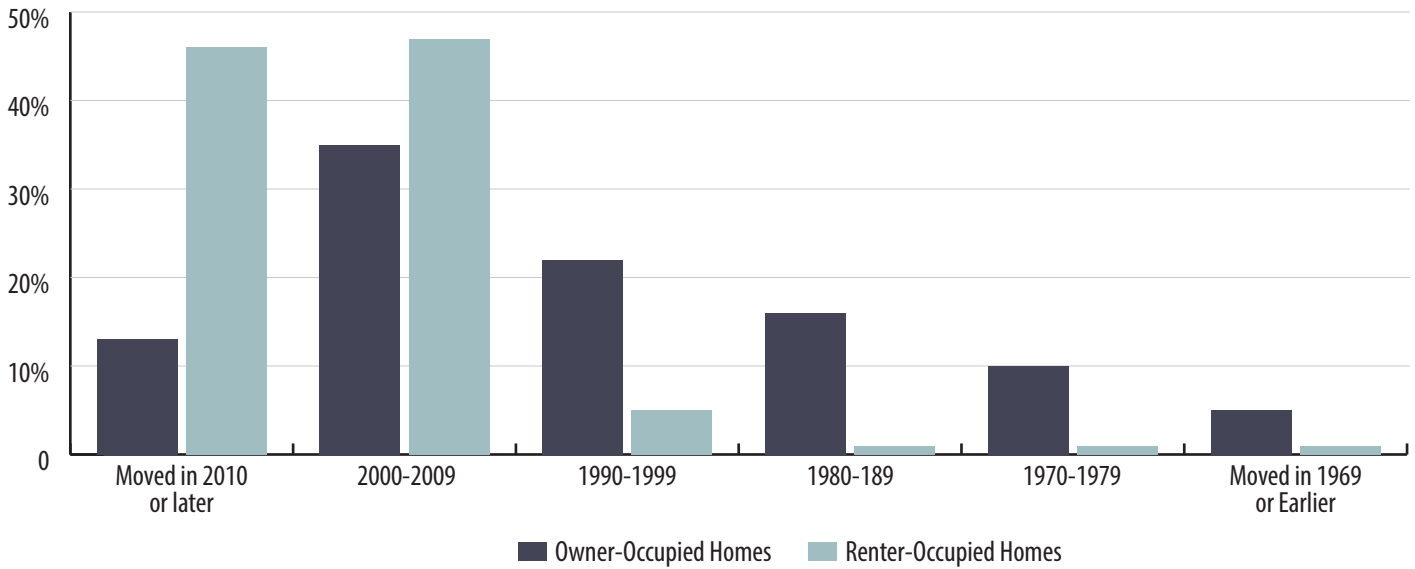
*Photo Source: [www.williamsonparks.org](http://www.williamsonparks.org).*



**Time in Home**

About half of Montour Falls’ homeowner residents moved in after 1999 (53%). By contrast, 93% of renters in Montour Falls moved in after 1999. Half of those renters who moved in after 1999 moved into their current residence in 2010 or later. This difference demonstrates the transience of renters compared to homeowners; renters are more likely to move more frequently, as they are not bound to their homes like homeowners.

**Owner and Renter Time of Move-in, 2014**



Another possible reason for the larger proportion of new renters compared to homeowners is that the quality of housing in the village is not capable of attracting potential homeowners. This was a problem identified across Schuyler County by the HNA, especially among middle and upper managers of large, regional businesses and institutions.

Retaining residents through home ownership is a much more reliable method than trying to retain residents as renters indefinitely. To appeal to potential home-buyers, renovations to existing housing and development of new housing should be completed to meet the quality standards that new homeowners are searching for. This will build on the many other amenities that Montour Falls’ homeowners enjoy, including a wide range of municipal services.

The State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA) offers a variety of mortgage programs to first-time homebuyers, including those buying homes in need of repairs or homes currently under renovation and low-income homebuyers. Programs of this type could incentivize residents to both buy homes, and to repair the existing housing stock.

At the federal level, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers a rural housing direct loan program to low-income individuals to purchase, rehabilitate or build homes in rural areas. Montour Falls qualifies as a rural area under this program. Applicants must meet an income threshold which is at or below the low-income limit for the area. Under this program, they can receive interest rates as low as 1% on loans and a payback period as long as 38 years. This program would make homeownership possible for those whose incomes would otherwise exclude them from purchasing a home.

## ISSUES & CHANGES IN HOUSING

### Housing Quality

One of the largest issues facing Montour Falls in terms of housing is housing quality. Survey respondents did not strongly indicate that village housing was good or fair; only 20% responded favorably regarding housing quality. Most respondents gave village housing quality a rating of neutral (42%).

This perception is not unique to Montour Falls. The HNA asserts that many housing structures county-wide are in need of repairs. A windshield survey conducted for the HNA concluded that, "...43.5% of the housing stock is in need of some level of repair, and 11.7% of the housing stock is in need of massive repairs and these units could even be considered a candidate for complete demolition and rebuilding" (HNA, p.29).

In the village itself, over a third of residents (36%) felt that housing had negatively changed in the last 20 years, while another 19% said it had not changed at all. Thirty-one percent of residents claimed that housing had positively changed in the village over the past 20 years.

The HNA goes on to explain that housing quality is important not just for the health and safety of residents. Housing is the "face" of a community, and significantly shapes the perceptions of outsiders and potential residents. It explains that when it surveyed Schuyler County employees such as doctors, executives, business owners, and para-professionals, many claimed to live outside of the county because they could not find suitable, quality housing (p.23).

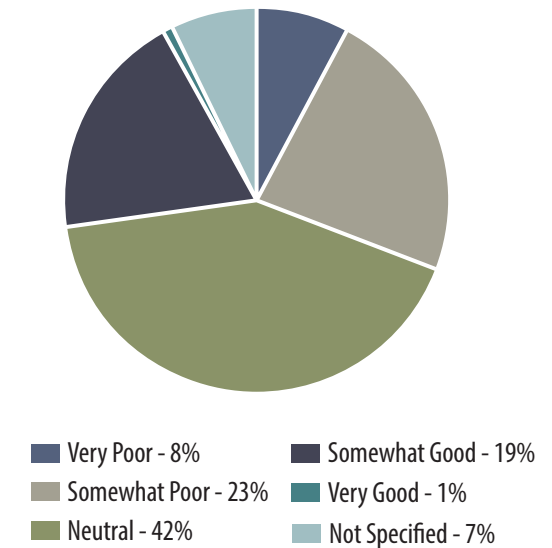
Being that Montour Falls is home to multiple large Schuyler County employers, these points are especially salient. Improving the existing housing stock and new quality housing development must happen hand in hand in order to attract new residents and be able to retain them. The HNA makes recommendations including weatherization of existing units and stronger code enforcement. The village can assist both homeowners and renters in weatherizing their homes by connecting them to EERE's Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) or a number of grant programs through NYSERDA. Further, infill development should be the first priority for new housing in the village, along with a focus on increased mixed-use development in the downtown for renters.

### Affordable Housing

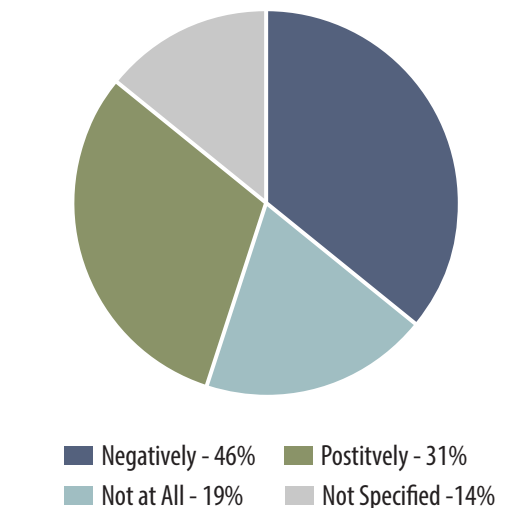
According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing when, "...not more than 30% of a household's gross income is spent on a mortgage payment, utilities, taxes, and insurance" for owner-occupied housing. HUD defines affordable housing for renter-occupied housing as, "...no more than 30% of [household] income [being] spent on rent and utilities" (HNA, p. 4).

In 2007, the HNA identified a gap in affordable housing units for both renters and homeowners among Schuyler County residents whose household income was at or below 50% of median household income. For this demographic, being the most financially vulnerable, it is especially important to have stable, affordable housing. According to 2014 ACS data, affordable housing continues to be an issue in the village of Montour Falls, as well.

Survey Results: Quality of Housing



Survey Results: Change in Housing over Last 20 Years



# HOUSING

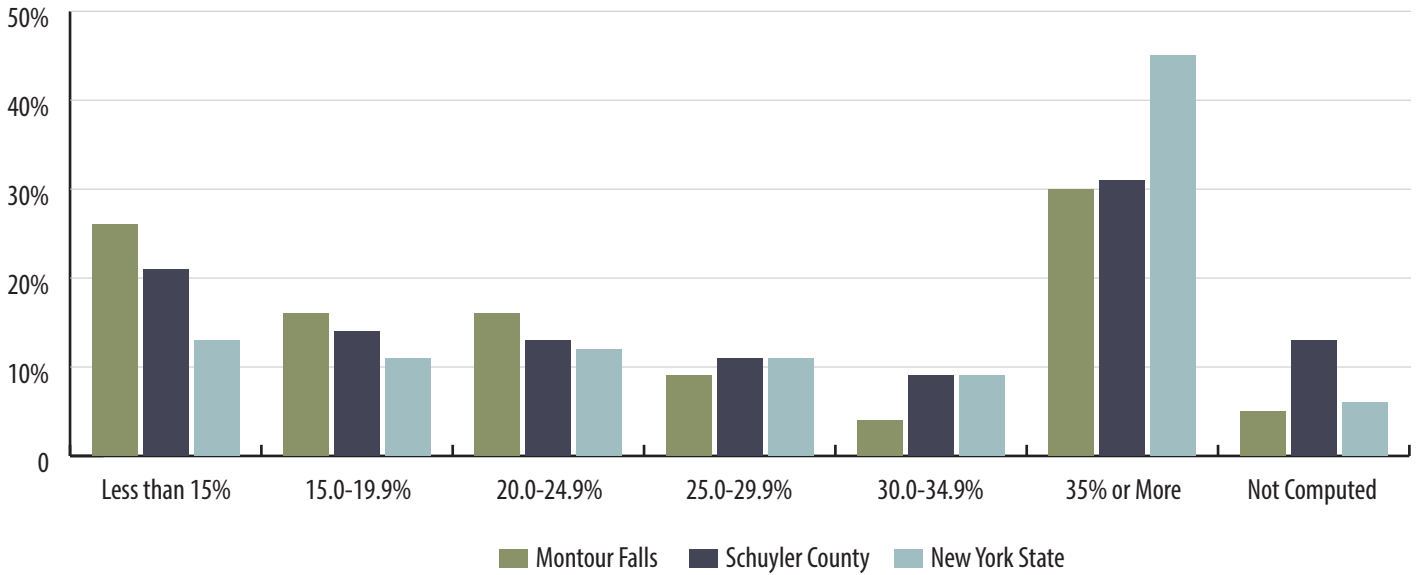
## Rent Cost

Montour Falls has a lower median gross rent and median household income than either Schuyler County or New York State as a whole. However, that alone does not indicate affordability. Given HUD's definition of affordable housing, gross rent as a percentage of household income is a much more accurate measure.

With 34% of Montour Falls renters spending 30% or more of their household income on their rent and utilities, this means that 34% of residents are not able to access affordable housing. This trend is similar across Schuyler County, with the county total of renters spending 30% or more of their household income on rent being 39%.

	Median Gross Rent	Median Household Income
New York State	\$1,117.00	\$58,687
Schuyler County	\$ 620.00	\$49,225
Montour Falls	\$ 557.00	\$34,803

## Owner and Renter Time of Move-in, 2014



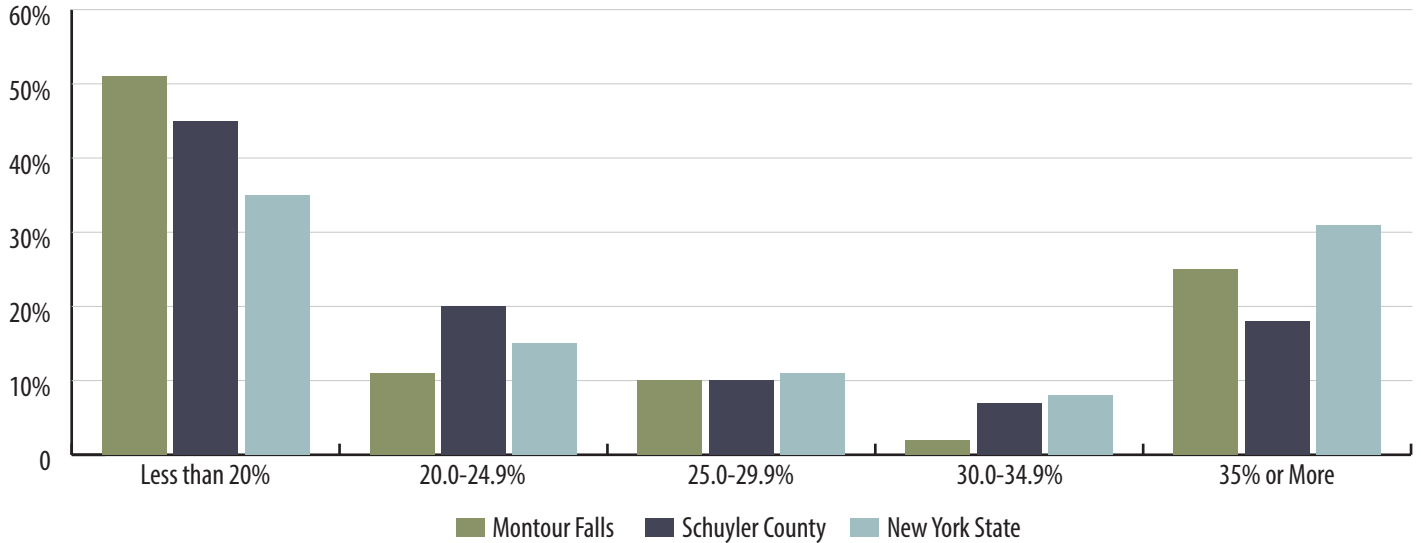
New York State offers funding to municipalities looking to increase affordable housing options. Municipalities and non-profit organizations may apply for funding to build or rehabilitate affordable housing for purchase or rent through the NYS HOME Program (HOME). Rental units built using HOME funds must remain affordable for five to 20 years, depending on the level of funding received. The City of Binghamton recently received HOME funds to redevelop a number of blighted historic properties along an arterial corridor into the City, turning them into quality affordable rental housing.

