

Growth & Development in the Erie-Niagara Region

Draft for Public Review | December 2003

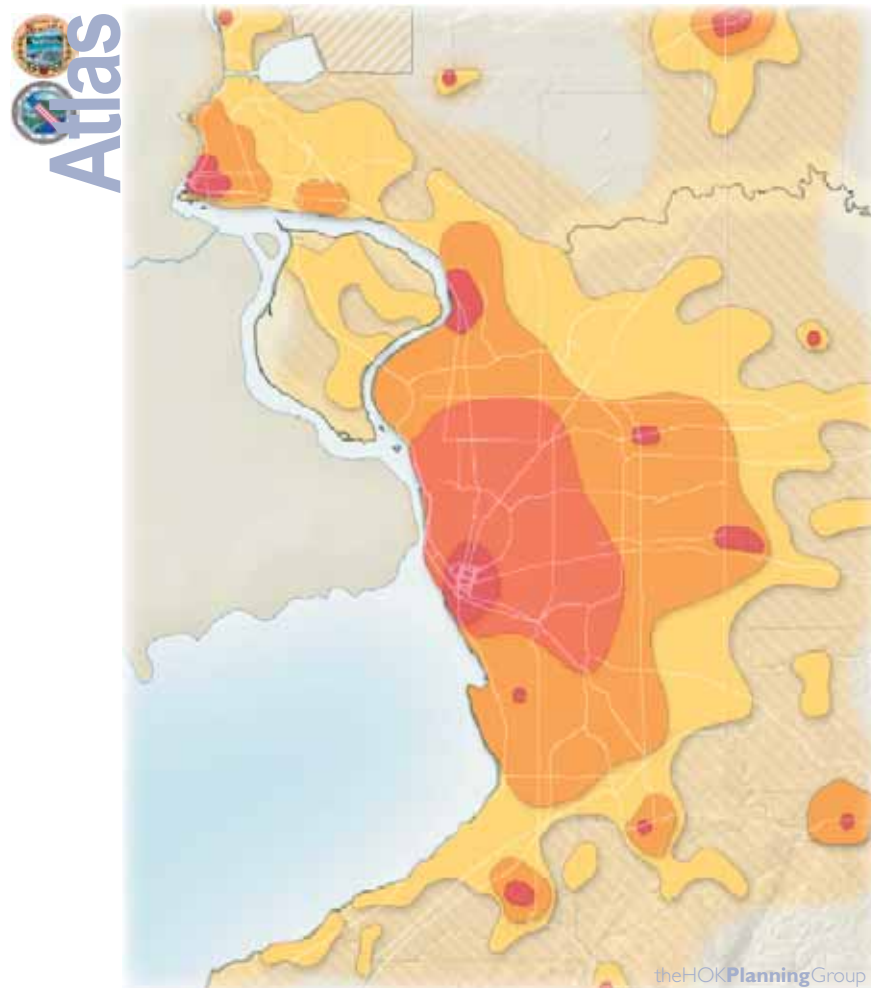




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1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of conditions and trends affecting the long term livability and sustainability of Erie and Niagara Counties. The report documents and analyzes current patterns of land use, defines changes to the pattern over the past 20 years, and explores ways the pattern and pace of development affects the region's quality of life and economic vitality.

The absence of a region-wide vision for conservation, development, and public investment has become an increasingly central concern. For the past two to three decades—the last regional plan was completed in 1974—local and regional planning projects have been undertaken without the benefit of reference to a larger policy or planning framework. Though much good has come of this work, important decisions regarding the location and pace of development, economic and community development, the extension of sewer and water service, improvements to parks and major public facilities, and reinvestments in transportation infrastructure have been made without a clear sense of how individual actions influence the region.

To fill this void, Erie & Niagara Counties have partnered to develop the Framework for Regional Growth. As envisioned by county leaders, the Framework will establish basic policies and principles to guide the future growth and redevelopment of the region. Specifically, the Framework will provide the following:

- A vision for how we wish the region to grow and redevelop over the next 15 years.
- Clear direction regarding growth and redevelopment matters to county decision-makers and other regional organizations linked to the two Counties via funding, membership, or other relationships.
- Information on the ways local governments, private sector, and non-profit actions and initiatives can reinforce the overall regional vision.
- Mechanisms to insure that the goals, concepts, and recommendations of the Framework for Regional Growth are implemented in an efficient and accountable manner.



Purpose and Approach

This report, the latest in a series of papers prepared for the Framework for Regional Growth, was undertaken to define issues of regional concern and provide a foundation for community discussions about growth and redevelopment challenges and alternative futures. The report offers information about the existing pattern of development and explores issues of regional concern, including the following:

- disinvestment in inner-city neighborhoods;
- threats to natural and cultural resources;
- vacant and underused commercial and industrial properties;
- loss of agricultural lands and rural character;
- eroding town and village centers;
- underappreciated historic and cultural assets;
- declining livability in the early suburbs; and
- increasing costs of providing public services and infrastructure.

