

Section II

Inventory and Analysis

Location, Landscape, and Natural Environment

The Town of Essex encompasses approximately 23,798 acres nestled in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains along the shore of Lake Champlain. It is almost a perfect rectangle in shape, 38 square miles in area. It is bounded on the north by the Town of Willsboro, on the west by the Town of Lewis, on the south by the Town of Westport and on the east by Lake Champlain. The western part of the Town is



The Essex Shoreline looking north from Whallons Bay

characterized by steep, wooded hills and rounded mountains often referred to as the foothills of the Adirondacks. The Boquet River flows northward through the center of Town. In the southeastern corner of Essex, the Schroom Range, a sub-group of the Adirondack Mountain system, extends out into the Lake, forming Whallons Bay with its rugged promontory ending at Split Rock. In between these mountainous outcroppings, the Boquet River cuts a narrow valley through a high central plateau of open farmland with dramatic views westward towards the Adirondacks and eastward out over Lake Champlain.

A significant part of the shoreline is characterized by narrow strips of rocky beach below steep banks. As stated previously, the offshore waters are not typically calm and recent unexplained weather patterns have meant that shoreline property owners are seeing the significant effects of erosion and dealing with the need for bank stabilization. What little is left of undeveloped shoreline can be considered generally unsuitable for future development.

Land Use and Analysis

The Town of Essex is situated in northeastern New York on Lake Champlain. The Town encompasses approximately 23,798 acres, of which approximately 16 percent is water.

The entire Town is located within the Adirondack Park and is subject to the Adirondack Park Agency's Land Use Plan and Regulations. This land is allocated to the official Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan Map - land use area classifications as of August, 2000:

Table 1
Land Use Classifications

	Essex Acres	% of Essex Total	Essex County	Essex County % of Park Total
Hamlet	255.0	1.1	18,864	1.4
Moderate Intensity Use	222.1	1.0	20,291	1.1
Low Intensity Use	1,892.1	8.0	77,651	2.5
Rural Use	8,728.5	36.7	184,884	4.8
Resource Management	8,195.5	34.5	309,006	2.7
Industrial Use	0.0	0.0	6,470	0.0
Wilderness	0.0	0.0	326,819	0.0
Primitive	0.0	0.0	21,327	0.0
Wild Forest	617.0	2.6	175,146	0.4
Intensive Use	0.0	0.0	6,554	0.0
Historic	0.0	0.0	495	0.0
State Administrative	0.0	0.0	316	0.0
Pending Classification	0.0	0.0	182	0.0
Open Water	3,856.0	16.2	76,580	5.1
Total	23,766.1	100.00	1,224,583	2.0

The Town has two established hamlets, Essex and Whallonsburg. Several other concentrations of housing are recognized by local residents; Boquet, located about three miles west of the Essex hamlet on the shores of the Boquet River; Brookfield, located in a more remote area in the western part of the Town; and Whallons Bay, located in the southeast part of the Town embracing the bay which bears its name and Split Rock.

Generally speaking, the land uses in Essex have not changed drastically over the years, other than a reduction in the housing stock reflected in the population figures.

The existing land uses in the waterfront area are presented in five arbitrarily named sub-areas, including North Bay, Beggs Point, South Bay, Lake Shore Road, and Whallons Bay. The bulk of access to the Essex Waterfront takes place in the Essex Hamlet with the cross-lake ferry, Beggs Park, and the marinas.

1. North Bay

The North Bay sub area includes that portion of the waterfront area from the northernmost boundary of Essex to the Ferry Landing at the intersection of State Route 22 and Lake Shore Road. This sub-area contains several different land use patterns. Land from the northern Town line to land just north of the Ferry dock is privately owned with residences on fairly good sized lots. The northernmost shoreline is characterized by rocky beaches with little or no sand. Several of the homeowners in this area have had to shore up the banks of the shoreline due to erosion over the years. Only one homeowner in the

northernmost area maintains a seasonal dock, as the Lake is broad and open and subject to strong winds. As you make your way south to the Ferry Dock, there exists an area called "Sandy Point" which has one of the few sandy beaches on the Essex shoreline. This beach is privately owned by seasonal homeowners. The bay close to the Ferry dock is a popular overnight mooring spot for sail boaters in the summer, however it is not completely sheltered and is subject to the unpredictable weather and winds of Lake Champlain. The main obstacle to this mooring area is no public access to the Essex waterfront. Most access is by permission on private property.



Lake Champlain Transportation Ferry Landing (right), the Old Dock Restaurant (left).

The North Bay area is also home to the Lake Champlain Transportation Company ferry dock. In the summer months, the ferry operates two boats from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. This schedule shortens to one boat on the hour in the off-season. Due to the fact that the Lake has not frozen for the past several years, the ferry has run year-round. This is a major access point to Essex and the entire New York Champlain Valley Region for purposes of general commerce and tourism.