Expanding affordable housing options in Montour Falls is absolutely crucial for the economic vitality of the community, and to attract new local and regional employees to locate in The village. Working with local nonprofits and developers as partners to secure this financing and build affordable housing in Montour Falls is a sustainable way to act on that.

Home Ownership Costs

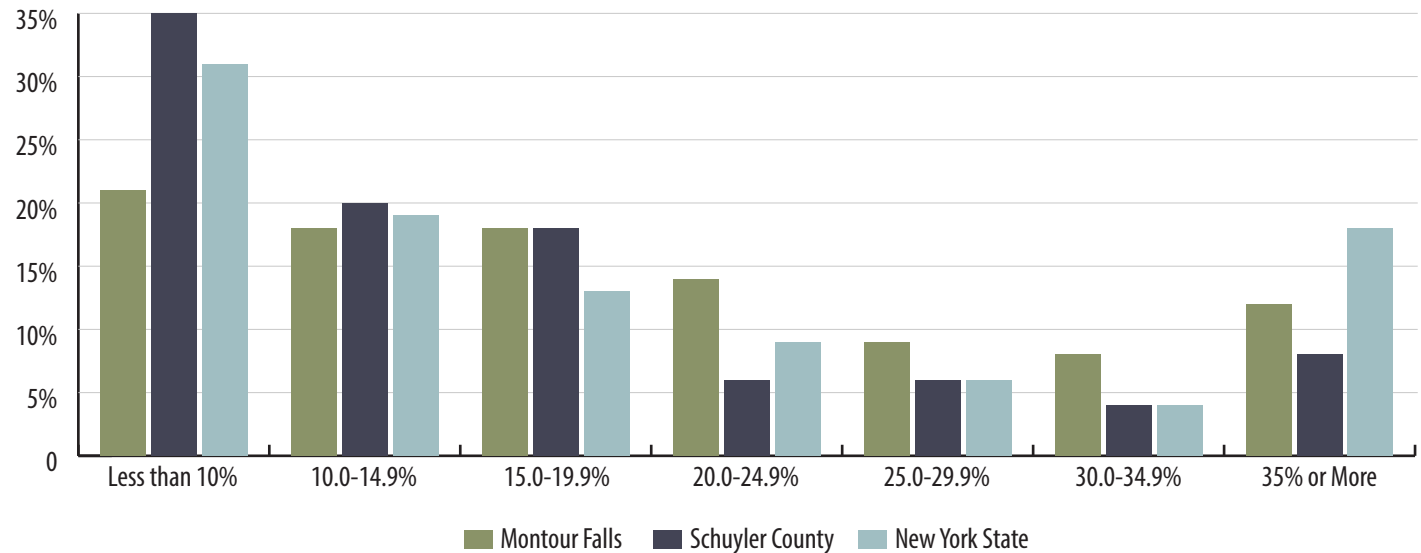
Affordable housing is less of an issue for homeowners than for renters in Montour Falls, but the need still does exist. For those with a mortgage, 51% report having monthly costs that are less than 20% of their household income. However, there are still 27% that report having monthly costs that are 30% or more of their household incomes. Therefore, 27% of homeowners do not have a housing situation that is considered affordable.

Monthly Owner Cost of Units with a Mortgage as a Percentage of Household Income, 2014



Homeowners without a mortgage have greater access to affordable housing than owners with a mortgage or renters in Montour Falls. For owners without a mortgage, monthly costs are distributed more equally across categories. However, 20% of residents spend 30% or more of their household income on monthly housing costs, so there is still an unaddressed need for affordable housing among this cohort.

Monthly Owner Costs of Units without a Mortgage as a Percentage of Household Income, 2014



One of the largest monthly costs for homeowners, besides their mortgage, is energy. Since Montour Falls is located in New York State, this cost will always be higher than some other regions of the country, due to the cold winters this area endures. However, the type of heating fuel used and energy efficiency measures taken in a home can significantly reduce these costs. Utility gas (64%) and electricity (26%) are the two most widely-used sources of heating fuel in residential structures in Montour Falls. Renewable sources of energy such as solar and geothermal have higher up-front costs for installation, but are more efficient and reduce energy costs over time. For homeowners who plan on living in their homes long-term, renewable systems are an excellent means of reducing energy costs and one's carbon footprint.

To offset the up-front installation costs associated with solar energy, New York State offers incentives through the NY-Sun Program for homeowners, small businesses, local governments and communities. This means that individuals or businesses can apply directly, or that communities can invest in solar to share among many stakeholders. Solar Schuyler is a program of Schuyler County Cornell Cooperative Extension which also provides financial resources for solar installation. Either option could work in Montour Falls; more public input should be gathered before decisions are made regarding solar energy at the community level.

### Property Maintenance

Poor quality of rental properties was frequently cited in the survey as an issue in the village of Montour Falls. Respondents speculated that the poor quality of some rental units is the result of out-of-town landlords not properly or routinely maintaining the structures. While the village cannot prevent landlords from renting homes in Montour Falls and living elsewhere, it can take measures to enforce building code and zoning ordinances more stringently for all properties. Increased code enforcement presence in order to cite violations or increased fines for violations would improve the safety and appearance of the village.

This step would also likely be supported by village residents; 34% of total survey respondents claimed that they would like to see an increase in code enforcement, and 14 of the total survey respondents claimed they would be willing to pay more in taxes for that increase.

The village currently has a rental registration law in place to help maintain the appearance and safety of rental units. This law requires rental properties to be registered with the village and inspected by a code enforcement officer periodically.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *1. Adopt a set of historic design guidelines in the Village Zoning Law that apply exclusively to buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.*

The Glorious T Historic District is made up of 24 historic structures and one waterfall; it is the crown jewel of the village. The village has demonstrated enormous aptitude since most of the buildings were constructed in the mid-1800s in maintaining them well, even when the uses of the buildings have changed.

In order to continue to preserve the historic and cultural significance of these buildings and character of the village, Montour Falls should adopt a zoning ordinance that requires a set of historic design guidelines for the buildings on the National Register of Historic Places only. The village should consult with the Schuyler County Historical Society and home and business owners currently residing in structures on the National Register of Historic Places to discuss what design guidelines are relevant and feasible

### *2. Avoid sprawl and maintain small-town environment by encouraging Smart Growth development practices.*

Smart Growth is a pattern of development that concentrates housing, businesses, services, and amenities such as transportation stops and parks in close proximity, instead of sprawling outward. In Montour Falls, Smart Growth would take the form of developing in areas that are already densely built; particularly on vacant lots downtown or in residential neighborhoods, or above businesses in the downtown area. One way the village can encourage this type of infill development by adding density bonuses to the local zoning law. Maintaining a similar level of density throughout the village will preserve the walkability and Montour Falls quaint, small-town feel.

Smart Growth America announced in March 2016 that it is in the process of forming a Rural Leaders Network. This network would bring together rural municipal leaders to network and learn from one another how to make their communities vibrant and livable. Participation in this network would be beneficial for Montour Falls as it continues to grow; the village should pursue this designation.

### *3. Provide resources to residents looking to weatherize their homes, or for potential homebuyers who want to purchase a home to repair.*

The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), as previously mentioned, helps income-eligible residents make repairs to their homes that increase weather resiliency and energy efficiency. WAP-eligible households must have an income that is 60% or below the state median income. Repairs under the WAP program include, but are not limited to sealing cracks and doors; insulating attics and walls; and outdoor window and door replacement. Both homeowners and renters can apply for funding.

There is a local WAP provider which dispenses WAP funds. Through an annual state planning process, WAP providers are selected. Providers can be municipal governments, county governments, nonprofits, etc. The local WAP provider for Schuyler County is currently is the Economic Opportunity Program, Inc. of Chemung and Schuyler Counties (Economic Opportunity Program). Montour Falls might consider one of two options in directing its residents to WAP services. First, Montour Falls could develop a partnership with the Economic Opportunity Program to increase visibility of WAP and other services offered by the agency in Montour Falls. Alternatively, Montour Falls' village government could apply to be a local WAP provider.



*Montour Falls' Village Hall is one of a handful of Greek Revival buildings in the downtown area. These structures are not only visually striking; built in the mid-1800s, they are also a reminder of the village's early history. Photo Source: STC Planning Board.*



*According to NYSERDA, sealing and insulating cracks in outside windows, walls, ceiling and floors can save homeowners up to 20% in heating and cooling costs. Photo Source: [www.communityservices.nd.gov](http://www.communityservices.nd.gov).*

***4. In new rental housing developments or rehabilitations, set a mandate for developers that some units remain affordable.***

At only a 2% vacancy rate, Montour Falls does not have an excess of rental housing to attract new residents or for them to choose from. Affordable rental housing will become more important over the course of the next five to fifteen years as economic development initiatives related to this plan, Project Seneca initiatives and URI initiatives come to fruition, bringing jobs and professionals to the area. Affordable rental housing will be especially important for people relocating to Montour Falls for work, especially service workers.

Some housing grants or financing programs carry their own stipulations about affordable housing units. For example, the HOME Program requires that affordable housing units constructed under it remain affordable for five to 20 years. As for developments not funded by a grant with such stipulations, the village has options to develop its own tools to increase affordable housing. The village could adopt an inclusionary zoning ordinance for any structures with a certain number of units in it, requiring that a set percentage of units are rented as affordable. The village could also provide incentive bonuses to developers building multi-family complexes for setting aside a certain number of units as affordable. The village should explore the financial feasibility of each option before adopting either.

There is evidence that integrating affordable housing into a market rate community is more socially and financially beneficial to low-moderate income (LMI) residents than being completely separated from middle-upper income (UI) neighborhoods. Mount Laurel, New Jersey is one very famous example where LMI residents living in affordable housing located in an affluent area all raised their standard of living to a greater degree than their counterparts living in affordable housing in a LMI neighborhood. Affordable housing can serve as a bridge from new resident to permanent resident.

***5. Reduce housing costs by encouraging solar energy amongst village residents.***

Renewable energy is both more cost-effective in the long run for homeowners, and more sustainable for the environment. Many cities, towns and villages across the country are becoming more solar-friendly, even outfitting government buildings with solar panels. Homeowners and landlords in Montour Falls should be made aware of the benefits of solar power for their source of energy.

Solar Schuyler is a local organization that helps Schuyler County residents learn more about and buy solar panels for their homes or businesses. Through Solar Schuyler, applicants can receive up to 20% off in addition to the state and federal rebates they would receive normally. Inviting Solar Schuyler to hold information sessions in the village, at venues such as Village Hall, the Fire Department or the Human Services Complex will let homeowners know what the benefits of solar are, and how they can tap into them.



*There are currently residential and commercial buildings that use solar energy in Montour Falls, including Lakeside Animal Hospital. This indicates that there is interest in solar energy amongst residents. However, future solar and other alternative energy development should be guided by zoning laws*

*Photo Source: STC Planning.*

Montour Falls does not currently have any zoning laws regarding solar panels. Although the presence of solar panels on homes in the village indicates that there is some current interest, the village should develop zoning ordinances regarding solar power to guide the expansion of solar energy.

***6. Increase opportunities for aging in place by providing seniors with safe and affordable housing.***

Seniors living independently have particular considerations that need to be addressed in order for them to continue to age in place. As we get older, our ability to get around unassisted and drive may be less sharp. Those in retirement also live on a fixed income, and might have financial constraints as a result.

For seniors aging in place in their own homes, the costs of living independently and maintaining one's home may be very costly on a fixed income. Sometimes, leaving repairs unattended can be dangerous for elderly residents. New York

State offers a program called Residential Emergency Services to Offer Home Repairs to the Elderly (RESTORE). Municipalities or non-profits can apply to receive this funding. They are then able to use those funds to make emergency repairs or fix hazardous conditions in the homes of elderly residents. Additionally, the WAP program, previously discussed, can help seniors make repairs on their home to be more energy efficient.

In new rental units, some units should be designed with seniors in mind. This includes design elements such as wheelchair ramps, handicap accessible first floor units, and proximity to businesses, services and the bus line. Some of these such units should be set aside as affordable, as well.

***7. Hire a full-time Code Enforcement Officer for the Village of Montour Falls.***

In the survey, 34% of respondents indicated that they were interested in increased code enforcement services in the village. Currently, Montour Falls employs two part time Code Enforcement Officers. Both split their time between Montour Falls and Watkins Glen. Having one full-time Code Enforcement Officer would allow one individual to spend more time in the village and be able to maintain more focus on the village. Increased attention and observation of properties would result in stricter application of the law, because properties would be less likely to be overlooked then with two officers who don't necessarily know what the other has observed.

