

**Section 1**  
**Introduction**



# TOWN AND VILLAGE OF WILSON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



## SECTION 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Regional and Local Setting

The Town and Village of Wilson are located along the shoreline of Lake Ontario, in the central portion of Niagara County, New York, with the Town of Porter to the west, Town of Newfane to the east and the Town of Cambria to the south (Maps 1 and 2). The Town encompasses approximately 50.2 square miles in area, with the incorporated Village covering about 0.8 square miles of this area. The Village of Wilson is situated in the center of the Town, in close proximity to Lake Ontario and Wilson Harbor.

The surface topography of the town is a level plain that is raised above Lake Ontario by unstable bluffs measuring between 10 and 30 feet in height. The northern one-third of this plain has been worn away by the western branch of Twelve-Mile Creek, which flows through the northeastern corner of the Town and discharges to Lake Ontario. The East Branch of Twelve-Mile Creek meanders through the central portion of the Town, skirting the western edge of the Village as it flows toward Tuscarora Bay. The southern part of the Town is very flat.

Tuscarora Bay is a natural embayment of open waters and marsh that is protected from the lake by Sunset Beach Island. Much of the bay has been developed with private marinas and boating infrastructure to support a prosperous recreational fishing industry in Lake Ontario.

The Town remains a rural farming community. In 2008, at the time of the last U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, the Town (outside of the Village) had an estimated population of 4,561 persons. Including the Village, the Town's population in 2008 was estimated at 5,702. This is a decline from the 2000 census figure of 5,840 persons.

The Town of Wilson is currently governed by a Town Board, which includes the Town Supervisor and four Council members. The Village of Wilson is governed by a Board of Trustees that is comprised of the Mayor and two Trustees. The Town and Village each have a Planning Board and a Zoning Board of Appeals.





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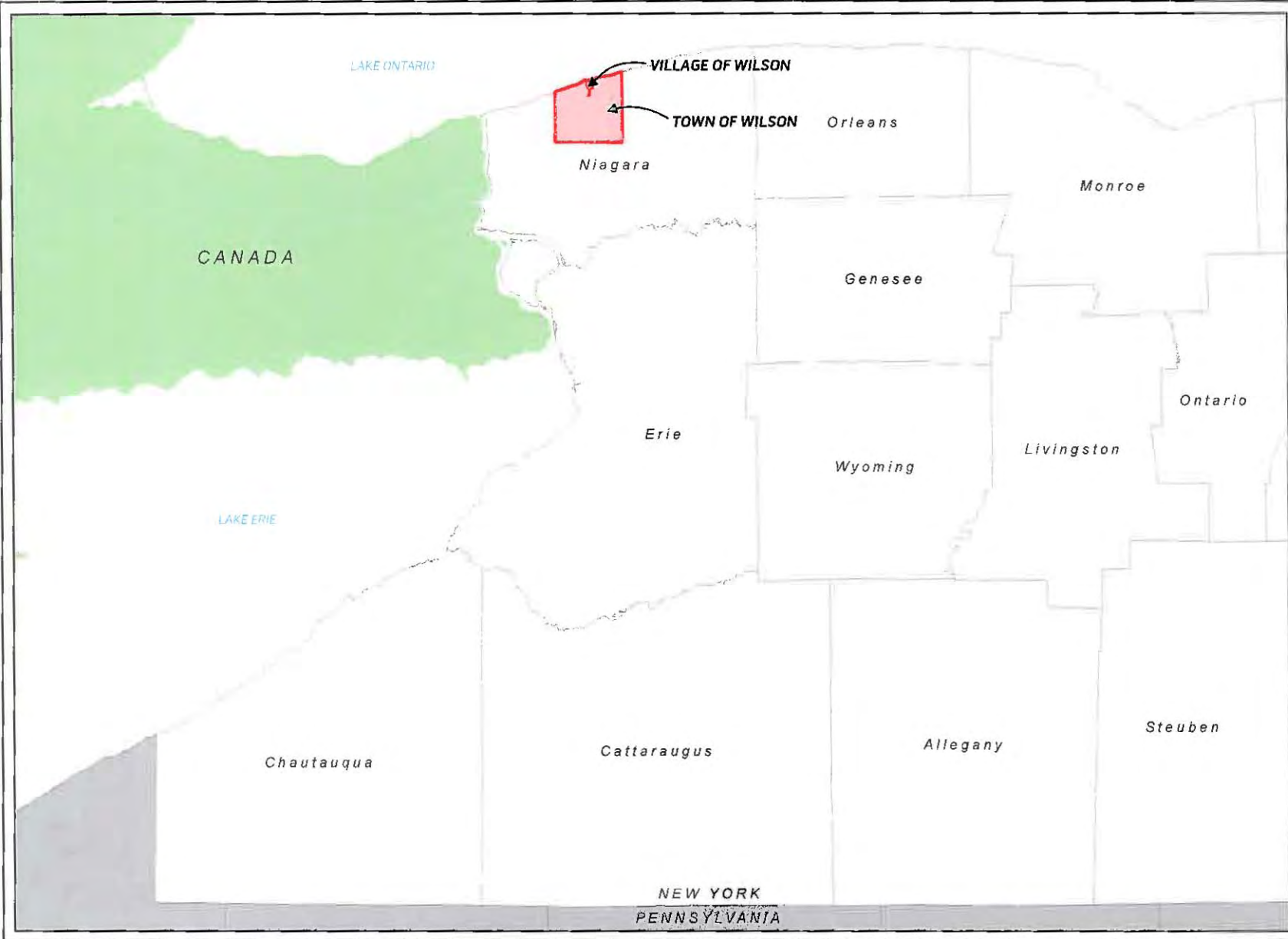
### 1.2 Town and Village History

