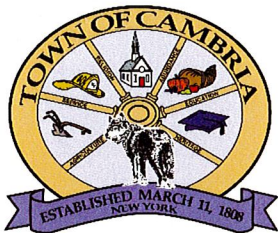


# TOWN OF CAMBRIA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Adopted February 12, 2015

Updated May, 2021

# Town of Cambria Comprehensive Plan 2021 Update FINAL – May 2021

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town of Cambria Town Board recognized the need to update the 2015 Comprehensive Plan and appointed a committee to accomplish the task. Successful completion of the 2021 update was made possible through the efforts of the following individuals:

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## **Special Thanks for Their Valuable Contributions**

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**And the Citizens and Public Officials of the Town of Cambria**

# INTRODUCTION

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## Reasons for Preparing a Comprehensive Plan

New York State Town Law §272-a authorizes Towns to prepare and adopt a Comprehensive Plan. The legislation notes:

“Among the most important powers and duties granted . . . to a town government is the authority and responsibility to undertake town comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens.”

The legislation acknowledges the importance of local governments in the enhancement, growth and development of the state. It notes that each municipality has its own resources and conditions to be considered and highlights the importance of public input in developing the “optimum town comprehensive plan.” The legislation further notes “The development and enactment by the town government of a town comprehensive plan which can be readily identified, and is available for use by the public, is in the best interest of the people of each town.”

The Town of Cambria had adopted a comprehensive plan in 1965. In 1997, recognizing that conditions had changed over the past 30 years, the Town prepared an Update to the 1965 Plan. The purpose of the 1997 Plan was explicitly to:

- “Update though not rewrite” the earlier document.
- “Respond to planning problems” facing the community, and
- “Provide new insight, ideas and planning techniques for resolving changes in the use of land, zoning problems and shifts in values and attitudes toward the environment in general.”

In 2013, the Town decided to revisit its Comprehensive Plan. The Town was interested in coordinating its activities more with regional planning trends, particularly after the establishment of the State’s Regional Economic Development Councils. The Town also recognized that new issues had emerged that were not necessarily addressed in the existing comprehensive plan. Accordingly, that update was intended to take a fresh look at issues relating to rural character, growth and economic development opportunities for the Town. Prepared cooperatively with input from the citizens of the community, it was designed to guide the Town of Cambria into the future and was adopted in 2015.

The 2015 Plan recommended that the Town consider updates every 5 years in order to evaluate existing conditions, pending developments, and any unforeseen circumstances that are affecting the Community's Plan and Vision. The Town started an update in 2020 to address the completion of several Regional Plans, the changes and pressures on the Town's largest Industry- Agriculture, and a pending large-scale, green energy project (Solar) currently under consideration in the Town. Green energy projects of this scale were not previously envisioned in the Town. These green energy projects were aided by the recent passage of New York State laws aimed at incentivizing and accelerating the permitting process for renewable energy projects. This Plan represents that 2021 update, building upon the work completed for the 2015 Plan, and taking into account the regional planning, and legislative and physical changes that have occurred over the last 5 years, and anticipated changes that are pending. Especially important to this update is the continuing and growing importance placed on Agricultural Protection (see Niagara County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, September 2018), and the growing Agri-tourism component of the Town and its economy.

There are many concrete benefits of a Comprehensive Plan. Municipalities are given the power to regulate land uses through zoning, but these decisions should be based on sound planning principles and a rational basis. The process of developing a Comprehensive Plan helps establish a consensus on what the community's vision for the future is, which helps guide decisions on how to regulate growth and development.

A Comprehensive Plan also establishes goals and objectives that provide guidance for other types of decision making. Local officials can evaluate policies, projects and practices based on whether they are consistent with the stated goals of the Town. The Plan also communicates the Town's preferences and priorities to other levels of government. All County, State or Federal governmental agencies that propose capital projects that would affect lands in the Town must take the Comprehensive Plan into consideration as part of their own decision-making processes. Having a clear statement of local vision strengthens the local input into these decisions, particularly after the passage of the New York State Smart Growth Act, which sets general policy guidelines that may or may not fit the local conditions.

