

**TOWN AND VILLAGE OF CHAMPLAIN
SMART GROWTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Community Profile (Task 9)
Chapter 5: Smart Growth Considerations
July 2025**



**Department
of State**

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Smart Growth in New York State	4
The Five Tests of Smart Growth.....	5
Champlain Town and Village's Consideration of Smart Growth Principles.....	6
Theme 1: Collective decision-making is prudent when growth is slow and incremental.	6
Theme 2: Strong village centers and downtown/commercial centers support density and provide a compact mix of uses.	9
Theme 3: Jobs and housing go hand in hand.	10
Theme 4: Well-defined boundaries prevent sprawl and protect natural resources.	11
Theme 5: Access to nature provides many with the authentic Adirondack and Champlain Valley experiences.	11
Conclusion: How Community Profile Chapters 1–4 of the Town and Village of Champlain Community Profile Address Smart Growth Principles	12

Table of Figures

Figure 1 - Smart Growth in NYS (Smart Growth America 2024, n.d.).....	4
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Introduction

Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, distinguished public servant, and leader in the planning field once commented, “Communities can be shaped by choice, or they can be shaped by chance. We can keep on accepting the kind of communities we get, or we can start creating the kind of communities we want.”¹

David Goldberg, a longtime executive at *Smart Growth America*, (the leading advocate for the national Smart Growth movement) made the following recommendation regarding the marriage of local comprehensive planning and consideration of Smart Growth Principles:

“The surest way to create towns worthy of passing on to our children is to engage the full, informed participation of the people who live in them making planning and development more collaborative and less adversarial. That is perhaps more important today than ever before. Over the last decade, people all across the country have grown increasingly worried about the consequences of rapid growth and poorly planned development. In search of a better way, many of those concerned citizens have been working with forward-looking professionals in planning, design, real estate, and related fields to figure out how to be smarter about growth.”²

The Town and Village of Champlain Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning process (Our Plan) uses an approach to land planning that continues to promote growth and infrastructure improvements where suitable and appropriate. The location of development and investment supports the build-out of compact, healthy, and walkable neighborhoods. Furthermore, it encourages complete use of roads for biking, pedestrians, and autos. Finally, it incentivizes mixed-use development with a range of housing choices. Champlain Town and Village intend to preserve and protect their unique sense of community and place that overlays its strategic location, abundant natural, and cultural resources. “Our Plan” is, and will be, consistent with Smart Growth core values that emphasize long-range, regional considerations of sustainability and cumulative effects.

We chose NOT to parse out various Smart Growth Principles and try to “shoehorn” them into the previous four subject-based chapters. Instead, we have devoted a fifth and final chapter within the Town and Village of Champlain Community Profile to a synthesized and relevant discussion of how smart growth considerations can be practiced by the Town and Village. Not all the principles of Smart Growth apply and therefore some principles are described and explained in greater detail than others. Some will certainly be more important and useful to inform the findings and recommendations to be developed within the formal Comprehensive Plan document.

¹ <https://www.cityofhuntington.com/residents/americas-best-communities>

² <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/smart-growth-implementation-toolkit/>

Our Plan will put into practice many Smart Growth principles that closely tie to the goals of the community. We will use careful consideration and caution in land use decisions to maintain Champlain's sense of community, rural charm, natural beauty, and small-town character. Wherever possible, we will encourage adaptive reuse and recycling of existing buildings while conserving countryside and protection of natural resources for this and the next generation to enjoy. Champlain will also support affordable housing and the use of fair and representative community participation activities to encourage residents, businesses, and visitors to enjoy life here.

Smart Growth in New York State

Smart growth looks different from place to place. It is an overall approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and robust community engagement. The 15 principles are considered the foundation of a smart growth approach.