Adjacent to the ferry dock is the Old Dock Restaurant which has transient docking facilities for up to 30 boats. This service is offered at no charge to customers. Short-term overnight docking is permitted.

Immediately south of the Old Dock are Cabins by the Lake, which has a large cement dock which is permitted for several boats. There are also some privately owned moorings at this location.

2. Beggs Point and Beggs Park

Over 20 years ago, with broad local support and a Federal Land and Water Conservation grant, the Town of Essex acquired and developed a waterfront municipal park at Beggs Point. The park was developed on the site formerly occupied by the Essex Horse Nail Company. The park is located on a man-made plateau rising about fifteen feet above the Lake level of Lake Champlain. The plateau is contained on the east by 19th century stone retaining walls, which rise from Lake Champlain. The walls, and a wharf which is no longer present, were constructed by previous industrial users of the site including the horse nail factory works (c.1879), or earlier occupants which include the Lyon and Palmer Sash Company and the Hoskins and Ross Shipyard.



Beggs Park and the Town Dock

The retaining wall is subject to very harsh treatment by the elements, including repeated freezing and thawing, wave action, and the effects of Lake ice. At present, it requires extensive repair. Such repairs are necessary to protect the integrity of both the historic walls and the park itself. In 1997, a grant was received from the Lake Champlain Basin Program to do an engineering study to provide the necessary guidance for the rehabilitation of Beggs Point wall. This study and engineers' recommendation for reconstruction of the wall was completed in December of 1999. In late 2001 it was discovered that a

critical retaining wall on Lake Road directly adjacent to the Beggs Park wall was in a very serious state of collapse. This sea wall retains a critical section of Lake Road that, unless repairs are made soon, may have to be closed to traffic. Funding sources should be sought immediately by the Town Board to effect the necessary repair of the road and wall.

Begg's Park today is home to a Town maintained public dock which allows access on a limited basis for boaters wishing to dock at no charge for up to two hours, a playground and picnic tables and is a tremendous asset to the community. The vistas from the Park extend for miles up and down the Lake. It is the only access most hamlet residents and visitors have to the Lake. The Town maintains a beach adjacent to the park; however, at the current time, public swimming is not allowed. There is no public access to the Lake in the Town for purpose of launching watercraft.

3. South Bay

Early in the 1800s there were two shipyards in Essex. One was located on what is today known as Begg's Point and operated by John Ross; the other on Gould or "South Bay", the present site of the Essex Marina and Essex Shipyard and operated by the Eggleston brothers. The Ross yard built sail and steamboats. The Eggleston Brothers built the Euretta, the first sloop to sail these northern waters, about 1800. A short time later, with war in view, eight or ten vessels of one-hundred and fifty tons were built as well as two hundred and fifty row galleys or bateaux for the American fleet on the Lake.

Around 1850, the village of Essex was the leading port on Lake Champlain, shipping locally produced lumber, iron, clothing, sash and doors, lime, brick, quarried stone, dairy products, etc. The Ross Shipyard became the Essex Manufacturing Company in 1879, builders of sashes and blinds. The Essex Horse Nail Company subsequently occupied the same site, and employed sixty to seventy men and women until it burned in 1917. The Ross Shipyard no longer exists.

Business at the Eggleston Brothers' shipyard declined but later revived when it was purchased and operated by C.W. Mead as a boatyard. He built several sailboats and a 40-foot power yacht, the Emerald. In 1938 the Morse brothers, James, Alpheus, and Frank bought the yard and set about reestablishing the business. By 1955, this enterprise boasted of having the largest undercover storage and first complete marina on Lake Champlain. It expanded to include a garage, machine shop, and boat building shop.

With a 1930s vision of seaplanes becoming a popular mode of travel, the name of the business was established as the Essex Marine Base, and recognized as a seaplane base by the FAA. The identification can still be seen on aeronautical charts. James Morse operated the marina until the entire property was sold in December 1986.

Shortly after taking over the Essex Marine Base property in 1987, the new owners divided the Essex Marine Base into two separate properties. The northerly portion included the service dock, two boathouses, a gas station, a small workshop-apartment building, and the Cupola House; it is now operated as the Essex Marina. The southerly portion included the principal boat basin, with seasonal and transient dockage along with moorings for a total capacity of 60 boats. It also included a boat launch ramp, one boathouse, a restaurant-bar, restroom-shower-laundry buildings, a retail store, and the Cleland

House (an unoccupied duplex house fronting on Main Street). The southern portion is now operated as the Essex Shipyard.



