



RURAL LIVING CHARACTER AREA

Overview

Rural Living represents a transitional area between farmland/forest and village/hamlet areas where residential development encompasses a large share of active land uses. In these Character Areas, housing does not occupy the largest portion of the land, as it would in Village Living, but there are a large enough proportion of residences that are not linked to agricultural activities to change its character. Rural Living areas were historically populated by farmhouses, as transportation limitations reserved these areas only for those working the land. However, since the mid-20th century, and especially in the last 20 years, the population of these areas has grown with the onset of "country living" patterns that did not include agriculture activity. The automobile, coupled with an abundance of cheap energy, allowed people to build small to mid-sized homes in a rural setting while commuting to population centers such as Lowville, Watertown, Rome, and Syracuse.

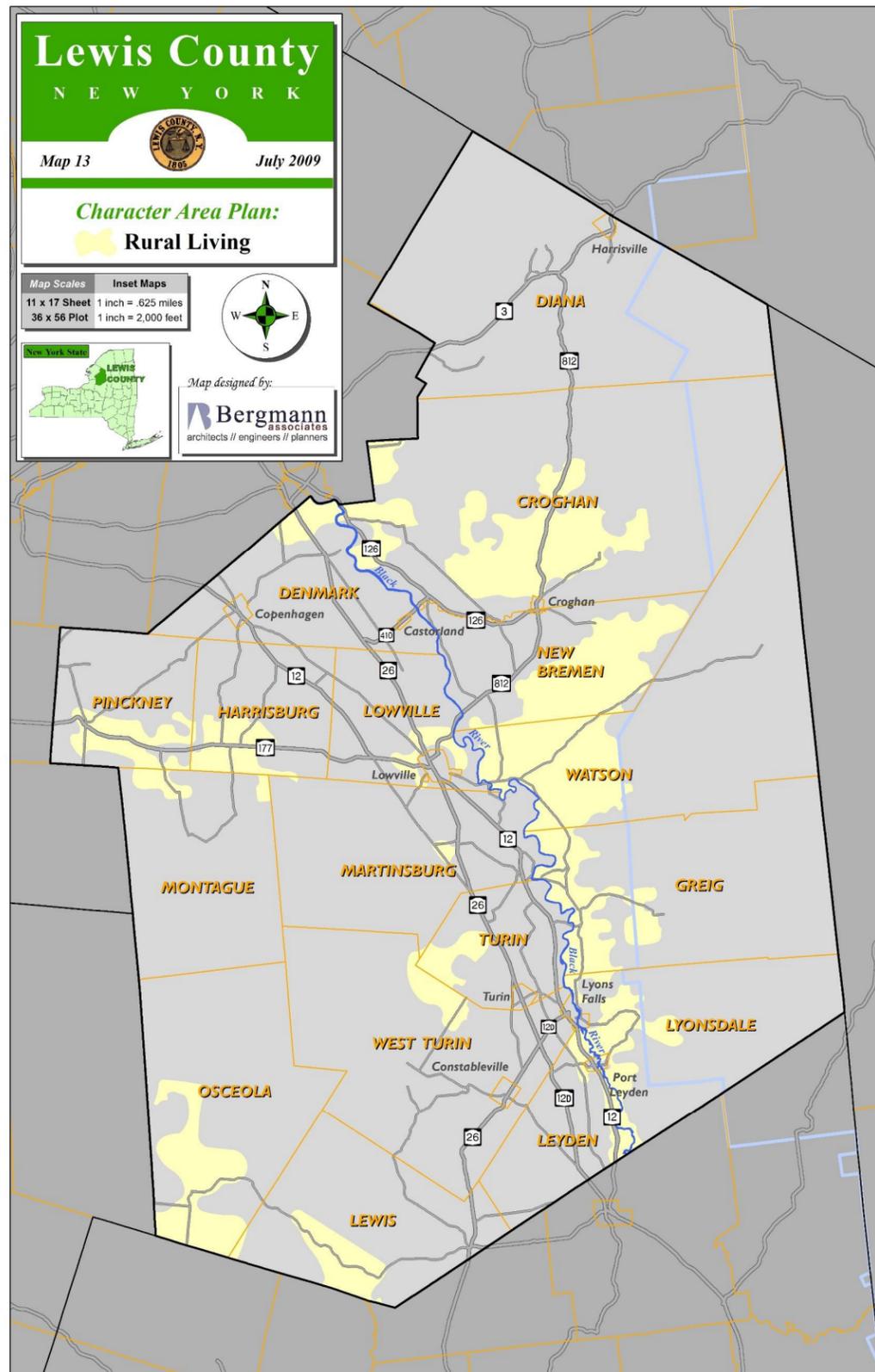
This pattern exists throughout the entire county, but the Character Area Plan identifies specific clusters of Rural Living where farming and forestry, although present, are not the dominant land use. There is a noticeable presence of this on the east side of the Black River, where, although some farms exist, the land is not as conducive to farming as the west side of the river. Yet the area is a quick commute to Lowville and other activity centers which attracts those wishing for a peaceful, natural setting within a reasonable distance of goods, services, and jobs.

The Character Area Plan identifies Rural Living in the following locations:

- South and east of the Village of Carthage
- North of the Village of Croghan
- Along Route 177
- Black River east shore from New Bremen to Port Leyden
- West of the Village of Turin on the Tug Hill Plateau
- Along County Road 46 in the Town of Lewis
- Around the hamlet of Osceola



Rural living residence in the Town of Martinsburg.