New York State Department of State Smart Growth Principles
• Promote mixed land uses in focus areas.
• Create an adequate range of housing opportunities and choices.
• Promote development and redevelopment where infrastructure is adequate and sustainable.
• Build on traits that make a distinctive and attractive community with a strong sense of place.
• Promote well-planned and well-placed public spaces
• Promote sustainable compact neighborhoods
• Increase mobility and circulation within jurisdictional lines and improve connectivity with areas outside jurisdictional lines.
• Promote sustainable mass transit that reduces the local levels of greenhouse gas emissions
• Promote walkable/bikeable neighborhood designs
• Promote and integrate clean energy resources and related incentives.
• Improve green infrastructure and resident's participation to this effort
• Increase resiliency to extreme weather events.
• Encourage social diversity and integration.
• Expand planning and implementation efforts across jurisdictional lines, to increase effectiveness, sustainability, and resiliency.
• Promote community and stakeholder collaboration in planning

Figure 1 - Smart Growth in NYS (Smart Growth America 2024, n.d.)

The Five Tests of Smart Growth³

The Community Profile Chapters 1-4 take a very comprehensive look at all the conditions that influence land use and community planning in Champlain. The results present both inventories and analysis of existing and past trends in a wide range of subject areas that influence Smart Growth. In developing the Town and Village of Champlain's future forward recommendations, the content of the Community Profile serves as the foundation for action. The Five Tests of Smart Growth can also serve to help shape new development, redevelopment, and infrastructure priorities, helping to envision where we are headed over the next few years.

1. Popsicle Test:

Can you walk home from the store before your popsicle melts?
Can walking or biking meet most daily needs?

2. Smooch Test:

Is the place comfortable, safe, attractive, and intimate, suitable for a date-night stroll?
Are people—and their ears—shielded from high-speed car traffic?
Would you feel good about taking a visitor there?

3. Kid Test:

Can children safely explore a world beyond their own backyards?
Can older kids get around on their own, safely developing a sense of self-reliance and autonomy?

4. Seniors Test:

Are elder citizens a welcome part of the mix of residents?
Are they engaged and active?
Can they get out and about and get their needs met when driving is no longer an option?

5. Commons Test:

Does the development contribute to the overall community something greater than what it takes in terms of natural and community resources?
Will it age gracefully and adapt to future uses, or is it designed to be disposable?
What does it leave for future generations?

³ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/choosing-our-communitys-future.pdf>

Champlain Town and Village's Consideration of Smart Growth Principles

Theme 1: Collective decision-making is prudent when growth is slow and incremental.

- *Critical Resources are preserved through good Planning.*
- *Development decisions are predictable, fair, and cost-effective.*

Unprepared municipalities are often confronted with piecemeal development in the form of project permit proposals from well-financed applicants and often find themselves anxiously (and on short notice) trying to equip themselves to do battle with well-paid teams of experts paid by property developers. Interim measures are adopted to stave off development as Comprehensive planning programs and zoning re-writes are fast tracked towards adoption.⁴ Piecemeal planning replaces Comprehensive Planning.

The Comprehensive Plan can act as the keystone in the structural foundation of a local planning program. Local governments guide private land use decisions and reflective planning can routinely occur. When this happens people enthusiastically give of their time to make sure that development projects measure up to the town's vision of its future. Citizens enter a meeting room with the intent to participate in an ongoing local land use planning program, and bring with them a wealth of knowledge, a morality that establishes some value for nature and a relationship with their neighbors and the landscape. Community Leadership and citizens follow through in project permitting and decision making. Center-stage to this alternative future is the script: the continually updated, highly respected and hopefully dog-eared community Comprehensive Plan. It acts as the mirror to reflect and remind citizens that place-making is about community self-determination and rowing the boat in the same direction.⁵

Incremental Smart Growth Requires Local Planning

Rural communities tend to build-out slowly and in small, incremental steps. This is particularly so in Champlain and is reflected in a modest, but consistent number of building permits issued year over year. This gradual growth can and should be planned through initial and periodic review of the land use laws and capital planning efforts by the Town and Village. The Town and Village conduct capital planning for infrastructure, roads, and sidewalks, as well as which grant-funded projects need attention. These efforts are admirable. In the future, both comprehensive and capital plans will be periodically updated to reflect changing local conditions and regional market forces.

⁴ New York State Commission on Rural Resources 2008

⁵ Ann Ruzow Holland, November 2008

Tools and techniques⁶ available to the Town and Village of Champlain to support Incremental Smart Growth

Density transfers

Depending upon legal circumstances, a parcel or zoning district that desires or could benefit from additional density for an area may be able to use one of three kinds of density transfers. First, a landowner has the ability to transfer density on a given parcel of land. This enables clustering development on the most appropriate areas while avoiding development on least. Second, if density transfer is provided for in the local zoning law, two land owners can transfer density between them. If density transfer is not part of a local land use program, transfers are limited to adjacent properties. This limitation may be overcome by means of a complicated scheme of transferring density from one property to another in a kind of fireman's bucket brigade. Third, a municipality may transfer density as part of a local land use program.

