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CHAPTER 5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

I. Introduction and Background Information

A. 2025 Update and Purpose for Economic Development Element

Economic development helps a community identify opportunities for future growth and prosperity by examining the current economic conditions and creating a roadmap towards a successful future. Economic development can be a complex process that touches many aspects of a community, including workforce development, housing, transportation, land use, quality of life, marketing and branding, and more. While economic development activities often focus on business attraction, growth, expansion, and retention, it is important to note that economic vitality is not dependent on a certain type or size of business. A prosperous economy is not only built on large employers, but also depends on having a thriving ecosystem of small and micro-businesses. The Town of Ulysses welcomes entrepreneurs across all sectors and aims to foster an inclusive environment where businesses of any type — whether rural, digital, creative, trade, or service-oriented — can start, grow, and succeed. Due to the complex nature of economic development, some goals and objectives within this chapter will be intertwined with goals in other chapters, recognizing that successful economic development requires collaboration with other organizations and alignment with other goals and priorities.

Materials reviewed to develop this chapter include:

- **Tompkins County Countywide Planning Policies.** The 2015 Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for the development of local comprehensive plans within the County, including tourism and economic development.
- **Tompkins County Economic Development Strategy 2.0.** The latest update of the Tompkins County Economic Development Strategy, this document provides updated data and goals related to Tompkins County's economy for 2020-2024.
- **Trumansburg Comprehensive Plan.** The 2021 Trumansburg Comprehensive Plan identifies a vision for Trumansburg's future and provides context and data for local decision makers. While this Comprehensive Plan focuses on the Village of Trumansburg, not the Town of Ulysses, ensuring that strategies and findings align is key for future collaborative efforts.
- **Southern Tier 2023 Strategic Plan.** The Southern Tier 2023 Strategic Plan provides goals and strategies for improving the economy across the 8-county Southern Tier region. This plan provided additional context and informed recommendations about leveraging regional activities and industries.
- **Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan 2021-2027.** This document identifies goals and strategies for improving tourism in the County and provides recommendations around this key industry for the Town of Ulysses.

- Public outreach findings from a community focus group and survey with more than 300 responses. All input was received as part of the public participation process for the plan update.

This element is not meant to be free-standing; it relates to a number of other elements in a complementary manner. In particular, the elements concerning transportation, land use, housing, and community well-being all have a relation to economic development.

B. Implementation of Economic Development Policies Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan Adoption

The local economy policy area from the previous 2009 Comprehensive Plan included goals, objectives, and actions pertaining to economic development. The policies and implementation efforts are provided below:

Objective #3.1 Understand the role of agriculture in the local economy and support the businesses of local farmers.

Actions

- Prepare a Farmland Protection Plan to better understand the economic implications of land use decision-making on agricultural production and farming practices.
- Facilitate a public information campaign on behalf of local farmers to educate area residents about the specific needs, obstacles, and opportunities associated with local farm businesses.
- Develop a local agriculture committee to identify issues and advise the town boards on environmental concerns, land use conflicts, and other potential sustainability concerns that may impact agriculture in the town.
- Identify key agricultural lands and identify opportunities to ensure future farming of key agricultural lands.
- Support the active involvement of area farmers in the Trumansburg Farmers Market. The Town should coordinate with the Village to assist with the administration of the Farmers Market to ensure its continued success as a marketplace for local farmers.
- Support CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) opportunities.
- Allow farm-related businesses on farms as long as they remain secondary to the farm operation. For example, a bed-and-breakfast establishment could help farm owners generate additional income as well as promote tourism in the town.

Objective #3.2: Diversify the local economy and promote economic growth by supporting and promoting tourism-based opportunities.

Actions

- Encourage a diverse mix of small businesses, including those that support tourism, in designated mixed-use and commercial areas. Appropriate neighborhood-scale uses may include bed and breakfasts, restaurants, specialty stores, and other service- or trade-oriented businesses that meet community needs and contribute to the local economy.

- B. Coordinate with regional tourism agencies and organizations to promote tourism in the Town and develop partnerships for future tourism-based initiatives.

OBJECTIVE #3.3 Identify an appropriate balance between limiting new development in the Town and creating a business-friendly environment.

Actions

- A. Market the Town's accessibility and capabilities for high-speed internet access as an attractor for businesses that have the ability to work remotely, or to employees who have the ability to work remotely from their main business office in another location.
- B. Update the Town's Future Land Use Plan to ensure leadership has a full and current understanding of available land and potential development options. Consider the results of past surveys and stakeholder engagement when updating the Future Land Use Plan.
- C. Work with the Trumansburg Area Chamber of Commerce and other countywide economic development organizations to identify opportunities.
- D. Work with Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD) to access regional and statewide economic development loan funds.

II. Laws and Guidelines Influencing Ulysses' Historic Preservation & Built Resources Element

Tompkins Countywide Planning Policies

PRINCIPLE

Tompkins County should be a place where economic prosperity is accessible to all.

POLICIES

It is the policy of Tompkins County to:

- Support economic development that provides high-quality employment opportunities with living wages and benefits.
- Promote the growth and development of local businesses and encourage the purchase of locally produced goods and services.
- Work with economic development agencies and institutions of higher education to diversify and expand the local economy and enhance community vitality.
- Promote innovation and technology transfer and attract and support people working to start and grow competitive businesses.
- Support quality of life measures that enhance the local business climate and attract employees.
- Promote development of a strong land-based rural economy.
- Provide opportunities to all residents to develop the skills necessary to obtain high-quality employment, such as career and technical education for high school and adult learners, apprenticeships, internships, and more.
- Ensure the benefits and costs of economic development incentives are distributed equitably and there is an open and transparent process for decision-making.

