PLANNING FOR SMART GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF HAMLETS IN THE ADIRONDACK PARK

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

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This guidebook can be viewed online at the Hamlets 3 website www.adkhamlets.org.

Image Sources
The Hamlets 3 team produced all images except the following:
About Hamlets 3

Many hamlets in the Adirondack Park have expressed a need for residential and commercial expansion. Using the principles of smart growth, Hamlets 3 responds to this need by helping local communities and regional decision-makers plan for sustainable development. Smart growth, which balances economic development and preservation of the environment, has two important benefits:

1. it enables communities to integrate land suitable for development into the fabric of the existing hamlet, thus concentrating rather than dissipating resources, and
2. it complements the protection of forests, farmland and other forms of open space by avoiding visually unappealing, and resource-inefficient sprawl and strip development.

This guide develops a planning and design model for smart growth that builds on existing community centers and bridges state and local planning processes.

Hamlets 3 encompasses the entire 6-million acre park and over 130 hamlets and villages, mapped in red.

Hamlets 3 builds on Hamlets of the Adirondacks 1 & 2 from the 1980s.

HAMLETS 1 AND 2
about HAMLETS 3

Hamlets 3 is the third installment of a series that builds on two previous studies from the 1980s: *Hamlets of the Adirondacks 1* and *Hamlets 2*. *Hamlets 1* educated persons and agencies (especially those outside of the park) about the existence of the hamlets, addressing any perception that the Adirondacks is entirely a wilderness, without any communities or resident population. It made the case that the hamlets had pressing needs for new investment and revitalization, and that appropriate policies and programs were required to meet the needs of hamlets. Problems identified in *Hamlets 1* included struggling local economies, workforce housing shortages, inadequate infrastructure, deteriorating public realms, and perceived administrative obstacles to development.

*Hamlets 2* provided local governments, planning boards, community organizations, and concerned individuals with ideas and strategies on hamlet revitalization. *Hamlets 1* & 2 won the American Planning Association's National Best Planning Project Award in 1987. Roger Trancik, professor emeritus, Cornell University, was lead consultant in the development and production of *Hamlets 1 & 2*.

Hamlets 3 project

Hamlets 3 finds ways to create opportunities for sustainable smart expansion of Adirondack hamlets by improving their physical and economic environment. This can be achieved in part through affordable housing, jobs, open spaces, community facilities, and the expansion of infrastructure.

Hamlets 3 recognizes the uniqueness of the Adirondacks as a significant nature preserve that also contains a diverse collection of hamlets – “a park of people and nature.” It recognizes the special problems of the Adirondack hamlet as small, isolated, and having a seasonally-fluctuating population and economy. It also recognizes the requirements of the regional environmental planning regulations administered by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and the need to provide local communities and their constituent agencies with tools, procedures, and guidelines to plan for appropriate kinds of development. *Hamlets 3* respects the positive attributes of the Adirondacks to improve quality of life in the hamlets.

Client groups and sponsors

*Hamlets 3* is funded by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), in partnership with the APA and Department of State, under its current and ongoing Adirondack Park Community Smart Growth Grant Program. The overall purpose of this initiative is to link environmental protection, economic development and community livability within the special conditions of the Adirondack Park.

The firm of Roger Trancik, FASLA, Urban Design Consultants, Ithaca, New York is lead consultant for *Hamlets 3*. The Adirondack Community Housing Trust is principal client with Essex County, acting through its planning department, as the municipal sponsor. A broad-based Advisory Committee representing many different public, semi-public and private organizations and stakeholders throughout the park provided project direction and feedback during the development of *Hamlets 3*. For a complete listing of contributors see credits on Page 2.
While the park has been a recreational destination since the 19th century, its forestry and mining industries have an even longer history, giving birth to the Adirondack hamlet as a physical and social entity. But with the park’s remoteness and changes in technology posing almost insurmountable barriers to economic growth, sustaining the Adirondack hamlet has been a major challenge.

Yet, Adirondack Park communities continue to retain their heritage, sense of place, and powerful relationship with nature in the 21st century. Today these settlements, along with tourism, are the cornerstone of the Adirondack economy and are essential to the future of the park. The region’s renewable resources have been largely preserved, enabling its supreme environmental quality to be leveraged to achieve development of hamlets compatible with this unique landscape. Through smart growth planning, communities can preserve hamlet culture and lifestyle and find the right balance between development and preservation.

Hamlets 3 worktable combines digital and hand-mapping techniques.

The workflow was organized in four stages over a two-year period.

WORKFLOW

- **STAGE ONE**
  - Regional Surveys
  - Problem defined
  - Feb 2009

- **STAGE TWO**
  - Case Study Hamlets
  - Analysis
  - Mapping
  - Workshops
  - Strategies
  - June 2009

- **STAGE THREE**
  - Models + Guidelines
  - Synthesis
  - Approaches
  - How-to-chart
  - Mechanisms
  - Jan 2010

- **STAGE FOUR**
  - Final Products
  - Handbook
  - CD-ROM
  - Website
  - March 2011
Hamlets 3 objectives and workflow

Hamlets 3 has three objectives:

- to protect natural resources in and around hamlets by preventing sprawl
- to integrate expansion projects into the structure of existing hamlets
- to promote smart, sustainable physical and economic growth of hamlets

These objectives underpin the four stages of the project workflow.

In Stage 1 visual presentations in different areas of the park showed principles, precedents, and best practices of smart growth. Regional surveys elicited feedback on the following questions: What types of hamlet expansion are needed? How much expansion is desirable? Can expansion be accommodated within existing settlement areas or is outward expansion required? What impact does location and geography have on expansion? What smart growth principles can be applied to sustainable hamlet expansion in the Adirondacks? These discussions led to the selection of case study communities addressed in the second stage.

In Stage 2, the team conducted fieldwork in three hamlet clusters – Elizabethtown, Old Forge, and Star Lake – to document, analyze, and evaluate hamlet expansion options. This included a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) of public space and its “walkability,” mapping of lost spaces including vacant sites and buildings, and documentation of natural conditions, roads, water, and sewer lines. They recorded demographics, existing zoning, land uses, and open space assets, documented historical and cultural heritage and photographed visual character to determine areas of high value. They distributed a user survey and held a series of workshops and ‘charrettes’ in the communities to assess expansion needs and to evolve ‘sketch plans’ and economic development proposals. These on-site studies and interactions led to the models and design strategies developed in the third stage.

In Stage 3, the team created a planning model with design tools for hamlet expansion that local communities could use. This included a step-by-step guide of how to apply...