South Bay, home to the Essex Marina (right) and the Essex Shipyard (left)

In 1988 the Essex Community Heritage Organization (ECHO) sued the Town of Essex Planning Board in a case involving the granting of special use permits by the Town of Essex Planning Board to the Essex Marine Base and Essex Shipyard for increased dock space. As a result of that lawsuit, permits were issued by the Town allowing for the construction of a crib dock at the Essex Marine Base to accommodate 20 boats and 10 cars and the Essex Shipyard was allowed to increase the size of the marina by 20 slips by substituting 10 moorings with 10 slips and adding 20 new slips for a total of 80 slips. They were also to add 10 parking spaces. The settlement of the lawsuit also included a Stipulation that the Town would develop and adopt a formal shoreline and hamlet land use ordinance with ECHO contributing toward the costs of the project. This LWRP and its implementing laws are intended to meet that court (legal) requirement.

Since the 1988 Court Stipulation, both marinas have upgraded their facilities significantly. The Essex Marina created a new boat basin utilizing timber and stone cribbing to accommodate 20 boats in accordance with its permit. The Cupola House was restored and adapted to two apartments and a retail gallery. Additional parking and landscaping were completed and toilets and showers were added for boaters. The gas station was rejuvenated. Fuel tanks, fuel pumps, and a boat pump-out station were installed in accordance with current regulations. The service dock, with fuel, water, and pump out is the only service dock in Essex. Because of the modest demand in Essex, it adequately serves those needs.

The Essex Shipyard restored the badly deteriorated timber and stone crib docks that protected its boat basin and installed concrete tops, which are resistive to wave action in the spring. Power poles and crane equipment that occupied the wharf area were removed and replaced with underground power lines. A deck with seasonal awning expanded the restaurant capacity and the entire kitchen and dining areas were refurbished. Trees, flower beds, benches, and boardwalks were added to the waterfront and incorporated into an expanded parking plan. The entire exterior of the Cleland House was restored.

In 1990, the Essex Shipyard was further subdivided to create a separate one-half acre parcel for the boathouse (home to Essex Boatworks) and the retail store building. The Essex Shipyard was unable to expand to its permitted capacity in 1989-1990 due to the Recession and a sudden drop in the boating market. The Essex Marina actually ceased operation for two years at about this time. The Essex boating market has still not recovered to its 1980s level, partly due to recreational boating trends on Lake Champlain and partly due to the development of several new, large marinas between Essex and the Canadian border. With confidence that Essex will continue to retain its market share, the Essex Shipyard obtained new expansion permits in 2001 from the NYS DEC and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Lake Champlain boating season is periodically delayed by high water in the spring. Since both marinas have basins that are surrounded by timber and stone (on the bottom) docks, both are subject to potential flooding and wave damage.

Essex is not a full-service boating center. The commercial marinas to the north have travel-lifts, full-time mechanics, marine supplies, boat sales, winter storage, and rates that reflect the economies of handling 200 – 300 boats at one operation.

On the other hand, none of them are as attractive as Essex, with its lakeside setting, shops, accommodations, restaurants, and historic architecture. Essex's major appeal – and real potential – is as a prime boating destination. Both marinas serve several purposes relating to the economy and quality of life in Essex: they bring visitors to Essex by boat rather than by car, they create waterfront activity and interest that has been an inherent characteristic of Essex for over two centuries, and they provide access to the water. Neither marina closes its doors to fishermen, photographers, or sight-seers. Anyone can go to the marinas and look at boats, eat, or just sit. Boating visitors are likely to patronize other local businesses. In addition, the marinas provide convenient dockage for local residents.

The only boat launch area available in Essex is at the Essex Shipyard Marina for which a fee is charged. Also, this is a very difficult launch due to the steepness of the entry and limited access for maneuvering vehicles. While the area at Whallons Bay has been suggested as a site for a public boat launch, its physical location close to Lake Shore Road makes this almost impossible. Public boat launch facilities are available in the neighboring Towns of Westport and Willsboro.

The proximity of the two marinas to each other and a recent application by the Essex Marine Base for an expansion, coupled with the concerns of two adjoining land-owners, has been the source of controversy in the Town for the past several years.

As a result of the historical use of this bay for marina and marina-related services, this area is best identified as the most reasonable and practical location on the Essex shoreline for commercial marina

and boat-related activities. A pierhead line within which expansion of the marinas will be considered has been established as part of the Town's Waterways and Harbor Management Law adopted in March 2003 (Appendix C). Any expansion of the marinas within this area will be subject to all the zoning rules and regulations, SEQR, and other environmental considerations and reviews.

Impact from the marinas can be hard to measure directly, as there is generally a mixture of permanent and transient boat slips. It is important to note that the availability of transient boat slips provides another means of access to the community rather than relying on vehicle access.

4. Lake Shore Road

This area of the shoreline encompasses all that shoreline south of South Bay down to Whallons Bay.