***8. Develop a Renter's Bill of Rights and educational series for renters in the village.***

Survey respondents and steering committee members alike expressed concern that renters are taken advantage of by their landlords, forced to live in blighted or inadequate housing stock. The steering committee recommended that the village develop and distribute a Renter's Bill of Rights to all renters in the village. It could be coupled with an educational series for renters in the village, teaching them strategies to approach their landlord about maintenance issues and related issues. By giving tenants the tools to advocate for better housing conditions, landlords would have greater motivation to maintain their properties thereby alleviating some of the property maintenance issues in Montour Falls.

A New York State Tenants' Rights Guide, authored by the Attorney General for New York State, Eric T. Schneiderman exists as a resource for renters in New York State. It provides an overview of the laws that impact renters as tenants, in addition to those that their landlords must follow. The village might consider adopting this guide, or drawing from this document to create their own that is more tailored to Montour Falls.

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# 6



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY



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*Given the economic reality and development potential in the village, the comprehensive plan sets a vision for your community and the recommended actions in this chapter will provide some of the steps for achieving that vision.*

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The Village of Montour Falls is a small village with a population of 1,932 (ACS approximation), approximately 1/10th of the population in Schuyler County. There are nearly 400 children (under 18) living in the village, 482 people aged 65+ and more than 250 of the seniors are people aged 75+. The village has a high dependency ratio of 79% (young people & seniors / working age people); many other small upstate NY communities have similar dependency ratios

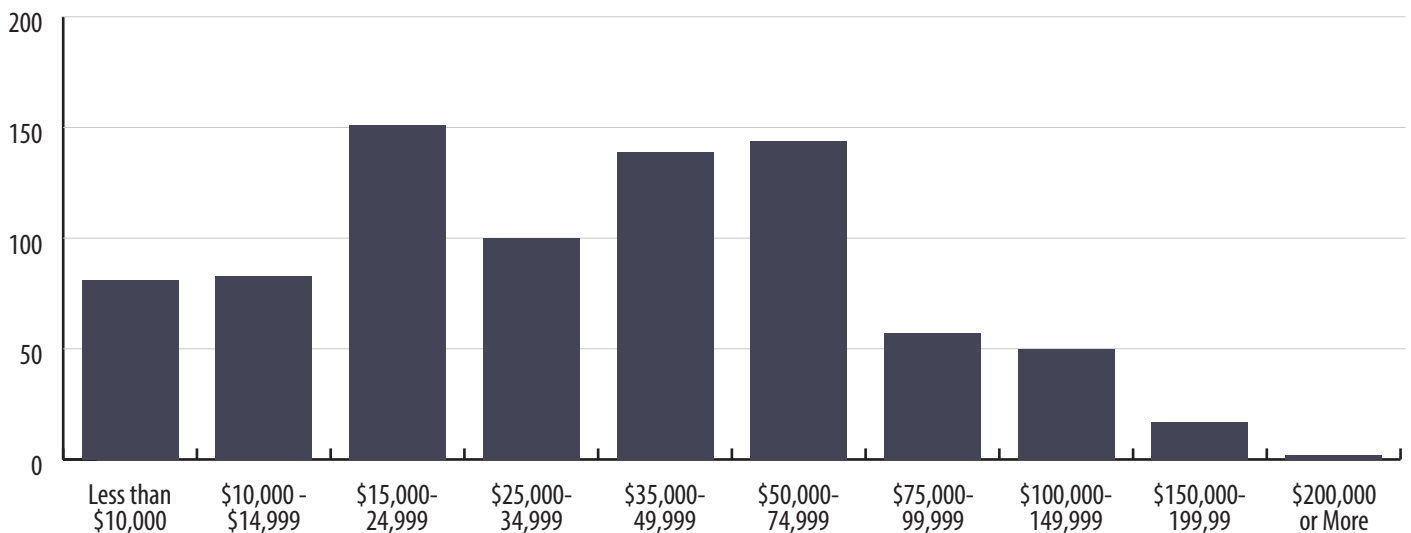
### Income

Household income in the village is not high. The median household income is only \$34,803 per year. According to the 2014 ACS, only 69 households have income over \$100,000; communities with a larger number of higher income families are able to attract a greater variety of businesses. Figure 1 shows the number of households at several income levels, there does not seem to be much discretionary income in the village. Retail businesses use discretionary/disposable income as an indicator of the economic health of the community. Higher levels of discretionary income will be needed to attract certain types of high-end retailers.

As we know from the demographic chapter, Montour Falls struggles with income and poverty. Poverty is a drain on economic growth. Getting poverty under control will make Montour Falls more attractive to potential developers and business owners. Many businesses are based on sales to people with disposable income (café, bakery, brewery, vintage boutique, home improvement, craft shop, and farm-to-table businesses).

Economic development proposals must take into account the high poverty rate of the village. Development that reduces day-to-day expenses for lower-income residents, reduces transportation costs, increases employment opportunities, provides day-care options for children or seniors, or provides training/volunteer opportunities will be an economic benefit to the village in the long-run. Recommendations of this plan are to ‘jump-start’ your village economy while making long-term preparations for larger economic development projects in the future.

### Number of Households by Income Level



## Traffic

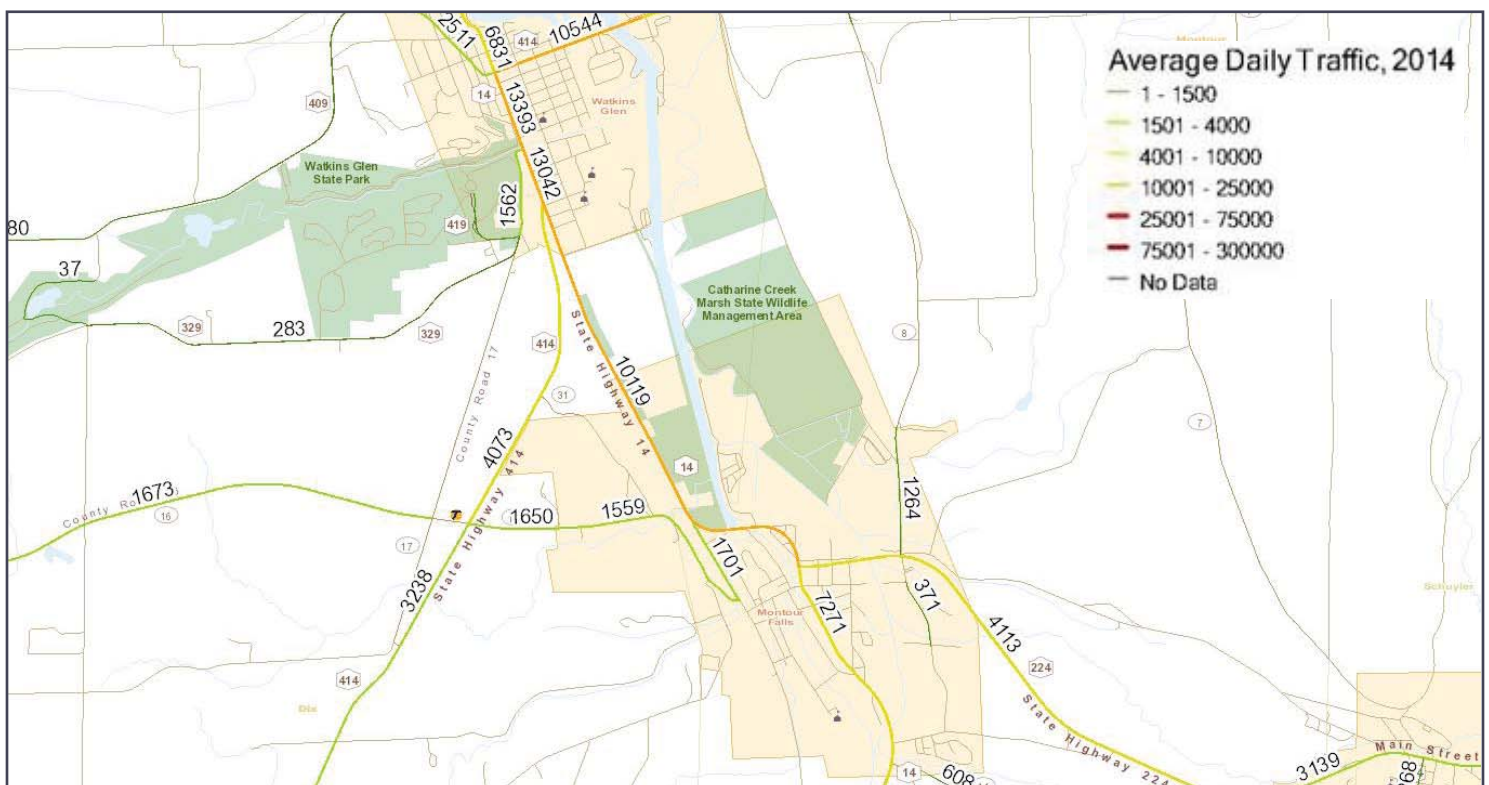
Traffic flow through Montour Falls is about half of the traffic flowing through Watkins Glen. The highest traffic flows in the village are on NYS Route 14, with more than 10,000 average vehicles per day. This high traffic area is a natural choice for car-focused development within the village. Unfortunately, the area surrounding the northern (high traffic) area of Rt. 14 is blocked by steep slopes to the west and marshes to the east. Traffic is good near the intersection of Rt. 14 and N. Genesee Street, that area is a good location for focused development. Existing curb-cuts in the center of the village should be preserved for future development whenever possible.

Measures to balance streetscape improvements, walkability, and NYS Rt. 14 traffic flow are necessary to improve economic potential in the heart of the village. Zoning changes along Rt. 14 can be used to focus on car-dependent development and while improving the visual cohesiveness of buildings for travelers through the village. Shared driveways and turning lanes could be used (with NYS agreement) to focus traffic on strategic intersections.

The safety and availability of sidewalks throughout should be evaluated and improved. Common walking paths and beautiful routes through the village should be the first areas targeted for sidewalk and streetscape improvements. As part of the comprehensive plan process, the village can designate areas of the community that require sidewalks and then create a local sidewalk law.

Montour Falls has a smaller population than the Village of Watkins Glen; so the number of businesses will be proportionally smaller. Some businesses (chains and start-up small businesses) won't consider a potential site for development unless daily traffic surpasses a certain threshold. Making small improvements to the downtown business environment will begin the cycle of increasing daily visitor numbers in the village and attracting new businesses to the area. Transportation related improvements are:

1. Increasing access to the village for tour bus and the public bus system.
2. Ensuring that traffic signals and controls work well even during times of 'peak' traffic volume like the summer season, high traffic events.
3. Regulating parking, so there are always parking spaces open in the downtown.
4. Addressing walkability and bike-friendliness of existing sidewalks, paths, trails, and curb-cuts.
5. Improve bicycle access and add bike racks.



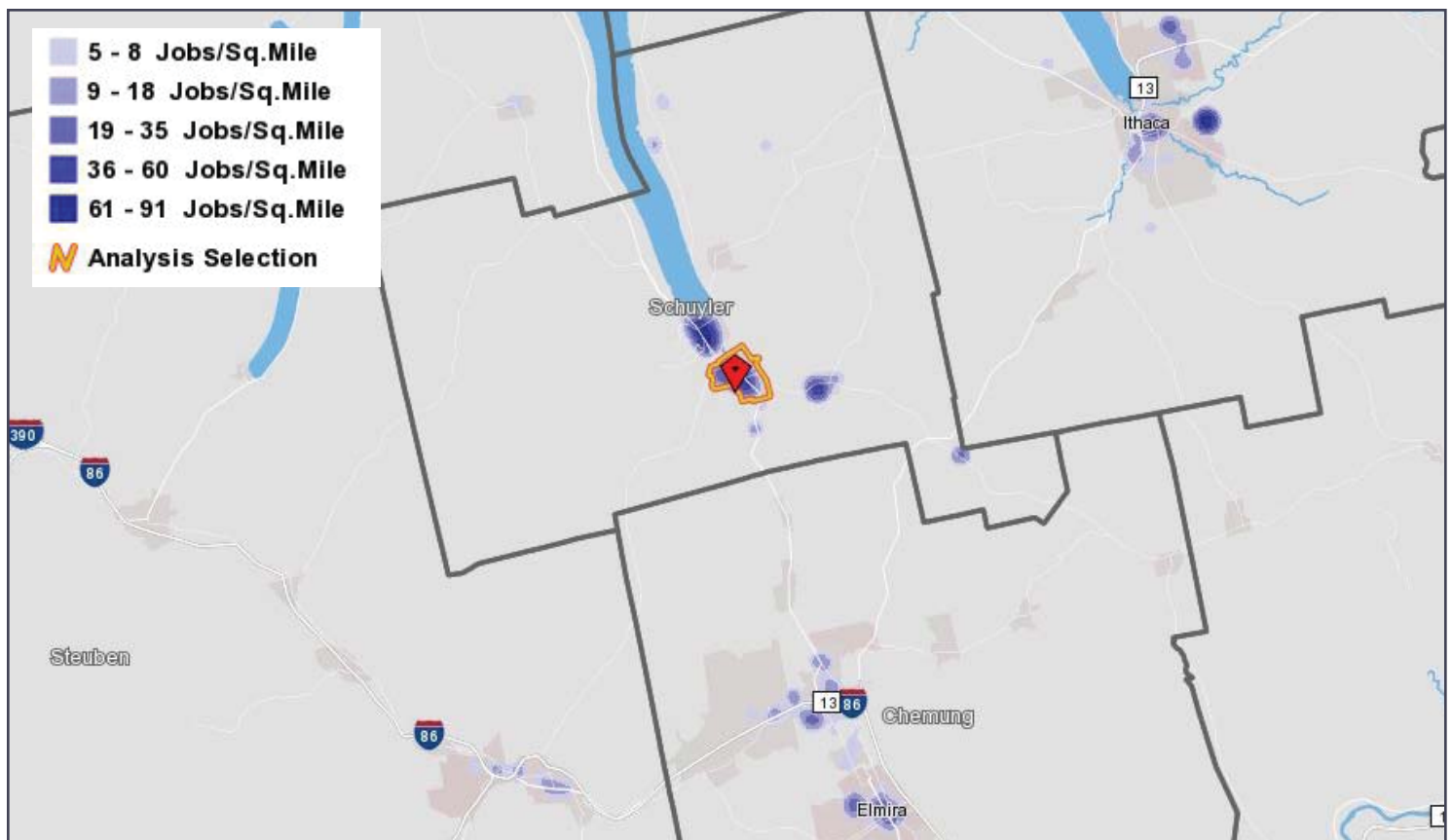
### Childcare

According to the ACS data, 83 families have kids under 6 and 58 families need childcare for children under 6 years old, because both parents are in the workforce; nearly 70% of families with kids under 6 need childcare. Approximately 100 additional families have both parents in the workforce and have children under 18, so there may be some additional before/after school-care needed by these families; so working-age adults can remain in the workforce.