Ulysses Visioning Efforts

During the visioning phase of the comprehensive planning process, various exercises were conducted to facilitate feedback from the public about economic development. This was completed through a community survey, steering committee meetings, a focus group meeting, and a public open house. The steering committee, focus group, and open house featured a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis (also known as a SWOT analysis) to allow the public to convey their thoughts. The following topics were brought up as priorities that the comprehensive plan update should focus on:

- Promoting tourism opportunities
- Need for recreational spaces and amenities for youth/all ages
- Developing an economic development committee
- Jacksonville Hamlet center development
- Adaptive reuse of existing buildings to provide more retail and services
- Expanding housing and having more diverse options available
- Having more grocery/local food options
- More locally owned businesses, especially dining, entertainment and retail

Throughout the survey and in person events, the public conveyed that they often do their shopping within the Village of Trumansburg or larger cities such as Ithaca. Many expressed that they would like to do more shopping locally and be able to support local businesses more. However, this does not mean that they want big-box stores located within Ulysses. The public expressed their appreciation for local shops and want to continue to support additional small businesses in the future. The public suggested focusing on hamlet development and bringing additional services and retail there.

Managing economic development initiatives can involve a lot of different entities and can be challenging for municipal staff alone to manage. Designating an economic development committee can also help with implementation efforts pertaining to economic development. The committee can work with advisement from the Town to ensure economic development goals set forth by the Comprehensive Plan are being met in an equitable manner and in alignment with County economic development goals.

70% of survey respondents indicated they would like to see local agriculture (e.g., vineyards, orchards, agritourism, small-scale animal husbandry and crops, CFAs, etc.) as their top choice of non-residential development that they would like to see in the Town of Ulysses. 50% of respondents also indicated that they would like to see more mixed-use locations (combination of uses, e.g., office, retail, commercial, residential, etc.) throughout Ulysses.

43.6% of respondents indicated they would like to see transit-oriented development (focused nodal development along transit routes/stops to reduce reliance on private vehicles). 38.5% of respondents indicated they would like to see institutions (public use buildings, educational, healthcare, etc.) within Ulysses.

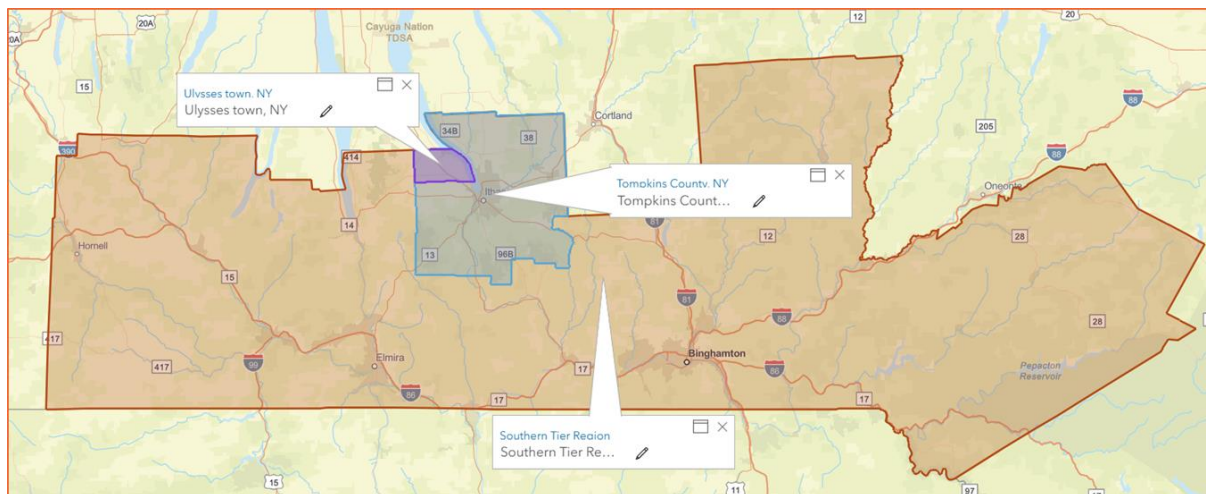
III. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Economy

A. Inventory of Current Economic Conditions

The following economic base report examines the historical, current, and projected economic conditions of the Town of Ulysses (“the Town”), Tompkins County (“the County”), and the Southern Tier Region (“the Region”). The purpose of this analysis is to provide a data-driven foundational understanding of the market to ground the current conditions section of the Comprehensive Plan.

Market Area

The following geographies are used in this analysis: 1) Town of Ulysses, 2) Tompkins County, and 3) the Southern Tier Region, which includes the counties of Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung, Tioga, Tompkins, Broome, Chenango, and Delaware. We include these geographies in our analysis to more accurately identify unique trends in the Town within the context of regional economic and market conditions.



Demographic Overview

Since 2010, the population of the Town has remained relatively stable, with only a small decrease.¹ The County saw a significant increase in population over the same period, growing by 4,010 individuals or 3.9%. The Region, on the other hand, saw a significant population decline, with a loss of 29,925 individuals or 4.5% of the Region’s total population. Over the next five years, the population in each geography is expected to decline, with the largest percentage loss in the Region, followed by the Town, then the County.

¹ Though the table shows a decrease of 6 individuals (0.1%), the small geography of the town means that this is more likely to be measurement error. The takeaway should instead be that there was a small decrease in population, rather than any numerical value that may be more accurate for larger geographies.

See housing chapter 1.C 2045 population forecast, which shows the county continuing to grow to 116,000.