Zoning

Champlain Town and Village currently use conventional zoning to regulate land use in both municipalities.

Cities, towns, and villages in New York State are authorized by state statutes (called "zoning enabling laws") to regulate the use of land by enacting what is commonly referred to as "zoning." Zoning governs the way land in a municipality is used and developed. Its goal is to carry out the municipality's long range land use objectives. Zoning regulates the uses to which property may be devoted, the siting of development on land, and the density of development on property.⁷ Where it is most successful, zoning is written in a way that compliments the planning goals of communities and addresses the needs of residents and businesses in the municipality.

Zoning protects health and safety and property values. Zoning separates potentially incompatible uses. A well-written zoning regulation permits appropriate uses in each zone and can even regulate the location of the development on the site and its building design. If applied this way, zoning can preserve or even enhance the character of a neighborhood or community. On the other hand, if not well-tailored to the needs of the community, zoning can needlessly separate compatible mixed uses and result in monotonous patterns of development.

Some landowners oppose zoning because of the restrictions it places on the ability to use their land or believe it diminishes their ability to sell the land to someone for a high price. Balanced against this concern is the recognition that zoned

⁶ Hamlets 3 : Planning for Smart Growth and Expansion of Hamlets in the Adirondack Park : An Illustrated Guide / [prepared by Roger Trancik] 2010

⁷ <https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/01/adopting-zoning-for-the-first-time.pdf>

properties often retain their value precisely because landowners know that nearby properties can only be occupied by compatible uses.⁸

Incentive zoning provides rewards for development, such as affordable housing or public space, which meets specified area or municipal development goals.

Overlay districts

Champlain Town recently adopted and currently uses an overlay district for large solar installations.

Overlay districts are drawn on a map over existing zoning to address the special needs of a particular area within one or more zoning classifications. Common examples include historic districts, road corridor standards, agricultural protection, watershed protection, and scenic view protection zones. These zones can preserve community character, promote mixed-use development or higher density development, encourage affordable housing, and achieve other community-desired results.

Subdivisions

When a landowner or developer wishes to subdivide an existing parcel, it offers a community the opportunity to ensure this expansion reflects smart growth principles. A municipal board can empower a local planning board to do subdivision review and adopt regulations, such as requiring that a certain percentage of a site be conserved by clustering structures. A design review board can exist independent of zoning laws.

Official map

An official map is a powerful, yet often underutilized planning tool. Municipal boards are legally empowered to create an official map delineating streets, highways, parks, and drainage systems, built and unbuilt. A town and village can draw out streets and other elements that do not currently exist to create a compact hamlet form following smart growth principles and design strategies. When a developer or landowner develops a piece of land, their plans will be legally bound to the features on the official map. Official maps are not straightjackets, though. They are a starting point for a rational layout of roads and other infrastructure and can be revised by a town board. If a land developer has a different idea that results in a logical and efficient layout of roads and other infrastructure, he/she can submit that idea to the town or village board for its action to revise the official map.⁹

⁸ <https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/01/adopting-zoning-for-the-first-time.pdf>

⁹ <https://apa.ny.gov/Documents/Reports/Hamlets/6-Achieving-Success.pdf>

Theme 2: Strong village centers and downtown/commercial centers support density and provide a compact mix of uses.

- *Create complete neighborhoods where daily needs are nearby.*
- *High visual quality attracts investment and reflects a hamlet's history.*
- *Walkable public spaces promote social interaction on a human scale, energizing hamlet activities.*
- *Strengthen existing communities and direct development towards them. Make efficient use of public investments in infrastructure, schools, and services.*

In the Post-Covid Era, Champlain has experienced a trend that mirrors circumstances in the Adirondacks, New England, and the Northern Forest Region. Local real estate prices have skyrocketed, primarily because COVID refugees—mostly urban dwellers—have bought up property—far away from the cities—in order to escape COVID—and reside where density was low, environmental quality was high, outdoor opportunities were abundant, and exposure to disease was limited. In addition, many people have reconsidered what they want. And it is something more than isolated housing subdivisions. With the popularity of remote work, employees are no longer wedded to office parks and downtown skyscrapers.

