

THE CAROGA PROCESS

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

TOWN OF CAROGA
Fulton County, New York

PRIOR PLANS & INITIATIVES

The *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* builds on a foundation of prior local, county, regional, and state planning efforts. Together, prior plans provide valued context, guidance, and continuity for current and future decision-making. Longstanding themes involve preserving the Adirondack experience and environmental stewardship while developing outdoor recreation, public infrastructure, and economic vitality for the future.

Plan / Initiative	Scale	Role in Planning
<i>Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan</i> (2011, 2002), <i>Land Use Plan</i> (1978)	Local	Core local long-term planning vision and policy framework
<i>Zoning Ordinance & Zoning Map</i> (2019, 2006, 1979)	Local (Regulatory)	Local implementation of comprehensive planning policies
<i>Preliminary Engineering Report for a Caroga Wastewater Collection & Tx System</i> (2021)	Local (Engineering)	Preliminary engineering plan for a central public sewer system
<i>Lakes Management Plan</i> (2019)	Local (Environmental)	Natural resource stewardship, mitigation, & protection strategies
<i>Local Trails Plan</i> (2023)	Local (Recreational)	Recreational trails framework
<i>Hamlets of the Adirondacks</i> (H2P3, 2013)	Regional / Local	Smart Growth framework for downtown / hamlet revitalization
<i>Caroga Arts Reimagining Campaign</i> (2025)	Local Stakeholder	Cultural and placemaking input
<i>Fulton County Development Strategy</i> (2026)	County	Economic development and quality of life priorities
<i>Fulton Ag & Farmland Protection Plan</i> (2026)	County	Fulton County land use in rural, agricultural, and forestry contexts
<i>Fulton County Hazard Mitigation Plan</i> (2021)	County	Multi-jurisdictional preparedness and risks (e.g., storms, invasives), long-term climate resilience
<i>Fulmont Community Action Needs Assessment</i> (2023)	County	Human services & programs in Fulton & Montgomery Counties
<i>MVREDC Strategic Plan</i> (2025, 2023)	Regional	Mohawk Valley regional economic development & funding priorities
<i>APA Adirondack Park Land Use Plan</i> (1973)	State / Regional	Regulatory context for private land use in the Adirondack Park
<i>Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan</i> (2025)	State / Regional	Regulatory context for state land use in the Adirondack Park
<i>Shaker Mountain Wild Forest UMP</i> (2006)	State / Regional	Regulatory context for state land use in the Town of Caroga
<i>Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan</i> (2025)	State	Strategic statewide framework for outdoor recreation planning
<i>NYS Smart Growth Program</i>	State	State funding and technical support for plan implementation

DESCRIPTIONS OF PRIOR PLANS & INITIATIVES

Local Plans

Prior Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plans (2011, 2002, 1978)

<https://carogacomprehensiveplan.wordpress.com/resources/>

Caroga has a long history of comprehensive planning. Beginning in 1978, the *Caroga Land Use Plan* established basic land use patterns and infrastructure priorities appropriate to a rural town in the Adirondack Park with a “recreation community” growth pattern. From 1975 to 1977 detailed analyses were conducted to specify local resources and conditions. The 2002 *Comprehensive Plan* built on the earlier foundation. Emphasis in the 2011 *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* remains notable:

- Reinforcement of Town Center within the downtown hamlet as a focal point for community life
- Protection of lakes, forests, and natural resources
- Infrastructure improvements, including community buildings, wastewater, and transportation
- Balanced economic development rooted in recreation and tourism

The current redevelopment of the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* can build on these themes while responding to changing demographic, environmental, regulatory, and economic conditions.

