

# HAMBURG WOODLAWN GATEWAY BROWNFIELD OPPORTUNITY AREA PLAN

Executive Summary

August 2025



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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*Images throughout this document were taken by Fisher Associates or from Google Earth / Google Maps unless otherwise noted.*

## 01 Project Overview

### What is the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program?

The BOA Program provides municipalities and community groups with financial and technical support to develop comprehensive revitalization strategies for properties where redevelopment is complicated by real or suspected environmental contamination, also known as brownfields. As defined by state law, a brownfield is any site where contaminants exceed health-based standards for expected land use. The BOA Plan includes both confirmed and suspected brownfields in its scope.

The BOA Plan utilizes this program to identify and plan the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated sites, often left behind by historic industrial activity. Without proper remediation, these sites pose barriers to economic growth and the health and safety of the community. By achieving official BOA designation by the New York State Department of State (NYSDOS), the area gains access to enhanced state incentives through the Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP). This designation reduces the financial risks of cleanup and attracts private investment, ultimately making the area more attractive for redevelopment. The goals of the BOA program are detailed below.

#### GOALS

- Assess the full range of community redevelopment opportunities posed by a concentration of brownfields.
- Build a shared community vision for the reuse of strategic sites.
- Identify actions and partnerships to achieve community revitalization.
- Coordinate and collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies, community groups, and private-sector partners to identify and implement solutions and leverage investments for community improvement.

### Purpose of the Plan

The Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway BOA Plan is a community-driven initiative designed to revitalize a historically industrial area along the Lake Erie waterfront that has suffered from decades of contamination, disinvestment, and economic decline. Sparked by local planning efforts beginning in 2019, the BOA Plan leverages the BOA Program to identify, assess, and prepare contaminated ("brownfield") sites for redevelopment. It aims to transform the area into a vibrant, economically diverse, and environmentally sustainable community.

The Plan benefits local residents, businesses, and visitors by offering a clear framework for revitalization, grounded in community input. It will be used by the Town of Hamburg and partner agencies to guide public investment and align resources. The Plan's components include a detailed analysis of current conditions and strategic recommendations to support sustainable redevelopment.

## Study Area Description

The study area is 1,380 acres in size with its borders generally defined by key transportation infrastructure and natural features. The northern boundary is the rail line owned by South Buffalo Railroad Company and the northern border of the Town of Hamburg. The western boundary is the Lake Erie shoreline, including Woodlawn Beach State Park. The eastern boundary is the rail corridor. The southern boundary follows Big Tree Road to the intersection with St Francis Drive, along St Francis Drive to the St. Francis High School campus, and south to follow the properties on the eastern side of Lakeshore Road to Camp Road.

The BOA's residential areas include the Hamlet of Woodlawn, the Hoover Beach neighborhood, and the Hamlet of Athol Springs. Each area has a unique history and specific challenges are that addressed by the BOA Plan.

## Study Area History

The Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway is a historically significant area in northwest Hamburg, NY, serving as a key transportation and industrial corridor since the early 1800s. Once home to the Haudenosaunee people,

it later became an important settlement and commerce route due to its proximity to Lake Erie. Communities like Athol Springs, Bayview, and Woodlawn developed with compact, walkable "hamlet" character, though much of this has been eroded by modern zoning and industrial expansion.

By the 20th century, the area was dominated by Bethlehem Steel, which became the world's largest steel plant, employing over 20,000 workers. Additional industrial growth followed, including the Ford Stamping Plant in 1950. However, from the 1970s onward, the region saw economic decline and disinvestment as steel production shut down and industrial activity dwindled, leaving behind widespread environmental contamination.

Despite its decline, the area is rich in infrastructure and location advantages, including access to major transportation routes, rail lines, and employers like Ford, Amazon, and FedEx. While some redevelopment has occurred, many properties remain too complex for individual owners to tackle alone, underscoring the need for coordinated revitalization efforts through the BOA Plan.



## 03 Community Vision & Values

A vision statement is a future-oriented statement that represents a community's preferred image and embodies deeply held beliefs and ideals. A community's vision provides the foundation for decision making and prioritization of actions, policies, and projects.