### Workforce

Communities with higher numbers of workers are usually more attractive to developers, typically, working-age adults have higher amounts of discretionary income. Unfortunately, the village can't change the community demographics, the comprehensive plan process can only identify ideal land uses and propose types of development that may re-vitalize the community. According to 2014 ACS data, there are only 679 people in the village are employed of the 1,932 residents (35.1%). There are 769 people in the 'labor force' (people who work or who are looking for jobs). The labor force has an approximately equal number of women and men.

According to the ACS data, 84% of commuters travel by car, which is typical for a community of this size. The average commute time for village residents is 18 minutes which is good for a small village in a rural county.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Industry

Education, Healthcare, and social assistance is the industry with the highest employment, 1/3 (35%) of village workers are employed in this field. The well-used Schuyler County Human Services Complex is located on Rt. 14. Employment in human services is usually decent-paying and very stable. State and local government (like the New York State Fire Academy, the Schuyler County Human Services Office, and the village) are notable employers in the area. Manufacturing and retail each employ about 10% of village residents. Around 9.7% of residents are employed in Arts, tourism, and food service; tourism is significant economic driver in Montour Falls and it is an industry with increasing growth potential. Good land use and economic development will increase tourism in the village. *Expansion potential is great, among the smaller industries surrounding the village.*

Civilian employed population 16 years and over	679
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining	15
Construction	39
Manufacturing	65
Wholesale Trade	37
Retail Trade	66
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	43
Information	0
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	21
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services	37
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	239
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	65
Other services, except public administration	20
Public Administration	32

## SURVEY ANALYSIS

### Vacant Lots



The survey responses were informative regarding the future uses of vacant lots. The newly formed Farmers Market was the number 1 request of the public, which shows a good correlation between the survey responses and what

is economically possible in the village. Success of the existing farmer's market could be expanded to attract additional pop-up markets for antiques, equipment, or other sales. New commercial and residential development would be the best way to increase the village tax base; new development should be permitted wherever possible. Community garden, food truck, and open recreational space are excellent ways to use existing vacant parcels (with the agreement of the current owner).

Possible Business	# of times requested
Pop-up Markets, such as Farmers' Markets	59
New Commercial Development	54
Open Green or Recreational Space	40
Community Garden Space	31
New Residential Development	24
Public Parking	21
Space for Food Trucks	12



## Business Preferences

Survey responses were informative; the business preferences expressed by the residents are well aligned with smart-growth/ walkability recommendations for a small village like Montour Falls. A new supermarket, farmers market, and convenience store would decrease food and transportation costs for residents of the village, and offer more exciting opportunities for travelers who drive through the village on a regular basis. Most families are able to make ends meet, but that doesn't leave much money in the 'family budget' for craft beer or fancy cappuccino.

A bakery, deli, restaurant, "concert hall", and "night life" would increase street traffic in the village. More foot-traffic increases profitability for existing businesses and increases the value of nearby shops and apartments.

Survey respondents indicated there is a need for an additional daycare in the village. Another daycare center in the village is supported by the demographic data.

Recent trends indicate there is an opportunity for an outdoor recreation shop. The nearby Catharine Valley Trail, Marina, and Marsh Park are all features which could support a kayak and bike rental company. Physical facilities, like lockers and bathrooms are necessary to create a lively public space. Trail visitors need access to bathroom facilities. If visitors are able to use a clean and safe public bathroom, they are more likely to extend their visit, and continue walking among the shops and trails.

Possible Business	# of times requested
Supermarket	70
Farmers Market	54
Restaurants	50
Deli	33
Concert hall/ cultural center	21
Night life	20
Antique stores	17
Art studios	16
Convenience store	13
Child care	12
Bakery	8
Bank	6
Drug store	5
Laundromat	4

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. *Economic Gardening:*** *Focusing on the development and expansion of existing businesses in your area. Approach the business community to understand how local zoning regulations are affecting their business decisions and profitability.*

Partner with development organizations to target existing businesses for staff training opportunities, NYSERDA energy audits, and greater collaboration with REDC, the Small Business Development Center, and CSS Workforce NY. The government can't take action to benefit a single business owner or resident, but the government can take action to benefit all residents and businesses; determine which actions would 'do the most good' and begin village-wide implementation.

**2. *Welliver Business Park:*** *Work with Economic development organizations to facilitate development of the Welliver Business Park in the Center of the village, in accordance with the zoning law and smart-growth principals. Focus local effort on continuing project Seneca, so the business park will be up and running with employees "soon".*

A business park in the center of the village (like this) is an un-rivaled opportunity for growth. A development like this could be a significant catalyst for development, employment, and investment throughout the village. Implementing a zoning law that enshrines smart-growth and walkability will give the residents and planning board more influence, while ensuring the development will be suitable for the long term economic future of the village. Induced employment (waitresses, mechanics, cleaners, landscapers) as a result of the Welliver Business Park could 'jump-start' the local restaurant scene and service industry.

***3. Volunteer Development: Tap into the senior volunteer network (RSVP) to promote care for the elderly and others in need of assistance***

There are also volunteer opportunities for workforce development and skill training for the unemployed and under-employed. The village has a high number of seniors, so it's best to treat them as a resource. Plan for ways that the seniors can assist in the community.

***4. Walkability: Address walkability and bike-friendliness of existing sidewalks, paths, trails, and curb-cuts***

Montour Falls is a relatively dense community with many shops and natural amenities; keep 'facilitate the easy movement of people' in the fore-front of all streetscape, path, and traffic decisions. Families are moving to this community specifically because of the walkability and quality of life in the village. Constriction of sidewalks and crosswalks along Rt. 14 should coincide with NYS DOT repaving projects for Rt. 14.

***5. Coordinate with NYSDOT and Schuyler DOT: Work with transportation agencies so that traffic signals and controls work well even during times of 'peak' traffic volume like the summer season, high traffic events, and during times of bad weather.***

If travelers are able to drive safely and comfortably through Montour Falls, they should be considering traveling into the village more frequently. Existing curb-cuts on Rt. 14 should be preserved for possible business development in the village.

***6. Historic character, architectural elements, and Design guidelines: Preserve and protect architectural elements and historical character of the village by keeping historically knowledgeable members on the Planning Board.***

Incorporate historic district recommended design guidelines into existing village design guidelines. Promote area wide visual improvements to the downtown. Begin a culture of continuous improvement and re-investment in the community. Improve existing design guidelines to incorporate historic district design guidelines. Adopt guidelines as required in the historic district, adopt additional guidelines as required in the business district.

***7. Small Business: Work with SCOPED to consider a Montour Falls small business incubator. Work to ensure that the local development process is consistent and easy to understand for potential developers/business owners.***

Only impose reasonable and relatively easy to navigate regulations on business in the village. Coordinate with the "Main Street Business Association" sponsored by Harvest Bowl and the MFIA (Montour Falls Improvement Association).

***8. Parking: Regulate parking, so there are always parking spaces open in the downtown.***

Montour Falls is 6-7 minutes from the nearest communities (Odessa and Watkins Glen), 30 minutes from Corning or Elmira, and nearly 40 minutes from Ithaca. Someone who drove 30 minutes to visit Montour Falls won't just turn around if they have to search for parking. An ideal arrangement would be to have at least 2 parking spots available on Main Street at all times. Fees for Main street parking could be used to encourage parking in the nearby parking lots. If the village were to develop one of the nearby lots into a well maintained, paved, nice & safe parking lot would improve the perception of parking in the village center.

***9. Re-zone the Business areas along Rt. 14: Route 14 in Montour Falls is a predominantly commercial roadway; parcels along Rt. 14 should be re-zoned for commercial uses, to improve the traffic flow, increase the number of shared intersections, to adjust the front setbacks, and to reduce the regulatory burden on local businesses.***

It is in the best interest of the village, the current homeowners, and business owners to re-zone the parcels along Rt. 14. The area has become a de-facto commercial district. Rezoning the land it will make it easier for business to utilize the existing parcels and comply with the business district design guidelines.

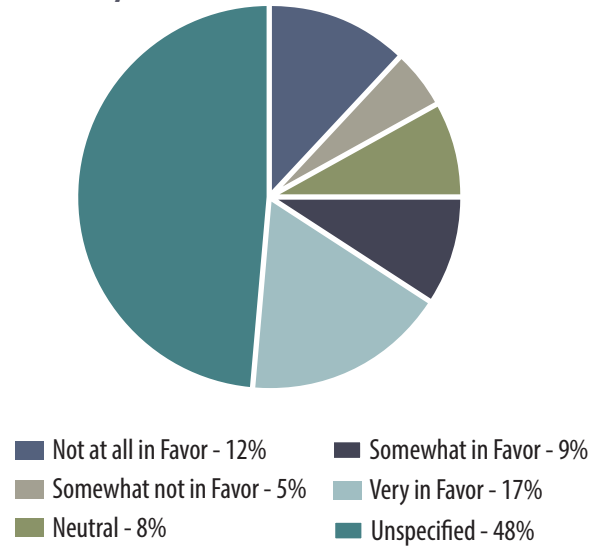
**10. *Transportation in the Village: Increase transportation options in the village, to reduce travel cost for residents and to increase the employment options available to people commuting out of the village. Add a bus parking spot in the downtown***

Identify the location for a downtown bus stop. Paint stripes for the bus- parking spot, publicize the spot to the bus operators, and connect Montour falls to public transit bus routes.

Currently, tour busses ‘drive-by’ the falls; without parking or allowing the tourists to get out and visit Main Street. This bus traffic isn’t driving retail sales or tourism in the village. Designating a central bus-parking spot for use by public transit and tour busses will increase activity downtown. It is important to designate bus parking to allow free flow of traffic on N. Genesee Street, so the bus doesn’t block the view for other visitors, and to encourage visitors to walk down Main Street to see the falls. If tour buses choose not to stop in the bus parking spot, the negative effects on Montour Falls should be small; but the benefits would be significant if tour busses use the designated area. Appointed and elected officials from the village should explain the benefits of a Main Street bus stop to the residents and business owners in the area.

The Village of Montour Falls should coordinate with Schuyler County Transit to extend the hours of operation earlier in the morning and later in the evening. Village and county representatives should work with all the bus systems to coordinate rates, transfers, timing, and payments – “You shouldn’t need a PhD to use the public bus system”.

**Favorability to Increase Infrastructure: Public Transit**



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# NATURAL RESOURCES

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY



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There are many things that make Montour Falls special, but its' greatest assets are the Natural Resources. Montour Falls is fortunate to have an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities and scenic views; including trail systems, trout streams, waterfalls and significant biodiverse areas.

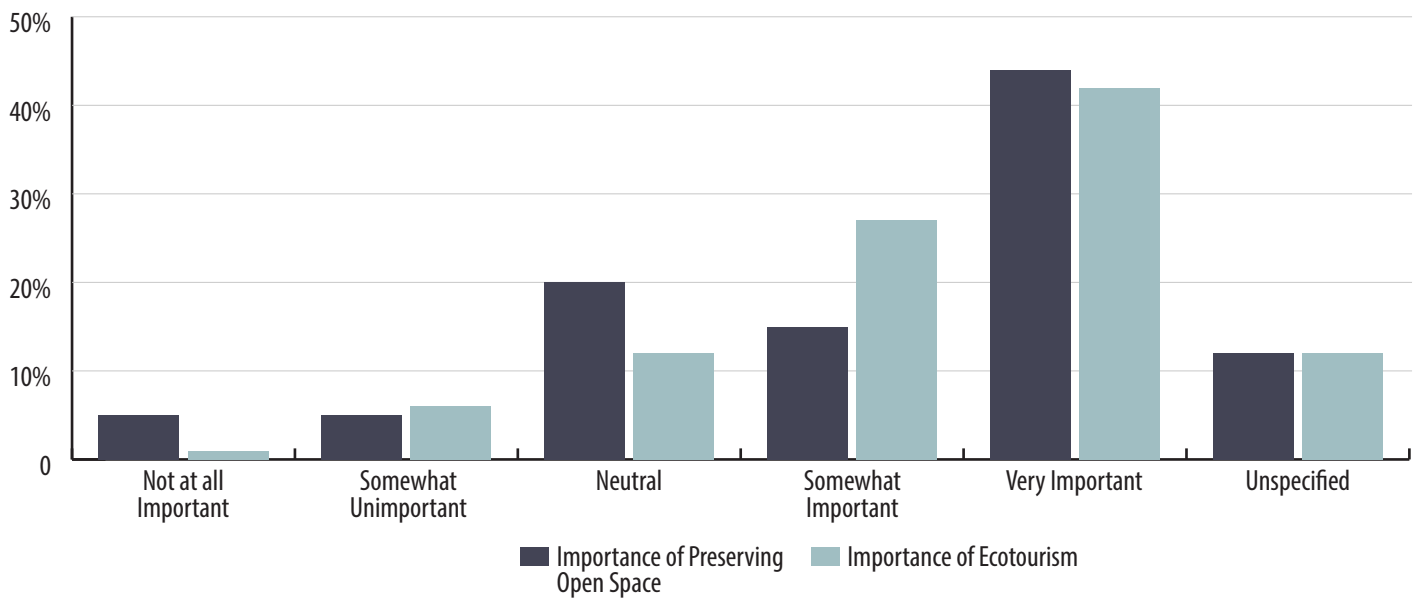
When asked on the resident survey about Montour Fall's greatest assets respondents had the following top 5 responses:

**Survey Results: Top 5 Assets**

Asset	Count
Falls	49
Small Town Atmosphere	30
Natural Beauty	21
Proximity to Businesses, Activities, Recreation and Natural Environment	20
People	17

Three of the top 5 assets mentioned are directly related to the natural environment. It is clear that residents value and enjoy the many different natural resources. A challenge that Montour Falls' residents will have to contend with is how to balance development pressures with natural resource preservation. The resident survey indicates there is a desire to protect these beautiful places; with 59% of respondents indicating that it is "very important" or "somewhat important" to preserve open space. The survey also showed a favorable attitude towards ecotourism.