Data Sources

The paper draws heavily on land use and development data from the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) of the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning and the Niagara County Department of Planning, Development and Tourism. Additional information was gathered from both primary sources such as the US Census Bureau and US Geological Survey (USGS) and secondary sources such as the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council, the University at Buffalo's Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth, Empire State Development's State Data Center, the New York State GIS Clearinghouse, and the Library of Congress. The Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth's State of the Region Report and Western New York Regional Information Network were particular useful sources, providing analyses of relevant data and gateways to additional datasets and studies. Recent reports prepared on behalf of the Erie Niagara Regional Partnership, Buffalo-Niagara Enterprise, the New York State Quality Communities Task Force, and the League of Women Voters Education Campaign on Sprawl also provided background for this report.



The Erie-Niagara
Region within the Bi-
National context.



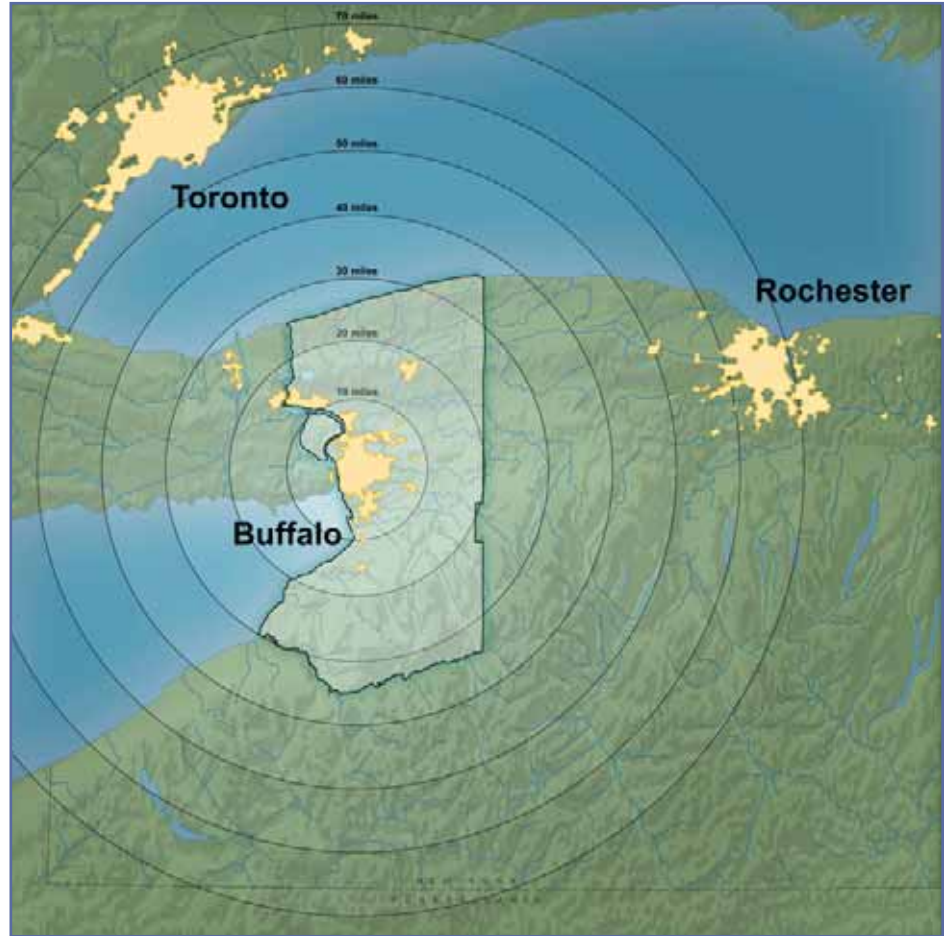
Regional Context

Although the Counties do not directly influence patterns of development and public investment beyond their borders, understanding the region's place in the Western New York and Bi-National regions is important.

Bi-National Context. Erie and Niagara Counties occupy a strategic position at the center of a dynamic region. As emphasized in recent reports by Niagara BiNational Region Economic Roundtable and the Urban Design Project/Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the counties benefit from their location in the middle of an internationally significant regional community and marketplace extending over 3,700 square miles from Toronto to Rochester and home to 3.2 million people. According to the Roundtable report, the border location presents a host of advantages:

- access within ½ days drive to ½ of the U.S. and Canadian populations;
- the presence of industry leaders in information technology and data process, banking and financial services, telecommunications, automotive manufacturing, and food processing;
- a cluster of over 60 colleges and universities with enrollment of more than 300,000 students; and
- a unique and often underappreciated collection of significant historic and natural resources and cultural events and activities.

Proximity to the Toronto and Rochester regions provides an important strategic advantage.