The Town of Wilson was established on April 10, 1818. It was named for Luther Wilson, the son of Reuben Wilson, who was the founder of the Town. In 1827, Luther Wilson started the hamlet of Wilson by laying out a single tier of lots along the north side of Young Street, from Lake Street to the Creek. In 1829, a tavern was added to his father's store and post office at the west end of Young Street, which was often visited by the early settlers and soldiers from Old Fort Niagara. In 1834, Luther and his father built the cobblestone "Ontario House" on the southwest corner of Young and Lake Streets, and up to 1894 (when it was destroyed by fire); it was considered one of Wilson's oldest and best known hostelries. Through 1837, Luther helped his father as a merchant and miller, and in that same year, enlarged the grist mill by adding steam power and two more run of stones. In 1845, Luther built a cobblestone home on the site of the first log school-house, which was built in the village center in 1820. Today, this home is known as the "Wilson House."



In 1846, Luther Wilson established the harbor and obtained permission from the Secretary of War to build two 200-foot piers into the lake at the mouth of Twelve-Mile creek. He was also responsible for having Congress declare Wilson Harbor a Port of Entry in 1848. For the next 20 years, at his own expense, he dredged the channel by the use of horsepower, and continued to make improvements until 1867, when the Wilson Harbor Company was incorporated. Other improvements in the harbor area included a large store house where he began buying and shipping grain and fruit. He built a shipyard, which was the start of a new industry in Wilson. Through 1875, about 20 two and three-masted schooners were built at the harbor by itinerant contractors.





**TOWN OF WILSON**

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

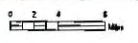
**MAP 1  
Regional Setting / Location**



NIAGARA COUNTY - NEW YORK

**LEGEND**

Town of Wilson



**WENDEL COMPANIES**  
 WD Project # 220920  
 Map Created: August, 2010

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# TOWN OF WILSON

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### MAP 2 Aerial Photography

