

JESSEY PELLOTTE  
699-3947

# *The Greater Nichols 2020 Plan: Building a More Vibrant Community Through Cooperative Action*



**Prepared for the Village of Nichols Planning Board &  
Town of Nichols Planning Board**

**by the Community Planning Workshop  
Department of City and Regional Planning  
Cornell University**

**January 2006**

**A SHORT AND GLORIOUS HISTORY OF NICHOLS, NY**

completed in 1969, Binghamton's Oakdale Mall was constructed in 1975, and Vestal's Town Square Mall was opened in 1992.

The completion of the Southern Tier Expressway through the area in the 1970s made Nichols more accessible to professionals, employed by area colleges and universities, medical centers, and technology firms, who were seeking a quiet, peaceful, and affordable place to live. Route 17, which, ironically, was constructed on the former right-of-way of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad Company, also made shopping at the suburban malls surrounding Nichols more convenient for its residents, most of whom were commuting to locations outside of the community for work, school, medical services, sporting events, and other cultural activities by the early 1970s.

A major improvement benefiting the Village and Town of Nichols took place in 1971 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed work on a dike system designed to protect the community from the seasonal flooding of the Wappasening Creek. The value of this \$25 million Federal commitment was demonstrated in 1972 when the Village and Town were protected from flooding of the Wappasening caused by Hurricane Agnes. In 1976, Tioga Park, a race track for quarter horses, was opened, but by 1978 it had closed – a victim of the declining popularity of horse racing as a recreational activity. Plans are currently underway by its new owners to re-open the facility, under the name Tioga Downs, as a combined thoroughbred horse racing and slot machine venue, commonly referred to as a racino.



While many Upstate New York communities have been ravaged by the decline of traditional agricultural markets, the loss of manufacturing firms, ongoing suburbanization, unfunded state and federal mandates for education and health care, and reductions in state and federal aid to municipalities and counties, such has not been the case with the Village and Town of Nichols. These communities have managed to maintain a high quality of life during the difficult economic times experienced by Upstate New York through careful management of municipal resources, significant volunteer efforts, and ongoing intermunicipal cooperation. While several of the Village's storefronts had become vacant by the 1990s, a number of new enterprises have recently been recruited to its retail district, including: the Barstow House, Kim's Diner, Lou's Diner and Dad's Ice Cream. More than thirty home-based businesses have also been started by local entrepreneurs.

## AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Built environment-

The Village and the Town have a substantial number of beautifully designed, constructed, and maintained industrial, commercial, and residential structures. The majority of these buildings are occupied, but a small number of them are currently vacant and available for adaptive re-use. Among the community's most significant historic structures that are still in use are the: Cady Public Library, the former Town Hall, the commercial structures lining Main Street, the First Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Masonic Temple. Among the historic structures that might be suitable for adaptive re-use are the former Nichols Train Station, the Borden Creamery, and the Agway Building.

### Local businesses-

The Village and Town of Nichols have a dynamic small business sector. In addition to the several business enterprises occupying commercial space along Main Street in the Village and near the two Route 17 Interchanges in the Town, Nichols is home to more than thirty home-based businesses. Within the last five years, a number of new businesses have opened in the Main Street Retail District of the Village. During this period, the Town was able to recruit a regional warehouse center of the Best Buy Corporation to its Lounsbury Industrial Park and attract a new developer for the long-abandoned Tioga Downs.

### Farms and dairies-

Local farmers and dairymen have been able to maintain their farms and dairies despite depressed farm and dairy markets. The knowledge, skill, and commitment of Nichols' area farmers and dairymen have kept a significant amount of local acreage in agricultural use despite pressures from residential developers. The success of these agricultural enterprises has enabled the Village and Town to maintain the historic small town feel and the rural lifestyle that current residents value.

### Recreational services-

The Village and the Town have a significant number of important recreational facilities and services that currently attract a large number of visitors to the Village and the Town. The Tioga Country Club, located near the heart of the Village, is one of the region's most scenic and popular public courses. The Leisure Living Campground serves campers throughout the year and hosts a number of different music series that are attractive to youth. The Town's horse stables serve area riders looking for stable and grooming services as well as weekend riding opportunities. The State of New York's DEC Boat Launch, located in the Town, offers access to one of the Susquehanna's most scenic and navigable stretches to would-be fishermen and boaters. Kirby Park, located near the center of the Village, attracts individuals, families, and organizations for recreational activities and special events. **The Tioga Downs Racetrack and Racino**

## AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Complex, which should be re-opened soon, is expected to significantly increase the number of visitors coming to the area.