Demographic Fundamentals				
POPULATION				
	2010	2024	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	4,900	4,894	(6)	(0.1%)
Tompkins County	101,564	105,574	4,010	3.9%
Southern Tier Region	657,909	627,984	(29,925)	(4.5%)
PROJECTED POPULATION				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	4,894	4,830	(64)	(1.3%)
Tompkins County	105,574	105,463	(111)	(0.1%)
Southern Tier Region	627,984	616,581	(11,403)	(1.8%)
HOUSEHOLDS				
	2010	2024	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	2,138	2,218	80	3.7%
Tompkins County	38,967	43,125	4,158	10.7%
Southern Tier Region	265,154	265,281	127	0.0%
PROJECTED HOUSEHOLDS				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	2,218	2,235	17	0.8%
Tompkins County	43,125	44,298	1,173	2.7%
Southern Tier Region	265,281	266,721	1,440	0.5%

Source: Esri

Though the population for the Town saw slight decreases since 2010, the number of households has increased by a greater amount, in part due to shrinking household sizes. The number of households in the region has remained relatively stable, with only a small increase. Tompkins County saw significant increases in the number of households since 2010, adding 4,158 new households for a change of 10.7%. Over the next five years, the number of households is expected to remain relatively stable or increase slightly.

Demographic Fundamentals				
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	\$76,879	\$83,867	\$6,988	9.1%
Tompkins County	\$77,610	\$86,334	\$8,724	11.2%
Southern Tier Region	\$63,557	\$72,528	\$8,971	14.1%
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	\$100,921	\$117,003	\$16,082	15.9%
Tompkins County	\$107,905	\$123,544	\$15,639	14.5%
Southern Tier Region	\$89,028	\$101,949	\$12,921	14.5%
MEDIAN HOME VALUE				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	\$363,085	\$422,316	\$59,231	16.3%
Tompkins County	\$330,445	\$386,564	\$56,119	17.0%
Southern Tier Region	\$182,967	\$201,809	\$18,842	10.3%
MEDIAN AGE				
	2024	2029	Change	% Change
Town of Ulysses	47.8	48.4	0.6	1.3%
Tompkins County	31.8	32.9	1.1	3.5%
Southern Tier Region	41.0	42.0	1.0	2.4%

Source: Esri

Median household income in the Town is \$76,879 and is anticipated to increase by 9.1% to \$83,867 in 2029. The Town's median household income is just below that of the County, which is \$77,610. The region's median household income is the lowest compared to Tompkins County and the Town at \$63,557, but is expected to increase the most, both by dollar and percent change. The average household income in the Town is \$100,921, which is significantly higher than the median household income. This indicates that there are a handful of higher-income households that skew the average higher.

The median home value in the Town is the greatest compared to Tompkins County and the Southern Tier Region at \$363,085. By 2029, it is expected to have increased by 16.3% to \$422,316. The median home value in the County is only slightly lower than the Town at \$330,445. The Region has a significantly lower median home value of \$182,967—just over half of the County and Town's median home values.

The median age in the Town is 47.8, significantly higher than both the County and the Region median ages of 31.8 and 41, respectively. Median age in each geographic area is anticipated to increase in the next five years, though the Town will see the lowest increase of the geographies.

Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Less than 9th Grade	0.9%	1.7%	2.3%
9th to 12th Grade	2.0%	2.5%	5.4%
High School Diploma/GED	16.6%	16.7%	31.9%
Some College	16.7%	12.0%	14.9%
Associate Degree	12.0%	8.5%	13.2%
Bachelor's Degree	28.5%	25.1%	16.4%
Graduate Degree or Higher	23.2%	33.7%	15.9%

Source: Esri

Nearly all residents in the Town of Ulysses have graduated from high school or have an equivalent education, at 97%.

Tompkins County also has a high percentage of residents who have completed at least high school, at 96%. The Region has the lowest percentage of residents who have completed high school or an equivalent education, at 92.3%. Less of the Town's population has

a bachelor's degree or higher than the County, at 51.7% compared to 58.8%. Less than a third of the Region's population has a bachelor's degree or higher.

Household Income Distribution

Household Income Distribution 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
<\$15,000	5.1%	13.4%	11.0%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	5.1%	5.8%	8.2%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	3.3%	3.7%	7.3%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	12.3%	9.4%	12.3%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	22.3%	15.9%	17.8%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	17.9%	13.4%	13.1%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	19.4%	19.0%	16.5%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%
\$200,000+	8.3%	12.2%	6.7%

Source: Esri

The Town has the lowest percentage of low-income households, with only 10.2% of households earning \$25,000 or less annually and about a quarter earning under \$50,000. In the County and Region, 19.2% of households earn below \$25,000. Just over a third (34%) of the Town's households are high-income earners, making \$100,000 or more each year. The County has a slightly higher percentage of households earning \$100,000 or more each year at 38.4%, and the Region

has the lowest percentage at 30.3%.

Age Distribution

Age Distribution 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
0 - 4	4.4%	3.7%	4.7%
5 - 9	5.3%	3.7%	5.0%
10 - 14	5.5%	3.8%	5.3%
15 - 24	9.5%	28.4%	16.0%
25 - 34	9.9%	14.9%	12.1%
35 - 44	12.5%	10.4%	11.4%
45 - 54	11.6%	9.2%	10.9%
55 - 64	14.9%	9.7%	13.3%
65 - 74	15.4%	9.3%	12.0%
75 - 84	8.6%	4.9%	6.6%
85+	2.5%	1.9%	2.7%
Racial Composition, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region

White Alone	86.4%	73.1%	82.9%
Black Alone	1.9%	4.5%	4.2%
American Indian Alone	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Asian Alone	1.2%	10.6%	4.2%
Pacific Islander Alone	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	1.2%	2.9%	1.7%
Two or More Races	8.9%	8.5%	6.7%
Hispanic Origin	3.8%	7.0%	4.5%
Diversity Index	30.0	51.7	36.5

Source: Esri

The largest share of the Town's population, 41.4% is over the age of 55, which is the highest of any geography. Similarly, the town has the smallest proportion of residents aged 25 and younger, at 24.7% compared to 39.6% in the County and 31% in the Region. Each geography has a similar proportion of the population aged 25 to 55, ranging from 34% to 34.5%.