The Comprehensive Plan, developed with the support and input from both municipal officials and the general public, helps build consensus toward a shared vision for the Town's future. It helps ensure that the Town's decisions are made with an awareness of how they help achieve that future. As expressly intended by the State enabling legislation, a plan is a valuable tool in shaping land use policies and zoning. However, its influence can be much greater, also affecting any Town, County, State and federal decisions on capital spending, infrastructure, grants, and intermunicipal cooperation that occur within the Town of Cambria.

## Regional and Local Setting

The Town of Cambria is located near the center of Niagara County, New York. The Town is bordered by the Town of Lewiston to the west, the Town of Lockport to the east, the Town of Wilson to the north and the Towns of Pendleton and Wheatfield to the south. The Town, which is 39.9 square miles in area, falls within the Western New York region. The government of the Town consists of a Town Board, with a **supervisor** and four Councilmen. Cambria is a rural community, characterized by farms, orchards and vineyards, and its citizens value the rural character of their town.

## Town History<sup>1</sup>

The Town of Cambria was officially established on March 11, 1808. It was the first Town in what was to become Niagara County, and its boundaries incorporated the entire geography of present-day Niagara County. At that time, Erie County encompassed both Erie and Niagara Counties, and Niagara County was not established as a separate county until 1821, meaning the Town of Cambria preceded Niagara County by 13 years.



*An authentic log cabin, one of the earliest homes of Cambria's first settlers.*

One of the first pioneers in the Town was Philip Beach, who carried the mail on horseback from Canandaigua, through Cambria on route to Fort Niagara. He saw the potential of the area and purchased a homesite on what is now Ridge Road in the Town of Cambria in 1801. Additional family members moved to Cambria. In 1806, he sold his original log cabin to Joseph Hewitt, who became the first Supervisor of the Town. This property located along the swiftly moving 12-Mile Creek also became the site of the Town's first sawmill. The property passed to William Howell, who built the Town's first clapboard house in 1808. This property was operated as Howell's Tavern. The Greek Revival home still stands on Ridge Road in the Town.

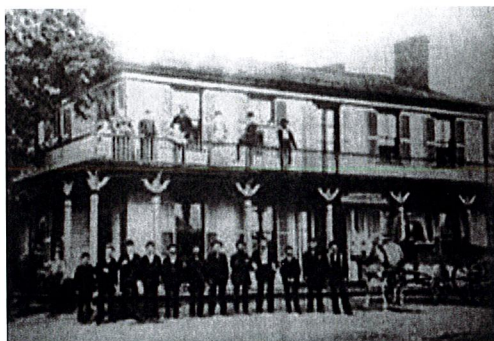


*The former Howell's Tavern on Ridge Road*

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<sup>1</sup> Based on **The Evolution of Niagara County** by Vernetta Genter, former Town of Cambria Historian (from Town of Cambria website)

The hamlets of Warren's Corners, Molyneaux and Streeters Corner, named after early settlers of the community, grew around early taverns or inns. In the case of Molyneaux, a large hotel was located at the intersection of Ridge and North Ridge Roads from 1826 for nearly 100 years, when it burned in 1923. Molyneaux was also the site of the first post office in Cambria. By 1867, there were five post offices within the Town. Ironically, there is no post office in the Town today.



*The Molyneaux Hotel at Molyneaux Corners*



*The Former Laffier General Store on North Ridge Road*

The division of the Town of Cambria began in 1812, when the eastern half of the Town was established as Hartland. The western portion of the Town was divided into three municipalities, with Porter to the north, Schlosser (later Niagara) to the south, and Cambria occupying the central portion. The Town was further divided in 1818 to create Lewiston to the west. In 1824, the Town of Lockport was formed from the eastern portion of Cambria and the western portion of Royalton, resulting in the current geographic configuration of the town.

## **Using the Comprehensive Plan**

There is no designated format for a comprehensive plan in New York State. Each plan is developed to fit the needs of the community. However, nearly all comprehensive plans contain certain common elements. These can be summarized by three questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we *want* to be?
- How do we get there?

The first question is addressed by an assessment of the town's existing conditions, which is included in the Inventory and Analysis section of this document. This section provides a description of the Town, including land use, demographics, environmental features, utilities, transportation and other features.