The national trends are clear. Folks want ready access to jobs, daily necessities, and fun, with less time in traffic. Jobs near housing, housing near jobs. People who want to drive should be able to. Places with a center point, a “downstreet,” walkable streets, energized gathering places, green space, parks, trails, and face-to-face social events are thriving. Champlain wants to be a place where people who work from home can invest in the community by attending and participating in community life, raise children in a safe environment, buy local, engage with neighbors at the local café or store, walk to get the mail, then community “home” and back to work.

The following recommendations from Hamlets 3¹⁰ encourage compact, incremental smart growth.

“Communities should plan their road network via the official map to encourage compact patterns of development near an existing hamlet center. The community or a developer may finance and build these roads individually or in partnership.

Roads and utility placement within and near a [community] center encourages infill development and the reconfiguration and densification of inner lots.

¹⁰ Roger Trancik, Hamlets 3 <https://apa.ny.gov/Documents/Reports/Hamlets/index.html>

Building utilities and utility districts first guides the location of new growth and prevents unplanned linear strip development.

Special overlay districts, such as a business improvement district (BID), requiring a critical mass of businesses may come subsequently.¹¹

Theme 3: Jobs and housing go hand in hand.

Energy Efficiency is achieved through Green Design and Sustainable Land Use.

Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.

Put jobs and good schools within reach of all who need them.

“Smart projects shouldn’t just bring a lot more of what already exists.” “[Communities} that position themselves with an eye to long-term sustainability will succeed in their quest for new investment.”¹² Projects that incorporate mixed uses (shops and housing, or offices and retail) are growing in popularity. Emerging forms of investment should support increasing diversity in retail and service sectors. As part of a larger regional economy, Champlain needs to attract and house a younger and more diversified labor force that is available to fill all job sectors. As noted in other sections, Champlain’s Villages have great potential to serve as community hubs where residents and businesses support one-another through investment, spending, and revitalization activities. Furthermore, any child, no matter where he or she lives, should have access to good schools, a safe environment, and opportunities for advancement.

Good planning ought to allow for housing for the full population in a way that is fair to homeowners, home-seekers of all incomes and to local jurisdictions.” Champlain Town and Village will strive to incentivize an equitable, appropriate (to scale), and necessary mix of affordable, senior, and workforce housing that address regional housing market needs. The mix of housing will attract new residents at various stages of life and include new construction townhouse-style condominiums or rentals, adaptive reuse of structures for single or multi-family units, accessory dwelling units, and senior independent living. This would encourage continued development of Champlain as a bedroom community to Montreal, Plattsburgh, and Burlington. Great quality of life begins at the street or neighborhood scale, though one size doesn’t fit all. There’s no reason we can’t have all the qualities we want in Champlain.

¹¹ <https://apa.ny.gov/Documents/Reports/Hamlets/6-Achieving-Success.pdf>

¹² <https://apa.ny.gov/Documents/Reports/Hamlets/6-Achieving-Success.pdf>

Theme 4: Well-defined boundaries prevent sprawl and protect natural resources.

Keeping development compact helps preserve water quality and natural resources in a number of ways and contributes in a meaningful way to enhancing the ecosystem services provided by nature. Compact development can help preserve continuous areas of open space important for agriculture, climate mitigation, protecting water and air quality. It reduces the amount of impervious surface that covers the land and shunts stormwater and pollutants into nearby rivers and streams. Multi-story buildings with smaller parking lots cover less land than spread-out single-story developments with big parking lots. Compact development also makes it easier to protect critical water resources from development, such as wetlands, vegetated buffers along streambeds, river corridors, and floodplains.

Theme 5: Access to nature provides many with the authentic Adirondack and Champlain Valley experiences.

- *Preserve natural beauty, parks, farmland, Lake Champlain, and environmentally critical areas.*

Protected areas, such as New York's Adirondack Park and the Lake Champlain Watershed/Basin, constitute natural resource-rich amenity islands, isolated in a sea of development, and hence are particularly threatened by land transformation. As such, they are in great danger from market forces because they possess great scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. On the other hand, these special amenities increase private land values enhancing the tax base.