Racial Composition

The Town is the least racially diverse community compared to Tompkins County and the Southern Tier Region, with a diversity index of 30. The closer to 100 the index is, the closer the population is to having equal shares of each race. White individuals constitute 86.4% of the Town's population, the most of any geography. The second largest racial group is those of two or more races at 8.9%, followed by Hispanic individuals at 3.8%. Shares of each racial group follow the same ranking in the County and Region, though percentage amounts differ, with the County being the most racially diverse

geography.

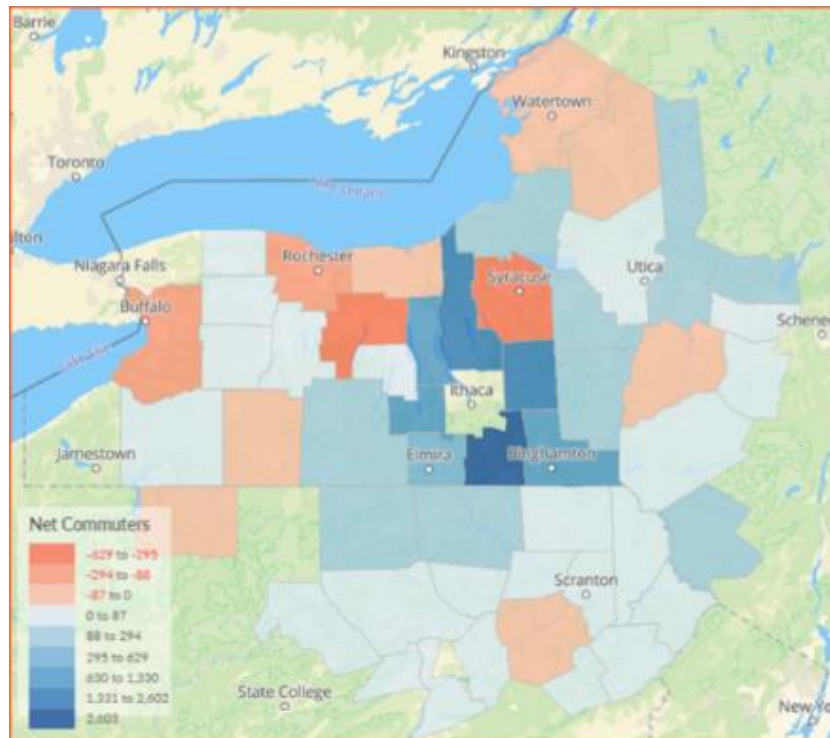
At-Risk Population

Poverty Statistics, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Households Below the Poverty Level (%)	4%	17%	15%
Households Below the Poverty Level (#)	98	7,251	40,390
Source: Esri			

The Town has the lowest number of households living below the poverty level at only 4% compared to the County’s 17% and the Region’s 15%. Only 2% of households in the Town do not have access to a vehicle, while the County and Region have 13% and 11% of households without access to a vehicle, respectively. Over a quarter of the Town’s population is aged 65 and over, the most of any geography. A fifth of the town’s households have an individual with a disability, which is the same as the County and lower than the Region’s 28%.

At-Risk Populations, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Households with Disability	20%	20%	28%
Population 65+	26%	16%	21%
Households without a Vehicle	2%	13%	11%
Source: Esri			

Commuting



The figure to the right shows the daily commuting patterns for Tompkins County. The County has a net commuting inflow of 8,521 individuals. Tioga County provides the greatest net inflow of individuals, at 2,603. The largest net outflow for Tompkins County is to Onondaga County (-366), Ontario County (-295), and Erie County (-202).

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

Industry Composition

The figure to the right shows the industry sector composition of Tompkins County. Overall, the county added 722 jobs since 2010, for a 1% increase.

The top industries are educational services, health care and social assistance, and government. Together, these three industries constitute 58.7% of the County's total jobs in 2024.

By job count, the industries that saw the largest growth since 2010 are educational services, health care and social assistance, and management of companies and enterprises. The industries that saw the largest decreases are government, retail trade, and manufacturing.

Employment Change by Sector, 2010-2024						
NAICS & Description		Tompkins County				
		2010	2024	% of Total Jobs	# Change (2010-2024)	% Change (2010-2024)
61	Educational Services	17,644	19,355	36.3%	1,710	10%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	5,616	6,045	11.3%	429	8%
90	Government	7,190	5,918	11.1%	(1,272)	(18%)
44	Retail Trade	4,965	4,251	8.0%	(714)	(14%)
72	Accommodation and Food Services	3,708	3,500	6.6%	(208)	(6%)
31	Manufacturing	3,109	2,652	5.0%	(457)	(15%)
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2,175	2,511	4.7%	336	15%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,870	2,097	3.9%	227	12%
52	Finance and Insurance	1,099	1,144	2.1%	44	4%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	719	962	1.8%	244	34%
23	Construction	942	947	1.8%	5	0%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	509	614	1.2%	106	21%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	547	571	1.1%	24	4%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	314	537	1.0%	223	71%
42	Wholesale Trade	438	453	0.8%	14	3%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	599	451	0.8%	(148)	(25%)
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	65	420	0.8%	355	545%
51	Information	496	362	0.7%	(135)	(27%)
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	268	212	0.4%	(56)	(21%)
22	Utilities	269	170	0.3%	(99)	(37%)
99	Unclassified Industry	46	139	0.3%	92	199%
TOTAL		52,589	53,311	100.0%	722	1.0%