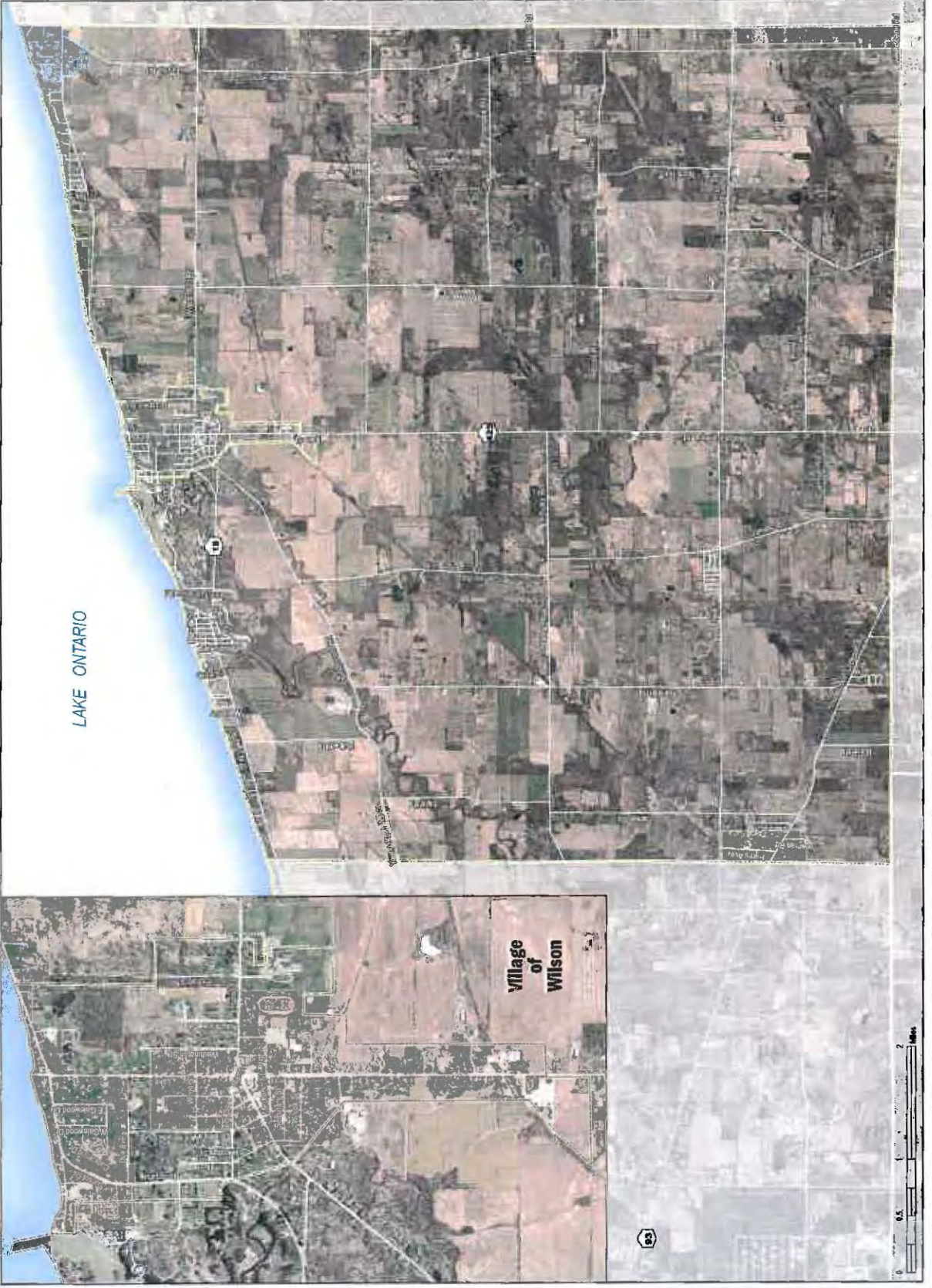


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**LEGEND**

- Municipal Boundary

**WENDELL CONSULTING**  
 WOI Project #220930  
 Map Created January, 2010  
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The Village of Wilson was incorporated May 11, 1858, by an act of the state legislature. At the time, it encompassed 416 acres and had a population of 715 persons. Luther Wilson was elected to serve as the first president of the Board of Trustees. Luther donated eight acres of land near Twelve-Mile Creek for a new cemetery. When he died in 1890, at the age of 92, he was interred in the cemetery that he started.

### 1.3 Reasons for Preparing a Comprehensive Plan

New York State Town Law §272-a and Village Law 7-722 authorize local municipalities to develop and adopt a Comprehensive Plan to help promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the community, with due consideration given to the needs of the people of the community. The Laws state that:

*"Among the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to a town or village government is the authority and responsibility to undertake Comprehensive Planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens."*

*"The Comprehensive Plan fosters cooperation among governmental agencies planning and implementing capital projects and municipalities that may be directly affected thereby."*

The Town and Village of Wilson last developed a joint Comprehensive Master Plan in 1966. Recognizing that this plan is outdated and no longer addresses the issues and opportunities of the community, the communities chose to undertake the preparation of an update to the Comprehensive Plan in 2010. The Town and Village Boards, in making a decision to authorize an update to the Plan, recognized that the Comprehensive Plan is the most important document for managing the physical growth of the area and maintaining the rural character of the community.

There are many concrete benefits of a Comprehensive Plan. One critical benefit relates to the Town and Village's zoning authority. Municipalities are given the power to regulate land uses within the community, but these decisions should be based on sound planning principles and developed through a process that represents a consensus of the community. The process of developing a Comprehensive Plan provides a rational basis for decisions regarding zoning and other land use regulations. This helps ensure better decision making, while providing the Town





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and Village with a powerful tool to help direct growth in a manner and intensity that meets the community's vision for the future.

