

Figure III-3: Focus Area I is dominated by open space, with limited residential and commercial development.

C. Focus Area I

Vision:

“Nodes of activity separated by stretches of open space”

Focus Area I is located north of Swormville and is the least developed section of the study area. Characterized by undeveloped lands and a limited amount of clustered commercial development, this rural section of the corridor serves as a gateway into Amherst and Clarence from the north. This area, which is the termination point for Millersport Highway (Figure III-3), is a commonly traveled commuter route. Millersport Highway is a major link to the City of Buffalo and Lockport via Interstate Route 990, which intersects with Transit Road in this area. These roads are commonly traveled commuter routes.

Issues:

Through the planning process, members of the Technical Advisory Committee and the community at-large indicated that the area’s rural landscape and abundance of undeveloped land should be preserved. The primary projected land use in the Town of Amherst is low density residential development, while the Town of Clarence projects commercial development, although environmental limitations presented by the floodway will limit development options. The existing node of commercial activity at the intersection of

Millersport Highway and Transit Road should continue to be supported and used as a center for development in the future. However, development should be limited to lower volume traffic generators. Allowing this area to develop with uses that generate higher traffic volumes on Transit Road could require a widening, which would threaten the viability and character of the Swormville hamlet to the south. Additionally, potential impacts to access and safety, such as higher speeds, increased residential and commercial development adjacent to the corridor and poor alignment of roads, were also identified as key issues to be addressed through this study.

Responses:

- Maintain rural character
- Emphasize activity node at Millersport Hwy. & Transit Road
- Accommodate low density residential development with limited direct access to Transit Road
- Slow traffic from Millersport Hwy. entering Transit Road
- Promote alternative routes to Transit Rd. (especially for local traffic)
- Examine possibility of road realignments
- Promote interconnected streets in residential developments
- Accommodate limited commercial development in the Town of Clarence with managed access to Transit Road

- Preserve through-traffic capacity and regional arterial function of the roadway

Actions:

In Focus Area I, Transit Road is a two-lane roadway with a speed limit of 55 mph. Motorists travel through this area efficiently because of the generous lane and shoulder widths as well as the limited development, lack of traffic signals, and low number of curb cuts.

Efficiency and Traffic Flow

This focus area is an important component of the towns' transportation systems and is an integral commuter route in the Buffalo area. This section of Transit Road also serves as a gateway to several neighboring communities due the terminus of Millersport Highway and proximity to municipal boundaries. Consequently, safe and efficient movement of through-traffic is essential. Generally speaking, this portion of Transit Road is not a destination for many people. The majority of motorists want to enter and exit the focus area with limited slowdowns.

Limiting development in the area is one way to maintain the corridor's efficient flow of traffic. Supporting the current node of activity and encouraging a nodal approach to future development will minimize the number of curb cuts along this section of the corridor. Fewer curb cuts will yield safer, more efficient travel along Transit Road by