The Crater Club, a rustic camp retreat and summer resort colony is located two miles south of the Essex Hamlet on Lake Champlain. It was founded and built in the early 1900s by John Bird Burnham, and it is home today to approximately 40 seasonal property owners. John Burnham constructed telephone lines, four tennis courts, a fourteen-mile water system, docks, a central building with dining room, a library, recreational facilities, a big garden and a federal Post Office. Many of these facilities remain today. In the days of long vacations, the Crater Club resort's clients were persons of middle means, among them clergymen, educators, government officials, authors, and persons whose tastes were simple. During this time, Burnham built over 75 cottages, each with a lake or mountain vista. The members have continued to maintain the common buildings and facilities and have upgraded the dock area. Today, the residents of the Crater Club bring vitality and life during the summer months to an otherwise secluded and private part of our Town.

While most of the residences at the Crater Club are still seasonal, over recent years several homes have been retrofitted for year round use.

The Crater Club is serviced by an on-site privately owned water system. Water is pumped from the Lake to many of the camps through pipe that lies above the ground, making it a seasonal operation. Several of the members have drilled wells for water, however, due to ground restrictions, this is not a viable option for most of the camps. In 2001, a committee was formed to explore options for a new water system for the Club. The Town was approached for input, but it has been determined that the cost of infrastructure to run Town water to the site was far more than the seasonal homeowners would be willing to bear at this time.

Individual septic systems are also the norm at the Crater Club. Once again, due to rocky site conditions, future expansion and or new construction of buildings at this site should be monitored closely for discharge and runoff, as the hillside location of this housing development has the potential to directly impact Lake Champlain.

Adjacent to the Crater Club dock, the Split Rock Yacht Club, a small informal club, sponsors weekly sailing races during mid-summer. For the past 60 years, the Club has followed the course from the

southern shore of Essex to a marker in Whallons Bay and back to a marker off Cannon Point and finally to the finish line in Cape Cod Knockabouts. In 1999 the Club had approximately 100 members. Lake Champlain is a marvelous lake for sailors. Powerboats also enjoy it but often find the heavy



Crater Club beach and dock facility (right) and sailing club (left)

weather unpredictable and difficult. Experiments with houseboats have not worked because an active lake pounds them too much. The two marinas in Essex are filled with large sail vessels as well as powerboats.

This area of the Lake represents the most threatened in terms of development. Lake Shore Road, which serves as a major north south travel route, is built very close to the shoreline and at places is subject to severe erosion. Due to severe erosion on a major section of the road at the South Farm property, the Essex County Highway Department in the year 2001 moved that section of the road to the west side of its actual location with grant funds from FEMA.

This part of the shoreline is also characterized by docks, boathouses and very few seasonal homes. This section of the shoreline has been targeted as critical. The often steep drop from the upland area to the lake surface is prone to erosion, slumping, and even collapse. These areas are unsuitable for development and should be protected.

5. Whallons Bay and Split Rock Point

The southernmost part of the shoreline encompasses Whallons Bay and an area known as Split Rock. The Town owns an access point to the Lake at Whallons Bay, which has been used in past years as a swimming area. However, recent problems with "swimmer's itch" closed this beach area to public swimming. This area provides a natural cove protecting boaters from the wind and is a popular transient mooring and water ski site.



Whallons Bay

Adjacent to Whallons Bay, the cliffs of Split Rock Mountain rise 400 feet out of Lake Champlain between Westport and Essex, creating a dramatic bluff known as the Palisades. The state acquired the cliffs in 1980 and much of the rest of the Mountain in 1994 totaling 3,000 acres and 4.3 miles of shoreline, representing the largest stretch of undisturbed waterfront on the 120-mile long Lake. In 1994, the state also bought the Webb-Royce Swamp across the road from Split Rock Mountain. The swamp is popular among birders for its great variety of species, including osprey, heron, various ducks, and great horned owls. Swamp white oak, a rarity in the Adirondacks, can be found there.

Water Use, Public Access and Recreation Resources

The Essex shoreline is a wonderful resource that uniquely defines the character of the community.

The existence of the ferry dock provides a major access point to Essex County, Northern New York and the Adirondack Park. While no direct studies exist, it is a reasonable conclusion that upwards of 80% of peak season ferry traffic passes through Town without stopping. However, the historic and unspoiled nature of the Town itself is an attraction for tourists. Tourism is a major part of the economy of Essex County and is promoted heavily by surrounding Towns and the Essex County Visitors Bureau. In addition, shop owners in the Essex hamlet rely entirely on tourism for the success of their seasonal businesses.