Zoning and Land Use Regulations (2019, 2006, 1979)

https://townofcaroga.com/ordinances/zoning_map.pdf

<https://townofcaroga.com/ordinances/zoning.htm>

The Town’s Adirondack Park Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP) zoning and land use regulations serve as the primary implementation tools for past comprehensive plans. They reflect goals related to density, land use compatibility, natural resource protection, and preservation of rural character. The Town’s Sanitary Code also implements practices that reduce local water body pollution and oversee on-site wastewater management (<https://townofcaroga.com/ordinances/sanitary-code-2006.pdf>). The Town’s 2024 Short Term Renal (STR) Law establishes a local process for STR registration and inspections (https://townofcaroga.com/laws/law_2024.pdf). Redeveloping the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* provides opportunities to clarify the extent to which regulations are aligned with community goals and current conditions or need revisions. Comprehensive planning can inform a separate zoning project.

Lakes Management Plan (2019)

<https://townofcaroga.com/lakes/lmp.pdf>

Town officials and local volunteers have undertaken targeted planning and program efforts focused on lake and watershed protections. These initiatives address water quality, invasive species management, shoreline development, and long-term stewardship of major lakes in the Town of Caroga, which are central to community experience, environmental health, housing development, and recreation economy. Lakes management planning has implemented Smart Growth strategies involving stewardship of critical environmental areas as well as promoting climate resilience and adaptation. The Town’s sustainable water management and lake stewardship implements practices that relate to wastewater solutions, prevent local water body pollution, and manage clean water consumption. Caroga’s lakes management initiatives have been funded primarily by the Town and New York State Smart Growth grants.

Caroga Recreational Trails Plan (2023)

<https://caroga.town/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Caroga-Local-Trails-Plan-2023.pdf>

The Town has created and approved a local recreational trails plan for development of mountain biking (MTB) experiences on town-owned recreation lands. These initiatives have been guided by Smart Growth

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principles involving sustainable transportation, walkability, and bikeability. Caroga's MTB trail building initiatives have been funded by the Town and New York State Smart Growth grants. Trails and public spaces are designed for cyclists and pedestrians to enhance safe, active, healthy mobility and recreation.

In addition, multi-use trails exist in Caroga on "Forever Wild" Adirondack Forest Preserve and private lands. Questions remain about amending the Shaker Mountain Wild Forest UMP and advancing the Ferris Lake Wild Forest UMP. Nick Stoner Trailers have a voluntary stewardship agreement for snowmobile trail maintenance. Some interest also exists for a county-wide recreational trail plan that might potentially connect Caroga to other Forest Preserve areas, Peck Hill State Forest, the Town of Johnstown, and beyond.

Town Center and Downtown Revitalization Efforts (2013)

https://townofcaroga.com/comprehensive_plan/3-caroga-lake-h3p2-book.pdf <https://adkhousing.org/current-projects/>

Caroga was a featured community in Roger Trancik's Smart Growth *Hamlets of the Adirondacks* (H2P3) project, supported with funding from New York State administered by the Adirondack Park Agency. This Adirondack Hamlet development initiative highlighted the local importance of Caroga's "Central Park" and downtown (i.e., the APA Hamlet Land Use Area). Applying Smart Growth principles, collaborative planning and placemaking focused on inward expansion, historic redevelopment, and lakefront revitalization while protecting natural resources and discouraging sprawl. Designs featured community center reuse, natural lake features, walkable public spaces, and compact mixed-use redevelopment, starting at Sherman's Park. Smart Growth principles continue to inform land use and development. Yet, gaps exist. Prior planning used ring analysis and focused narrowly on the central anchor property at Sherman's Park. Questions remain about buildout analyses to continue momentum and widen the scope for more public and private projects within the 1-to-2-mile downtown ring identified in the 2013 *H2P3 Hamlets of the Adirondacks* plan.

Community Organization Initiatives (2025)

<https://carogaarts.org/reimagining-campaign/>

Local organizations and community-based initiatives have contributed to revitalization and local assets. While not regulatory, these efforts inform the Town's understanding of economic development opportunities, tourism, and community investment priorities. Perhaps most notably, Caroga Arts Collective has led revitalization of Sherman's Park, including community visioning for "Reimagining the Adirondack Experience through the power of the Arts." Collaborative public planning has built on unique local assets to create a 2025 master plan and engineering designs for anchor properties at Sherman's Park and the Myhil Estate. This initiative has gained momentum with securing public-private investments. Caroga Arts has capital funds from private philanthropy as well as the New York State Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council (MVREDC) and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).