The second question is probably the most important part of a Comprehensive Plan. The section on Goals sets forth a clear vision for the municipality and its desired future. This section helps serve as a benchmark for decision-making in the community. For the Town of Cambria Comprehensive

Plan, the chapter on goals also includes a discussion on the future vision for the town. A discussion of public input and how it contributed to establishing the vision for the town is also included.

The final question is addressed by the Recommendations section, as well as the Implementation section. The Recommendations section establishes a plan of action that the community can take to achieve its stated vision. It highlights specific actions, legislation or other steps the Town could undertake. The implementation section reviews the recommendations to suggest timing, level of effort and prioritization. These sections are not meant to represent all possible actions, nor is it necessary that the Town try to accomplish every single recommendation. It is up to the Town, with its citizens, to determine which activities to prioritize, depending on the circumstances facing the Town. As circumstances change, certain actions may become more compelling, while others may lose significance.

In the end, the main purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to articulate what is important to the Town of Cambria and its residents. The intent is to help decision-makers move toward a future that protects the essential character of the community and enhances local quality of life.

In the immediate term, the plan is best implemented by making sure the Town's land use regulations do not conflict with the Town's stated vision. The Plan should be referred to and used as a benchmark when evaluating decisions, such as site plan approvals and rezoning. The Town should evaluate capital budgeting decisions with an eye toward whether it furthers the stated goals of the community. The Town should consider this document a useful tool, a resource and a guide to help achieve a better Cambria for all citizens.



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# INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

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This section provides an overview and assessment of existing conditions in the Town of Cambria. It builds and expands upon the existing 2015 Plan and previous Town Plans. The discussion addresses environmental resources, demographics, transportation, utilities, community/governmental facilities, land use and zoning.

## Existing Land Use Patterns – Data

The Town of Cambria is a rural community located near the center of the County. The Niagara County Communities Comprehensive Plan identifies Cambria as one of “Central Communities” with the Town of Pendleton and the Town and City of Lockport. The Town’s land uses are primarily agricultural and rural residential, along with areas of woodlots and undeveloped lands, as is shown on Map 1: Land Use.

### *Land Use – Agriculture*

Cambria is known for its excellent agricultural lands, and a significant proportion of the Town is dedicated to agricultural use, as illustrated in Map 1. In addition to the parcels coded as agricultural, many of the larger residential parcels also include lands that are farmed. The Town has a varied agricultural base, with crop fields, vineyards, nurseries, dairy, cattle, and horse farms, as well as vacant agricultural lands, including wooded lots and fallow fields. In 1965, over 90 percent of the land in the Town supported agriculture or open space. While the percentage has decreased, agriculture uses remain the most common land use type in the Town.

In addition to traditional agricultural uses, Agricultural Tourism and other Agriculture related uses are increasingly prominent in Cambria. An Agricultural Tourism Map has been added to this Plan (see Map #2). This map depicts the location of a variety of agricultural attractions, including Cider Mills, Distilleries, Sunflower fields, Wineries, Maple Sugar farms and the Niagara County wine trail. The Niagara County Agricultural Protection Plan identifies the Town of Cambria as being the fourth largest (by acreage) agricultural community in Niagara County and almost all of the farm soils are Prime, Prime were drained and soils of Statewide importance. Map 3: Agriculture depicts prime soils.

The Niagara County Agricultural Plan not only supports the protection of these farms and agricultural activities but also recommends the integration of agritourism into the overall Tourism program of the County.

The Town of Cambria is within Consolidated Agricultural District #7, an Agricultural District established under the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law (see Map 3). Almost all of the land within the Town falls within this Agricultural District. Parcels that are exempted from the Agricultural District include Niagara County Community College, Sanborn, Pekin, and a few areas of more concentrated residential development. Some of the area south of Upper Mountain Road along the eastern border of the Town designated as an area for business development is also exempted from the Agricultural District, as is Town Hall and the Town Park. Several parcels that are exempted from the Agricultural District remain in agricultural use.

#### *Land Use – Residential*

The second most common land use in the Town of Cambria is residential. Most houses are located on large, rural lots. Since 2015, there has been only 42 new single-family homes built in the Town and no multi-family developments.

