

**TOWN OF ROMULUS  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
(Final Proposal)**

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I. FORWARD

*On July 16, 1997, the Town Board of the Town of Romulus appointed its Planning Board to prepare a Comprehensive Plan to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the Town.*

The Town of Romulus, Seneca County is a fantastically beautiful, largely rural and agricultural area, nestled between two of the finest of New York's Finger Lakes – Seneca and Cayuga. Many panoramic views are to be had on highways crossing the Town, some affording views of both lakes from the same spot.

The hamlet of Willard, at the southwestern corner of the Town, is the location of the Town Municipal Building. Adjacent thereto is the Willard Drug Treatment Center, the northern portion of which is in Romulus that provides employment to some local residents. Parts of the village of Ovid on the south and the hamlet of Romulus on the north are shared with adjacent towns. There are two other semi developed residential areas. One in the southeastern quadrant is named Hayts Corners. The other near the northwest corner of the Town is named Kendaia.

Assets include access to the lakes as provided by the 1, 852 acre Sampson State Park on Seneca Lake and Deans Cove on Cayuga Lake. Both of these offer public boat launching facilities, thereby being of great value to visitors as well as residents. In addition the former has a swimming area, 122 boat slips, 245 electrified campsites, a Naval Museum, a potential NY State Veterans burial site, and receives visits from over 250,000 people per year. Only a dozen or so miles away to the north in Seneca Falls are six scattered sites of the Women's Rights National Historical Park. Among other assets are the Wineries in the Town and region, which, benefiting from the climate and soil of this area between the lakes, offer some of the country's finest wines. Also beautiful, deep undeveloped stream corridors course down off the hill to the lakes, and an abundance of local wildlife includes a herd of white deer on the Depot property.

The shores of the lakes, where not inhibited by high, steep, rocky cliffs, are dotted with both permanent and summer residences. The latter swell the summer population with the influx of vacationers, and in season our clear lakes buzz with boating, fishing, and water sport activities. Held during the summer are a number of fishing derbies that take good advantage of the superb fishing in both Seneca and Cayuga Lakes. Another competition is that of sailboat racing, as seen by frequent regattas on both lakes.

The many horse and buggy rigs of the local Amish farmers, which are seen along the highways, lend an interesting aspect to the landscape. These industrious people have come to this area in substantial numbers and appear to be thriving.

There is a large 10,600 acre area near the center of the Town which, due to the imminent departure of the Seneca Army Depot, is subject to a current, intensively active effort to attract activities which will be compatible with our lifestyle, yet provide new additional jobs and attract desirable new permanent residents. That area benefits from a rail connection as well as from excellent highways, particularly north and south, which connect with the New York Thruway on the north and the Southern Tier Expressway on the south. Not too distant are top-notch schools of higher learning, which are a potential source of highly skilled employees. To the south is the city of Ithaca and to the north, the larger metropolitan areas of Rochester and Syracuse.

Various activities are envisioned and being proposed for the Depot property. Among them is a large law enforcement-training center in the area of the 7000 ft. airport runway that is already included in the '97 –'98 State budget.

The purpose of this plan is to develop and lay forth a land-use concept that protects, yet takes advantage of and builds upon, current assets. The plan takes into account the current desirable aspects of the Town of Romulus and then goes on to attempt to formulate a path for economically sound and orderly growth, which preserves the rural, agricultural and residential nature of the area and directs growth in the most desirable directions. Incorporated herein is a Map of recommended land use illustrating where it is believed that each would be most appropriate. Among the concepts embraced was one, which fosters quality residential development in and around existing hamlets and directs commercial, business and industrial growth to the suggested corridors if not to the preferred locations in the Depot redevelopment area. Development would be restricted along scenic routes, wetlands and deep wooded ravines. Provision is made for the protection of any sites or structures deemed to be of substantial historical, architectural, or archaeological nature and value. Over 2000 residents value their present way of living here and are looking for ways to enhance and further develop the Town.