Source: Lightcast

REAL ESTATE MARKET ANALYSIS

Housing Tenure

Housing Tenure 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Owner-Occupied	62.5%	44.1%	54.5%
Renter-Occupied	24.4%	45.0%	29.8%
Vacant Units, Rate	13.0%	10.9%	15.6%
Total Housing Units	2,550	48,396	314,466
Source: Esri			

There are 2,550 housing units in the Town of Ulysses. The majority of homes (62.5%) in the Town are owner-occupied, the most of any geography. The Town has the smallest share of renter-occupied units, at 24.4%. About 13% of the Town's housing units are vacant, 29.1% of which are seasonal/occasional homes, and a quarter of which are for rent. The Region has the largest share of seasonal/occasional vacant homes, and the largest share of vacant homes in general. The County has the largest share of renter-occupied housing.

Housing Characteristics

Vacant Units 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Total Vacant Units	179	3,744	47,231
For rent	24.6%	19.1%	10.7%
Rented, not occupied	0.0%	20.1%	3.8%
For sale only	0.0%	7.3%	4.9%
Sold, not occupied	0.0%	2.1%	2.9%
Seasonal/occasional	29.1%	7.4%	41.4%
For migrant workers	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Source: Esri			

Housing Units By Units In Structure, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Total	2,499	47,362	313,114
1, detached	73.8%	49.4%	63.5%
1, attached	0.2%	3.9%	2.0%
2	3.4%	8.8%	8.9%
3 or 4	6.6%	6.8%	5.0%
5 to 9	1.4%	7.8%	4.2%
10 to 19	1.4%	5.1%	2.4%
20 to 49	2.0%	4.9%	2.1%
50 or more	0.0%	5.8%	2.5%
Mobile home	11.2%	7.5%	9.3%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%

Source: Esri

About three-quarters of the Town's homes are single-family detached, a greater amount than the County's 49.4% and the region's 63.5%. The Town has the smallest share of multifamily housing and the largest share of mobile homes (11.2%). Esri data for the Village of Trumansburg indicates that there are 129 mobile home units, which constitute just under half of the Town's total.

Housing Units By Year Structure Built, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Built 2020 or later	0.0%	0.8%	0.3%
Built 2010 to 2019	6.3%	8.4%	4.1%
Built 2000 to 2009	3.7%	7.5%	6.0%
Built 1990 to 1999	13.6%	13.5%	8.7%
Built 1980 to 1989	9.5%	12.8%	10.9%
Built 1970 to 1979	11.4%	12.4%	12.7%
Built 1960 to 1969	5.8%	8.4%	10.7%
Built 1950 to 1959	13.9%	7.7%	11.0%
Built 1940 to 1949	5.4%	2.7%	5.9%
Built 1939 or earlier	30.3%	25.8%	29.8%

Source: Esri

The Town has the oldest housing stock after the Region. Over half, 55.4%, of homes in the town were built prior to 1970. These homes have a higher likelihood of containing hazards like lead paint, radon, and asbestos. Homes built later than 2010 make up a small share of the housing stock in each geography.

Housing Affordability

Housing Affordability - Owner-Occupied Housing, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Median Home Value - 2024	\$363,085	\$330,445	\$182,967
10% Down Payment	\$36,309	\$33,045	\$18,297
Remaining Balance	\$326,777	\$297,401	\$164,670
Average Mortgage @7% for 30 Years	\$2,174	\$1,979	\$1,096
Estimated Additional Costs*	\$750	\$691	\$429
Estimated Monthly Mortgage Costs	\$2,924	\$2,670	\$1,525
Household Income Threshold	\$116,960	\$106,800	\$61,000

*Include Zillow estimated insurance, PMI, and taxes

Home ownership in the Town is less affordable than in the County and the region. The median home value is \$363,085 in the Town, which is over \$30,000 more than the County, and just under double the Region's median home value. A household income of at least \$116,960 is needed in the Town to avoid being cost-burdened by

home ownership. Cost-burden is defined as households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

Housing Affordability - Renter - Occupied Housing, 2024			
	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County	Southern Tier Region
Median Contract Rent	\$1,006	\$1,242	\$831
Household Income Threshold	\$40,240	\$49,680	\$33,240

Source: Esri; MRB Group

Rental housing in the Town is the second most expensive after the County. The median contract rent in the Town is \$1,006, which requires a household income threshold of \$40,240 to avoid being cost-burdened.

In the Village of Trumansburg, there are approximately 92 active Airbnb listings, and a handful throughout the rest of the Town. In June, these rentals have an average daily rate of \$368 and an occupancy rate of 56%.²

B. Challenges for Economic Development

² <https://rabbu.com/airbnb-data/trumansburg-ny>

Identifying challenges within the Town of Ulysses' economy provides a better understanding of the current state of the economy and how to move forward. Many of these challenges are directly responded to in project needs and economic development goals, objectives, and policies.