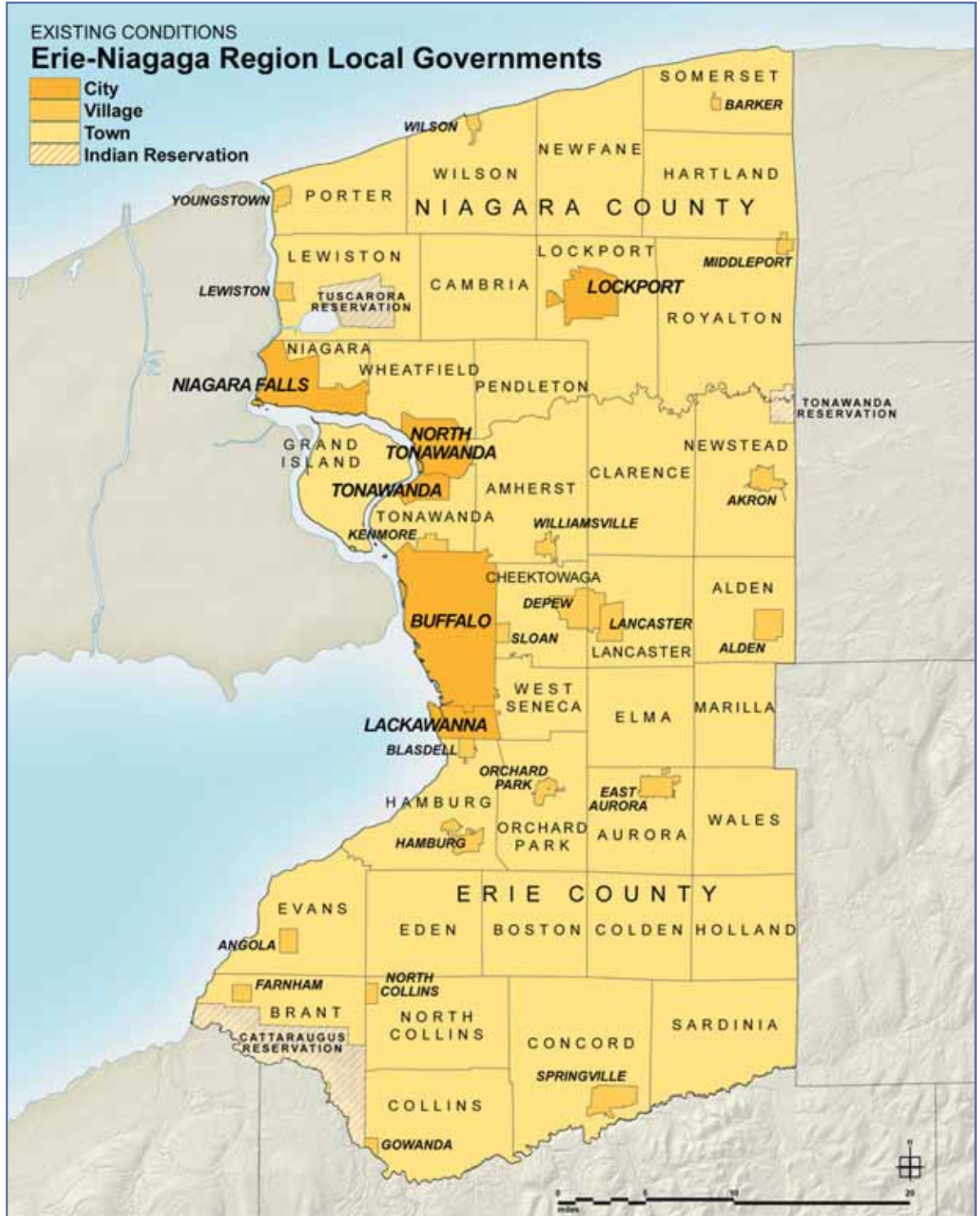


Western New York Population Change, 1990-2000

	1990	2000	% Chg 90-2000	
			#	%
Allegany County	50,470	49,927	-543	-1%
Cattaraugus County	84,234	83,955	-279	0%
Chautauqua County	141,895	139,750	-2,145	-2%
Erie County	968,532	950,265	-18,267	-2%
Genesee County	60,060	60,370	310	1%
Niagara County	220,756	219,846	-910	0%
Orleans County	41,846	44,171	2,325	6%
Wyoming County	42,507	43,424	917	2%
Western New York	1,610,300	1,591,708	-18,592	-1%

Source: US Census Bureau

Western New York. Erie and Niagara Counties serve as the urban centers of an eight county region referred to as Western New York. The region includes Erie and Niagara Counties and the surrounding counties of Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Wyoming, Genesee, Allegany, and Orleans. With the exceptions of Wyoming and Orleans County, the region has experienced a drop in population over the last decade with declines most pronounced in Erie and Chautauqua County.



The Erie-Niagara Region includes 64 local governments and 3 reservations with independent planning and zoning authority.