Higher density residential concentrations are in traditional hamlet areas such as Sanborn, Pekin, North Ridge and Cambria Center, as well as in some older subdivisions, such as Willow Creek. There have been no subdivisions of 5 or more lots over the past 10+ years.

There has been some limited subdivision of parcels into smaller lots, although since 2015, there have only been about 58 new lots created in the Town. The typical development pattern is road frontage lots along the major roadways, although there are a few older subdivisions.

Many of the lots which are noted as residential are actually large residential parcels that include land that is farmed.

An interesting note is that since 2015, there have been 40 solar energy systems added in the Town, primarily for residential homes (what would be defined in the zoning code as Tier 1 solar energy systems).

#### *Land Use – Commercial & Industrial & Utilities*

There are limited amounts of commercial and industrial property in the Town of Cambria. Commercial uses (retail and offices) tend to be scattered across Town. There is a small plaza across from Niagara County Community College on Saunders Settlement Road, and other small businesses primarily on major roadways. A “Professional Park” is also located on Saunders Settlement Road. The Town’s industrial area straddles the CSX Railroad between Lockport Junction Road and Comstock Road. A site on Lockport Road has been designated as “Shovel Ready” under the New York State Shovel Ready program, for eventual development with light industrial uses, although the parcel is currently agricultural/vacant in use. Several uses categorized as “Public Services” consist of utilities uses, such as an electrical substation and the Tennessee Gas pipeline.

Over the past 5 years, there has been minor commercial/business development in the Town.

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It must be understood though that the biggest business in Town is Agriculture and Agritourism which is growing in Town.

#### *Land Use – Community Service, Recreational & Entertainment*

The largest land use categorized as “Community Service” is Niagara County Community College on Saunders Settlement Road. Other community services in Cambria include the BOCES facilities, Town Hall, the Fire Departments and several churches. The major recreational facility in the Town is the Town Park on Upper Mountain Road. There is also a private campground in the Town.

### **Existing Land Use Patterns – Observations**

The Town of Cambria retains its rural character, and the predominant land use in the Town is agricultural. Most farms in the Town are cultivating field crops, fruit and vegetables, although there is a mix of other types of agriculture, including dairy, horse and cattle farms. North of the escarpment, land use is primarily agricultural and large lot residential. Farming has also evolved to include more agritourism related facilities and the growth of the Niagara County Wine Trail (see Map 2 which illustrates the Agricultural features of the Town). Agriculture and agricultural related uses represent a large percentage of the Town’s land use. Agricultural and farmlands in the Town represent over 10% of all of agricultural land in the County, not including parcels categorized as residential that contain significant acreage of farmed lands.

There are some areas of slightly denser development patterns including a few commercial uses along major roadways. Generally, commercial uses north of the escarpment are rural in character, such as home occupations, small snack bars and wineries.

Agriculture remains the most common land use south of the escarpment, but there are also areas of other types of development, including slightly denser residential development, particularly south of Saunders Settlement Road (Route 31), where there are sewers to support smaller lots. The area of Sanborn has the greatest land use diversity, with a mix of residential types, commercial development and institutional uses, such as Niagara County Community College (NCCC) and BOCES. Fairview Village (the former Air Force Base) is also an area of denser development, and the Town has invested in brownfield cleanup operations at this location. There is a greater variety of commercial uses, including a small plaza across from NCCC, and a new medical office building west of Fairview Village, both on Saunders Settlement Road. Economic development (commercial and industrial development) is projected to be primarily located in the eastern portion of Town, adjacent to the Town of Lockport, and along Lockport Road at the southern corner of the Town. This area is targeted because of available sewer infrastructure.

Since 2015, there have been no large-scale commercial or residential developments within the Town. Agricultural production is still the most prevalent land use. Single-family lots, characterized

by a rural, agricultural setting are the dominant form of residential construction. There has been no large-scale industrial development since 2015, but the Town has created the Cambria Technology Park and sees this Park as a major job growth area for the Town (complimenting the Agricultural Industry).