- **Lack of affordable housing for residents.** Both data and stakeholder feedback identified affordable housing as a major challenge. The projected income needed to afford a home in the Town is \$116,960, while the Town's median income in 2024 was \$76,879. Many responses to the community survey also reference housing availability and affordability as an opportunity for improvement. The Town had only 179 vacant housing units in 2024, compared to more than 3,000 in Tompkins County and more than 47,000 in the Southern Tier Region. Out of the Town's 179 vacant units in 2024, only about 25% were available to rent, which means there were likely less than 50 units for rent available in the Town in 2024. Without housing growth, the Town will have a hard time attracting new residents because there are very few units for rent and homes for sale within the Town.
- **Lack of diverse housing.** Findings show that there are few options for multi-unit housing, like apartments, townhomes, condominiums, high-end larger single-family homes, or senior living, with 75.8% of housing in the Town being single-family detached homes. With fewer homes for sale, and most of them are lots or single-family homes, many individuals who might want to live in the Town might be unable to because there is not a housing option that suits their lifestyle and/or budget.
- **Transportation could be improved.** Many stakeholders reported that they wanted to see improvements in both pedestrian and vehicle transportation infrastructure. There were several calls for improved sidewalks and bike lanes to encourage sustainable transportation, while also making it safe for walkers and cyclists. Many stakeholders also suggested that TCAT bus service be expanded, although this will need to be a collaborative effort with Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.
- **Slow, almost stagnant population growth** – The Town of Ulysses experienced a .1% population decline from 2010-2024. A declining or stagnant population will be a challenge because the Town's largest industries (education, government, and healthcare) are all industries that often grow and decline with the population. Population decline or stagnation could mean less economic activity in these industries, less job growth, and fewer students and workers in the Town in the future.
- **Being wary of an over-reliance on tourism as a target industry.** The Region's natural beauty and lakes make it an ideal location for tourism, making it one of the Town's leading industries. However, tourism is an industry that can face challenges, especially after the industry has only recently recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism can change year-to-year depending on economic conditions and is often an industry that suffers during economic downturns. Within a community, tourism jobs don't always pay the highest wages, with jobs in the hospitality or service industry. Tourism can be an economic growth and marketing opportunity but should be balanced with other economic activities.

- **Climate change and a lack of sustainability efforts could threaten the natural environment.** Recent concerns about global warming and harmful algal blooms have residents concerned that the beauty and natural environment of the area are threatened. Many residents cite the landscape as a key factor in their decision to choose and stay in the Town because it contributes to their quality of life. The natural landscape is also key to the economy, with agriculture and tourism being dependent on the health and sustainability of the natural environment. If the natural environment is not protected, it could detract from the quality of life and have negative impacts on the Town and Regional economies.
- **Lack of some quality-of-life amenities.** Many residents were effusive in their praise for the Town, the landscape, and their quality-of-life, but did acknowledge there could be more local amenities. Most often residents requested more parks, recreational facilities, and athletic facilities, both indoor and outdoor, to serve residents. There was a desire to see more space created for both family and teenager activities that were not tied to facilities at the school district, and were accessible for free to lower-income families. This is a well-known community need, and the Town has made significant strides to improve its recreational options over the past decades, such as launching the Trumansburg Recreation Center initiative in 2016 and providing activities like summer camps for Town residents. Residents also said more restaurants, coffee shops, and specialty stores would be welcome, but were not interested in big box or chain retailers. Stakeholders strongly emphasized that for big box or chain shopping needs, they could easily access all the shopping in Ithaca, and wanted to see more local, homegrown businesses within the Town itself.
- **Restrictive Zoning could inhibit growth.** Some stakeholders mentioned that restrictive zoning, particularly for businesses and homes, could be a factor in less economic activity and slow population growth. Without business- and developer-friendly zoning, those with business or housing opportunities could locate elsewhere in the region where they feel it's easier to build.
- **Concerns about water availability, safety and cost.** Access to safe and affordable water is key for both business and residential growth. Many residents feel their water could be unsafe or that making it safe is costly, but there doesn't appear to be consensus on how to move forward. While water accessibility will be explored in more detail in other areas of this report, its importance to economic development should be noted.

C. Project Economic Development Needs

The following are key themes that emerged from our research and stakeholder engagement that will be necessary for further successful economic development efforts. While these topics might not cover every facet of economic development, which can be complex and reach into many areas of government, business, and residential life, they do highlight important needs for the Town of Ulysses moving forward.

Collaboration with local, regional, and state entities: Ulysses will likely need to collaborate with partners inside and outside of the Town to realize their full economic development potential. Within the Town, there will need to be collaboration and alignment among all municipalities. The Town will need to collaborate with Tompkins County, the Southern Tier Economic Region, and the State of New York to achieve its economic goals. Recognizing where the Town can lead or initiate projects and what players need to be involved will help them establish how to move forward to achieve economic prosperity.

Recreational areas and quality-of-life improvements: The Town has heard feedback from residents about recreation and has made significant advancements in its parks and recreation offerings over the last decade. While maintaining and improving quality of life remains a primary concern for residents based on their feedback in community surveys, it's also an area where improvements are actively being made. Improvements to recreational facilities, local trails, and increased programming have all been implemented. Noting that residents still see this as an area for improvement is important and suggests that more could be done, but it's also important not to discount the strides that have previously been made in this area.

More affordable and accessible housing: Another key theme from stakeholder engagement was affordable housing. Many residents expressed concern that their children couldn't locate in the Town, that if they lost their current home, they couldn't find or afford another, or that seniors would need to leave if unable to age in place. While housing is explored more in-depth in other areas of this plan, it's also essential for economic growth. Without places for residents and workers to live, there will likely be continued slow or stagnant population growth, which negatively affects the Town's largest industries.

IV. Goals, Objectives, and Policies

There are ample opportunities for growth, new businesses, and industry in the Town of Ulysses. The Town will need to harness these opportunities and pursue new industries to promote further economic growth throughout its geography. Increased growth could mean better jobs and wages for residents, more jobs located within the Town, and an improved tax base. As the Town grows, more businesses can support the local tax base, helping the Town provide the services the community values and desires.

