



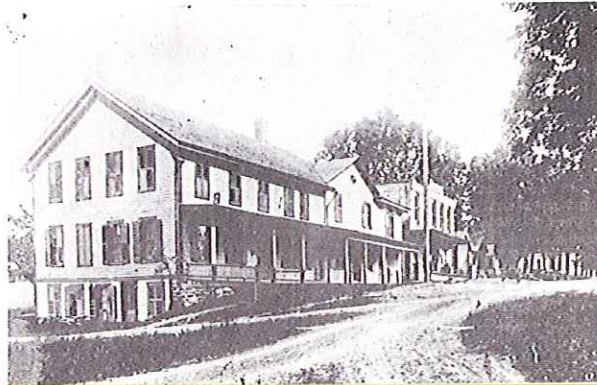
## SECTION V. HAMLET DEVELOPMENT

The area known as the LaFayette Hamlet is located at the historic crossroads of Route 20 and Route 11. A revision to the Town's zoning ordinance in 1999 formally designated this area as "hamlet". For the purposes of this plan a larger geographical area than the official hamlet boundary was used. Map \_\_ shows the boundaries of the zoned Hamlet and the area focused on in this Plan.

### HISTORY

The Hamlet of LaFayette, also known as LaFayette Village and LaFayette Square was once only one of a number of hamlets in the Town. Located in the heart of New York, the center of Lafayette Hamlet lies at the crossroads of two of the longest roads in the United States, Routes 11 and 20, which span all the way from Canada to Louisiana and the East Coast to the West Coast.

The completion of the Skaneateles and Cazenovia Road resulted in the "village" of LaFayette becoming the commercial hub of the Town. A village square was donated and became the focal point of the community. By 1835, LaFayette village had a Presbyterian church, two stores, a tavern, and twelve or fifteen dwellings. By 1886, it had two agricultural equipment stores, two blacksmiths, one furniture maker, two shoemakers, two hotels, three stores, three sawmills, a grist mill, two churches, a physician, milliner, and butcher. Although there were a number of commercial establishments, large swaths of agricultural land surrounded the development in all directions.



The main intersection in the Hamlet circa 1912 looking southeast toward the LaFayette Hotel

In 1854, the railroad was constructed in the nearby hamlet of Onativia, which had several feed stores, a grocery, and a hotel. Town residents used the rail system to access goods and services available in the City of Syracuse located to the north of the Town. A station closer to the Hamlet area would have fortified the economy of the Hamlet, but instead people had to make the trek to the rail station located one mile to the east. Because of this, and other forces, the Hamlet of LaFayette never grew into a substantial village. It did, however outpace other hamlets in the Town to become the predominate development concentration in the Town.

By the 1950's the American love affair with the automobile produced four gas stations in the LaFayette hamlet area. In addition, two grocery stores were located in the hamlet, one on the first level of the LaFayette Hotel and one located just south. The LaFayette Central School, grades K-12 had been erected in the 1939, with additions



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completed in 1950 and 1965 (a new high school building was erected north of the Hamlet in 1970-1971). The construction of Interstate 81 in the 1960's further transformed the Hamlet and provided easy access by car to the City of Syracuse a few miles north.

## HAMLET TODAY

The Hamlet of LaFayette, as aforementioned, never grew into a substantial Village or a traditional downtown. Nevertheless, it is the Town's most significant commercial and residential hub, and serves as the center of community and civic life. It is located adjacent to the Town's only exit off of Interstate 81 (Exit 15), hosts the majority of Town businesses, and is home to Town government offices, the library, the elementary school and the post office. There were and still are a series of sidewalks in the hamlet, however, many lack handicap access and crossing at the four corners is dangerous.

Centered around the crossroads of Route 11 and Route 20, The Hamlet is also figuratively at a crossroads: historic buildings have been lost; open space has been developed for newer commercial structures; everyday retail options have diminished; and traffic has increased. The Town must determine how the Hamlet will function and what it will look like in the future, and take actions to ensure this desired future, in order to stem the continued loss of character.

Below is a summary of the specific issues facing the Hamlet.