County and Regional Plans

Fulton County Development and Strategic Planning Efforts (2026)

<https://www.fcida.org/vision-for-future/>

County-level planning initiatives emphasize economic development, housing, workforce development, infrastructure investment, and quality of life improvements. These efforts recognize the importance of natural and recreational assets as well as seasonal tourism. Small communities like Caroga enhance the county's overall development strategy, support quality of life initiatives, and complement Smart Growth investments in neighboring cities of Gloversville and Johnstown (that share zip codes with Caroga).

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Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Planning (2026)

<https://www.fultoncountyny.gov/agriculture-protection>

County agricultural planning supports the long-term viability of farming, forestry, and rural land uses. The Ag Plan provide guidance relevant to Caroga's rural areas, including land stewardship, agritourism opportunities, and balancing renewable energy, conservation, and working landscapes. This plan includes an appendix with a detailed audit of Caroga, including farm-friendly features, ag-and-forestry resources, zoning policies, and other considerations. This initiative was funded by Fulton County and a Farmland Protection Planning Grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Fulton County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021 HMP)

<https://fulmont.mitigateny.org/>

In January 2022, Caroga officially adopted the Fulton County HMP as part of its planning commitments. This means that the HMP goals and actions apply to Caroga as a participating jurisdiction. County-wide risk assessments and preparedness plans are in place. Participation opens eligibility for federal funding for local projects that reduce hazards before or after disasters. The HMP encourages Caroga to integrate hazard mitigation into local planning and development decisions, including zoning, building code enforcement, critical infrastructure protection, and community education programs. The HMP can reduce loss of life and property, lessening the impact of disasters. Long-term resilience planning offers a framework to address multiple challenges, including fire, dam safety, and aquatic invasive species.

Fulmont Community Action Community Needs Assessment (2023)

<https://fulmont.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/FINAL-2023-2026-CNA-Community-Needs-Assessment-12-14-23-2.pdf>

In 2023, the Fulmont Community Action Agency prepared a Fulton-Montgomery needs assessment as part of their Community Services Block Grant and Head Start programs, based on prior plans, focus groups, surveys, and related input. Based on the needs assessment, Fulmont's strategic plans focus on outcome-based anti-poverty goals for community livability across the lifespan, including affordable housing, home energy, food security, health care, transportation, workforce needs, and child services.

Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council (MVREDC)

<https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/mohawk-valley>

Rooted in the Mohawk Valley, the Town of Caroga is influenced by regional economic development strategies that prioritize rural resilience, regenerative enterprise, and community reinvestment, including:

- Quality of Place: Vibrant, Equitable, and Resilient Communities
- People: Inclusive Workforce Development in Advanced Manufacturing & STEM + Arts Education
- Industries: Agribusiness, Tourism, Innovative Entrepreneurship, & STEM + Advanced Manufacturing
- Infrastructure: Downtown Revitalization, Public Infrastructure, & Housing

Aligning with MVREDC guiding priorities can position Caroga to benefit from opportunities and resources, including competing for a broad range of state funding and technical assistance programs. Caroga's Wheelerville Trails program was featured in the MVREDC 2023 Strategic Plan and noted in 2024. In the 2025 Strategic Plan and ACHIEVE Proposal, the Caroga Arts Center was a featured supporting project with a transformational impact on the region through historic reuse, arts experiences, and economic growth.