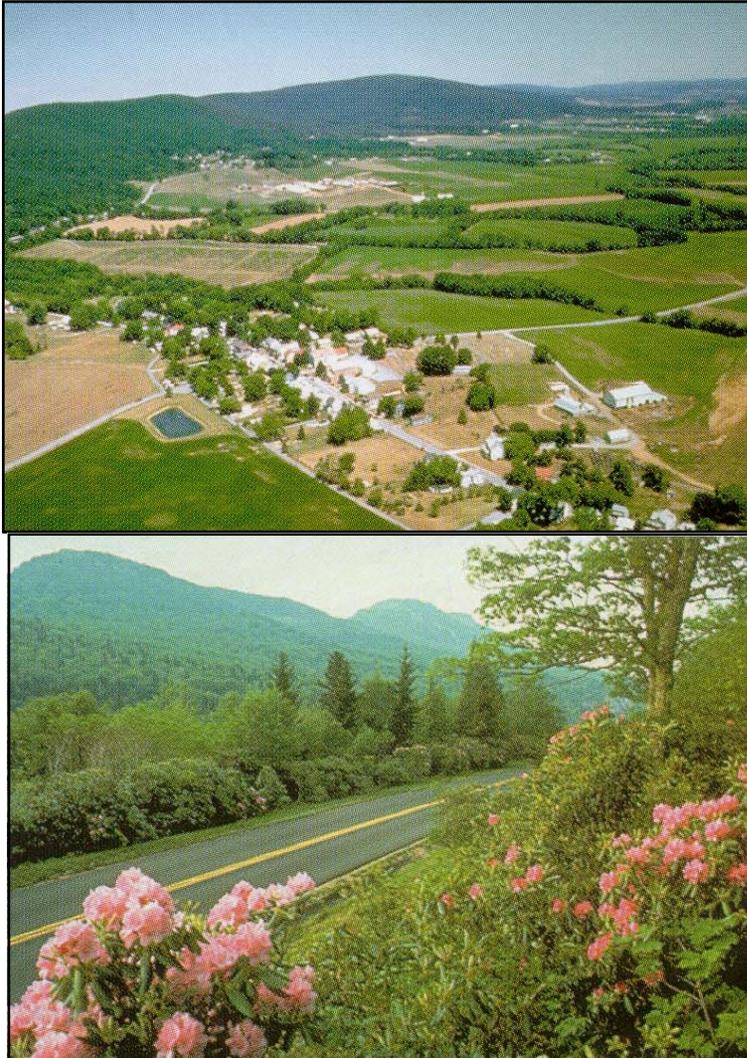


Figure III-5: Images from the Preferred Development Survey that represent the desired character and appearance for Focus Area I.

reducing the opportunities for cars to slow down, stop or turn.

As is show in Figure III-6, the proposed conceptual design for this area includes wide travel lanes (14 feet), ample shoulders (8 feet) and a median. This configuration enables motorists to maintain consistent travel speeds which will reduce traffic slow-downs in the area. The conceptual design does not include sidewalks or a dedicated bike lane given current levels of pedestrian activity. However, as development occurs, each town will have to consider pedestrian access to ensure accommodations are adequate. Although New York is a “share the road” state, which typically means bike lanes are provided along the road, Amherst and Clarence may want to consider the addition of off-road pedestrian facilities to eliminate pedestrian/motorist conflicts in the shoulder. While the shoulder provides ample room to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, high speeds in this area may make sharing the road a hazardous option.

Importance of Rural Landscape

The community expressed a desire to preserve the area’s rural landscape. The images in Figure III-5 (page 16), which scored very high in the Preferred Development Survey, illustrate that vision. However, preference for open space in this area must be handled in a way that provides the Town of Clarence with development opportunities. Promoting nodes of activity in this area is one way to achieve these objectives. A