In addition to defining the Town's goals, advantages of having this plan include:

- Informing builders and developers of the type and pattern of land use desired by the Town's residents
- Encouraging consistent decision-making regarding new development
- Providing the legal basis for the adoption and implementation of land-use tools
- Helping the Town with the expansion and development of further infrastructure and municipal services

The greatest advantage will be the sense of accomplishment that the community can share in the knowledge that future residents will continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

## II. HISTORY

Before the first “settlers” arrived here, what is now the Town of Romulus was a wild and undeveloped land in the midst of Indian country, specifically that of the Iroquois Confederation, a “Nation” which included tribes such as the Cayuga’s and the Seneca’s. The first Europeans to come here were traders who roamed the area and dealt directly with those Indians. The influx of permanent residents, who migrated in to clear, develop and farm fertile land, didn’t really begin until the late 1700’s or after New York Revolutionary War soldiers had been awarded their Bounty Land (1782) in payment for their military service. This “military tract” was comprised of 1,500,000 acres in central New York and included what is now Romulus. Subsequently those veterans, or purchasers of their land, moved here from Pennsylvania, New England, and downstate New York to dwell permanently. The population quickly grew to about 2500 souls where it remains even until today. Purportedly Abram Brown was the first Romulus settler. Reportedly another of the very early settlers was Captain Abel Frisbee (1741-1823) who fought in the Revolutionary War, was a prisoner of the British for 7 years, and ended up as a tavern keeper and ferryman. Still another of the earliest settlers was Alda McMath who homesteaded just north of Rising (Indian) Creek but died only a few short years later. In years following 1791 they were joined in the area by many new residents, some with familiar names such as Covert, Kinne, Purdy, Seeley, Vorhees, Warne, Wilson, Wisner, and Wyckoff. The first white child born in Romulus was Elsie Fleming. Three Sutton children followed in 1793, 1803, and 1806.

The first task of the new settlers was the clearing of the land for agricultural purposes, although businesses such as saw mill, gristmill, distillery, blacksmith shop, store, and inn soon followed. Other vocations practiced were carpentry, cooper, and ferryman. Farming remains until today the primary occupation of Town residents, although a significant segment of the population now commutes to nearby cities to pursue their endeavors.

The Township of Romulus was formed in 1794 and has remained a Township until the present although much diminished in size and with hundreds of acres still owned by the State and Federal Governments.

The original housing was clearly primitive in nature and of the log cabin type. As years went by these accommodations were replaced by farmhouses of a more current construction. One of the earliest homes erected here, and still standing, is that of CAPTAIN ELIJAH KINNE, the original part of which was built in 1804. This home on Rt. 96A, owned in 1998 by Anne Getman, is a stately Greek revival house. It is believed that in 1842 Kinne built the large addition to the south that is now the main part of that house, all in the classic style of the period.

One of the four pillars on the front portico was removed because it obstructed view to the south, and, subsequently, the small south porch was enclosed and the pillars removed to make an extra room. Except for this, the structure remains largely unaltered. The CHAMBERLAIN home, now located at the corner of Wells Hollow and West Blaine Rds. was moved from Baptist Church Rd. when the Air force decided to build an airstrip for the then Sampson Airbase. Another home, one now owned by James McDonald and located on Seneca St. in the hamlet of Romulus, was reportedly once a “stop” on the “underground railroad”. The original structure, which at first appears to be a wing on the two-story portion of the building, is believed to have been build in 1822. A Dutch oven-fireplace combination in it is in a remarkable state of preservation.

Some of the earliest settlements were Romulus Ville, Plymouth, Romulus Center, and Bailey town. Most of these consisted of only a few houses and quickly faded from the scene.

Records show that the first schoolhouse was built in 1799, the location being one mile northeast of Lancaster (now Willard). From this point there was gradual growth until Romulus contained nine school districts, each with a frame schoolhouse and a licensed teacher, offering education to 683 children. Currently the Town of Romulus is served by just two central schools. One of these is located in the hamlet of Romulus and in 1994 that school, the Romulus Central School, had an enrollment of 595 students, 49 teachers and approximately the same number in the support staff. The other school is in Ovid, and this district when originally formed in 1938 by absorbing the Willard, Hayts Corners, and other small school districts became the Ovid Central School. In 1968 when further combined with Interlaken the enlarged district became the South Seneca Central School.