**Hamlet Character** – Public visioning sessions clearly demonstrated residents concerns to preserve, protect, and enhance the character and sense of place of the Hamlet. Character and Sense of Place are derived from many factors, including topography, roads and streets, landscaping, buildings, and signage. However, with a mix of older historic homes, a historic church, and a collection of more recent commercial buildings typical of highway commercial style development, the LaFayette Hamlet's character is not clearly evident, although residents have repeatedly referred to "rural" as touchstone for describing the character of the Town.

In order to better define the desired character of the Hamlet a Visual Preference Exercise was undertaken with the Steering Committee in the summer of 2011. The exercise included guided discussions of various images to determine preferred physical characteristics of the Hamlet's built environment. The results of the exercise, a summary of which is included in Appendix \_\_, showed mutually agreed preferences, including:

- Architectural styles that are reminiscent of agricultural structures or early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial and residential structures
- Small to moderately sized buildings
- Chain and franchise stores that conform to local standards rather than generic designs
- Commercial buildings with gabled or hipped roofs instead of flat roofs
- Use of natural materials such as clapboard, brick, or stone.
- Two story buildings



- Architectural details such as dormers and cupolas.
- Sidewalk lined streets with trees and landscaping
- Smaller scale signage

The development of detailed Minimum Design Guidelines can assist both the Town and developers to create buildings that will enhance the character of the Hamlet. Enhanced site design requirements that include requirements for trees and landscaping will also further these efforts. Such requirements are typically welcome by developers as they remove a great deal of subjectivity in the planning review and approval process.

In addition to assuring that new construction (or major reconstruction) projects enhance the sense of place, the preservation of existing historic structures is important. Much of the Hamlet's historic commercial building stock has been lost. The major remaining commercial structure, the LaFayette Hotel, will likely be lost to the DOT intersection construction. This prominent landmark has sat vacant for many years, primarily do to the inability of its small lot to support the needed water and sewer infrastructure. Although the preservation of this landmark should be the first choice for the Town, the reality is that its future reuse is highly unlikely, and that removal of the structure by the DOT is the most prudent alternative. It is very important that the Town work to retain and preserve its remaining older structures, including historic residential buildings. Efforts should also be made to renovate existing buildings in the area that are in poor condition and are a blight on the Hamlet.

The Hamlet also includes a number of latter 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings that, while in good condition, are not architecturally consistent with the desired character of the Hamlet. There is little the Town can do to effect change on these existing structures, but future renovations, when undertaken, should be developed to bring them into closer conformance with the Town's goals. It is possible, however, for the Town to revise its sign ordinance and amortize out existing signs, which will improve the character of existing development.

Regarding the streetscape, committee members universally stated that the eastern approach into the Hamlet, on Route 20, most closely resembled the character that they wanted the rest of the Hamlet to emulate. The most defining feature of this gateway is the heavy tree canopy that lines and overhangs the roadway. Other than the front lawn of the church, there are few trees in the heart of the Hamlet. Concerted efforts should be made to plant trees in the commercial areas of the Hamlet, in particular large trees that will create a canopy over the roadway.

**Commercial Development** - The Hamlet includes the greatest number of commercial businesses in the Town, 42, which is approximately half of all commercial enterprises in the Town. Over the years, however, businesses providing everyday goods and services have been declining. For example, the Red and White grocery store existed in the hamlet until 15 years ago, and now no grocery exists. Major clusters of business types include:

- Medical (7)
- Eateries (6)



- Retail (5)
- Auto Service (4)
- Financial (4)
- Other services (3)

Presently the only places to buy limited groceries are the Nice and Easy gas station/ convenience store or the Dollar General Store. Several “newer” buildings include a bank, health center, library, NAPA dealership, dollar store, real estate and other personal service businesses. The LaFayette Hotel, the Hamlet’s most prominent building, sits vacant and deteriorating and will likely be lost in the near future (see below\_\_\_\_). The gas station and McDonald’s restaurant draw significant numbers of travelers off of I-81.