The process for drafting a vision began with development of a series of value statements based on community input/feedback. These value statements received refinement and adjustment from the PSC and during Public Meeting #2. This project's vision was carried through the BOA Plan, helping frame the inventory and analysis, strategic site scoring, and project recommendations.

The resulting value statements cover many aspects of the Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway area and represent a broad range of community desires. These values, along with all of the feedback received during PSC meetings and public meetings, were used to shape a multifaceted vision statement. These values also directed the development of the goals and objectives listed on the following page and the recommendations detailed in Chapter 05.

### VISION

The Woodlawn, Hoover Beach, and Athol Springs neighborhoods are attractive and prosperous communities which are well connected to their surrounding assets and one another through various forms of multi-modal transportation.

Contaminated properties have been remediated and are now healthy, sustainable places prime for economic development, recreation, and community enjoyment. Any contamination from former industries has been located, contained, and removed. Industrial development has been planned for in a way that does not negatively impact the surrounding community.

Transportation systems have been right sized for the community and pedestrian accommodations have been created in a meaningful and attractive manner while preserving the importance of the Route 5 corridor for vehicular traffic.

The hamlet character has been restored and a wide variety of community services, retail, and assets are located within the hamlets and extended along major corridors.

Access to the Lake Erie waterfront has been restored for the community and contaminated properties along the waterfront have been revitalized as a community asset.

### VALUE STATEMENTS

#### We Value...

A safe and desirable community for all residents, workers, and visitors

Increased connectivity between residential neighborhoods and community assets

Improved housing opportunities for current and future residents

New development utilizing brownfield, vacant, and underutilized lands

Preservation of historic character through reuse of historic buildings and context-sensitive new development.

## 04 Plan Priorities

### What is the relationship between the Priorities and the Vision, Values, and Goals?

As the practitioners who will be implementing many of the recommendations in the BOA Plan, the priorities set by the PSC and Town of Hamburg are essential in the future success of the BOA. The BOA Plan also represents the community's vision, with the Vision, Values, and Goals underlying every step of the development of the Plan. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the Priorities and the Vision, Values, and Goals relate to one another. The table below demonstrates where each value fits into the Town Priorities. Some values, such as creating a safe community for all, fit into multiple priorities - a safe community free of contamination is most closely aligned with Priority 1 - Site Investigation and Remediation and Priority 3 - Multimodal Improvements.

The combination of Priorities and Vision, Values, and Goals are identified with each recommendation below.

### PRIORITIES

#### 1 Site Investigation and Remediation

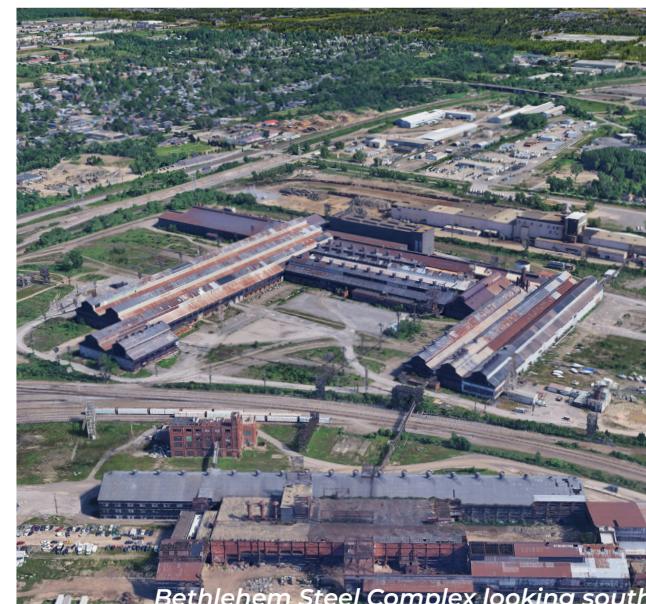
The highest priority of the BOA Plan is to locate and remediate suspected contamination, particularly contamination on public lands and within residential areas.

#### 2 Economic Development

After remediation, sites should be redeveloped to their highest and best use in order to provide new amenities, housing, and employment, and reduce the tax burden of brownfield properties and strategic sites on the community.