The construction of the State Agricultural College at the location now known as Willard was begun in 1857 with the cornerstone laid in 1858 at a site on 686 acres of land partly in the Town of Ovid and partly in Romulus. Subsequently opened, this school lost favor shortly to the new Cornell Agricultural School which had thereafter been established in Ithaca by Ezra Cornell. In 1865, with the school having ceased operation, it was decided that the use of the facility be redirected toward care for the chronic insane, and in 1869 the **WILLARD ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE** was opened. This institution was named after Dr. Sylvester D. Willard who had investigated and reported on this need at the direction of the State. As late as the 1950's, there were over 3000 patients being cared for there. Recently the Willard Psychiatric Center has been totally shut down, and in its place the Willard Drug Treatment Center has been installed. That facility is intended to house up to 1000 inmates and operates as a modified shock facility; the inmates receive education, counseling, and physical activity during their 90 day treatment regimen.

It was in 1873 that the last spike was driven to complete the track connection at Romulus for the Geneva, Ithaca, and Syre, Pa. Railroad from the north with that of the Lehigh Valley from the south. Later in that decade the Lehigh Railroad gained full control of this whole segment. A 1907 map indicates that the Lehigh Railroad had its main north-south line near Willard, the route of the “Black Diamond” passenger train through Hayts Corners, and a spur from the latter hamlet through Ovid to Willard. These sections were reputedly abandoned as follows: the Willard spur somewhere around 1940, the Hayts Corners to Ovid section in 1957, and the NS track through Hayts Corners in the 1960’s. The only remnant of these railroads is that portion of the Lehigh main line, which has become a little active spur from Geneva down into the Seneca Army Depot property operated by the Finger Lakes Railway Company.

Construction of what is now called the **SENECA ORDINANCE DEPOT** began in 1941. Approximately 500 “igloos” were built and 20 miles of fencing erected to seal off the property from unauthorized entry. Warehouses, housing, and administration buildings were added and ultimately the 5000 ft. airport runway, acquired from the Air force, was lengthened to 7000 ft. The peak civilian employment at the Depot was reached in July 1943 when 2511 people from 60 different communities were employed there. In Nov. 1946 civilian employment had sunk to 595. Then in 1956, a Special Weapons Project was initiated and established at what would ultimately be called the North Base. At this point, housing at the North Depot Activity became acute with 300 to 400 military personnel to be brought in, so in 1959 125 Capehart Housing units were constructed. In 1961 the North Base Activity became part of the Seneca Ordinance Depot, and in 1963 the whole Depot was transferred to the U.S. Army Maintenance Command and was renamed the **SENECA ARMY DEPOT**. Then in 1992 the Army announced that the Depot’s work force would be further cut and the operation realigned. Today (1998) the Depot has only a skeleton crew working while awaiting its final complete closure in the next couple of years.

After the outbreak of **WW II**, quiet farm life along the shore of Seneca Lake was forced to give way to make for the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest **NAVAL TRAINING STATION** in the country. This installation called **SAMPSON** existed throughout the duration of that war. In the late 1940’s Sampson State College was established, and it existed there on the main portion of the base until that activity was transferred to Plattsburgh. Subsequently, the US Air force took over the complex and operated a training center there until 1955 during which time the airfield (later transferred to the Army) was built. During much of these periods the south or hospital area of the old base had various State of NY functions addressing the needs of TB and then later mental patients. The last and current use of Sampson began in 1960 when the State of New York acquired it and converted it into the present State Park, which has many fine recreational facilities. A few of the original buildings have been reconditioned and among them is one containing a Naval Historical Museum.

Since its beginning, The Town of Romulus has had post offices in seven locations, namely Romulus, Baileytown, Romulus Centre, Kendaia, Hayts Corners, Willard, and Sampson. At the present time two of these remain active.