Champlain Town and Village have done an outstanding job capitalizing on and transforming the natural features and open space within and nearby into community amenities, such as parks and recreational spaces. More can always be done, and further actions are on the drawing board. A comprehensive recreational plan for the Town and Village might bring together all the existing and possible community amenities and evaluate ways that low impact multi-use trails and greenbelts can enhance the connections between public lands and nearby communities. These actions can also attract development and investment into the community.

Charming, picturesque, beautiful are words describing the landscape of Champlain. If it were not for the way farming has sculpted and framed the geography along the Great Chazy River and Lake Champlain, one might not see the lakes, rivers, and mountains for the abundance of trees. With the advent of climate change, the bread baskets of the USA are drying out and becoming inhospitable. Our region has the ability to feed itself. The regional agricultural economy has great potential to feed, and provide non-food resources, perhaps export food resources to food-scarce regions of the world. The local foods and food security movement are important entrance points for making the argument to residents for protecting local farmland which is also conserved open space. When new development occurs on farms or other open land, as most of it does, those resources are gone for good. How Champlain's residents decide when such growth is appropriate and push for change when it isn't is an important consideration in the future.

Conclusion: How Community Profile Chapters 1–4 of the Town and Village of Champlain Community Profile Address Smart Growth Principles

Chapters 1 through 4 of the Town and Village of Champlain Community Profile comprehensively set the foundation for Smart Growth by analyzing existing conditions, trends, and infrastructure in ways that align with New York State's Smart Growth Principles. Together, they inform future planning that prioritizes compact, efficient, equitable, and sustainable development.

Chapter 1: People, History, Economics, and Culture

Chapter 1 underscores historic preservation, community identity, and economic vitality-- all core Smart Growth values. It documents Champlain's rich heritage, cultural resources (like the Champlain History Center and Fort Montgomery), and the settlement patterns rooted in transportation corridors and trade. Demographic and socioeconomic data highlight evolving housing needs, income disparities, and educational attainment, which can inform strategies that promote diverse housing options and equitable access to opportunity. The chapter also emphasizes local economic assets, such as the proximity to the Canadian border and presence of major employers—supporting regional economic development and job-housing balance.

Chapter 2: Natural Systems and Landscape Features

This chapter aligns strongly with the principles of environmental protection and resilient development. It provides detailed data on geography, water systems, soils, and ecological communities, emphasizing the importance of protecting the natural landscape from inappropriate development. Climate change impacts—such as increasing precipitation, flood risks, and agricultural shifts—are thoroughly analyzed, encouraging climate-resilient land use. The chapter reinforces that land suitability must guide growth, a key tenet of Smart Growth.

Chapter 3: Existing and Future Land Use

Chapter 3 is directly tied to Smart Growth through its analysis of land use patterns and constraints. It highlights the predominance of agricultural and residential land, limited land fragmentation, and the importance of preserving working landscapes. The chapter advocates compact growth in village centers, minimizing sprawl and infrastructure costs. It evaluates zoning and land regulations in the context of environmental risks and development suitability, supporting predictable, fair, and cost-effective development decisions. Land suitability analysis is introduced to promote thoughtful infill and redevelopment.

Chapter 4: Public Facilities and Services

Public infrastructure is essential to support efficient, location-appropriate growth. Chapter 4 details water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation systems, as well as governance, education, and emergency services. It explicitly connects capital investment in wastewater and water infrastructure to future growth areas, such as along U.S. Route 11, ensuring that growth is directed to areas with adequate infrastructure. It also encourages multimodal transportation, including sidewalks, public transit, and complete streets, consistent with Smart Growth's emphasis on accessibility and mobility choice.

Conclusion

Chapters 1 through 4 provide the empirical groundwork and policy context needed to apply Smart Growth Principles in Champlain. These chapters highlight the Town and Village's historical assets, environmental conditions, land use patterns, and infrastructure capabilities, laying the foundation for sustainable, resilient, and community-driven growth in the years ahead. The integration of environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, infrastructure planning, and citizen engagement exemplifies Champlain's proactive approach to Smart Growth.