### Land Use Regulations (Zoning) - Data

The primary means of regulating land use in Cambria is zoning. Under State Town Law, municipalities are granted the power of zoning “for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, morals or general welfare of the community.” The Town’s zoning regulates the type of uses that are allowed and establishes standards, such as building heights, yard sizes and density. They are intended to prevent land use conflicts and to guide how development occurs in the Town. The Town of Cambria Zoning Code establishes ten zoning districts (See Map 4: Existing Zoning).

Zoning Districts, Town of Cambria		Purpose
Agriculture and Residence District	AR	Agricultural and non-farm or suburban residential uses
Residence District	R-1	Residential neighborhoods, served by public utilities
Light Retail Business District	B-1	Businesses involving light retail trade
General Business District	B-2	General retail trade and business uses, including automotive uses
Industrial District	I-1	Heavy commercial and light industrial
Escarpment District	ED	To provide stronger controls for escarpment properties
Medium Density Residential District	MD	Single-family and multi-family dwellings, where public sewers are available
Planned Development District	P-D	Diverse uses guided by a specific development plan
Recreational-Campground	R-C	Recreational and campground purposes
Stormwater Management (overlay)		Adds controls for stormwater management, erosion and sediment control town wide

Much of the land area in the Town is zoned A-R. Allowed uses include agriculture, one- and two-family homes, parks, and various accessory uses, such as garages, swimming pools and barns. A relatively large number of uses are allowed in the A-R district with a special use permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals, subject to additional criteria set forth in the zoning. These special permit uses include agricultural, residential and commercial uses, such as animal hospitals, bed and breakfasts, day care facilities, motels, medical clinics and stables. A separate section of the code sets forth more guidance on the development of these special exception uses. The code also lists

prohibited uses. In the A-R zone, prohibited uses are any use not listed, mining, and signs, with some exceptions (real estate and political signs; signs for the sale of farm products).

The area surrounding Niagara County Community College is zoned R-1. This district allows one- and two-family dwellings and typical accessory uses, such as garages and pools, as well as up to two temporary boarders. Some, but not all, agricultural uses are allowed. Prohibited uses include certain agricultural uses (e.g., animal husbandry, commercial greenhouses, barns), storage of commercial vehicles, and major excavations, and, as in the case of the A-R district, signs. One small area off Shenk Road is zoned Medium Density residential (MD). This area is where the Cedar Knoll apartments are located. In addition to the uses allowed in the R-1 district, the MD district also allows multi-family buildings, which is defined as detached buildings accommodating three to four families.

The Town of Cambria business districts include B-1, which has a more restrictive list of allowed businesses; B-2 and the Recreational-Campground District (R-C). B-1 allowed uses tend to be retail in nature and include antique stores; beauty and barber shops; hardware and food stores, among others. The district also permits offices, motels, movie theaters and medical buildings. Animal hospitals, veterinarians, kennels, and light assembly are permitted as special use permit, subject to additional criteria. There is a long list of prohibited uses, which tend to be more intensive commercial uses, such as welding, junk yards, motor vehicle repair and mining. The B-2 district is less restrictive, particular in regard to automotive uses. Light industrial and motor vehicle repairs are allowed with a special use permit. Most of the lands zoned for business uses in Cambria are considered B-2 district. The Recreation-Campground District only allows recreational, and campground uses. No specific zoning regulations apply, because the Town has a separate ordinance to regulate Recreation Vehicle Parks and Camping Grounds.

The town's industrial district is located west of Lockport Junction Road and extends along the rail corridor. Most of the lands within the area zoned for industrial use are vacant or currently being farmed. The Industrial Zoning district is the most permissive, allowing non-residential uses not permitted in other districts, such as mining, topsoil stripping, light assembly and outdoor storage of commercial vehicles. Potentially dangerous manufacturing is prohibited (e.g., explosives, fireworks, poisonous gases), as are dumps, sludge and storage of scrap metal.

The Escarpment District is a protective district intended to protect environmentally sensitive areas along the Niagara Escarpment. Homes are allowed, with the requirement that they be set back a minimum of 80 feet from the edges of the escarpment (areas with steep slopes).

The Town of Cambria has a Planned Development (P-D) district that permits the establishment of mixed-use areas, developed according to an approved development plan. Sites must be a minimum of five acres in size. The district is applied as a rezoning, subject to a Public Hearing and