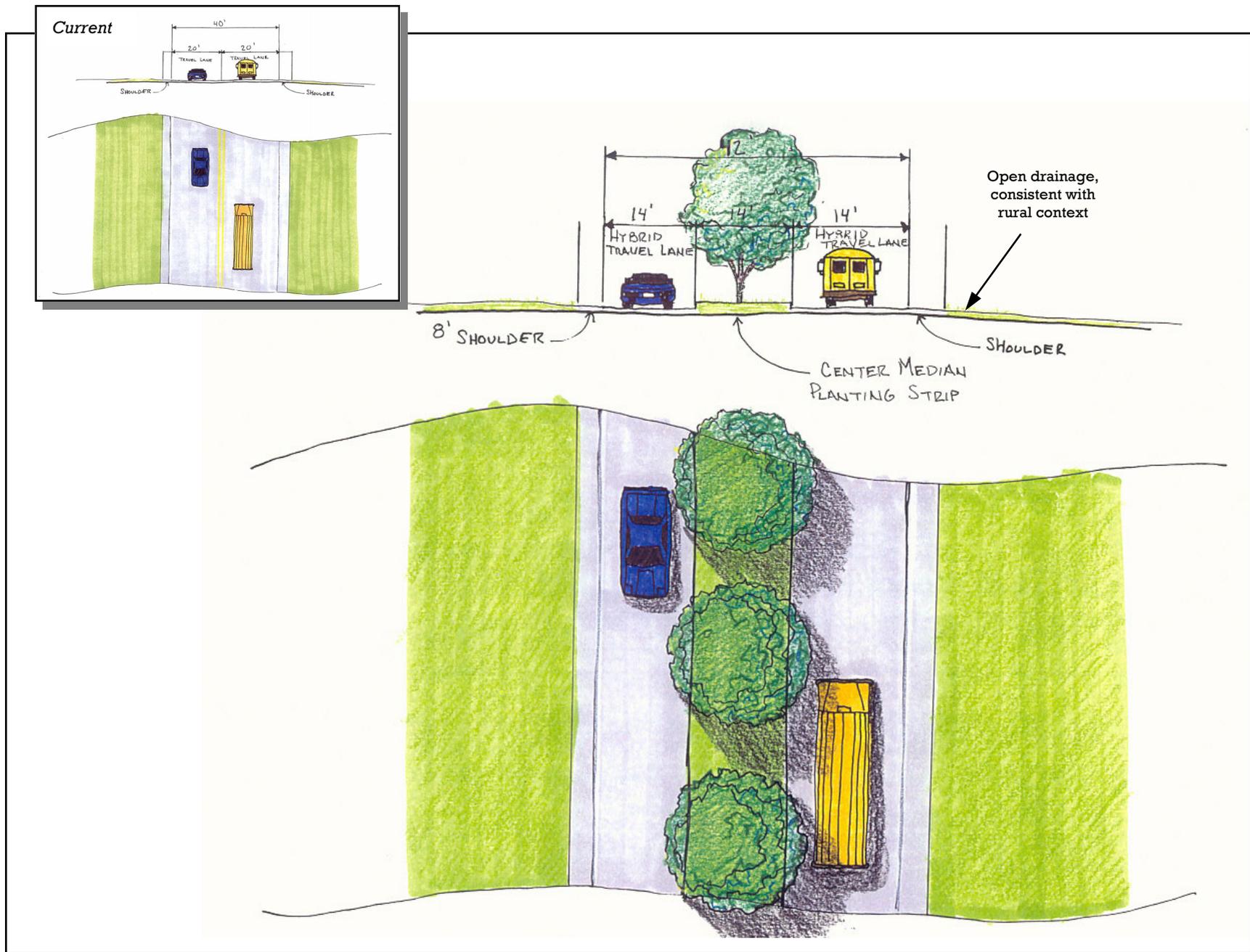


Figure III-6: A proposed cross-section for Focus Area I includes two travel lanes with a landscaped median.



Figure III-7: Photo simulation depicting what the installa-

nodal approach to commercial development will enable contiguous parcels of open space to remain.

Open space or the appearance of open space will be addressed differently in each town. In Amherst, much of the undeveloped land is located in the northern section of the town, especially in the northeast. According to future land use policies outlined in the recently completed Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan, future development in the focus area should be limited to rural residential in order to preserve rural character. However, Clarence anticipates the need for additional commercial development in this area to meet economic development needs in their community. In either case, limiting direct access to Transit Road will help minimize negative impacts associated with future development in this area. Additionally site layout and design techniques can be used to emphasize landscaping and improve the appearance of development. The towns should also consider open space preservation techniques (e.g. purchase and/or transfer of development rights, cluster zoning, conservation developments, etc.) to ensure that contiguous parcels of open space are preserved, which will help maintain the rural character.