#### 3 Multimodal Improvements

Connections should be developed that allow for safe movement between existing and proposed amenities in the BOA by all forms of transportation, including personal vehicles, public transit, on bikes, and on foot.



## 05 Public Participation

For the Hamburg Woodlawn BOA Plan, the Town of Hamburg prioritized a community-driven process that allowed for collaboration between community members and the project team. To ensure the BOA plan reflected the interests of the community, a Community Participation Plan (CPP) was developed. The CPP details methods to engage a full range of stakeholders, including residents, property and business owners, developers, institutions, and key community organizations. The CPP includes methods of engagement to ensure effective communication, learning opportunities, and information gathering through the planning process. One of the primary objectives was to communicate the importance of community participation and how public input impacts decision-making. The process was designed to be transparent, providing access to planning documents and project-related information to everyone.

### Methods

Community engagement methods outlined in the CPP included the identification of stakeholders and stakeholder groups, engagement methods for each stakeholder group, and a general outline for PSC meetings and each planned public meeting.

Stakeholder groups included residents and visitors, neighborhood organizations, environmental groups, businesses and merchant associations, municipal agencies, property owners, and developers. Engagement methods were detailed for each group and included public meetings and interviews.



For planned PSC and public meetings, the CPP included details on topics, objectives, format, notification, and documentation method. Each meeting was planned within the requirements of the BOA program but tailored with consideration to past community engagement events and current community expectations. Additional engagement methods included the use of the Town's project website and opportunities for public meeting attendees to leave feedback and comments.

### Engagement Timeline

The CPP included a project schedule to guide the planning and community engagement process. The schedule focused on aligning PSC and public meetings with the planning process and key project milestones. As the planning process progressed, strategic adjustments were made to the schedule to accommodate an expanded inventory/analysis and adequate review time for the PSC and the public.

### Outcomes

The outcome of the CPP is evident in the level of public meeting attendance, comments received, and input from the community. **Over 250 people attended public meetings and over 300 written comments were received, analyzed, and incorporated.** The community's ambitions for a more vibrant and prosperous Hamburg Woodlawn provided the BOA Team with the ideas and tools necessary for creating an implementable and effective plan.



## 06 Inventory, Analysis, and Market Trends

The inventory for the Hamburg Woodlawn BOA Plan was crucial to informing the creation of strategic sites and future recommendations and strategies. A market analysis was completed to understand the economic trends affecting the BOA. Broadly, the inventory looked at the project's community and regional

setting; market trends; land use and zoning; land ownership patterns; transportation and infrastructure; parks, historic, and natural resources; vacant, unoccupied, and underutilized lands; and identified brownfields. Key findings from each section can be found below

### Market Trends

1. The Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway BOA continues to struggle with disinvestment and negative impacts of vacancy associated with the former industries that once dominated the BOA.
2. There is potential for multi-family, mixed use, senior housing, townhomes, and single-family housing.
3. There is potential for neighborhood-focused retail, and demand will increase with commercial and residential redevelopment.
4. There is a need for local housing assistance and business assistance programs.
5. There is high demand for industrial development, including light industrial, warehousing and logistics.

### Community + Regional Setting

1. The BOA is in a key location between the City of Buffalo and its southern suburbs, known as the southtowns.
2. While the surrounding area has seen population growth, the BOA's population continues to decline and is aging faster than the Town of Hamburg and Erie County.
3. Housing in the BOA is becoming increasingly unaffordable to existing homeowners and renters.

### Land Use + Zoning

1. Residential areas are isolated due to industrial, roadway and rail corridors.
2. There are land use conflicts between residential and non-residential uses.
3. Traditional development patterns and building types have been replaced with auto-oriented development.
4. Rail spurs offer opportunity for rail-enabled development.
5. Zoning regulations in the BOA are complex and do not allow for development desired by the community or demanded by the market.



Wind Turbines as seen from Woodlawn Beach State Park

#### Land Ownership

1. Most of the BOA is privately owned.
2. Most publicly owned parcels are utilized for public services.
3. Two vacant properties owned by the Town of Hamburg (3849 Hoover Road and the former Woodlawn High School playing fields) are underutilized.
4. Multiple private development projects are proposed in the BOA or have recently been completed.