In 2005, the Syracuse University Maxwell School’s Community Link Program completed a survey to ascertain the community’s views on a number of issues, including issues that impact the Hamlet. Seventy-seven (77%) of respondents indicated they were in favor of soliciting new businesses in the Town, while 94% favored “smaller businesses that provide modest employment opportunities”. A grocery store and a pharmacy were the two business most often mentioned. An additional survey conducted by the Syracuse University Link Program in 2007 provides additional detail into the level of demand for various businesses, products, or services. Respondents were asked to rate 24 potential businesses on a five-point scale, from #1 being “very disinterested” to #5 being “very interested”. The results, in decreasing order of demand are as follows:

1. Restaurant	90% interested
2. Grocery Store	83% interested
3. Construction and Building Supply Store	62% interested
4. Fitness Center	51% interested
5. Banking	58% interested
6. Handyman/women services	55% interested
7. Healthcare provider & therapy services	52% interested
8. Novelty item or gift stores	51% not interested
9. Computer and Technical Services	58% not interested
10. Children’s daycare	59% not interested
11. Cleaning services	59% not interested
12. Educational products and toys	62% not interested
13. Landscaping and lawn care	63% not interested
14. Sporting goods	65% not interested
15. Furniture store	67% not interested
16. Home medical supply services	68% not interested
17. Adult daycare services	68% not interested
18. Beauty salon	69% not interested
19. Attorney-at-law	71% not interested
20. Interior design	74% not interested
21. Investment and insurance	76% not interested
22. Real estate	81% not interested
23. Home security and alarm business	85% not interested
24. Advertising/marketing firms	85% not interested



Residents were also asked if they preferred development in or near the hamlet of LaFayette, the hamlet of Jamesville, or “other”. Eighty-six (86) respondents chose the LaFayette Hamlet, 12 chose the Jamesville Hamlet, and 12 chose “other”, indicating a clear preference among residents for the location of future business development in the hamlet of LaFayette. The results of these surveys were reinforced via public visioning sessions held during the development of this plan. “Greater development of the Hamlet area” was identified as the greatest opportunity for the Town. It is clear that residents desire more commercial development in the Town, and that the Hamlet is the desired location for such development. It is also clear that residents are concerned that new development does not diminish the Town’s rural agrarian character.

Future commercial development is hampered by the lack of public water and/or sewer facilities (see Section IX. Infrastructure and Telecommunication). The development of a public water system will assist existing businesses, and allow for easier development of new compatible businesses.

The Town must be proactive in creating an environment that encourages the establishment of compatible commercial businesses in the hamlet. This includes new construction on available developable properties that is of a size, scale and design that complements and enhances the rural, agricultural character of the community. Moderately scaled commercial development is most appropriate on the western and northern edges of the Hamlet, while smaller commercial businesses are most appropriate near the center of the Hamlet. The establishment of businesses in residential properties near the center of the Hamlet should be welcome, although the residential character of these structures should be preserved.

**Housing Development** – Housing is an important component of the character and sense of place of the Hamlet. While much of the historic commercial building stock has been lost, many historic residential buildings remain. Relatively few people, however, live in the heart of the Hamlet. According to demographic data provided by the Neilson Company, a demographic research company, 33 people reside within ½ mile radius of “the four corners”. 263 people live within a 1 mile radius, and 966 live within 1.5 miles. Residential development nearest the heart of the Hamlet tends to be older homes (more than 75 years old) while newer residential development is located on the outskirts. Nearly all of the Town’s rental housing is located in apartment complexes in or adjacent to the Hamlet.

Those homes located on Route 11 and Route 20 west of the intersection are likely to lose their residential appeal due to the heavy traffic on the highways. Rather than let these decay over time, the Town should encourage reuse as office or retail shops while retaining their residential identity.

There is a nexus between residential and commercial development in the Hamlet. Future residential development will likely demand the availability of convenient goods and services. Conversely, commercial development, such as a pharmacy or grocery store will need a population concentration to be successful, with the exception of businesses deriving the majority of their patronage from I-81.



In order to further the overall community goal of preserving an open, rural sense of place, the Town should enact zoning and land use regulations to concentrate residential development in and adjacent to the Hamlet. There are appropriate development sites in the southern and eastern areas of the Hamlet area that could accommodate up to 90 new homes without public water, or over 200 new homes with public water. The higher level of concentrated residential development, if carefully implemented, will help to relieve development pressure in more rural areas of the Town, provide a stronger base for commercial growth in and around the four corners, and a rural “village” atmosphere.