Fire protection was a concern of early residents and the organizations subsequently established for that purpose have evolved over the years into the currently remaining two fire districts.

On February 6, 1897, the businessmen of the hamlet of Romulus took action and the Romulus Protective consisting of 30 members was formed. Its first truck was a hand drawn hook and ladder. In 1913 a fire district was organized, and a two wheeled truck with chemical tanks mounted on it was purchased. Then in 1943 the department was again reorganized and incorporated under the name of Romulus Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. That Department has had a number of "firsts": In 1973 a woman firefighter, and in 1991 a school bus converted into a command post.

Despite its name, the Romulus Volunteer Fire Department does not provide protection for the entire Town. As a matter of fact about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it, all except the NE quarter and the Hamlet of Romulus, is under the protection of the Ovid Volunteer Fire Department. The latter organization was organized in 1844 and incorporated in 1938.

The **BAPTIST CHURCH** of Romulus, constituted in June 1795, was the first church organized in Seneca County. This church, of a square white frame Colonial style, was originally arranged with the communicants facing a high old-fashioned pulpit and the doors behind that. This was changed after the doors blew open in a south wind and livestock wandered in. The meetinghouse was remodeled in 1849 after as many as 100 new members had been added. The final service was in 1941 and in October the Federal government took possession of the church property, except for the Kendaia cemetery, for incorporation into the Depot being established there. The present **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** of Romulus is located in the hamlet of Romulus, although it is actually just over the Town line into Varick. It was organized in 1802 and was originally in the Town of Romulus until Varick was split off. It is the oldest Presbyterian organization in Seneca County and remains active. The current edifice was built in 1838. **CHRIST EPISCOPAL** Church was established in Willard in 1877, and the Rev. Charles W. MacNish held services house to house. After the schoolhouse was built in Willard in 1880, services were then held there. The cornerstone of the present church was laid on June 18, 1886, and on November 12, 1886 that church was consecrated. In July 1976 a number of families began meeting together with the announced intention of beginning another local church ministry in the hamlet of Romulus. The first service of this new **SENECA COMMUNITY CHURCH** was held on Nov. 21, 1976.

The oldest cemetery in the Town of Romulus, and possibly Seneca County, has been known by various names, first as the Bailey Town Burying Grounds and then as the Rising Cemetery. There are at least 80 graves there, and we have evidence that it had been deeded to the First Baptist Church and Society of Romulus. This cemetery is located in the southwest corner of the Town.

Early burials there were in 1796 and they continued to possibly 1865. VanVleet Cemetery lies just off Rt. 96A within the borders of Sampson State Park. The David Covert Cemetery is located on the eastern side of the Town just off Rt. 89 and not far from Cayuga Lake. Burials in the latter plot seem to have taken place between 1817 and 1873. The Willard Cemetery sits above Seneca Lake and the old East Lake Road. It was used for many years for burial of residents of the Willard Asylum who had no families nearby. The Kendaia Cemetery lies wholly within

The confines of the Seneca Army Depot. The first burials there were in 1816 with occasionally a few more in the recent past. Lastly, the Mount Green Cemetery is the largest serving this local area. It is located within the hamlet of Romulus on the west end of Seneca St., although actually in the Town of Varick.

The earliest Romulus settlers were attracted by inexpensive land, good soil, and plentiful water. Our vision for our future is one that seeks to retain and protect, possibly even enhance, the beauty and ambiance of this still largely rural between-the-lakes area that nonetheless has the advantages of being relatively close to metropolitan cities. The maintenance of sites and objects of a historical nature, as well as the scenic natural habitat of a variety of wildlife, is to be encouraged for the benefit of all, particularly visitors to our area.

### III. SENECA ARMY DEPOT

In order to deal with the negative employment and economic impacts associated with the closure of the Depot, the Seneca County Board of Supervisors established (October 1995) the Seneca Army Depot Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA). The primary responsibility assigned to the LRA was the preparation of a plan for the redevelopment of the Depot.