#### Transportation + Infrastructure

1. The roadway network has been heavily modified to allow for high-speed traffic to travel through the BOA.
2. The BOA is auto-oriented, despite the historical development along the main corridors.
3. Sidewalk networks are incomplete and in poor condition.
4. The BOA presents an opportunity to connect regional multimodal networks.

#### Parks, Historic, + Natural Resources

1. Woodlawn Beach State Park is the largest recreational space in the BOA but is lacking connections to the residential neighborhoods in the BOA.
2. Local parks are in need of investment and lack amenities.
3. Natural resources are concentrated in Woodlawn Beach State Park and along the BOA's waterways, streams, and shoreline.
4. No historic resources are formally recognized in the BOA, though the area and many of its buildings have significant historical value to the community, the Town of Hamburg, and the region.

#### Vacant, Unoccupied, + Underutilized

1. There are 118 vacant parcels in the study area, comprising 207 total acres.
2. Vacant industrial parcels make up 175 acres in the study area.
3. Most of the vacant land in the study area is concentrated around the Hamlet of Woodlawn.
4. Unoccupied buildings include former steel production and industrial properties, commercial buildings, and public buildings.
5. There are 107 underutilized properties in the study area, comprising over 40% of the total BOA land area.

#### Brownfields

1. 43 properties within the BOA have been identified as potential brownfield sites.
2. Brownfields are primarily commercial and industrial land, though some exist in residential areas.
3. There may be additional contamination not identified by the Brownfield Analysis in the Hamlet of Woodlawn.
4. Land use planning and redevelopment potential is limited by a lack of information regarding the nature and extent of contamination within the BOA.

#### Summary Analysis

In the development of this BOA Plan, it is clear that the Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway has incredible potential in its unique history, location within the region, and diverse transportation, cultural, and natural assets. Every meeting held during the development of this Plan was well attended by the community and included dozens of comments and feedback with one unified theme: revitalize and remediate our neighborhood.

Since the development and decline of the steel industry along the Lake Erie waterfront, residents of the Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway BOA have fought decades of environmental and socioeconomic challenges related to the presence of brownfields. These challenges have not deterred their sense of community and drive for a better quality of life, and the findings from this Plan show numerous redevelopment

opportunities that have the potential to be transformative of the area for its residents.

#### Economic/Employment Opportunities

The inventory and analysis identified that post-Covid, general employment growth in the BOA has lagged behind the rest of Hamburg and Erie County. Recent manufacturing shutdowns have continued to harm the BOA's employment sector. However, despite a decline in other industries, the BOA has experienced an increase in logistics and warehousing employment and space. Recent developments along the Route 5 Corridor from the City of Buffalo to Athol Springs have helped improve these job prospects, and a significant market demand for logistics and warehousing space indicated the opportunity for future growth.

## 07 Strategic Sites

### Identification Method

Based on the review of BOA Plans and the NYSDOS BOA Guidance, the BOA Team chose both a quantitative and qualitative approach to identify strategic sites through a series of five steps. Each of the five steps, including Map Overlay, Site Screening, Site Scoring, Site Selection, and identification of Strategic Areas are summarized below.

### Step 1: Map Overlay

The Map Overlay step consolidated all properties identified as known brownfields, as vacant, underutilized, and properties containing a key buildings. The Map Overlay includes the totality of properties that need some level of revitalization and properties that contain key buildings (assets) that can be utilized to aid implementation of the BOA Plan through strategic partnerships or through adaptive reuse.

### Step 2: Site Screening

The Site Screening step eliminated certain properties identified in the Step 1 Map Overlay from the site selection process. This included properties that are currently used to their highest capacity, vacant properties that are too small for any development according to the existing building code and cannot be adjoined with adjacent identified properties, and all properties containing a community service.

### Step 3: Site Scoring

The Site Scoring step utilized the results from Step 2 and several additional criteria to identify sites that display characteristics with a greater likelihood of becoming catalyst sites if redeveloped or adaptively re-used. Criteria were grouped into five categories and assigned points based on the desirability of the characteristic (see Site Scoring Criteria). Information used for scoring individual properties came from various Town sources and information gathered during the inventory process.