In March, 1997, a study was sponsored by the Village of Port Henry and funded through a Department of State Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program grant entitled: "Essex and Clinton County Local Waterfront Revitalization Program". The study stated: "today, tourism and recreation utilizing the incomparable natural and cultural resources of Lake Champlain are economic activities which no community can afford not to incorporate in any revitalization effort, but in doing so the communities need and wish to preserve the unique quality of life and the environment associated with it."

Lake Champlain Byways, a collaborative effort between three New York County Planning Offices (Clinton, Essex and Washington) and four Vermont Regional Planning Commissions (Northwest, Chittenden, Addison, and Rutland) developed a plan for a 250-mile bi-state route surrounding Lake Champlain (America's sixth largest fresh water lake) and including the Town of Essex. The Corridor Management Plan is aimed at coordinating existing activities to establish a regional identity and unification of the Lake as a region. Strategies and partnerships identified in the plan are to promote, interpret and steward the region's resources in balance with economic development in the region.

In 1992 the state of New York designated the Champlain Trail as a New York State Scenic Byway, recognizing the roadway's access to the scenic, historic, cultural, natural, and recreational qualities of Lake Champlain and the communities that line its shore. New York State has identified NYS Route 22 in Essex County as a designated byway on the Champlain Trail. Lake Champlain Byways is more than a designated roadway. It reflects a "geographic sense of place" that is created by a concentration of byway resources that have a functional or physical relationship to Lake Champlain. The objective of regional unity is realized through the linkage of communities by a network of multi-modal routes with themed interpretation.

By this definition, the Byway corridor extends from the center of the Lake to Elizabethtown, encompassing the entire Town of Essex. The Byways Corridor Management Plan does not include land use policies or plans for implementation. Specific areas where there is interest to work together includes education, recreation, transportation, agriculture, tourism, environment, and historic/cultural resource management.

The Essex Community Heritage Organization has recently received funding for the establishment of a heritage/tourism facility to be located in the hamlet of Essex. In 1996, the National Park Service funded

the "Champlain Valley Heritage Corridor Project," a New York-Vermont effort to study how best to take advantage of the historic nature of the Champlain valley. This effort, initiated by Senator James Jeffords of Vermont resulted in the U. S. Congress establishing a national heritage corridor in the Champlain Valley. A team of planners from the National Park Service worked in consultation with local citizens, government representatives, scholars, and resource specialists to evaluate the preservation and interpretation of the resources of the Champlain Valley.

In Essex County, the Champlain Valley Heritage Network supports recognition of the Champlain Valley Heritage Corridor providing for its implementation to be managed locally, and its emphasis includes economic development as well as addresses industrial tourism, tourism history and the military history of the area.

Within the corridor, the Champlain Trail is supplemented by a network of multi-modal transportation routes:

- **Lake Champlain Bikeways** is a network of routes for bicyclists. The principle route, "Champlain Bikeway", circles Lake Champlain. From this principle route, interpreted bicycle theme loops provide access for bicyclists to the smaller communities and roadways in the region.
- **Lake Champlain Walkways** is a network of trails and roadways that connect the region's communities and are accessible by the pedestrian. Although this network is in a pilot-study stage, it is anticipated that these routes will have local interpretation developed for the user.
- **Lake Champlain Waterways** are routes for boaters that connect the lakeshore to the Lake's streams and rivers up to the first non-navigable point (dam or waterfall). The Waterways include the Lake Champlain Paddlers Trail, which connects sites along the Lake that are accessible to the public. This network is also in a pilot-study stage, it is anticipated that these routes will have local interpretation developed for the user.

This network of multi-modal routes is developed to merge transportation and recreation for the visitor. The slower modes of travel, coupled with interpretation, allows the visitor to have a meaningful and authentic experience of the region. By having visitors utilize various modes of travel, the region can experience reduced congestion on major roadways, while increasing visitor access to the local businesses and services, and showcasing local culture and heritage.

Zoning

A community's zoning is its guide for future development. The Town of Essex Zoning Ordinance was initially adopted in 1974. The zoning ordinance was updated as part of the development of a new Comprehensive Plan and the adoption of a Shoreline Overlay District. For the most part, the existing zoning establishes districts which support fairly stable existing land uses, but enhancements are needed to accommodate planned future development and to insure the protection of existing resources. Such development can be expected to take place in all of the LWRP sub-areas and adequate protection for the waterfront and related resources should be adopted in anticipation of such development.

Lands included in the Shoreline Overlay District (the Study Area) overlap five different zoning districts (see map in Appendix A). These include:

Table 2
Land Uses in Shoreline Overlay District

Zoning District	Description	Principal Bldgs. Per Square Mile	Average Lot Size (acres)	Density (minimum lot size)
Residential II (R2)	Moderate Intensity	500	1.3	1
Agriculture (A)	Resource Management	15	42.7	2
Essex Hamlet (H)	No Intensity Restriction	N/A	N/A	.5
Forest/Recreation (FR)	Rural Use	75	8.5	5
Critical Areas (C)	Critical Environmental Areas	15	42.7	Not Specified

The entire Town is under the jurisdiction of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) which has its own set of land use classifications. However, the overall intensity in the Town's zoning ordinance matches the intensity set forth in the APA land use regulations.