Recommended Land Uses

Land use goals should preserve the remaining rural, historic and agricultural character in this area by minimizing the visual impact of development from public roadways and protecting important environmental features. Planning should encourage innovative development, more opportunities for traditional community living, employment, housing, recreation, and the conservation and efficient use of open space. Future land uses should include residential dwellings mixed with commercial/retail farm support, religious, public/municipal, and recreational uses. Rural Living area development should be carefully designed and sited, and each town should consider a strategy for managing residential development based on the methods outlined in this section and the Farmland section (ppg. 106-107). Small-scale, neighborhood-based retail businesses should be retained for hamlet and village areas.

Town of Seneca Agricultural Zoning District

The Town of Seneca, NY created its Agricultural Zoning District to preserve existing agricultural lands and protect the rural character of the area that reinforces the special quality of life enjoyed by residents. The creation of the Agricultural Zoning District illustrates the Town's commitment to farming and agricultural uses as a preferred use in these districts, and protects existing agricultural areas from suburban and urban development, encourages the continuation of agriculture, reduces land conflicts and preserves open space and natural resources.

The following is an example of how the Seneca ordinance addresses density in the Agricultural Zone:

- A single subdivided lot is allowed on parent parcels that are between 5 and 100 acres in total size.
- Up to 2 subdivided lots are allowed on parent parcels that are more than 100 acres and up to 150 acres in total size.
- Up to 3 subdivided lots are allowed on parent parcels that are more than 150 acres and up to 200 acres in total size.
- Parent parcels that are greater than 200 acres in size are allowed 1 subdivided lot per 50 acres.



Example: Parent parcel = 140 acres 2 subdivided lots are permitted Minimum lot size = 1 acre

For additional techniques used in farmland preservation, see page 107.

Life in Rural Areas

Many new residents join the Lewis County community from urban or suburban locations. While the country atmosphere and open environment of Lewis County are highly desired, many public services and amenities that people are used to from other locations are not economically feasible to be provided for or are not consistent with small town living. This discrepancy of expectations can be problematic. Throughout the planning process, participants indicated that there is a need to educate newcomers to Lewis County about living in a rural area. The following information addresses topics where conflicts often arise. This information could be provided to local realtors to assist prospective buyers, and provide an improved understanding of the character of Lewis County.

1. Public water and sewer systems are limited to the areas around villages, and home owners should be aware of their responsibility to provide for their individual water and waste treatment, via wells and septic systems, on their own property.
2. Electrical, telephone, cellular, and internet services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in cities. Prior to construction, property owners should determine the proximity of electrical power and other utilities, as the extension of these services often comes at great expense.
3. Property owners should be aware of the budgetary challenges facing municipalities, which are in part the result of providing modern services to small populations across a large geographic area.

4. Many local roads are gravel and will not be paved. Unpaved roads are not always smooth, are often slippery when they are wet, and can be muddy during the spring thaw. An increase in vehicle maintenance costs may be experienced from regular travel on rural, unpaved county roads. Property owners are advised to understand the municipality's road maintenance programs and determine the maintenance designation of their local roads, as not all roadways are eligible for year-round care.
5. Growth is occurring in Lewis County, and the views and vistas surrounding a given parcel may change in the future. Prospective property owners should investigate the local municipality's land use and zoning regulations to determine if changes to the character of the landscape are likely.
6. Farming is a common activity in Lewis County and is a very important part of the community. Farm activities require large machinery travelling on local and county roads between fields. Farm and forestry traffic may slow travel down at times.
7. Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Chemicals are often used in growing crops. Animals and their manure may cause objectionable odors. It is possible that adjoining agricultural uses may disturb the relative peace and quiet of the country side, and prospective owners should take these factors into consideration prior to purchasing property in the rural areas of Lewis County.
8. Dark skies are usually thought of as a very valuable rural experience. Prospective buyers and current home owners should be considerate of light pollution, and use light fixtures that direct light downwards and consider the increased utilization of timers.



Design Considerations

Conventional, suburban style subdivisions and strip commercial development are land development patterns that should be discouraged within the Rural Living Area. Design considerations should be oriented to allow for new development that reduces sprawl, reduces negative traffic impacts on Route 12 and other major arterials, minimizes impacts on the environment, reduces impacts on agriculture and forest lands, and maintains small town rural character. Residential development should build upon the historic development pattern of Lewis County. Towns should promote development that displays the design features of traditional hamlets and low density development in this part of the county. Commercial development may be appropriate if it does not create objectionable noise, glare, or odors, and where the visual and open space characteristics of the area are reinforced.

Wherever feasible, towns should retain and reuse existing old farm roads and lanes rather than constructing new roads or driveways. Preserving stone walls and hedgerows will maintain these traditional landscape features, define outdoor areas, and create corridors useful for wildlife. New structures should be placed either at the edges of fields or in wooded areas. Existing vegetation and topography can be effectively used to buffer and screen new buildings. Buildings can be grouped in clusters or tucked behind tree lines or knolls instead of spreading them out across the landscape in a sprawling or haphazard pattern.

Clearing of vegetation at the edge of the road is not desirable and should include only what is necessary to create a driveway entrance with adequate sight distance. Where possible, existing vegetation can be used as a backdrop to reduce the prominence of the structure within the landscape. Cut and fill earthwork should be minimized to limit impacts on the environment and its visual character.

In the future, Lewis County towns have many opportunities to ensure that large residential developments are designed to complement the rural living character. Through use of conservation subdivision design (see sidebar on page 106), and encouraging development in and around existing population centers, the sense of community and character of the area can be preserved. Lewis County also can enhance planning for small, incremental growth as single family minor subdivisions and seasonal homes are developed. Site plan review, subdivision, zoning, and other local building lot laws can all be used to incorporate good rural design principles.