### SITE SCORING CRITERIA

1. Environmental Status	Points
Identified Brownfield	3
Adjacent to Brownfield	2
<b>2. Site Use</b>	
Parcel with a key building	3
Vacant land	3
Parking lot	3
Parcel with an unoccupied building	2
“Other underutilized”	2
“Low assessed value”	1
<b>3. Strategic Location</b>	
Rail Access	3
Next to Lakeshore Rd.	3
Next to Lake Ave., Milestrip Expy., Camp Rd., or Big Tree Rd.	2
Within a Hamlet	2
Adjacent to Lake Erie	1
<b>4. Adequate Parcel Size</b>	
> 5 acres	3
1 - 5 acre	2
0.5 - 1 acre	1
Larger Assembly Possible	1
<b>5. Ownership Status</b>	
Town of Hamburg	3
Other Public Ownership	2

### Step 4: Site Selection

The Site Selection step utilized the results from Steps 1-3 and considered sites with additional characteristics that are considered strategic or catalytic. This step combines the quantitative methods from Steps 1-3 with qualitative analysis to select strategic sites that, through redevelopment, would further the goals of the BOA to create an economically and environmentally sustainable neighborhood. Overall, these sites represent properties with characteristics that make them ideal for redevelopment due to their potential to stimulate investment.

### Step 5: Strategic Areas

Strategic sites identified in Steps 1-4 were clustered into “strategic areas” based on their geographic location and land use. These areas, detailed and mapped on the following page, were used to develop recommendations.

Strategic areas identified during the Strategic Site Analysis include:

#### Buffalo Crushed Stone

Three properties situated along Lake Erie in the northwest of the BOA.

#### Woodlawn Hamlet

Properties within the Hamlet of Woodlawn, with an emphasis on properties along Lakeshore Road and the former Woodlawn High School.

#### Republic Steel

Properties to the north of Lake Street that were once home to Bethlehem Steel, and more recently, Republic Steel and Metalico of Buffalo.

#### Gateway

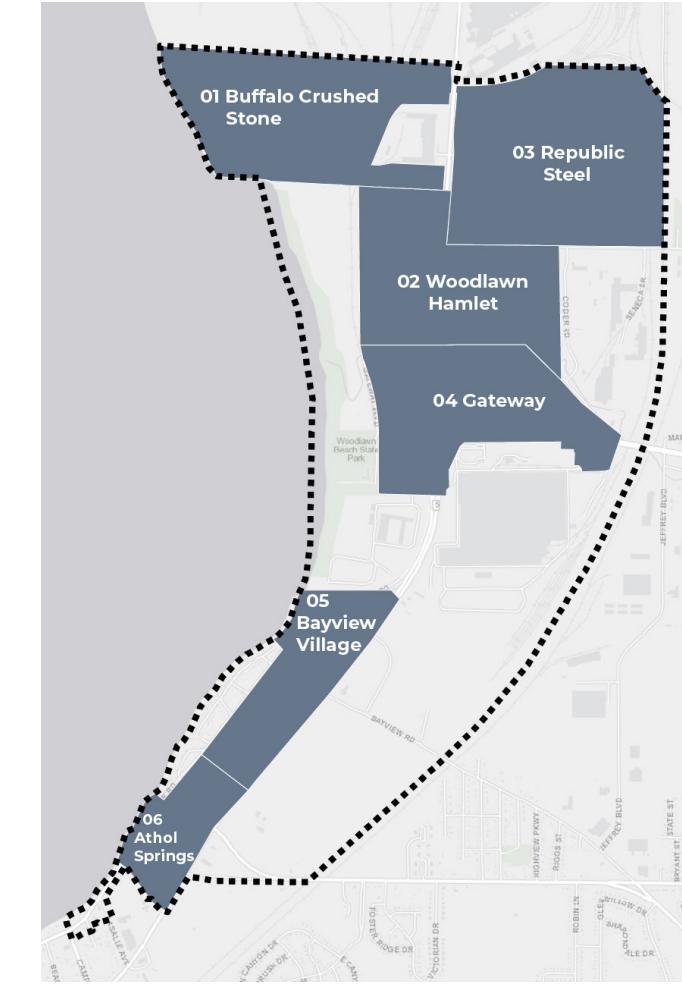
Properties surrounding the Lakeshore Road/ Milestrip Expressway interchange, including the Gateway Building and vacant lots located across Lakeshore Road.