Regional Organization Initiatives

<https://www.fccrg.org/2025-initiatives-guide-to-fulton-county/> <https://northernforest.org/borderlands-mountain-bike-collaboration/>
<https://northernforest.org/new-resident-project> <https://adkcommunityfoundation.org/place-start-adirondack-housing-resource>

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Regional development hubs provide collaboration and resources for framing strategies and solutions to attract new residents, develop recreational assets, advance housing renewal, and revitalize downtown. For example, the Town of Caroga has established working relationships with regional hubs including the Fulton County Center for Regional Growth and the Northern Forest Center. These hubs offer important regional frameworks and best-practice examples of how to advance themes and projects — such as for outdoor recreation, neighborhood housing, and downtown revitalization — that are aligned with community-driven Smart Growth strategies.

State and Adirondack Park Frameworks

Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan

<https://apa.ny.gov/planning/local-government.html> <https://apa.ny.gov/planning/gis/archive.html>

<https://apa.ny.gov/files/gis/assets/Maps/ApludpSImp20230318.pdf>

The Town of Caroga lies within the Adirondack Park and is subject to Adirondack Park Agency (APA) land use classifications and development regulations. The APA oversees both the 2025 *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan* (for state land) and 1973 *Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan* (for private land). The later shapes local land use decisions and must be considered with Town zoning and planning policies. Since 1980, Caroga has administered an Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP). The APA Land Use Map specifies land use areas that determine development levels (e.g., Hamlet, Moderate Intensity Use, Low Intensity Use, Rural Use, Resource Management, Industrial Use). Adirondack Hamlets are the Park's service and growth areas, where development is encouraged with minimal APA permitting.

Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan & Shaker Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan

<https://apa.ny.gov/files/laws/APSLMP.pdf> https://extapps.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/smwfump.pdf

APA and DEC oversee the 2025 *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan* (for state land), with classification systems and guidelines to manage use on "Forever Wild" Forest Preserve (e.g., Wilderness, Wild Forest). Caroga includes the Ferris Lake Wild Forest (no approved UMP) and the Shaker Mountain Wild Forest (2006 UMP), with inventories, analyses, and priorities to protect the wild character of the forests.

New York State Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2025)

<https://parks.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/FINAL%20SCORP%202025-2030.pdf>

The SCORP framework guides outdoor recreation planning and investment across New York State. Key priorities include: Equitable Access, Universal Design, Sustainability, Conservation, and Engagement. SCORP impacts how major grant programs select and prioritize projects for Municipal Parks and Recreation, Environmental Protection Fund, Recreational Trails, and Open Space Conservation. Programs support initiatives such as regional trail planning, greenway linkages, signage improvements, trail connectivity, and local mapping. By aligning with the SCORP's framework and strategies, equitable access and design can help more residents and visitors enjoy outdoor recreational assets.

New York State Smart Growth and Community Development Initiatives

<https://dos.ny.gov/nys-smart-growth-program>

State programs supporting Smart Growth, climate resilience, infrastructure investment, and sustainable development provide frameworks and strategies for local planning. Smart Growth Comprehensive Plans align with such guiding principles to support workable project implementation and state grant eligibility. The current Smart Growth redevelopment of the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* is prepared with funding provided by the New York State Department of State Environmental Protection Fund.

SUMMARY OF PRIOR PLANS & INITIATIVES

Caroga's Smart Growth planning builds on decades of local, county, regional, and state planning while also addressing emerging issues. Grounding future policies in prior plans provides long-term continuity.

Over the past 50 years, Caroga has adopted multiple comprehensive and land use plans. Core community-driven themes include protecting Adirondack character and environmental stewardship while advancing strategic investments and economic development. The 2011 *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* focused on Town Center (within the APA Hamlet land use area). Key priorities included downtown infrastructure, recreation-based economic activity, and protection of lakes and water quality. Subsequent zoning and land use updates served as implementation tools. Since 2011, several local programmatic initiatives — including lakes management, recreational trails, tourism projects, community placemaking, and capital campaigns — have engaged the community and further advanced the themes and priorities.