However, making these investments should not detract from what residents and businesses love about being in Ulysses – the small-town charm, open green space, local agriculture, access to outdoor amenities like Cayuga Lake and the Black Diamond Trail, and the natural beauty of the area. These recommendations seek to identify opportunities for economic growth while maintaining the character of the Town that is so highly valued.

Collaboration with other local, regional, and state entities will be necessary to complete some of these recommendations. Economic development is often considered a team sport, and the benefits of economic development can be felt beyond the geographic boundaries of where a new project or investment might be located. It considers what the Town can accomplish and where partnerships with other organizations could be beneficial.

Goal 1: The town will promote economic diversity in order to enhance the economic health of the community.

Currently, the Town's largest industries include education, healthcare, government, and retail, along with a robust tourism industry centered around the Town's natural resources. While these are good jobs and strong industries, they are often the most vulnerable to population changes and economic downturns. If the Town's population continues to stagnate or decrease, this could negatively affect its largest industries. To promote long-lasting economic health in the community, the Town should seek to diversify its economy to create more good job opportunities for residents, promote economic resiliency against slow population growth and economic challenges, and provide the services that Town residents and businesses need. Note that while promoting economic diversity is important, it should not come at the expense of supporting and growing current industries. Rather it should be a multi-pronged approach that promotes business retention and expansion in current industries and growth in new industries.

To promote economic diversity, the Town will need to understand what its current assets are and how they can be leveraged to promote diverse industry growth. The Town will also need to consider what assets it might be missing that could be a detriment to future growth, and what it can do to fill those gaps. Based on the Town's current industry composition, there are some fast-growing industries that do not have a large presence in Ulysses, like professional, scientific, and technical services, administration and support and waste and remediation services, agriculture, fishing, forestry and hunting, and management of companies and enterprises that could be good targets for growth. Each of these industries experienced double-digit industry growth from 2010

to 2024 but still make up less than 5% of jobs in the Town each. This finding suggests that the Town is an ideal location for these businesses, but that the market is not over-saturated. Although the manufacturing industry saw declines during the same period, the new Menlo Micro facility in Lansing and regional strengths in semi-conductor manufacturing could still make this a target industry worth considering.

Objective 1.1: Identify opportunities for economic growth and diversification based on local and regional opportunities.

Policies:

- 1.1.1 Consider conducting a target industry analysis to identify new target industries based on data and stakeholders for the Town to pursue. Potential industries to consider could include light manufacturing, semi-conductor suppliers, local agriculture, agricultural supply, and more.
- 1.1.2 Identify educational opportunities locally and/or in the region that align with target industries to ensure that future business opportunities can be connected to the local workforce.
- 1.1.3 Create an inventory of current assets for target industries to understand what amenities the Town currently has to offer to new target industries, as well as opportunities to provide more assets.
- 1.1.4 Build on the region's strengths in semi-conductor and electronics manufacturing by attracting small suppliers or related businesses to the Town, possibly along Route 96.
- 1.1.5 Consider crafting new incentive policies that target businesses that align with the Town's target industries and preferred business types. Provide financial support for new businesses that create jobs in the Town that would support a resident, such as providing above average wages, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement.
- 1.1.6 Encourage and support small businesses of all types, including home-based, mobile, and online businesses, by ensuring zoning, permitting, utilities and support services are inclusive and flexible.

Objective 2: Create opportunities for diversification within existing industries and promote business retention and expansion.

- 1.2.1 Reinstall an agricultural committee in the Town to provide direct input from local farmers and industry about how to expand and support local agriculture, specifically opportunities to grow existing businesses and attract new businesses.
- 1.2.2 Engage current business owners and leaders in the Town to better understand the local business environment. Find ways to enhance current assets and address challenges.

- 1.2.3 Provide support for new, local businesses of all kinds — including retail, services, creative industries, and professional trades — that appeal to both tourists and year-round residents to access funding such as grants or financing.
- 1.2.4 Promote housing and population growth in the Town, ensuring that existing industries like education, healthcare, government, and retail have access to customers and workers.

Goal 2: The Town will encourage redevelopment and improvements to promote economic development and improve the quality and character of its neighborhoods.

Stakeholders were effusive in their praise for the natural beauty and quality of life in the Town. Future economic growth should seek to enhance and preserve the character of the community that is beloved by residents and businesses. Pursuing new business targets will likely create the need for new or redeveloped sites and buildings. Site availability and readiness are often a top concern for businesses because they know that the longer it takes to develop a site or construct a building, the longer it will be until operations can start and revenue will flow. Creating space for businesses to grow, through both new development and redevelopment, is key to increasing economic activity in the Town. Ensuring that growth happens in a strategic way can help promote the positive effects of economic development without sacrificing the community character that residents love. Policies should be put in place to ensure that Ulysses maintains historic properties, the area's natural beauty, and the Town's close-knit community, while also creating new opportunities for business growth.

Objective 2.1 Encourage new development and redevelopment to create more opportunities for business and economic growth.

- 2.1.1 Identify and market existing areas for development, targeting new industry that will provide good jobs and sustained economic activity for the community.
- 2.1.1 Consider local zoning codes and restrictions and identify if changes need to be made to promote new development and redevelopment for businesses.
- 2.1.3 Develop building and preservation codes for home remodels to ensure historic buildings are preserved, which preserves the character of the community.
- 2.1.4 Ensure future building and infrastructure improvements protect the Town's natural environment and promote sustainable development.
- 2.1.5 Consider identifying a potential industrial area or investing in an industrial park, so Ulysses can pursue new economic opportunities in ways that do not detract from its natural beauty and landscape.