Infrastructure

The Town as a whole has no public water or sewer system. There is currently one Water District in the Essex Hamlet. Water is pumped from an intake approximately 120 feet off the shore of Lake Champlain at Beggs Park. The water line intake sits at a depth of approximately 40 feet. The majority of residents get water from wells and are serviced by on-site septic systems. Several year round and seasonal residents draw their drinking water directly from Lake Champlain.

The Town recently received funding for the expansion of the water district surrounding the hamlet of Essex. This new water district (Water District # 1, Extension # 1) extends the water line to the north border of the Town and was completed in late summer 2002.

The Town of Essex is the last un-sewered community on Lake Champlain. Individually owned septic tanks and leaching fields are the present means of sewage treatment. The Town has recently retained the services of a professional engineering firm to provide a preliminary engineering study of wastewater treatment system options for the Town. In addition, the Town has been and continues to actively pursue

funding programs to provide for the cost of a municipal sewer. It is anticipated that any public sewer system will be limited to the Essex Hamlet area directly on and adjacent to the shores of Lake Champlain, as it is a well known fact that there are many failing systems leaching into the Lake at this time.

With the exception of the Essex Ferry, the Town of Essex has no public transportation system(s).

Historic Resources

Visually, both in layout and architecture, Essex has retained the character of an early 19th century village, a character determined by its geographical and historical position.

In 1974, the Essex Community Heritage Organization, (ECHO), prepared the National Register nomination which led to the listing of the Essex Village Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The resulting historic district is approximately 1.5 miles long and .3 miles wide. From the intersection of Route 22 and Main Street it extends approximately .8 miles to the north, with the current Kellogg (Blockhouse Farm) property being the northern most property to be included. It extends approximately .6 miles to the south with the "Champ Watch" property being the most southerly. The shore of Lake Champlain is the eastern boundary and the western boundary is a line .3 miles from the intersection of Route 22 and Main and running parallel to Main Street.

The district contains approximately 150 structures which predate the 20th century. Of the structures in the district, there are only 15 that were constructed after 1900. Of these, only 3 were built after 1910. Four or five structures are of the 18th century; the rest are all 19th century. Of these, only 7 were constructed after 1860. The predominant building materials were clapboarded wood, frame, brick, and native stone. No structure exceeds 2 1/2 stories, thus taking the fullest advantage of the natural beauty of a location between wooded ridge and a rocky and irregular lakeshore.

It should be added that it is the sense of Essex as an architectural whole, without intrusive modern elements, and with a wealth of imaginative taste in the use of detail, that is the village's finest heritage. From the viewpoint of either an architectural historian or a casual visitor, the village of Essex displays a unique opportunity to see and study a village that "went to sleep architecturally" for 100 years and, excepting a brief arousal at the turn of the 19th century, has not changed in any important aspects.

Life however, does go on for the many residents and businesses in the Essex Hamlet. A very lively and energetic business core heavily promotes the area during the summer season. The population of the Town swells and the many seasonal residents return to enjoy the Lake and the very special quality of life. On any given day, the hamlet is replete with tourists, enjoying the sights, patronizing shops, restaurants, and marinas.

Scenic Resources

Given its location on Lake Champlain between the Adirondack Mountains of New York and the Green Mountains of Vermont, Essex has an abundance of scenic views which should be identified and preserved. The visual resources of Essex are as unique and varied as anywhere in the Adirondacks and beautiful views of Lake Champlain can be seen from points all along the waterfront. Route 22 carries the most automobile tourist traffic and visual impressions are created by this travel route through majestic hillsides and sprawling open farm fields heading north, south, or east through the Town.

Entering the Hamlet from the north, the road bends around the shoreline presenting a vista of the Ferry landing, Community Church spire, and the Greystone Manor. From the west, the view corridor is terminated by the "sunburst" pediment of the former firehouse at the main hamlet intersection with the Green Mountains of Vermont as a backdrop. These and other panoramic vistas, such as from Beggs Point, are memorable events which give Essex its special place-identity.