A Comprehensive Plan provides the vision for the future of the community and also establishes goals and objectives that guide future growth, reflecting the principles and concepts that a community feels will enhance the character and quality of life therein. Therefore, another benefit of a Comprehensive Plan is that it helps guide local officials, who can look to their established vision and the goals and objectives for assistance in making future land use decisions. These elements of the Plan also have an influence on other levels of government. All County, State or Federal governmental agencies that propose capital projects that would affect lands in the Town and Village must take the Comprehensive Plan into consideration as part of their own decision-making processes.

The Comprehensive Plan, developed with the support and input from both municipal officials and the general public, acts as a standard for ensuring that the Town's land use regulations are built on a solid foundation and represent a consensus of the community. It shows the cooperation and commitment of the community that can aid in seeking governmental grants and other assistance. In short, the Town's Comprehensive Plan provides Wilson with an effective tool for shaping its future. It influences local actions on the part of the Town and its citizens, as well as the actions of County and State and Federal agencies that are proposed and undertaken within the Town.

## 1.4 Public Participation Overview

*"The participation of citizens in an open, responsible and flexible planning process is essential to the designing of the optimum comprehensive plan."*

The Town and Village of Wilson are committed to the idea that a critical and necessary element of the Comprehensive Planning process is continuous and effective public participation. Hence, this Plan was prepared from the beginning with acknowledgement of public concerns and desires and included on-going public outreach to build support of the Plan. The communities established an Advisory Committee, which included representatives from the Town and the Village, to oversee the development of the Comprehensive Plan. The Advisory Committee also included representation from the agricultural community, school district, and other organizations who helped to make sure the Plan expressed a clear vision of the Town. The





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Committee met on a regular basis to provide guidance and insight into the planning process and to ensure that the final document would be an effective Plan that considered the concerns and ideas of local citizens.

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee held public meetings to gather input from the community. The first public meeting was held on March 15, 2010, at Wilson High School, to introduce the project and collect comments from the general public on important issues and opportunities that should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Input from this meeting was essential in developing a summary of local concerns and ideas and drafting a set of goals and objectives.

A second public meeting was held on July 20, 2010 in the Wilson High School auditorium to confirm the findings that were derived from the first public meeting, to present the draft goals and objectives and to conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis for the Comprehensive Plan. Input from this meeting was used to finalize the goals and objectives and establish a draft vision for the community, as well as draft recommendations. Project information, and information on the meetings, was also made available on the Town's website.

### **1.5 How the Plan will be Utilized**

New York State does not dictate what form a Comprehensive Plan must take, but suggests that it consist of written and graphic materials, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports, and other descriptive material that identify the goals, objectives, and recommendations that the Town wishes to set forth to attain its vision. It examines the environmental, demographic, physical, and developmental aspects of the Town, as well as the regulatory setting that guides these factors.

While municipalities are given the power to regulate land uses within their communities, these decisions should be based on sound planning principles, and must not be arbitrary or capricious. As previously noted, Town Law generally indicates that municipal planning, zoning, capital budgeting, and other land use regulation decisions made in the Town should be done so in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan provides an accessible and clear guide for entities seeking to undertake an action or project in their community. It also provides greater leverage on land use and planning related activities and programs that are instituted by other governmental authorities, such as State or County agencies, who are





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required to take local plans into consideration when proposing to undertake capital projects in local communities.

The Comprehensive Plan addresses the issues and concerns specific to the Town and Village based on input from local residents and stakeholders, gathered through a variety of forums. The Plan provides a vision for the Town and Village and reflects the principals and concepts that the community feels will enhance and protect its character and quality of life.

The goals and objectives, recommendations, and implementation strategy included in the Wilson Comprehensive Plan are designed to address the issues and concerns that are unique to the Town and Village. This Plan demonstrates the cooperation and commitment of the communities, which also lends strong support for grant funding opportunities. The Comprehensive Plan provides an assessment of where the communities are, identifies what the communities would like to be, and includes recommendations and strategies to attain their vision.

If and when adopted by each community, the Town and Village of Wilson should begin to implement the Plan by amending their land use regulations, as required, to conform to the Comprehensive Plan and consider the Plan in all of their land use making decisions (site plans, subdivisions and zoning actions) and capital budgeting actions. Copies of the completed Comprehensive Plan must be filed with County and State agencies and must be utilized by those agencies in planning projects and actions that could affect the community. The Town and Village should actively utilize the Plan as a tool, resource and guide for all future land use decisions in an effort to achieve their vision.