**Survey Results: Importance of Preserving Open Space vs. Ecotourism**

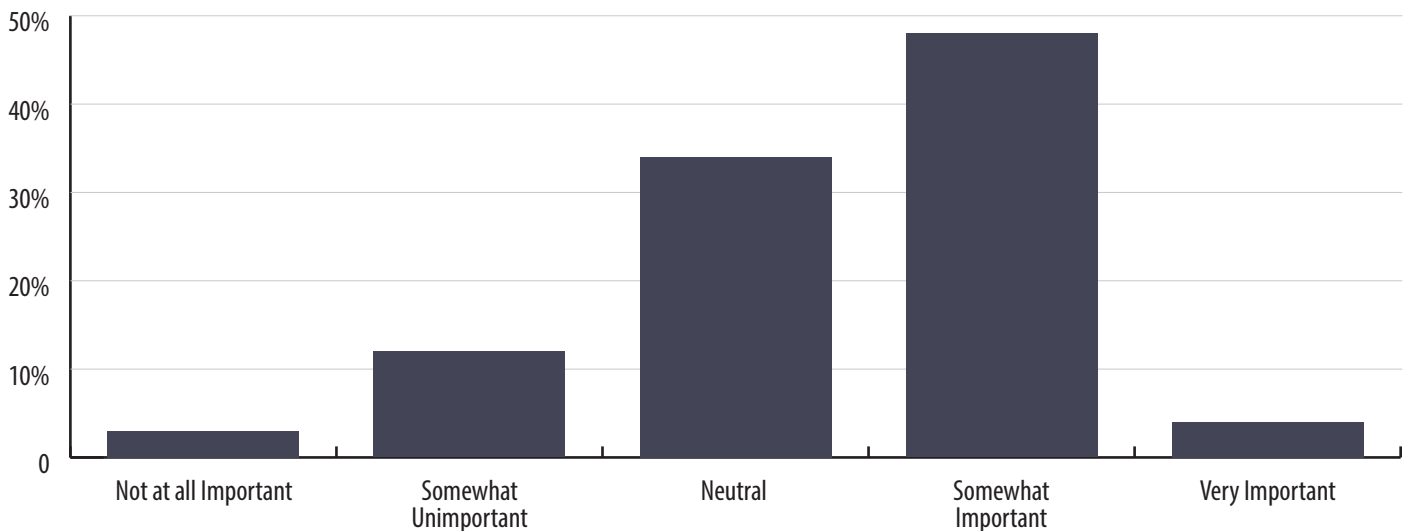


**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VS. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Environmental Protection and Economic Development are often at odds. The resident survey shows a majority of respondents only consider the importance of preserving the natural environment while expanding the built environment as “somewhat important”. This being said, Montour Falls is uniquely positioned to balance these two competing interest in a way that allows for the best of both worlds.

While Montour Falls will undoubtedly experience development pressures, the development pressures are not expected to be overnight. With the support of Project Seneca, Montour Falls is expected to feel moderate growth in the near future. This allows Montour Falls to plan accordingly and gives the village time to recruit the type of development they wish to see.

**Survey Results: Importance of Preserving Natural Environment while Expanding Built Environment**



A simple google search of Montour Falls can quickly show that tourism is Montour Falls’ industry. There are blogs of individuals hiking Queen Catharine Marsh, there is hundreds of mentions of the incredible waterfalls that Montour Falls is home to, and every trout fisherman knows of the fantastic finishing opportunities that Montour Falls can offer.

As Montour Falls continues to design, plan and grow they should take advantage of what many consider to be their greatest assets, the natural environment. Protecting these natural resources through land use regulations will be vital. Coupling these protections with recruitment of outdoor recreation jobs/retail/ industry will fill a retail gap that currently exist in the region while allowing Montour Falls to have the best of both worlds, economic growth and environmental protection. If Montour Falls views their natural resources as their product, environmental protection of these natural resources is a form of economic development. This is one way that Montour Falls can balance development pressures with environmental protection. As well as capitalize on their greatest assets, package those assets up and sell them as a product.

Some of the retail/service gaps in the region that Montour Falls could work to recruit are:

- Bicycle rental on Catharine Valley Trail. Nominal fee, variety of bikes (bikes for two), pull along children’s bikes.
- Canoe and Kayak rental. Offering transportation of the boats to close locations.
- Tours. – Hiking tours, falls tours, boating tours, fishing tours.
- Fishing rentals and classes.
- Retail for outdoor recreation equipment. May include high end, high tech apparel, shoes, fishing equipment, Canoe and Kayaks, bicycles, ect.
- Bed and Breakfast – small scale.
- Restaurants

## SIGNIFICANT NATURAL SITES IN MONTOUR FALLS

It is understood that preserving all things natural is unreasonable. In the previous village comprehensive plan as well as the newly adopted county comprehensive plan many sites within the village were identified for their scenic and environmentally important qualities. These sites should be subject to the most stringent review when any development proposal is offered. These reviews should occur not only for proposals within the site, but also any adjacent activities that might affect the site.

Sites within Montour Falls that are consider unique and in need of extra protections are as follows:

### Queen Catharine Marsh (Catharine Creek Wildlife Management Area)

Queen Catharine Mash is the most environmentally important site in Montour falls, Schuyler County and arguably the Southern Tier Central region (Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties). It has been identified as a Critical Environmental Area (CEA) requiring an extra level of review and consideration during the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process.

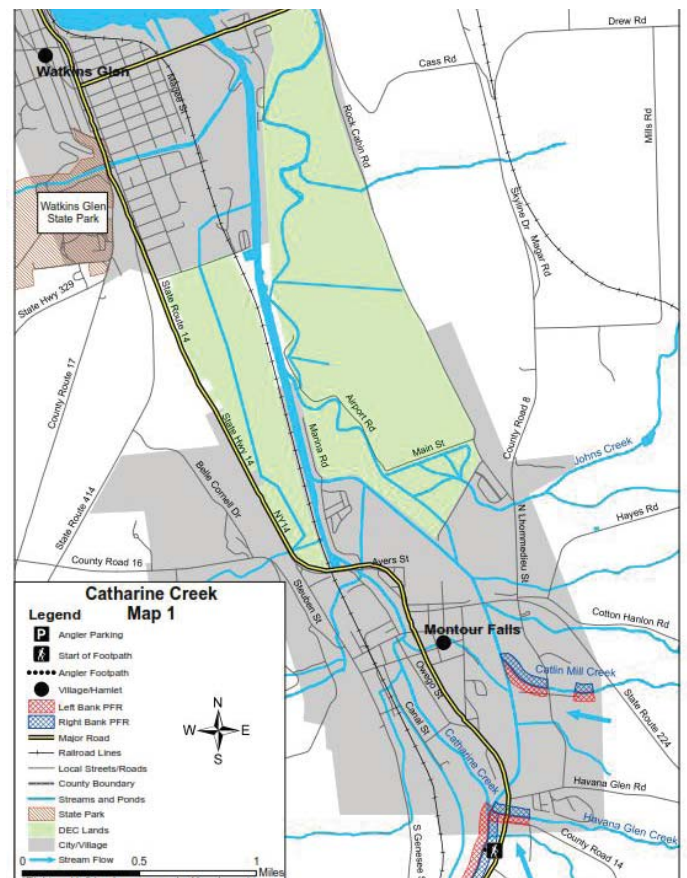
The site is a 1,000 acre marsh that stretches between Watkins Glen and Montour Falls. This wetland contains Catharine Creek Bird Conservation Area and is designated as Important Bird Area by the Audubon of New York. Running through Queen Catharine Marsh is remnants of another era. The Barge Canal is accessible by a marina and board ramps. The canal is used by both fishermen and boaters.



Queen Catharine Marsh  
Photo Source: Richard Owlett

### Montour Falls Biodiverse Area

Cornell Plantation Botanists have labeled this area to be the most important and diverse ecosystem in the Finger Lakes region.







*Trout Fishing in Catharine Creek.*



*Frozen Aunt Sarah's Falls*  
*Photo Source: Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce*



*She-Qua-Ga Falls*  
*Photo Source: Schuyler County Highway Dept.*

### Trout Fishing

Catharine Creek Trout Stream & John's Creek are host to world class trout fishing. Catharine Creek originates in northern Chemung County and flows north through Queen Catharine Marsh and into Seneca Lake following much of Route 14 and the Catharine Valley Trail. John's Creek originates east of Montour Falls in the Town of Montour and flows west into Queen Catharine Marsh and ultimately Seneca Lake as well.

### Aunt Sarah's Falls

A large waterfall on the west slope of Route 14 just north of Montour Falls is easily visible from the roadway. The view from Route 14 host the bottom 1/3 (approximately 90') of waterfall. There are pull offs on either side of the road in order to view the falls, but traffic along Route 14 can be fast and dangerous. Aunt Sarah's Falls is an excellent entrance and exit into Montour Falls and a reminder of why you visit.

### Rock Cabin Road

Queen Catharine Marsh is also home to Rock Cabin Road. Known locally for the scenic views and beautiful wildflowers, cattails and butterflies. Rock Cabin Road is an unpaved road that borders the eastern side of the marsh. The road is slightly elevated above the marsh and hosts spectacular views toward the interior. There exists a metal platform that provides additional viewing.

Rock Cabin Road appears to be frequented by locals but has little signage and is somewhat hard to find by visitors or tourism. Rock Cabin Road has also had an issue in the past with litter. Increased fines, enforcement and clean-up efforts may be necessary to curb the problem.

### Havana Glen

Located at the southern end of Montour Falls, Havana Glen is host to Eagle Cliff falls. Located 41 feet high with 16ft wide plunge. The park includes hiking, camping, picnicking and fishing. The site also is rich in Native American history and remnants of turtle mounds are still visible.

### She-Qua-Ga Falls

These jaw dropping falls are a popular tourist stop. The falls are located on Genesee Street and are visible from Main Street looking down. The falls are 160 feet tall and at the bottom is a small village park for visitors to gain access. She-Qua-Ga falls is a defining characteristic of Montour Falls and there has been concern in the past with new development and activity along Main Street detracting from the view of the falls. The view of the falls is also littered with utility poles. The village could consider requiring utility companies to bury their utilities in areas such as She-Qua-Ga Falls, where the view is compromised by the presence of these utility poles. Considerations for this view should be taken during proposal review by the planning board to ensure the viewshed remains protected.





### SIGNIFICANT VIEWSHEDS

A ‘viewshed’ is the area on the ground, hills, water and trees you can see from a given point. With all of these amazing natural assets comes significant views that the village should consider preserving. Some scenic views that have been identified are:

- Hospital Hill: a picturesque view from south of Montour Falls through Queen Catharine Marsh and up Seneca Lake. The view can be seen from the parking lots of Schuyler Hospital and the primary Care Center on Steuben Street.
- She-Qua-Ga Falls: View looking down Main Street and ending at the falls.
- Skyline Drive: County Route 8 runs North South above the Catharine Valley from Watkins Glen to Montour Falls providing a vista of the valley, marsh, villages and lake.
- Queen Catharine Marsh from Rock Cabin Road: View from Rock Cabin Road looking over the marsh.
- Route 79 Hill: the view can be seen driving down the hill on Route 79.
- Route 224 Hill: the view can be seen driving down the hill from Odessa into the Village of Montour Falls on Route 224.

With some natural assets, protection of the site itself is not enough. Often there is a concern of how can we protect the view of the site from another location. There are land use tools such as scenic overlay zones that could help the planning board assist with this protection. Requiring an extra level of review any time development occurs within one of these viewshed areas.

### STEEP SLOPES

Developing on steep slopes can cause issues both with a beautiful view and can cause increased erosion which can though cause increased sedimentation and pollution into waterways. The village already has a strong steep slope development law. It is recommended that the village continue their efforts to limit steep slope development and consider adding steep slopes to their Environmental Overlay zone.

### AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

While there are many outside threats that could have effects on the natural resources within the Village of Montour Falls, there is a rising concern of some of the agricultural operations that surrounds the village. There has been a significant increase in the past couple of years of land within the Town of Catharine and Village of Odessa being used as a dairy farm. This significant increase in cows, their manure, and forested land turned into pastures uphill from the village of Montour Falls has alarmed residents with concerns of water quality and contaminated runoff into the village. Montour Falls residents and officials should work with the farming community and Schuyler County to ensure that all negative environmental impacts from this farm and others may be mitigated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Consider adopting an Environmental Overlay zone that requires an extra level of review. The Environmental Overlay zone should include particularly sensitive environmental areas.**

Including all the sites mentioned in this chapter, significant viewsheds and steep slopes above 15%. An overlay zone helps to design development in those areas to protect the natural environment.