Topography and Geology (source Essex: A Land Use Planning Process, 1975)

The landscape of Essex was formed by a billion-year old uplift and more recent glaciation. The massive uplift of igneous rock is responsible for the mountainous areas within the Township; and the Lake Champlain Valley bedrock was formed under ancient seas where sandstone and limestone were deposited. A granite lacolith, found at the site of the Crater Club, was a vein of molten rock forced to the surface creating a small dome. The landscape was altered by glaciers of the last ice age; the ice sheet flowed from the north grinding and sculpturing the bedrock. Glaciers deposited what is known as glacial till-mixed rock fragments, sand and silts. Drumlins, a glacial landform deposited parallel to the flow of ice are low, cylindrical hills that occur in Essex between the Boquet River and Lake Champlain. These drumlins are surrounded by old lake bed deposits of clay and sand; sediments which were washed into Lake Vermont (Lake Champlain being a vestige of that Lake) settled out in the still water. Additional deposits include glacial outwash and are well drained coarse soils with deep water tables found near Whallons Bay Road and along the Boquet River at the Willsboro-Essex line.

The most recent landform in Essex is the Boquet River flood plain. The periodic flooding deposits soils of various textures along the flat lands of the river bottom. New channels are created as sediment clogs old channels which form oxbows where meanders occur. There are former channels that have been by-passed by the main flow.

Topographic maps are graphic representations of the earth's surface drawn to scale. Slopes are computed by comparing the vertical rise over horizontal distance expressed as a percentage. Thus, ten feet in rise in 100 feet is ten percent slope. Much of Essex is in the zero to three percent slope category – lands that are very flat. Water is slow to drain from such areas; and where soils are clayey, standing water is a problem. Except for possible drainage problems, development is appropriate in these areas. Slopes in the range of three to fifteen percent are suitable for most types of development, since grading building sites is not difficult. Public roads, however, may be difficult to travel in the winter if their gradient exceeds eight percent. Fifteen percent is the maximum for private driveways. Since grading is more extensive and retaining walls sometime required, 15 to 25 percent slopes are moderately difficult to

develop. In addition, erosion and septic tank leaching fields are common problems on these slopes. Sewage effluent can potentially seep downward and laterally to appear at the surface a few feet down slope. Very steep slopes over 25 percent occur in Essex on Split Rock Mountain, North Boquet Mountain, South Boquet Mountain, and several other areas in the western section of the Town.

Land Use/Growth Impact Issues

As part of this Program, the Town commissioned a growth impact analysis to be done of the shoreline by The Saratoga Associates of Saratoga Springs, New York. This study represents a compilation of past studies done by various consultants to the Town, and also provides an analysis of land use options for the future. The study also includes results of a survey conducted by the Town (see Town of Essex Shoreline Study, January, 2001, The Saratoga Associates.)

Water Quality

Water quality within Lake Champlain varies significantly from section to section and from season to season. Primary water quality threats for the Lake are excessive nutrients (primarily phosphorus), nuisance aquatic species, pathogens, and localized heavy concentrations of toxic substances.

The nutrient phosphorus poses the greatest threat to clear, nuisance-free water in the Lake. High concentrations of phosphorus cause excessive growth of algae and other aquatic plants, particularly the non-natives, Eurasian milfoil and water chestnuts. Zebra mussels, which entered Lake Champlain in 1993, have now been found in many sections of the Lake, including Essex, colonizing any hard surface in its shallower portions. These exotic colonies cause a problem for boat owners and those who withdraw drinking water from the Lake. Pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, and other micro-organisms enter the Lake mainly from animal and human waste sources. Sources often include faulty waste systems, discharges from boat holding tanks, agricultural run-off, and urban and suburban run-off.

Once again, it is important to note that Essex remains the last un-sewered community located directly on the shore of Lake Champlain. The Town is aware that there are many failing septic systems in the densely populated hamlet with a potential for significant impact to the Lake.

Levels of toxic substances are relatively low in Lake Champlain compared with bodies in more industrialized areas. While there have been occurrences of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and mercury in the Lake, the area adjacent to and including the Essex Shoreline Overlay District are not included.

Swimming in Lake Champlain on a hot summer day is one of the most popular activities in the area. In 1995, Lake Champlain Basin residents and visitors enjoyed 64 swimming beaches, both public and private along the New York and Vermont shorelines. During recent years, enhanced access to additional beach areas has been undertaken in local communities such as the neighboring Town of Willsboro with the development of Noblewood Park. Water at public beaches is monitored by the New York

Department of Health to determine if there are any threats to human health from pathogens such as fecal coliform.

Currently, there is no public swimming area in the Town of Essex. The beach at Whallons Bay has been closed to swimming for many years due to "swimmer's itch." The beach at Beggs Park is used occasionally for swimming during the summer months, however, the Town is not providing any lifeguard services and the beach is posted for no swimming.