**Reconstruction of Routes 20 & 11 Intersection** – Routes 20 and 11 intersect at the heart of the Hamlet of LaFayette, with exit and entrance ramps to I-81 nearby. It is the most heavily travelled part of Town (see Map \_\_\_ for more detailed counts). The intersection and the immediate stretches of Routes 20 and 11 have fallen into disrepair in recent years as a result of this heavy use. The NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) is developing plans to reconstruct it, scheduled to be completed in 2013.

The most recent draft plans from the DOT, dated January 2011, include adding a center turning lane on Route 20, in front of the school and some houses; adding a left-turn only lane on Route 20 on the west side of the light; adding a center median on the opposite, or east, side; widening the roadway and increasing the corner radii at the main intersection; and moving the I-81 northbound entrance and exit ramps so that they intersect with Route 11 at a safer angle. These plans also include removing the vacant LaFayette Hotel at the southeast corner of the hamlet intersection, and giving the property to the Town of LaFayette. The initial proposed plans will help to address roadway conditions and traffic flow concerns that have been continuing problems. Initial designs, however, appear to not protect and enhance the character that the Town wishes to promote for the hamlet, and could be a detriment to it. The Town must work closely with DOT during the project design phase and advocate for a carefully considered design that balances the need for roadway and traffic improvements with the need to maintain a human scale to the hamlet, preserve its small town character, and address alternate transportation needs such as pedestrians and bicyclists.

The Town has already been involved in discussions with the DOT about the proposed changes to make sure what is implemented is beneficial for the community. Because the reconstruction is in the heart of the Hamlet, it is important that the design not only make the intersection more efficient for drivers, but also improve the pedestrian experience. Currently there are crosswalks on three sides of the intersection, but not one on the west side. There are sidewalks on each side of the road in each direction, except on the west side of the road heading north on Route 11. In addition, the sidewalks on the southwest corner are not universally accessible, with about a foot in elevation change from the road to the sidewalk.

In addition to making sidewalks accessible and adding crosswalks where they currently do not exist, there are other changes the Town can suggest the DOT include in their design that will not only improve the pedestrian experience but create a more inviting atmosphere in the Hamlet area. Improvements such as brick or stamped concrete crosswalks, and a brick or stamped asphalt median, instead of a striped one,



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on the east side of the intersection, help to define the area as the heart of the Hamlet and give it the character the Town is striving for. In addition, planting trees along stretches of road where there currently are none, or where trees will be removed, will make it a more pleasant environment.

Finally, the future development of the lot where the old LaFayette hotel will be demolished is very important. The lot is highly visible since it is located directly on the corner of the intersection. It is important that it does not become a weed covered vacant lot, or even a parking lot, without the proper design. These would detract from the character the Town is striving to maintain and create in the Hamlet area. While a new building would be ideal for the corner lot location, this is difficult without public water or sewer. The lot is only .13 acres (5,662sf) in size. Typically at least 40,000 sf is recommended in new residential developments if both water and sewer are needed. There is a 12-acre vacant lot just south of the old hotel, but even if a developer were able to acquire this, that would bring the total size to only a quarter acre. While it may be possible to rebuild a structure on this lot, the other difficulty may be in finding a developer interested in doing so. In the interim, or if a new building is not possible, the Town should make plans for this lot before the NYS DOT removes former hotel. These plans should include designs to define the corner of this major intersection.



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## GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

**GOAL 14:** Ensure that new commercial development is compatible with the rural, traditional character and scale of the Hamlet.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Develop and adopt architectural design requirements for new buildings and major renovations to existing buildings in order to provide a consistent and attractive character to commercial areas.
- B) Develop and adopt site design requirements to infuse more landscaping and greenspace, including trees, into developments and to create a better sense of place.
- C) Revise the Town sign ordinance to limit primary site signage in the Hamlet to smaller scale or monument style signs at the roadway, prohibit internally lit signs, and limit the overall number of signs.