### Sense of community-

Many Village and Town residents were attracted to Nichols by its small town feel and strong sense of community. The majority of local residents know a significant number of their neighbors, the leaders of their communities' local civic organizations, and their elected officials. They are confident that they and their families can depend upon their neighbors and their community if they have a problem. Two-thirds of those interviewed as part of the planning process indicated their willingness to assist with future community-building activities.

### Spirit of volunteerism-

Town and Village residents are involved in a wide range of volunteer organizations that provide important community services. The Nichols Volunteer Fire Department and EMS Squad have a distinguished history of local and regional service. In the tragic days following 9-11, this local organization mobilized volunteers to support the New York City Fire Department's relief efforts. The Community Care Network of Nichols represents the community outreach efforts of Nichols. The Ro-Ki, Masonic Temple, VFW, area churches, and other fraternal and veterans' organizations regularly mobilize their members for important community events. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts involve dozens of

area youth in environmental improvement and community service activities. In addition, several dozen local residents are active members of Village, Town, and Tioga Central School District Committees.

### Forward-looking local governments-

The elected officials of the Town and Village have effectively and creatively addressed the challenge of providing basic municipal services during difficult economic times. Looking forward to a period of economic recovery for the Southern Tier, local officials have undertaken one of the few comprehensive planning processes currently underway within the Tioga-Broome Region. They are among a very few Villages and Towns that have joined together to cooperatively produce a joint plan. Their willingness and ability to successfully undertake a collaborative planning and development effort should give them a significant competitive advantage in a future which many analysts believe will require intergovernmental cooperation.

### Current Weaknesses (W)

#### Infrastructure challenges-

Like many rural communities in Upstate New York, the Village and the Town of Nichols face several infrastructure challenges. Currently, residents and businesses in the Village use septic systems. The lack of a municipal sewer system, in combination with run-off

## AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

investment in either the Village or the Town could be undermined by any perceived communication barriers.

### Future Opportunities (O)

#### **Tioga Park development-**

The investment group that recently purchased the long-abandoned Tioga Downs Racetrack seems to be poised for a re-opening of the facility as a mixed-use horse track, casino, antique/flea market, and youth park venue for families. State and County approval of gaming, upon which the developers' new business plan rests, appears to be nearly certain. The opening of this facility could bring needed jobs, consumer purchasing, and tax revenues to the Village and Town of Nichols. The Nichols 2020 Plan suggests the negotiation of an agreement similar to an EPA good neighbor agreement to increase the likelihood that the racetrack development will benefit both investors and local residents.

#### **State Route 17/Interstate 86 upgrade-**

The long-awaited upgrade of Route 17 into Interstate 86 across the Southern Tier should significantly increase automobile and truck traffic within Tioga County. With two highly-visible exits on Route 17, the Village and Town may capture a significant portion of anticipated new consumer spending for fuel, food, and recreation.

#### **Nature-based tourism-**

The Village and Town of Nichols are endowed with significant natural resources that could be used to foster significant eco-tourism. Access to the Wappasening Creek and the Susquehanna River could be used for hiking, fishing, hunting, boating, canoeing, and rafting. Both communities also have access to beautiful rolling fields and deeply-forested hillsides that are perfect for walking, hiking, running, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, biking, snowmobiling, and bird watching. Would-be visitors' experience of Nichols' natural beauty could be complemented by visits to the area's many historic sites and structures and Nichols' local restaurants. Such activities may provide important new opportunities for tourist-oriented retail activities.

#### **Local niche retailing-**

Most local residents travel eight to ten miles on a regular basis to meet their day-to-day household needs. With the exception of gasoline and hardware purchases, the overwhelming majority of Village and Town residents are forced to travel to Owego, Sayre PA, Vestal, Johnson City, Binghamton or Ithaca for basic goods and services, and a majority of local residents would prefer to patronize local stores to secure many of these goods. A buy-local program, in combination with a targeted business development program, could significantly expand the Nichols retail sector.