After a seven month long comprehensive planning process initiated in March 1996 and assisted by outside organizations, a Reuse Plan and Implementation strategy was adopted by the LRA on October 8, 1996. The reuse plan was subsequently approved by the Seneca County Board of Supervisors on October 22, 1996 and then by the Romulus Town Board on July 16, 1997. This plan together with amendment #1 dated November 1997 serves as the comprehensive reuse plan for the depot area. It is this latter package, which is to be implemented by the LRAs successor group – the Seneca County Industrial Development Agency.

#### IV. OPEN SPACES/NATURAL RESOURCES

There are a number of special areas that are sensitive, or at least not well suited to new development, yet are important to the long-term economic viability of the Town. These include flood plains, steep slopes, species habitats, wetlands, stream corridors and ground water aquifers. Besides their ecological and economic functions, many of these add to the Town's natural beauty and provide areas for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors. To protect these resources, the Plan continues the Town's policy of allowing only the least possible development in the most sensitive areas.

#### V. ECONOMIC TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT

During the past 50 plus years the Town of Romulus has been heavily dependent upon, and constrained by, government sector type facilities and employment. Subsequently, the economic health of the Township has encountered some big setbacks with the closing of all three of the large government employers – Sampson Naval Base (and its successors), the Willard Psychiatric Center, and the Seneca Army Depot – and these areas have remained off the tax rolls. The most recent closure, that of the Depot, will when completed, be highly detrimental, and it is coming just as the country is beginning to pull out of a downturn. Seneca County has also experienced the loss of manufacturing jobs at Phillips/Sylvania, although it has gained jobs in other areas.

This plan envisions the movement of the Town from a dependency on an economy which is government driven to one which is a more privately based. A limited economic impact of government agencies will remain, but it is thought that the Town will be strengthened by maintaining its strong agricultural base while diversifying through the attraction of other business activity primarily into the designated areas in the Depot. Guiding new

Development to the designated locations will also assist in protecting the Town's rural character and hopefully help by supporting costs of infrastructure now and in the future.

To the advantage of, and for support in, establishment of projected new endeavors is an excellent primary and secondary school system, many of whose graduates go on for advanced education. Also in proximity are sources of important technical support as well as graduates capable of filling employment needs. These are top-notch schools of higher education such as Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Hobart William Smith.

## VI. RECOMMENDED LAND USE AREAS

### 1. HAMLET RESIDENTIAL (gray)

Concentrated areas of residential housing; small business enterprises; churches; and public buildings including hamlets, villages, and Elliot Acres on the Depot. Growth would be encouraged in these areas because of the ready availability of utilities. However, density would be dependent upon the existing capacity of the infrastructure.

### 2. CONSERVATION AND RECREATION (dark green)

Areas where development is prohibited to protect plant and/or animal life or to promote recreational activities for the public. All public places such as both the 2300-acre conservation area in the Depot and Sampson Park would be promoted for recreational purposes, i.e. biking, skiing, hiking, etc.

### 3. AGRICULTURAL (light green)

Areas now dedicated to the production of crops and to animal husbandry. Every effort would be undertaken to maintain the status quo of these areas in order to retain the rural character of our town and to comply with State and Federal Laws. If future development (i.e. residential) were proposed on a portion of these lands it would be carefully reviewed to determine the impact on the entire.

Town and County. Wineries are included in this agricultural category while noting that they also engage in the brewing process (industrial) as well as the direct retail sales to the public (commercial). Also included are small home businesses often related to agriculture.

### 4. LAKESHORE RESIDENTIAL (blue)

Residential areas along our Cayuga and Seneca Lake shorelines plus adjacent areas that might also be prone to similar development including the 120-acre Depot housing area long Seneca Lake.

It would also include associated business enterprises, i.e. marinas (including boat fueling), tackle shops, ect... and lakeside wineries that presently draws a substantial amount of tourist business. In truth wineries can exist in agricultural, commercial, as well as lakeshore areas. Any structure inappropriate to the area would be discouraged. Finally, additional public areas to the lakes would be promoted.