Medians—One Tool, Many Benefits

The design concept for this focus area includes the creation of a landscaped median. The photo simulation in Figure III-7 illustrates what a median in this area could look like. As the picture shows, the presence of a median would enhance the aesthetic appeal of the corridor and support the towns' desire to maintain the

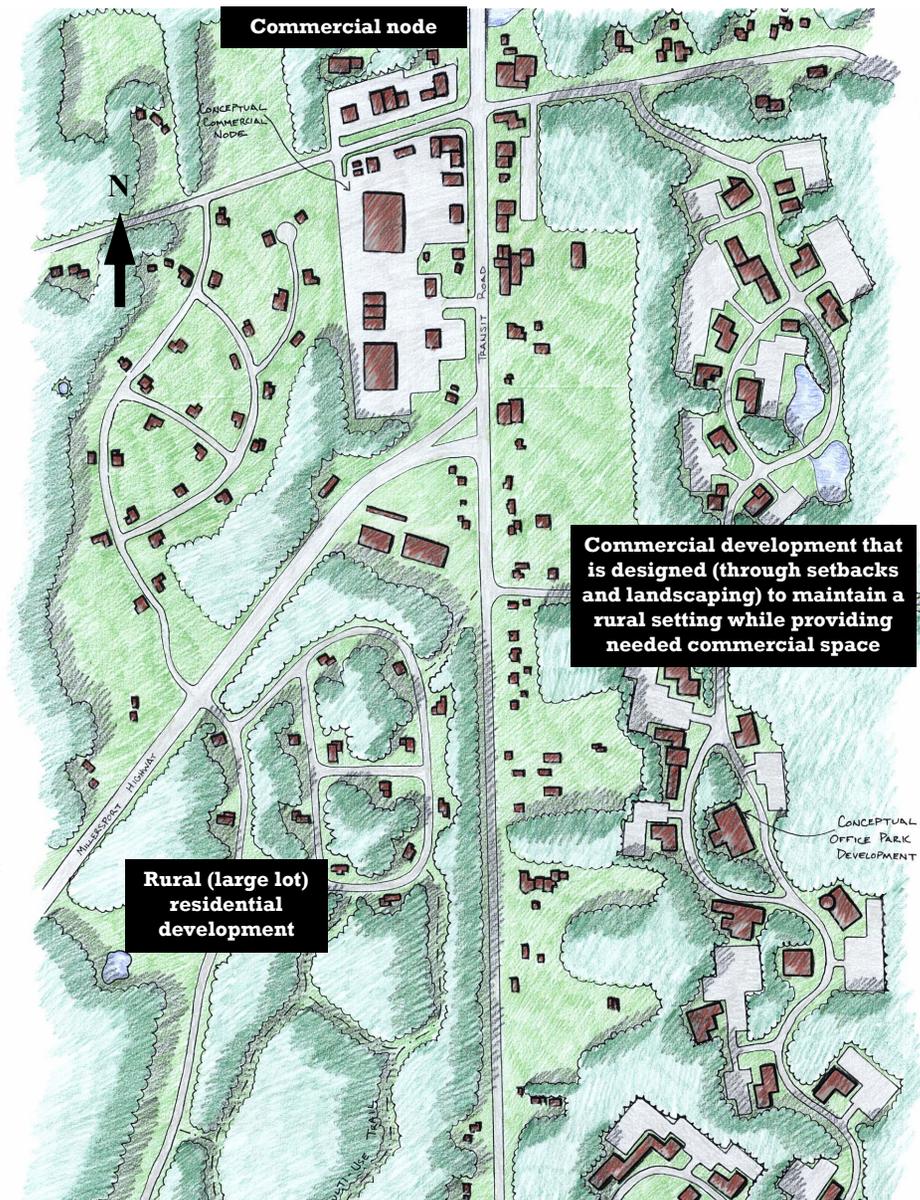


Figure III-8: Illustrates a conceptual design for the proposed land uses in northern portion of Focus Area I.