At regional levels, Fulton County initiatives and Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council strategies have emphasized quality of life, tourism, housing, infrastructure investments, workforce development, and economic vitality. These efforts have recognized the value of rooted networks for urban-rural partnerships, natural renewal, and locally-owned businesses. Such partnerships can support progress with neighborhood housing, family programs, transportation systems, energy efficiency, climate resilience, and year-round economic vitality. Aligning with regional frameworks can also help coordinate and access programs for external funding and strategic resources necessary for sustainable growth.

As a Mohawk Valley community in the Adirondack Park, Caroga is guided by the *Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan* and related state policies for land use classifications and development standards. Since 1980, the Town has administered an Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP) Zoning Ordinance. In addition, NYS Smart Growth community development initiatives and the Smart Growth Infrastructure Act further inform sustainable, resilient, and compact development practices.

By redeveloping the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan*, the community can reinforce long-standing values while responding proactively to evolving conditions and emerging opportunities. Such a long-term coordinated planning framework can guide land use, investment, and decision-making to ensure that growth strengthens the Town's character, resilience, and shared prosperity for generations to come.

In short, Caroga is growing. The Town is redeveloping the *Comprehensive Plan* — guided by community input and Smart Growth principles — to revitalize and sustain the local community.

The *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* was prepared with funding provided by the New York State Department of State Environmental Protection Fund.



Department of State
Planning, Development
& Community Infrastructure

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SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis identifies internal **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**, alongside external **Opportunities** and **Threats**. A four-quadrant SWOT matrix is commonly used to organize these factors for analysis. This helps to guide a process that maximizes advantages and reduces risks. Purposes and benefits include:

- **Strategic Planning:** To align local capacities with market opportunities and create realistic action plans.
- **Risk Management:** To flag potential challenges early and to mitigate them proactively.
- **Goal Setting:** To understand internal capabilities and to set achievable goals.

	Internal	External
Positive	STRENGTHS High Quality of Life: Caroga's quiet, safe community is rooted in connections to nature and neighbors. Scenic Landscape: Lakes, forests, and mountains define Caroga's natural character and appeal. Strong Sense of Place: Iconic local places and people foster local spirit. Abundant Outdoor Recreation: People enjoy year-round local access to hiking, biking, fishing, camping, boating, and winter sports.	OPPORTUNITIES Community Development Guides & Grants: Aligned resources can support local quality-of-life projects and programs. Climate & Energy Funding: Standard practices and external awards can advance local resilience, efficiency, and energy initiatives. Business & Workforce Development Initiatives: Technological innovations and aligned programs can support locally-owned businesses and job creation. Downtown Revitalization Initiative: Strategic public-private investments can strengthen Caroga's downtown and local economy.
	WEAKNESSES Shifting Demographics: Aging population and slow in-migration impact workforce and services. Wastewater Systems: The community needs coordinated approaches to help meet current and future demands. Public Infrastructure: Facilities, roads, and broadband require reconstruction, maintenance, and modernization. Limited Municipal Budgets: Rural tax base and state aid constrain capital investments and program expansion.	THREATS Affordability Gaps: Rapidly rising costs could impact residents' experiences, equitable access, & workforce housing. Invasive Species: Non-native plants and insects could endanger lakes, forests, recreation assets, and ecosystem integrity. Natural Disasters: Fires, floods, and weather could harm people and property, straining systems and emergency services. Economic & Financial Downturns: Instability could increase personal risks, reduce municipal revenues, and increase service demands.

Caroga's character and appeal emerge from the Town's high quality of life, scenic natural setting, strong sense of place, and abundant outdoor recreation. At the same time, the Town faces challenges related to shifting demographics, public infrastructure, and limited municipal resources. Proactive planning could position the Town to leverage regional, state, and federal resources, opportunities, and partnerships in areas such as community development, natural resilience, energy efficiency, business-workforces strength, neighborhood renewal, and downtown revitalization. Long-term planning could also aid awareness and proactive approaches to broader issues such as housing affordability, invasive species management, hazard mitigation, and economic stability.