**2. Analyze and map important viewsheds and add to the environmental overlay zone.**

Many of the important viewsheds mentioned by survey respondents are not officially mapped. Mapping these viewshed will allow for better regulation and inclusion into above mentioned environmental overlay zone.

**3. SEQR training for all village officials that includes training concerning Critical Environmental Areas and how best to review proposals that may have an impact.**

The Village of Montour Falls is home to one of the very few areas within the Southern Tier Region that has a Critical Environmental Area. Due to this designation, the lead agency on any SEQR will need to put projects that could effect that CEA through a rigorous review. Learning to do this review is important to the health and prosperity of the Catharine Marsh (the CEA within the village).

**4. Promote and grow eco-tourism in the Village.**

Growing this industry will increase pressures to preserve the natural environment. Preservation as economic development. One of the village's many assets is its natural beauty. As mentioned in the Economic Development chapter, there is a market for outdoor recreation and a desire to have more. Growing eco-tourism does not only preserve the most important parts of the village but also make for a great economic development opportunity.

**5. Encourage business growth related to outdoor recreation. Encourage Montour Falls Improvement Association (MFLA) to work with the IDA and Schuyler County to attract these types of businesses in Montour Falls.**

As mentioned in previous recommendations, when it comes to Montour Falls, preservation of some of its assets is economic development. Working with the existing economic development agencies to grow outdoor recreation opportunities is a win-win for the village and the county.

**6. Increased enforcement, fines and organized clean-up of litter along Rock Cabin Road. Consider more extreme measures, such as reducing access by car on Rock Cabin Road.**

This area is one of the important spots to preserve but has not been protected as well as it should have been. The village should work with existing committees to organize a clean-up and beef up law enforcement in the area. Addition signage, fines and enforcement may help clean this area up. If all else fails, reducing access by car onto the road may be necessary.

**7. Appoint resident to attend and work with the Friends of the Catharine Valley trail in order to address concerns within the village and work to find improvements.**

The Catharine Valley Trail has an active organization the meets monthly to play for and improve the trail. As the trail runs through the village, the village should take this opportunity to be active in this committee and advocate for trail improvements within the village.

### ***8. Revisit recommendations from Route 14 Corridor & Queen Catharine Marsh Conceptual Development Plan (2012).***

#### Aunt Sarah's Falls

- Slow down traffic on Route 14 between Montour Falls and Watkins Glen past the falls.
- Increased and improved pull off areas at Aunt Sarah's Falls.
- Improve and maintain Catharine Valley Trail so that there is a safer and visible access to view the falls. May need boardwalks installed to keep trail from washing away with rain and flooding.
- Work with DOT. Add crosswalk across the road and increased signage notifying passerby's of that they are approaching the falls.

#### Queen Catharine Marsh

- Signage advertising access to the interior of the marsh.
- Maintain and improve existing trail system with addition of a bridge over the canal.

#### Rock Cabin Road

- Better accessibility and signage to find Rock Cabin Road from Montour Falls.

#### Catharine Valley Trail

- Increased signage throughout the village.
- Extend sidewalk the length of Genesee Street.

### ***9. Montour Falls should consider assigning a resident or official to stay in communication with individual farms and Schuyler County Agricultural Protection Board as to the developments of farming uphill from the village. The assigned individual can report back to the Village board and encourage Schuyler County and individual farms to mitigate negative environmental impacts.***

While large-scale farming is not existent within the village limits, there are a few large-scale farm operations uphill of the village. There are concern over the negative impacts that these operations may have on the village. Becoming involved as a village in the existing county-wide agricultural protection board and working with neighboring communities may be required to fully mitigate negative environmental impacts due to farming uphill from the village.





8



# FLOOD RISKS

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY



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The beautiful water resources that contribute to the charm of Montour Falls can also present an occasional threat for which the Village must be prepared. The Schuyler County Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies flooding as the county's most significant hazard, due to both a high probability of occurring and the potential for severe impacts. In the Village of Montour Falls the flood risk takes a variety of forms: flash flooding on streams, high water in the Barge Canal and Queen Catharine Marsh, ponding in poor drainage areas, and the potential for overtopping or failure of flood control levees. In order to promote safety and protect property, the Village of Montour Falls is committed to reducing the risks associated with flooding in the Village. This is consistent with protection of the Village's natural resources and will also enhance the Village's economic and social resilience, enabling quicker recovery following future floods.

## FLOODPLAINS

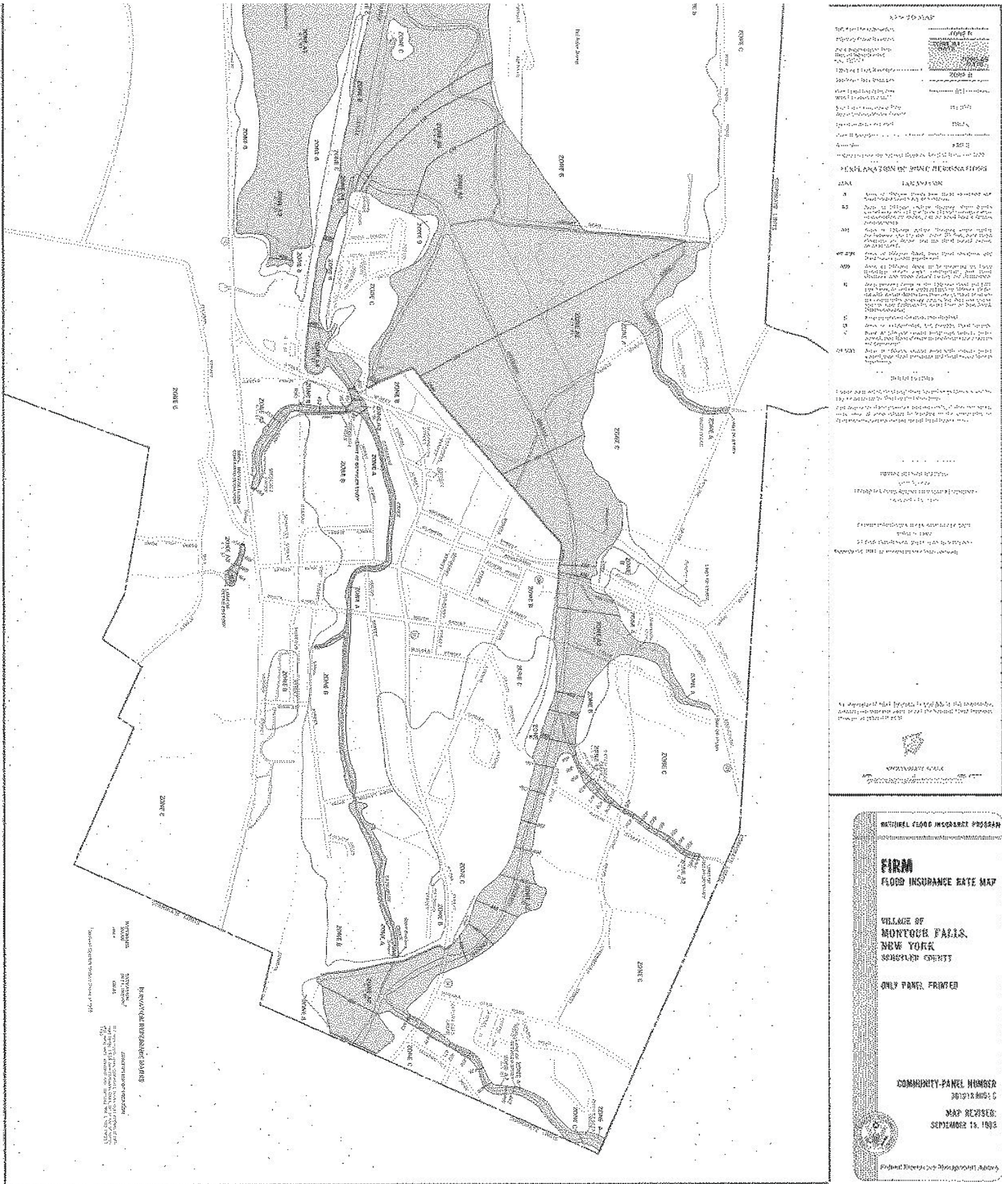
Streams are naturally active systems that occasionally overflow their banks and inundate the floodplains. The undeveloped floodplains serve a vital function by providing a place for water to spread out and thus reducing the height and speed of floodwaters. Floodplain areas with a 1% probability of flooding in any given year (the Special Flood Hazard Area or so-called 100-year floodplain) are shown on the Village's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). In addition, the regulatory floodway shown on the Village's Flood Boundary and Floodway Map is the area adjacent to streams that must be kept open to convey water.

Most of the areas within the Village that are mapped as Special Flood Hazard Area (100-year floodplain) are currently open space. According to the Schuyler County Hazard Mitigation Plan, there are 151 parcels located partly or completely within this floodplain (with a total value of \$20.1 million for these properties). This includes the Montour Falls Sewer Treatment Plant, which flooded in 1996, and the Montour Falls Marina. Most of the Village's floodplains are associated with Catharine Creek (which flows northward through the center of the Village), the Diversion Channel (which carries most of the Catharine Creek flow east of its original channel), the Barge Canal, and Queen Catharine Marsh. Additional floodplains were mapped along tributaries that enter the Village from the east (Havana Glen Creek, Catlin Mill Creek, L'Homedieu Creek, and John's Creek) and Shequaga Creek (downstream of Shequaga Falls).

The floodplain delineated on the FIRM does not represent all of the areas in Montour Falls that may flood. These maps are based on the assumption of unobstructed flow and are thus considered valid only if all channels and drainage structures remain unobstructed, operate properly, and do not fail. If these conditions do not exist, the impact of 100-year flooding could be greater. In addition, the maps were published in 1980 based on historic conditions at that time, which may not represent future conditions.

New development within the Special Flood Hazard Area (as shown on the FIRM) is regulated based on the Village's Local Law for Flood Damage Prevention (Local Law #1 of 1993) and the floodplain development requirements in the New York State Residential and Building Codes. A Floodplain Development Permit is required for buildings and other development (including grading, storage, and other activities) in the regulated floodplain. These standards require that new development be protected from flood damage and not contribute to damage on other properties. The local law is no longer consistent with the more recent NYS Uniform Code standards, which require protection of buildings to a level two feet above the modeled flood height (Base Flood Elevation). The local floodplain development regulations should be updated based on the current state model law. The Village could also incorporate additional provisions for floodplain development, such as restrictions on hazardous materials or critical facilities.

The most effective way to minimize the risk of flood damage is to locate development outside of the identified high hazard floodplains. Current tools for maintaining open space in the floodplain include flood control easements associated with the Catharine Creek Diversion Channel and levees, state and federal permit requirements for development in wetlands, and stricter development standards for the portion of the floodplain designated as floodway. Zoning can also be used as a tool for directing new development to safer areas and maintaining open space in flood hazard areas.



*Flood Insurance Rate Map for the Village of Montour Falls depicts the floodplain area with a 1% probability of flooding in any given year. This is the area within which a Floodplain Development Permit from the Village is required for any development activities.*



## FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION PROJECT

Before construction of the Montour Falls Flood Damage Reduction Project in 1953, most of the central area of Montour Falls was subject to frequent and highly damaging floods, some of which destroyed homes and businesses within the Village. The major flood problems were from Catharine Creek, which flows through the central portion of the village, and Catlin Mill Creek, which flowed into Catharine Creek from the east.

Flood protection measures constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers include a diversion channel for Catharine Creek, earthen levees, and channelization of Shequaga Creek. The Diversion Channel was built on the east side of the village to carry flood flows of Catharine Creek and intercept Catlin Mill Creek. At the start of the Diversion Channel, a gated structure and levee divert flood flows from Catharine Creek. The Diversion Channel joins the Barge Canal at the northern end of the village and has levees for most of its length on the west side. In Shequaga Creek, the pool at the base of the falls and the downstream channel were enlarged and flow is managed with a conduit, concrete walls, and levees.



Montour Falls during the 1935 Finger Lakes Flood

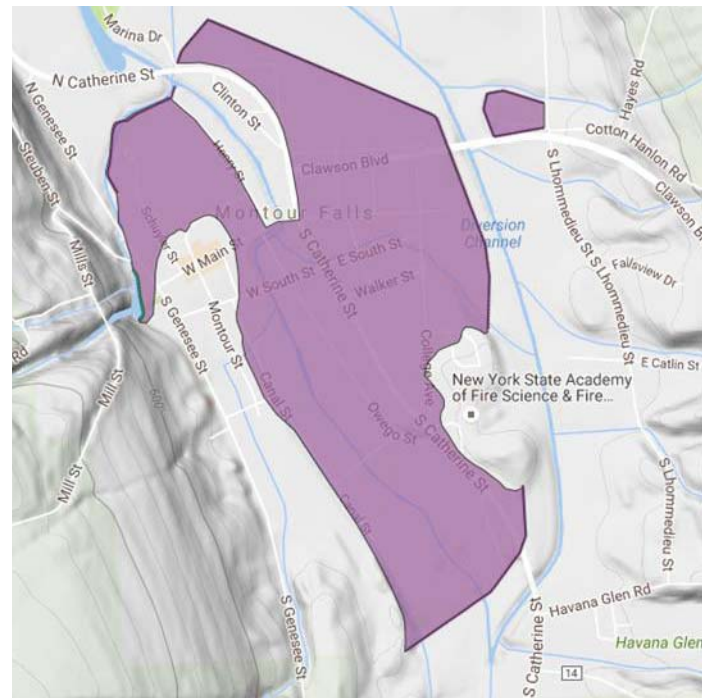
In Shequaga Creek, the pool at the base of the falls and the downstream channel were enlarged and flow is managed with a conduit, concrete walls, and levees.