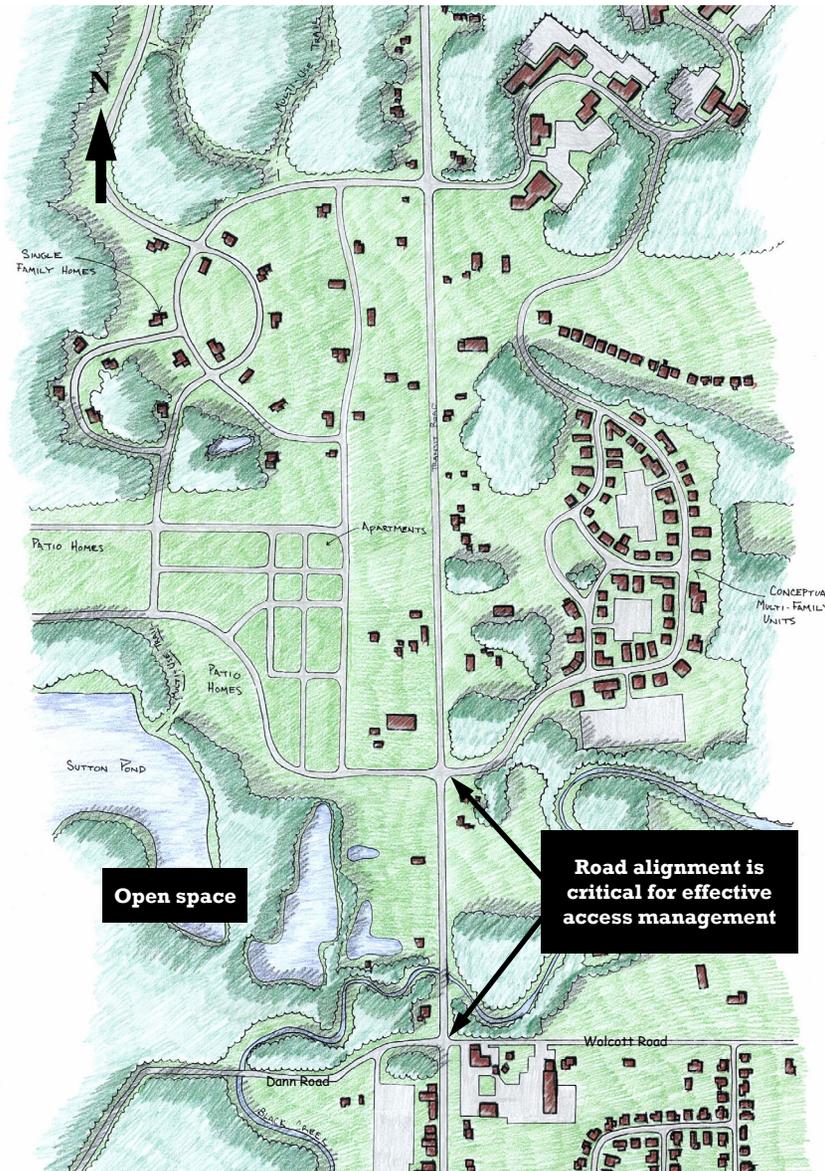


Figure III-9: Illustrates a conceptual design for the proposed land uses in southern portion of Focus Area I.

area's rural landscape by controlling access and turning movements along this stretch of the corridor.

A median in this focus area would also provide a significant gateway treatment, which would give a physical cue to travelers that they have entered the Towns of Amherst and Clarence. A landscaped median would enhance the aesthetic appeal of the corridor, setting this particular portion of Transit Road apart from other areas. Decorative signage, landscaping and lighting could be included at the northern end of the median to maximize its role as an Erie County gateway.

As stated earlier, a desire to protect the rural landscape was identified as a priority for this portion of the corridor. Consequently, dense development is not anticipated at this time. However, if this vision of limited development for the area north of Swornville should change over time, the median would allow for safer development and access in the future. The median would encourage good access management practices by reducing conflict points, encouraging consolidated access drives and limiting turning movements within the focus area.