#### Bayview Village

A collection of underutilized and vacant properties between Lakeshore Road and Hoover Road.

#### Hamlet of Athol Springs

The northernmost section of the Hamlet of Athol Springs, from St Francis High School to the Lakeshore Road/St Francis Drive interchange.



## 08 Recommendations

### What are BOA Recommendations?

The planning process for the Hamburg Woodlawn Gateway BOA included extensive outreach through numerous Project Steering Committee and public meetings, **with over 250 participants providing more than 300 written comments**. These inputs were analyzed and incorporated into the BOA Plan and its Recommendations. The process also involved collaboration with Town departments, Erie County, and state agencies. The community's vision, values, and goals guided the planning

and are reflected in the Plan and this chapter's recommendations.

In total, 75 BOA Recommendations are provided to address socioeconomic and environmental challenges related to brownfields. These include physical and planning projects, policy changes, and specific actions for the Town and local agencies. The goal is to foster revitalization and realize the community's vision of safe, affordable, and attractive neighborhoods.

## How were the recommendations created?

The BOA Plan features an inventory, analysis, and key findings outlining the study area's unique conditions. Grounded in public outreach and best practices, the planning team worked with the PSC to set revitalization priorities. These were aligned with the community's vision and values, producing recommendations tailored to local opportunities and challenges. The recommendations consider land uses such as residential, commercial, light industrial/manufacturing, recreational, and conservation.

## How are the recommendations organized?

Recommendations for the BOA are organized by geographic area. For each value statement, related goals and objectives are listed along with recommendations grouped into two categories: (1) Actions & Policies and (2) Projects. Each recommendation includes a narrative description. Some recommendations are for the entire BOA, while others only relate to specific sub-areas or opportunity areas.

## How will the recommendations be used?

This Plan complements other Town planning efforts and helps eliminate revitalization barriers. Numerous recommendations directly or indirectly address brownfield issues. The Town and partner agencies will use it to align resources for analysis and implementation. Next steps include reviewing strategies, site assessments, cleanups, and pre-development activities. Public meetings may occur at key milestones.

## What if I own one of these properties?

The Plan covers the entire study area, aiming to realize a safe and vibrant community. For publicly owned properties, planning and public engagement will continue. Private properties identified as strategic brownfields may qualify for funding for environmental assessments and may receive priority for the "BOA Bump-up" tax credit, an increase of up to 5% of the tangible property tax credit component of the Brownfield Redevelopment Tax Credit. Property owners are encouraged to reference recommendations during renovations or construction.

## How do I learn more?

Visit <https://www.townofhamburgny.gov/577/Brownfield-Opportunity-Area-Plans> or contact the Town of Hamburg, 6100 S Park Ave, Hamburg, NY 14075.

## How are the recommendations implemented?

An implementation matrix was developed alongside the recommendations. This matrix includes potential partners, timeline, high-level cost estimates, and funding sources. Timelines range from the short term (<5 years) to long term (>10 years). Costs range from low (<\$500,000) to high (>\$5,000,000) and include both costs supported by the Town of Hamburg, Erie County, New York State, or other public funders and costs borne by private developers and property owners.

Some activities have interim pre-development activities, or themselves are eligible development activities. According to the NYSDOS, communities with designated BOAs are able to apply for pre-development funding through the NYS Consolidated Funding Application. This funding supports implementation of pre-development activities to advance goals and priorities for revitalization and redevelopment, as outlined in the BOA Plan.

Additionally, an economic analysis was completed on each of redevelopment scenarios to assist the Town and other partners with site prioritization to facilitate economic development activities. This analysis includes possible permanent jobs created (up to 3,366), labor income from those jobs (up to \$267.3 million), total value added (up to \$341.9 million), and potential tax revenue (up to \$59.8 million).

## Actions Map