Significant Fish and Wildlife Habitats

Observers of wildlife and bird life within the Town have helped identify key wildlife habitats. Split Rock Mountain, one of these areas, is the northern edge of a valued deer wintering range. The white tailed deer is the most numerous of the large mammals in the Adirondacks, but the cold winters and limited food supply have kept the total numbers lower than in areas of central New York state. The best deer habitat contains vegetation patterns with open and forested areas. This network of "edges" accommodates both food supply and cover needs for the deer population. The second type of habitat is "diverse ecosystems." The most notable is the Webb Royce Swamp, of which one half is in Essex, and located adjacent to the southernmost area of the study area. While it is not included in the study area, it represents a significant critical area in the Town.

It is a wetland, supporting a hardwood forest surrounded by open agricultural landscape that harbors waterfowl, marsh birds, and various mammals including raccoons. The flood plain of the Boquet River near the oxbows is prime waterfowl nesting ground, and species such as mergansers and mallards are often seen. Near Essex "Station" in the marshy wetlands, cattails attract marsh birds such as redheaded blackbirds. Muskrat could also be expected here. Transient birds feed in the wheat and corn stubble found along the ridge tops in the agricultural areas (species such as killdeers, snow-bunting and Canadian geese). Along the Middle Road, solitary elms provide good vantage points for roughed legged hawks to hunt mice and other prey. The Boquet is known for its trout and bass fishing and is stocked by the Department of Environmental Conservation. This is in addition to the natural fisheries of Lake Champlain.

The Lake Champlain Basin supports abundant and diverse warm water fish populations. Eighty-one species of fish have been identified in Lake Champlain. About twenty of these species are actively sought by anglers, including large and small-mouth bass, walleye, northern pike, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, channel catfish, yellow perch, lake trout, landlocked Atlantic salmon, steelhead trout, brown trout, and rainbow smelt. At present, four species found in the Basin are classified by Vermont or New York as endangered: lake sturgeon (VT), northern brook lamprey (VT), stonecat (VT) and eastern sand darter (NY). Four species are listed as threatened: eastern sand darter (VT), American brook lamprey (VT), mooneye (NY), and lake sturgeon (NY).

Flooding and Erosion

The Town of Essex complied with the National Flood Insurance Act and delineated floodplain boundaries and adopted a local compliance law in 1987. The entire Shoreline Overlay District is located on lands determined to be outside the 500-year flood plain.

Important Agricultural Lands

Farming is an integral part of life in Essex and has been for two hundred years. Agriculture comprises up to 60% of the land use in Essex and more than any other single factor creates the rural Essex landscape. The soils in general are well-adapted for farming and grazing. Along the Lake, it is a claylike loam. Moving west into the mountains, it becomes a lighter sandy loam. The primary soil type, running in a north-south pattern, is the Vergennes-Kingsbury association described as deep, moderately well and somewhat poorly drained, fine textured soils. The underlying bedrock is limestone of the Glens Falls and Orwell formations of the Trenton and Black River groups, historically used both for construction and the manufacture of lime. The Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District has recently completed an updated soils mapping of Essex County.

Of the 32 farms or farm-related properties identified in the Town of Essex, the majority are in hay production. In addition, many other landowners have hay fields. Growing hay is well suited to Essex's soils and compatible with Essex's desire for well-groomed open land. There are no dairy farms active in Essex at this time, however a new milking facility is currently under construction and will be operational in 2002.

The use of land for agriculture has given Essex much of its characteristic look and feel. However, local agriculture has come to reside in the hands of fewer and fewer farmers. Our agricultural landscape, characterized by meadows, pastures, and fields of hay and corn are now interspersed with stretches of abandoned fields reverting to grassland or woods.

The South Farm property on the Lake Shore Road represents the largest parcel of agriculturally zoned land to be included in the Shoreline Protection Overlay District. This property has a remote owner and has not been actively farmed for many years. The site represents one of the most desirable housing development areas in the Town. However, its APA land use classification restricts the number of homes or principal buildings that may be constructed on this property.

Summary of Key Waterfront Conclusions

- Implement erosion control measures to save shoreline areas and improve safety and include shoreline stabilization methods which can be vegetated or blended in with the natural surroundings in areas of highly erodent soils;
- Restrict development in those areas with highly erodible soils, watershed areas, steep slopes, lack of central water and sewer facilities, and other environmental constraints.

- Provide for expanded opportunities for access to the waterfront, e.g. boat launch, swimming, public moorings;
- Provide for local control over the number of moorings, dock facilities and development on the shoreline;
- Strengthen linkages between the marinas, waterfront businesses, and the downtown;
- Provide for marina economic viability by allowing expanded services where feasible while protecting the character of the community and the environmental quality of the Lake;
- Raise public awareness of both the Town's and Lake Champlain's cultural and natural resources;
- Protect existing scenic and natural resources; important view sheds should be protected and enhanced;
- Preserve the historic character of the hamlet of Essex while allowing for compatible new development and access to the waterfront;
- Initiate a site plan review process for all development activities within the Shoreline Protection Overlay District.