**GOAL 15:** Ensure and enhance pedestrian and bike access and safety in the Hamlet.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) All new developments should incorporate sidewalks or trails, connected to municipal sidewalks, in order to enhance pedestrian and bicycle access.
- B) Sidewalks/crosswalks crossing business entranceways should be of a contrasting color and material, such as concrete, stamped concrete, brick, or stone. Such crosswalks should be consistent throughout the area.
- C) Encourage bicycle racks and pedestrian amenities as part of site plan review requirements.
- D) Install benches at various locations in the Hamlet.
- E) Extend public sidewalks throughout the Hamlet.
- F) Develop on-or-off road bike trails/lanes or shared pedestrian/bike paths.
- G) Develop and adopt a sidewalk maintenance law to ensure maintenance for all public sidewalks.

**GOAL 16:** Ensure the planned DOT reconstruction of the Hamlet intersection is compatible with, and enhances the existing and desired character of the Hamlet.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:





- A) Work with the DOT to minimize roadway widths and turning radii at the main intersection, and install other features, to create a human sense of scale.
- B) Accommodate pedestrians and cyclists by incorporating multi-modal transportation alternatives and amenities, including sidewalks on both sides of the road in every direction, and bike lanes, either in the roadway or in multi-use pedestrian/bike paths.
- C) Install and maintain crosswalks that are stamped asphalt or concrete made to look like brick or other natural materials. Install crosswalks on all four sides of the main intersection, across from the Elementary School where it currently exists, and at the reconfigured northbound exit intersection. "Yield to Pedestrian" signs should be placed at crosswalks.
- D) Provide for and identify on-street parking in all possible locations where it does not result in significant widening of the roadway.
- E) Advocate for a variety of trees to be planted along the right-of-way where they do not exist now, and replace trees that are removed as a result of construction. Plant larger shade trees where they can be accommodated. Use smaller trees under electrical wires to prevent costly future maintenance. Plant the largest diameter trees possible to ensure survival.
- F) Work with the DOT to design and install a Town owned pocket park on the southeast corner of the intersection to replace the old hotel if it is demolished. The park should include features that enhance the space for pedestrians and drivers passing by, such as benches, a walkway, trees, other plantings; a decorative wall or other elements to define the corner; and interpretive information regarding the old hotel, the hamlet, and the intersection as the crossroads of two of the longest highways in the U.S.
- G) Ensure that the re-aligned northbound I-81 off-ramp intersection is developed to create a welcoming gateway into the community including landscaping, crosswalks, and other design features.
- H) Install decorative, human scaled streetlight fixtures.
- I) Install raised landscaped medians where striped medians are proposed.
- J) Reduce the amount of road and directional signage to the lowest number possible.
- K) Incorporate creative elements, such as pavement markings or signage, into the designs to identify this as the intersection of the longest highways in the U.S.



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**GOAL 17:** Promote and support compatible residential development in and adjacent to the Hamlet in order to preserve open space outside the Hamlet.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Provide public water to support more compact development and revise zoning to reduce minimum lot sizes within the Hamlet.
- B) Consider implementation of Incentive Zoning to encourage or require clustering of housing, provision of needed amenities, and/or types of housing.
- C) Allow for and support development of mixed use buildings in the Hamlet center.
- D) Support development of housing appropriate for young families and seniors.

**GOAL 18:** Promote and support compatible commercial development in the Hamlet area.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Establish clear and concise planning and land use controls to eliminate uncertainty in the development process.
- B) Encourage development of small niche businesses, particularly in residential buildings near the Hamlet center.

**GOAL 19:** Protect and enhance the character of the Hamlet as the center of a rural agrarian community.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Institute a program to plant trees on public land and encourage planting of trees on private land.
- B) Research a partnership with SUNY ESF to utilize the Hamlet as a research location for urban forests.
- C) Establish a vacant building law to encourage renovation of blighting or vacant structures.
- D) Maintain town properties and right of ways to a high level.
- E) Preserve and protect historic structures from demolition or inappropriate alteration.



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**GOAL 20:** Provide adequate parking opportunities for residents and businesses.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Provide for on-street parking where possible.
- B) Investigate development of a public parking lot(s) in locations convenient to the Hamlet center but screened or located behind buildings.
- C) Work with the DOT to develop a landscaped and screened “Park and Ride” parking lot at the reconfigured I-81 northbound off-ramp.