*“Floods in Montour Falls are as old as the town itself. The file of old newspapers in the Memorial Library record annual ‘freshets’ with an occasional real deluge such as the 1937 flood when the top soil washed from Harold Barrett’s farm disclosed an Indian Village site and a sword dropped in 1779 by one of Sullivan’s soldiers.” – Star Gazette, 1946*

These flood protection works have been very effective in alleviating surface water flooding in the central portion of the Village. The 1972 “Agnes” flood did not cause major damage within the village.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation is responsible for operation and maintenance of the Montour Falls flood protection project.

The areas within the Village of Montour Falls that are protected by levees are not included in the Special Flood Hazard Area (regulated floodplain). However, this does not mean that these areas will never flood. Floods can exceed the design capacity of a structural project, gates can malfunction, and levees can fail. The effectiveness of these flood protection works has engendered complacency regarding the residual flood risks within protected areas. Because significant areas within the Village are protected by levees, it would be beneficial for residents to have a better understanding of these hazards, and strategies for reducing risks.



Approximate area protected by flood control levees.  
Source: US Army Corps of Engineers National Levee Database

When the Village’s Flood Insurance Rate Map is updated, it will be necessary to evaluate the condition of the levee system to determine whether it should continue to be accredited as providing protection from the model flood (100-year event). The cost for this engineering evaluation is not included in FEMA’s mapping budgets. If the levee condition is not assessed or if the engineer conducting the evaluation is unable to certify that it continues to provide adequate protection, the protected areas could be included in the floodplain on a future FIRM.

### MONTOUR FALLS RESERVOIR DAM

The old Village of Montour Falls water supply reservoir is located upstream of the Village on John's Creek. The dam for this reservoir is categorized by New York State as having an intermediate downstream hazard (hazard code B). This designation is based on the development downstream of the dam, not the condition of the structure or likelihood that it would fail. The dam is over 100 years old and is now privately owned. It is inspected periodically by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, which has documented deficiencies, including partial blockage of the spillway with woody debris. The 2015 report to the owner indicates that the lack of an Engineering Assessment, Emergency Action Plan, and Annual Certification constitute violations. There is no inundation map to indicate areas that might be affected if the dam fails. So it is not known if damaging flows from failure of this structure could reach developed areas. About a half mile downstream of the reservoir, St. John's Creek flows under N Lhommedieu and Seneca Streets, passing near houses, a nursery school, and a mobile home park before entering Queen Catharine Marsh. If additional development were to occur within the dam failure inundation area, the dam could be re-classified as a high hazard dam, which would increase the engineering and inspection requirements.



*Montour Falls Reservoir Dam and downstream development within the Village of Montour Falls.*



## FLASH FLOODING

Heavy rainfall events have resulted in closed roads and flooded basements within the Village. When excessive runoff overwhelms the capacity of small streams and drainage systems, flash flooding can develop quickly, often resulting in erosion by fast-moving water. Flash flooding on small streams, such as those flowing into the Village, is capable of tearing out trees, undermining buildings, and scouring new channels. Intense runoff can also exceed the capacity of roadside ditches and storm sewer systems, causing ponding of water and/or erosion. These problems are often compounded by the presence of trees and other debris. This flash flood damage often occurs outside of mapped floodplain areas. Since the 1950's, the northeastern U.S. has experienced an increase in sudden deluges of rainfall, which cause flash flooding. Based on this trend, it is reasonable to expect a continued increase in the number of flash flooding events in Montour Falls into the future.

The risk of damage from flash flooding can be reduced by locating development away from streambanks, maintaining drainage systems, and managing stormwater runoff from upland areas.

## FLOOD INSURANCE

The Village of Montour Falls participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which enables the availability of federal flood insurance in municipalities that adopt and enforce local regulations to reduce the risk of flood damage.

In 2015, there were six NFIP flood insurance policies in the Village of Montour Falls, with the total “insurance in force” of \$2.7 million. There have been seven NFIP flood insurance claims since 1968, with total payments of \$78,096 (Source: Hazard Mitigation Plan, Schuyler County, NY, 2015-2020). Because standard insurance policies do not generally cover flood damage, most of the damages that could result from a significant flood in the Village of Montour Falls are likely to be un-insured losses. Government disaster relief programs excel at helping communities rebuild from events that are widespread enough to receive federal disaster declarations. However, they do little for the homeowner or the business owner. In addition, many flash flood events are localized incidents that do not qualify for federal assistance.

## STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Alteration of natural drainage patterns and land cover can dramatically change the transportation and storage of water, contributing to flooding, erosion, and water quality impairment. Because the Village of Montour Falls receives runoff from the surrounding area, the Village can be impacted by construction and other land use activities in neighboring communities, as well as within the Village boundaries.

Construction activities that disturb one or more acre of land require a State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permit for stormwater discharges. This permit requires use of erosion control practices during construction and, for some projects, control of the quality and quantity of runoff from completed projects. Improved runoff management practices can be promoted by encouraging use of green infrastructure practices that protect natural features, minimize the amount of pavement, and enable water to soak into the ground. The challenges of safely managing runoff are increased on steep slopes. In particular, roads and driveways may be susceptible to washout and drainage problems.



*Rain garden uses runoff from the Montour Falls Library building, reducing flow into the storm sewer system.*

*Source: Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District.*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Consider zoning strategies for limiting future development in mapped floodplains and stream corridors.*
- 2. Replace the Village of Montour Falls Local Law #1 of 1993 with an updated Local Law for Flood Damage Prevention based on the current NYS model law. Consider incorporating additional standards, such as restrictions on hazardous materials and critical facilities in the regulated floodplain. Continue to enforce floodplain development standards so that existing and new development in identified flood hazard areas is protected from anticipated flood conditions.*
- 3. Raise public awareness about potential flood risks in areas protected by levees and provide information about strategies for improving resilience. Encourage flood insurance coverage in these areas.*
- 4. Continue to work closely with NYS DEC on operation and maintenance of the Montour Falls Flood Damage Reduction Project. Be prepared to seek funding for levee certification if the Flood Insurance Rate Map for the Village of Montour Falls is updated.*
- 5. The Village is aware of the poor condition of the privately-owned Montour Falls Reservoir Dam located upstream of the Village in the Town of Montour. Because failure of this structure could potentially impact developed areas within Montour Falls, the Village should encourage the owner to maintain the structure, develop an Emergency Action Plan, and remedy the existing violations.*
- 6. Identify areas downstream of the Montour Falls Reservoir Dam that could be at risk if the structure fails and use zoning tools to prevent new development within this area.*
- 7. Promote good stormwater management by providing landowners and developers with information about practices for managing runoff near its source and assistance with the state stormwater permit process.*
- 8. As part of the zoning and site plan approval process, promote project designs that protect natural features, limit unnecessary impervious surfaces (e.g. large parking lots and wide streets), and implement green infrastructure stormwater management practices (for bioretention and infiltration of runoff). Review local standard to ensure that they do not hinder the use of these green infrastructure strategies for managing stormwater runoff.*
- 9. Evaluate all road drainage and storm drainage systems to ensure adequate drainage capacity. Systematically address any issues as resources permit. Consider increasing capacity to accommodate future runoff conditions whenever practical.*



# 9



# ENERGY

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY

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We hear of new technology that allows us to be more energy efficient every day. Often the barrier to using these technologies has been price and availability. For Montour Falls, some methods of energy efficiency such as small scale solar make sense. Whereas wind development would be difficult due to density and size of the village.

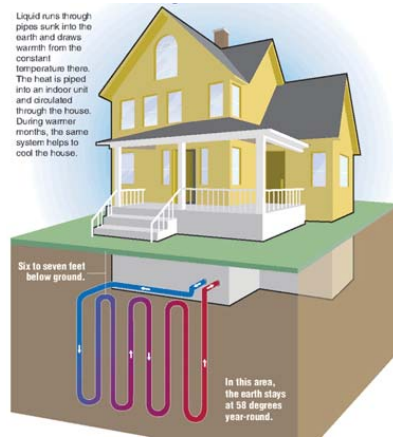
It is the desire of Montour Falls to encourage and allow for development of local and sustainable energy production methods so as to allow residents the opportunity to earn money, increase their self-sufficiency and reduce their environmental impact.

**SOLAR**

While the census bureau does not seem to recognize that the village has any solar installations. A drive around the village indicated that there were at least two. One residential installation and one small scale commercial installation. The Village of Montour Falls is a great place to encourage small scale solar. Larger scale, industrial solar farms would most likely not find the room they need within the village. There are many New York State programs that are aimed at encouraging the expansion of solar projects. Some offer special financing options. Providing information about solar energy to residents could help to substantially increase the amount of energy that is produced locally using solar panels.



*Lakeside Veterinarian Services Solar Installation*



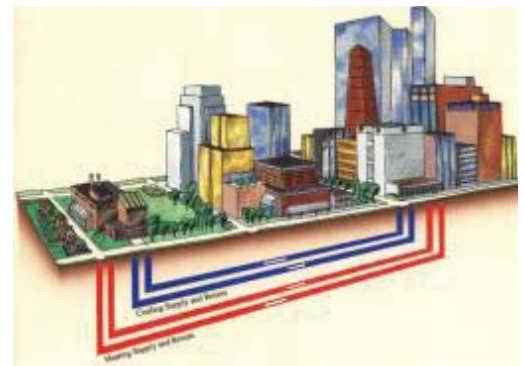
**GEOTHERMAL**

Geothermal heating and cooling is another energy efficient way to heat or cool homes and commercial properties. It works by using the earth’s constant temperature under the ground to heat and cool lines. While this technology works and can be a good source of energy, it is expensive to install without the site being fully cleared. As such, this technology usually only makes sense with new developments. New developments should be encouraged to consider geothermal energy.

**DISTRICT HEATING AND COOLING SYSTEMS**

cooling to denser developed areas. A system would produce steam, hot water or chilled water at a central plant, pipe it underground to individual buildings. Individual buildings served by the system therefore do not need their own heating and cooling systems. District energy can significantly improve the energy efficiency. This can be done though private agreements between property owners and will result in shared heating and cooling lines crossing parcel lines.

District energy systems are an energy efficient way to provide heating and



**ENERGY EFFICIENT TRAFFIC AND STREET LIGHTS**

A municipality can greatly reduce their own energy cost by installing energy efficient traffic and street lights. While the traffic signals are controlled by NYS DOT the village can certainly encourage DOT to take steps to increase efficiency with the traffic light. The village can evaluate their own street lighting to ensure it is energy efficient. NYSERDA does offer programs to help finance municipal efficiencies such as this.



## GREEN STREETS

Part of energy efficiency is creating spaces and streets that individuals want to walk through and bike through. These aesthetics serve multiple purposes. A green street can include street trees, shaded areas with benches, greenery, solar panels to power street lights, raingardens. Creating green streets can encourage individuals to walk and get outside. While the street trees and raingardens can help slow down water during downpours and assist in stormwater mitigation. It also creates an aesthetically pleasing space where people want to be and business want to invest.



## ENERGY HOME IMPROVEMENTS



Montour Falls has an aging housing stock similar to the rest of the region. As such, many of these older homes are not energy efficient and could use some upgrades. In the housing chapter we talk about taking advantage of the NYSERDA programs to increase home energy efficiency. With hopes that by increasing the home energy efficiency we are also upgrading these older homes and making them safer and more appealing. The goal of these programs that NYSERDA offers is to create more energy efficient homes. Many of the programs NYSERDA offers allows for special financing of the upgrades where the monthly loan payments are paid simply by the energy savings you experience once the upgrades are complete. The loan often goes with the home at the time of sale. There are also programs such as EmPower New York that will pay 100% of the improvements for a family of four with a household income of less than \$50,628, even if you are

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *1. Invite NYSERDA to give a village-wide training and presentation on all of the programs and financing they offer.*

NYSERDA offers an array of programs from grants to incentive financing for municipalities, homeowners and business owners. Many of the programs can be difficult to research or understand, but NYSERDA employees individuals to help with this. Invite these folks to speak to the village on how to become more proactive about energy efficiency.

### *2. Make information concerning small scale solar installation available at village hall.*

NYSERDA offers many print outs online that can used for informational purposes. Make these print outs available online so individuals frequenting the village hall can pick them up. The village could even send a copy with a water bill on occasion to spread information on how residents might be able to get solar installations on their own home.

### *3. Adopt a solar law into the zoning.*

Adopting a solar law will ensure that solar installations are installed in a way that not only will maximize solar power but will also ensure it has little interference with neighboring property. A solar law can also better regulate large scale solar installations. These larger scale installations can often be unsightly and close to the road. Ensuring setbacks and adequate buffering will make for a better development in which residents view in a positive manner.

### *4. Consider offering incentives, such as setback reductions, to commercial developments that choose to use on-site renewable energy sources.*

Encouraging renewable energy sources is good for the village and good for the earth. Working with developments to incentivize the use of renewable energy will allow for an increase in these energy sources while offering developments an incentive to do it. Montour Falls could easily become the poster village for green development, just another reason tourist will want to spend time in the village.

### *5. Evaluate the feasibility of implementing district heating and cooling systems in downtown Montour Falls.*

With increased new commercial development in Montour Falls, district heating and cooling may because an affordable option. Conducting a feasibility study on this option would provide the information necessary for incoming business development. District heating and cooling is not only energy efficient but can also be cost efficient as well. Further, NYSERDA may have funding available to study this option as well as implement it for the right development.