Objective 2.2: Maintain and enhance neighborhoods through infrastructure and building improvements, historic preservation, and the creation of new housing and amenities.

- 2.2.1 Promote the construction of diverse and affordable housing, in a way that aligns with community character and aesthetics. Consider multi-family and senior housing.
- 2.2.2 Consider adopting policies that would require landlords to maintain properties and providing support to do so, such as training, connecting them to affordable financing, and creating stronger connections with landlord associations. These actions will ensure that the existing housing stock does not deteriorate and further limit housing opportunities.
- 2.2.3 Fill the Ulysses Town Historian position to preserve the community's history, identify opportunities for historic events and information sessions, and contribute to preservation and tourism efforts.
- 2.2.4 Make targeted infrastructure improvements for pedestrian and cyclist connectivity throughout the Town, like fixing sidewalks, widening and protecting bike lanes, installing lights, and making improvements as needed to enhance neighborhoods.
- 2.2.5 Gather resident input regarding future commercial and residential land development, ensuring that the community has the opportunity to provide input on future development and that their input is considered.

Goal 3: Encourage employers to make use of the local workforce and increase opportunities for citizens to have access to local employment.

Having an available and skilled workforce is critical for economic growth in any community. Ensuring that students and workers can obtain skills and certifications relevant to local employers is beneficial for workers and businesses, enabling workers to find good jobs close to home and creating a pipeline of skilled workers for local employers. However, obtaining the skills necessary to succeed in a local job requires access to education and training, understanding what local jobs are available, and multiple touchpoints for workers and employers to engage. The local workforce is already highly educated, with 97% of residents in the Town having a high school education or equivalent, and more than 50% of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher. This means the Town has incredible access to an educated workforce, so the next step is making sure that the workforce has the skills needed to succeed in local jobs and knowledge of available opportunities.

Workforce development will require significant coordination among partners, including the Trumansburg Central School District, Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (TST BOCES), the Tompkins County Workforce Development Board, local industry, and more. Efforts to connect workers and employers should consider immediate needs and opportunities for improvement, but also how the Town will develop a strong workforce pipeline that can support local businesses in the years to come.

Objective 1: Create more opportunities for employers in the Town of Ulysses to engage the local workforce.

- 3.1.1 Engage employers to understand what skills, certifications, and other needs they have in their workforce. Find opportunities to teach in-demand skills in Ulysses.
- 3.1.2 Coordinate with municipalities and employers to host a job fair, enabling the local workforce to find new job opportunities and connect with local employers.
- 3.1.3 Help create more opportunities for employers to be engaged with educational institutions and career training, enabling them to demonstrate what jobs in key industries look like, engage students and the local workforce, and teach necessary skills. Examples of engagement could be participating in a career day or hosting a tour of their facilities for students.
- 3.1.4 Market employment opportunities in Ulysses in the larger region, attracting more workers to the Town.
- 3.1.5 Create an online job board specific to Ulysses where employers can post available jobs. Market the job board within the Town to increase engagement.

Objective 2: Create more opportunities for workers within the Town of Ulysses to gain the skills necessary to make them attractive to local employers.

- 3.2.1 Explore options to introduce more career and technical education in target industries or key skills for students at the high school level, enabling them to graduate with a certificate and/or real-world job experience in fields relevant to the Town's economy, such as agriculture.
- 3.2.2 Partner with TST BOCES to provide adult education within the Town of Ulysses, enabling adults to expand their skill set in target industries.
- 3.2.3 As applicable, explore apprenticeship and internship opportunities at businesses within the Town of Ulysses, engaging regional high school and college student populations and promoting real-world job experience.
- 3.2.4 Engage partners like the Tompkins County Workforce Development Board and TST BOCES to provide services within the Town of Ulysses, like offering job seeker and/or training services from the Trumansburg Library once a week or holding workshops.

Goal 4: The Town will strive to meet the land use needs, utility, and transportation requirements to encourage businesses to locate and grow in Ulysses.

As the Town grows, so must its utilities and infrastructure, so it can meet the needs of residents and businesses. Proactively making these improvements can prepare the Town for future growth and help mitigate the potential growing pains that a fast-growing population or business community can create. Stakeholder engagement revealed that restrictive zoning and land use policies are currently holding back growth, making it difficult to develop or redevelop businesses and housing. Stakeholders also advocated for improved mobility within the Town and around the Region, which makes it easier for people in the Region to access jobs in the community, patron

local businesses, and enjoy local amenities. These improvements must be made while also considering the character and landscape of the community, ensuring that improvements in utilities and transportation do not detract from the natural beauty of the area, which is highly valued by the community.

Objective 4.1: Make the necessary utility and infrastructure improvements to ensure the Town can grow its population and business community sustainably.

- 4.1.1 Explore the creation, expansion, and repair of water infrastructure in order to protect the Town's water sources and ensure the Town has safe drinking water.
- 4.1.2 Review current development and land use codes to ensure they align with the future land use needs of the community, such as more commercial space for businesses and opportunities for denser housing.
- 4.1.3 Make necessary roadway improvements to ensure that traveling along major roads in the Town, especially Route 96 and access points to the Black Diamond Trail, is safe for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians.
- 4.1.4 Align with local and regional initiatives to protect local natural resources, especially water.
- 4.1.5 Work with TCAT to increase the frequency of bus service within the Town, specifically on the weekends and after 5 pm on weekdays.
- 4.1.6 Invest in sustainable energy and utilities that align with local and regional sustainability efforts.