5. INDUSTRIAL/WAREHOUSE AREA (yellow/red)

Every type of legitimate small commercial or professional enterprise would be encouraged in designated areas. Large industrial or commercial businesses would be directed to appropriate areas within the depot, designated for warehouse and distribution activities. The IDA will be aggressively marketing this parcel with the intent to ease or convey as soon as the necessary environmental documentation is completed.

6. INSTITUTIONAL/GOVERNMENTAL (brown/med. green)

The IDA will be taking conveyance of this approximate 500-acre parcel. Current plans call for some type of law enforcement training presence at this location. The Coast Guard will be taking conveyance of this approximate 180-acre parcel via a Fed-to-Fed transfer.

A. TRANSPORTATION

The Town of Romulus enjoys an efficient and serviceable highway system that generally gives ready access to all parts of the Town as well as to nearby areas even though east and west travel into and out of the Township is inhibited by the presence of Seneca and Cayuga Lakes. The area is traversed by several high quality north/south highways maintained by the New York State Highway Department. These roads provide convenient access to the shopping areas in northern Seneca County and to the Ithaca and Elmira areas in the Southern Tier. The re-opening of a road from the hamlet of Romulus west to the Kendaia area is a desired eventuality.

All of the above areas can be reached in approximately one hour or less of travel time. In addition, the NY Thruway is located only about 25 miles north of the Town and Route 17 is only about 50 miles away to the south at Elmira. These north/south highways are suitable for heavy truck travel, and they are used regularly to reach the metropolitan areas of the larger cities to the north.

Not only are our highways well maintained and kept open in winter but they are virtually all paved – “dirt” roads being largely a thing of the past. The presence of a large stone quarry and blacktop plant in the middle of Seneca County facilitates the acquisition and hauling in of road building and maintenance material at a more reasonable cost than incurred by many other areas.

Railroad service has not been available locally for many years and most freight is hauled by truck. Insofar as commercial air service, that is available at Ithaca and in the Elmira area where there are connecting flights to larger cities. Or one may travel to Syracuse or Rochester for major airline connections. A smaller locally owned airport south of Seneca Falls serves industries and private interests.

## B. UTILITIES

The following illustrates the current status and expansion possibilities of public utilities serving the Town of Romulus.

### WATER

The hamlet of Romulus is now supplied by an 8” main from the Seneca Army Depot, which in turn obtains its water from Seneca Lake. A new 12” main has recently been installed by the Town of Varick to connect from an existing main to the Depot intake pump station on Seneca Lake. Upon completion of this work the water supply for the Depot will be transferred to the new main, which originates in the Waterloo water district.

The Hamlet of Willard is supplied from the Willard Corrections Complex through a 6” line.

That area of the Town of Romulus adjacent to and a part of the Village of Ovid is served by the Ovid Water District. Water is pumped from two sources, one being wells and the other being Seneca Lake. That Districts new water tower has a capacity of 75,000 gallons. The current average daily use is 70,000 gallons whereas the system has the capacity to deliver 200,000 gal./day.

All three of these water systems have more than adequate capacity for present and immediate future requirements.

The balance of the Town is supplied primarily by individual wells, although many lakeshore residents also pump water directly from their respective lakes.

SEWER:

South Depot has a 250,000 GPD system, which serves the Hamlet of Romulus and the southern end of the Depot. Average daily capacity is approximately 180,000 GPD.

District #1 operates a 700,000 tertiary facility within the Willard Corrections complex. It serves the Depot housing on the lake, Sampson State Park, the hamlet of Willard, and the villages of Ovid and Lodi.

ELECTRIC:

Electricity is available throughout the entire town. The service is above ground. Most roads within the Town have adequate aerial construction to accommodate extensions by NYSEG where necessary.

TELEPHONE:

The Town is within the Trumansburg Home Telephone Co. franchise area & Verizon franchise area. Adequate telephone service and capacity for expansion thereof is available with ability to link up to fiber optics.

GENERAL:

From a Utility standpoint it seems appropriate to recommend limiting growth to areas adjacent to the hamlets. Underground utility installations would definitely be the first option in any and all improvements and expansions of service.