Medians also encourage safety and efficiency by limiting conflict points and encouraging more right-in, right-out driveways and intersections. The physical structure of the median would maintain safe speeds and provide a location for a refuge for pedestrian access, albeit limited, across the corridor. The proposition of a raised median(s) generates questions and concerns about access, safety and turning movements associated

with median design. For the purposes of this study, general guidelines for median design and break spacing have been provided in the implementation section and in model access management code language provided to the town under separate cover. However, future study of the area would be required to determine specific break locations in this segment of Transit Road. At that time, emergency services access and accommodations for existing and future residential development would need to be considered.

Enhancing Roadway Connections

The conceptual scenario for the northern and southern sections of Focus Area I is illustrated in Figures III-8 and III-9, respectively. The conceptual design depicts interconnected roads with limited direct access along Transit Road. Local and private roads would need to be developed in both towns to effectively circulate traffic and provide alternative routes to minimize impact to Transit Rd. In addition, there are opportunities for additional connections to Millersport Highway, which currently has one access point in the focus area at the Transit Road intersection. Planned access points to Millersport Highway would allow it to serve as an alternative route to Transit Road.

Other potential access points and connections to Millersport Highway should be considered for this focus area. Figure III-8 shows direct connections that could be made between future rural residential development and Millersport Highway. In addition, the new, 600-unit residential development under review in the Town of

Amherst proposes access to Dann Road, which would alleviate traffic conflicts and congestion at Transit Road by providing residents with alternative access routes. Other roadway connections illustrated in the scenario include the alignment of Dann and Wolcott Roads, which would improve traffic circulation.

Future Land Use

As discussed earlier in this document, the relationship between land use and transportation is cyclical, whereby changes to one often precipitate changes to the other. Examining future land use in the focus area helped to determine the necessary transportation improvements and modifications needed for future development. Given the community's expressed desire to maintain the rural setting of this area, careful consideration was given to balancing both towns' needs and the community's desire for future uses in the area and the environmental considerations presented by the floodway and protected wetlands located in the towns.

The result is a conceptual development scenario that emphasizes green space while allowing each town the type of development identified in their future land use plans. Amherst's desire for rural residential development and Clarence's need for limited commercial development have been accommodated. The fundamental components of the conceptual scenario include:

- Limited, large-lot development in Amherst with limited/no direct access to Transit Road;

- Commercial development in Clarence that utilizes a “campus” or “park” approach in its layout and internal circulation design. This will be accomplished through use of Clarence’s Planned Unit Development regulations;
- Service or access road with lot connections;
- Reverse frontage for residential development;
- Large setbacks for commercial development;
- Limited/shared access to Transit Road;
- Preservation of contiguous parcels of open space where feasible; and
- Extensive use of landscaping buffers to preserve green space and view sheds from Transit Road in this area.

Careful planning and site development will be needed to bridge the range of uses anticipated along the corridor. Building upon the node in and around the Millersport Highway/Transit Road intersection should continue to be a priority for both communities.

In order to achieve the goals outlined in this Report, the Towns of Amherst and Clarence will need to develop a cooperative approach to managing development. This might be achieved by encouraging a development review and comment period for each Town when a project is proposed along the corridor. This will ensure that each Town is involved in the implementation of the Report in Focus Area I.

In the Town of Clarence, the best way to encourage development patterns that are consistent with the

recommendations of the Report is to revise zoning district boundaries. Creating an open space or rural residential zone with a 200’ setback from Transit Road and retaining/expanding the remaining commercial zone to the east will allow for the development of an attractive campus style commercial development. If retail and service is desired, appropriate signage kiosks will need to be allowed at the access roads for the commercial areas. This will require signage kiosks to be permitted, outright or by special-use permit, in the rural residential/open space district.

In addition to the protection of rural character in this area, there are environmental considerations related to floodplains and wetlands. Since the Town of Clarence desires development in this area, it should complete a Generic Environmental Impact Statement that addresses the limitations of the area. This will expedite future development, reduce potential permitting conflicts, protect the natural environment and encourage appropriate development patterns.