### *6. Revise zoning to include and allow for district heating and cooling systems as accessory use. Consider offering incentives to developments that implement district heating and cooling systems.*

Current zoning does not allow for district heating and cooling. Making sure that local laws do not get in the way of these types of systems will ensure that the option for district heating and cooling can stay open. For the right commercial development, district heating and cooling can be both energy efficient and cost effective.

### *7. Offer incentives for commercial developments that meet higher efficiency standards such as LEED status.*

Gaining LEED status on renovated commercial properties as well as new developments is a very difficult task. Developments should be rewarded and incentivized should they be interested in gaining LEED certification. The ultimate goal of LEED is to help reduce a developments carbon footprint. The village playing an active role in encouraging these reductions will result in a greener Montour Falls and a greener Schuyler County.

***8. Require by law that all commercial and public lighting be considered “night skies” lighting.***

This requirement is vital to reducing light pollution and ensuring that stars remain visible! Night skies lighting is becoming more standard for developments, but putting this requirement into law is important. Night skies lighting is lighting that shines downward and emits no light upward to the sky. This type of lighting not only has the benefit of preserving the night sky but also ensures that light does not shine from one property to another; keeping commercial lights from shining onto neighboring residential *properties*.

***9. Work with local code enforcement to learn the new New York State energy code and what it means to development.***

New York State has recently adopted new energy code requirements. These requirements are complex and will require local code enforcement to be trained. Further, New York State and NYSERDA have made resources available to municipalities and code enforcement to better understand the new code. NYSERDA has contracted with T.L. Lin International (a private company) to provide training and local law review free of charge to municipalities.

***10. Contact local NYSERDA contact to inquire how the village may be able to find efficiencies within local government property.***

Working with NYSERDA representatives, the Village of Montour Falls may be able to find funding resources as well as energy efficiencies that they have not yet explored. There is a wealth of information on NYSERDA's website and resources available. NYSERDA employs individuals to assist municipalities with navigating the resources available.

***11. Evaluate how the village could make their streets greener. Begin with the Glorious T and build off of that.***

Greening the streets of Montour Falls has many benefits. Creating walkable streets that also incorporate nature will improve the overall feeling of downtown and may have the added benefit of drawing more tourist to downtown. Village committees and volunteer residents can work together to plant flowers, trees, and other greenery around Glorious T. These committees should also work closely with the village DPW to work on more green street design when repairs are made to Main Street. Further, there is funding available through NY Main Street grant program to fund green street scape design.

***12. Village should work with renters and home owners that qualify for special programs such as Assisted Home Performance with Energy Star and EmPower New York to upgrade the energy efficiency of homes in the village.***

Making information available to homeowners is vital. The village could periodically send information about the different programs available to them through mailings with their bi-monthly water bills.



# 10



# LAND USE

**2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
MONTOUR FALLS, NY

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The culmination of this comprehensive plan is this land use chapter. The goal of this land use chapter is to provide direct guidance to edits of the village’s zoning laws. Through the comprehensive plan process the committee and village have heard overall themes in which all zoning regulations should consider and focus on:

- Preservation of historic downtown, historic residences and already designated historic district.
- Preservation of scenic viewsheds and biodiverse areas.
- Encouraged economic development along Main Street, in Welliver Business Park and State Highway Route 14.
- Required design guidelines to preserve character of the village.
- Improved residential property maintenance.
- Improved traffic flow
- Simple, easy to understand and easy to enforce zoning.

With this overarching goals in mind, Montour Falls’ zoning should follow suit.

**LAND USE DEVELOPMENT**

**Residential Areas**

Survey results from the comprehensive plan survey indicated that residents would like to preserve the historic district. Ensuring that historic design guidelines are enforced and maintained on existing homes within the district. There is also a great concern with the deterioration of existing homes. Much of quality of housing and issues with property maintenance were mentioned during the housing chapter of this plan. Goals for the village are simply to improve the housing they have. Much of Montour Falls’ unbuilt areas are undeveloped due to the unique ecological areas that the village and Schuyler County would like to see preserved. Other areas that are unbuilt are due to existing floodplain hazards.



Schuyler County has a housing shortage and lack of diversity of housing types. The quaint village of Montour Falls could fill some of these niche housing needs by offering diverse housing types. Allowing for multi-family housing, vacation rentals and even boarding house/hostel type of housing in the village Center could increase the influx of vacationers and seasonal dwellers to the village as an alternative to the busy Watkins Glen.

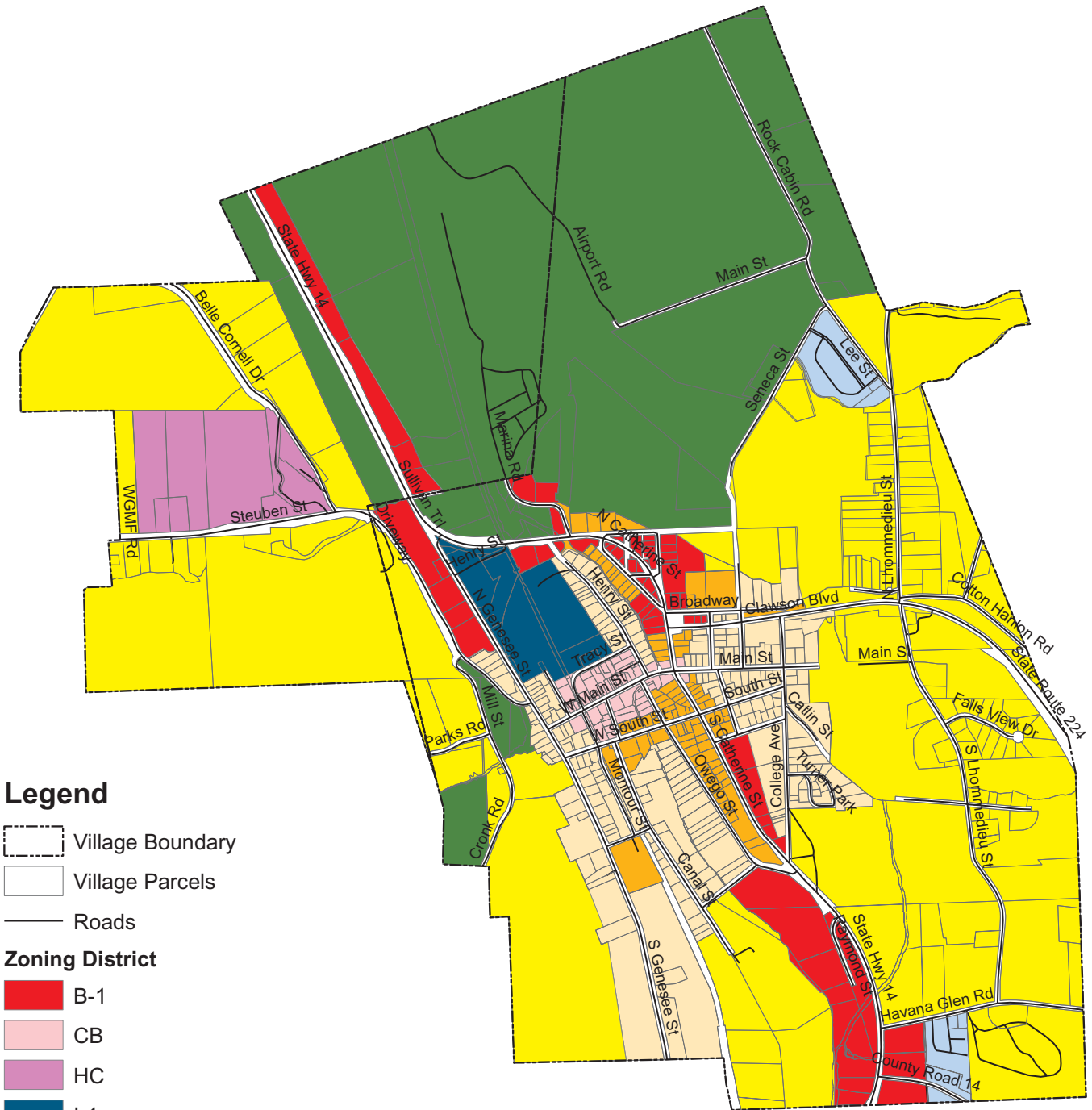
The CB, RLB and R2 zones could all be combined into a mixed use residential / small business zone. This area could include a diversity of all housing types along with corner markets, pharmacies, restaurants and other business that could meet the daily needs of the residents in those zones. The ground floor of structures located on Main Street should be turned back into commercial space, while maintaining the upper story as residential.

There are two car sales/repair lots at the entrance to Main Street and Rt. 14. Both businesses are well maintained. The concern is if future owners of these businesses will continue to maintain the properties as such. It is recommended that the village restrict the types of businesses allowed on Main Street to only small scale restaurants, professional offices and retail. Also it is recommended that the village adopt strict standards for car sales lots to ensure that the current lots continue to be a nice entry point into the village.

**Areas for Protection and Preservation**

As fully addressed in the natural resources chapter, it is imperative that Montour Falls continue to preserve the very unique ecological gems that they hold. Areas such as Shequaga Falls, Catharine Marsh, Aunt Sarah Falls, Havana Glen, Catharine Creek, floodplains throughout the village areas off of Rock Cabin Road should be preserved from development. Preservation of these areas to only allow for small scale recreational development to encourage use by those seeking recreational opportunities.

# Village of Montour Falls Zoning Map



### Legend

Village Boundary

Village Parcels

Roads

### Zoning District

B-1

CB

HC

I-1

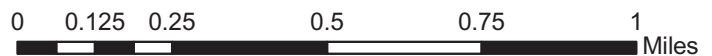
PC

R-1

R-2

RLB

RMH



## Areas for Development

Commercial development within Montour Falls should all be concentrated on Main Street, within Welliver Business Park and on Rt. 14. Each of these areas are unique and should be treated as such.

### Downtown/Main Street

Preservation and improvement of Montour Falls' Main Street is central to the character of Montour Falls. Main Street currently host a mixture of housing, and businesses. Creating design guidelines for Main Street and adopting strict zoning requirements for Main Street allowing only for upper story residential and businesses on the ground level will only improve Main Street. There currently exist a couple of buildings that are apartments both ground floor and upper story. These buildings look very out of place, as residents tend to sit outside their front door. The village of Montour Falls should work to rid Main Street of street level residential and convert all street level to commercial development.



### Welliver Business Park

The potential fully functioning business park within Montour Falls would be a great asset. Full development of this business park would be a great economic boon and would hopefully directly benefit current and future businesses located on Main Street. Considering the option of making the Business Park a planned development in which village Board approval would be needed for the final design/plan for the entire business park could allow for flexibility in the types of businesses allowed in the business park but some sort of oversight as to the layout and ascetic of the property.

### Route 14

Businesses along Route 14 are in the most need of assistance. They are generally ascetically unappealing and seem to be not well planned. The zoning should clearly lay out a plan for the area of the types of commercial businesses that would be appropriate for Rt. 14. Along with setbacks that better create a sense of place. The setbacks and business facades should be appealing and inviting, as Rt. 14 is the most highly traveled road in Montour Falls.



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

***1. Consider simplification of residential zones. Utilize formed based codes in order to regulate residential zones as opposed to adopting numerous zones. Consider flexible housing options when areas meet the right conditions. Offer an overlay zone of the historic district to ensure full protections of the historic housing.***

Current zoning in Montour Falls seems complicated considering the size, density and variation of land use within the village. Most residential areas, commercial areas and industrial areas are easy to define. Reducing the number of residential zones, while utilizing more formed based code would allow for efficient use of existing buildings, mixed use to bring residents closer to the services they utilize and making a community more walkable and efficient on the whole. Current zoning should be revised to allow for more types of housing options. Schuylar County and Montour Falls has a housing shortage and an aging population. Providing different types of housing options will encourage residential development within Montour Falls. Lastly an overlay zone to protect the historic district will ensure that the village will not lose their historic charm.

***2. Implement mixed use zoning on Main Street. Continue to zone out car sales/repair at the intersection of Main Street and Rt. 14. Adopt design guidelines for Main Street and require only commercial business on street level.***

Based on survey results, residents would like to see a bustling Main Street with offices, restaurants and retail located on street level while allowing for residential dwellings to reside on second stories. Creating a welcoming entrance onto Main Street means continuing to zone out the automobile sales and repair shops. Adopting design guidelines that ensure residential on street level Main Street will not be allowed uses in the future will create the downtown feel that village is looking for.

***3. Ensure full protection of ecologically sensitive areas mentioned in this chapter and throughout the Natural Resources chapter.***

Rather than protect the village's natural resources by zoning them "residential" it is recommended that conservation overlay zone or other type of strict conservation zone be adopted to severely limit building within these ecologically sensitive areas.

***4. Allow for flexible uses at Welliver Business Park, which limit heavy industrial uses but allow most other types of commercial and residential uses while adopting strict design standards for the business park. Ensuring the park becomes an attractive development within the village.***

The development of Welliver Business Park is a promising opportunity for the village. Village officials should with Welliver to ensure the business park is an attractive development and will employ individuals that will utilize downtown businesses. It is important to allow Welliver the flexibility of uses, but ensure an attractive development through the enforcement of design standards.

***5. Allow for residential and multifamily development along Rt. 14. Allow for denser development, encourage townhome development and have a healthy mix of both vehicle-centric commercial and residential along Rt. 14.***

Rt. 14 should be the home to more motor vehicle-centric types of developments. Rt. 14 should allow for uses such as the car wash, vehicle repair and sale shops and other similar developments. Also Rt. 14 should be opened up to different types of housing options, such as multi-family dwellings and townhomes. To allow for these types of developments greater density within the zoning law will need to be allowed.