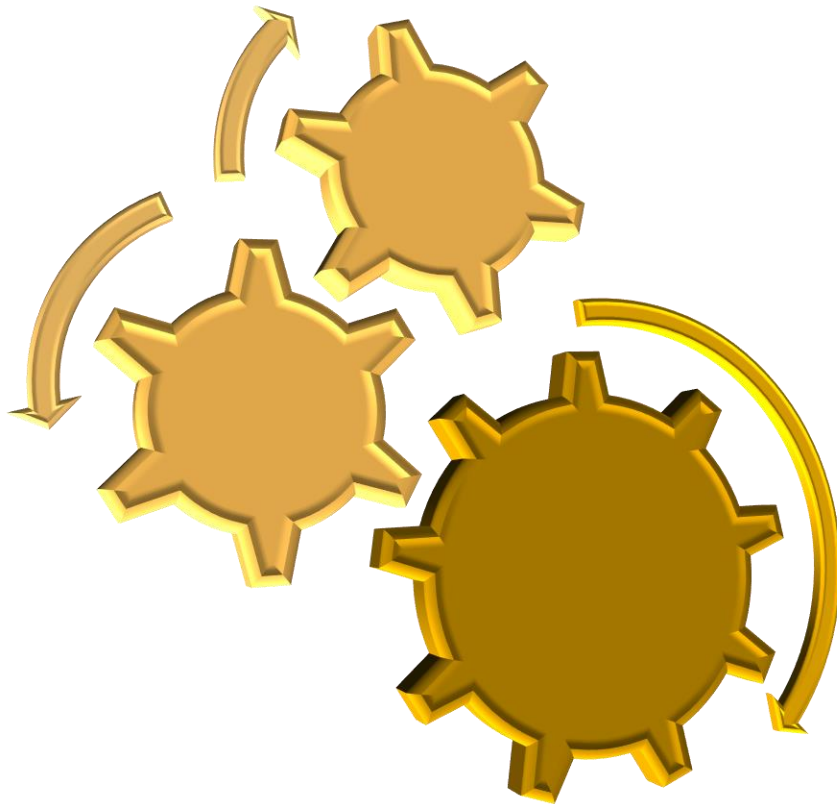


# Willow Ridge Community and Neighborhood Assessment, Inventory and Profile



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## Project Purpose and Objectives

### Profile and Inventory Community and Investigate Community Concerns

The purpose of this report is to summarize community input and collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data to characterize changes in the Willow Ridge community from 2000 to 2017. Willow Ridge is a portion of the Ellicott Creek neighborhood in Amherst, New York. This report focuses on this community because Amherst seeks to understand the changes in this community and investigate any community concerns.

### SUNY Buffalo State Urban and Regional Planning Program

Senior level planning students in the Urban and Regional Planning program at SUNY Buffalo State are conducting this report as a part of their planning practicum. The planning practicum is a senior level course designed for students to apply the knowledge and skills gained throughout the program to create a professional report and analysis of a community.

## History of Amherst and Willow Ridge

Amherst was founded on April 10th, 1818. Located in Erie County, it is bordered by Niagara County to the north; the Town of Cheektowaga to the south; the Town of Clarence to the east; and the City of Buffalo and the Town of Tonawanda to the west. The settlement of Amherst dates back to 1799, when 300 acres of land were purchased by Benjamin Ellicott and John Thompson. The land was acquired from the Holland Company.

Amherst began development during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with logging, agriculture, commercial and residential development. By 1818, Amherst's development led to the separation from the Town of Clarence. With the expansion of the Erie Canal in 1825, rapid settlement began in the town. Expansion of the Erie Canal brought a large number of settlers to the northern part of Amherst and settlements were constructed near the Canal and Ellicott Creek. When development of boats, stagecoaches, and trains came to Amherst, it offered destination stops in the town. These routes of transportation ran between Buffalo and the Batavia/Rochester area. While boats and the Erie Canal were significant to growth for Amherst, railroads were also being constructed during the 1800s. The completion of the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls Railroad in 1854 brought the train to Amherst which allowed for the movement of more goods.

During the same era as railroads, trolleys moved people throughout Buffalo. They began as horse powered and transitioned into electric, with a major line running along Main Street in 1893. However, this phase of transportation did not last long. During the 1920s the development of automobiles and buses took over and became the main mode of transportation. Increased popularity of the automobile led to a significant transition to suburbanization. Amherst was soon to be changed. With this massive increase in auto dependency and push for living outside the city, the population of Amherst skyrocketed. With this significant influx of population into Amherst, the first phase development did not anticipate the amount of housing needed to meet the high demand. So, more housing units were developed to meet the needs of the growing population during the 1920s and 1930s.

After World War II, the widening of major highways led to considerable growth in residential and commercial development. In June of 1956 the Federal AID Highway Act was passed, which created an interstate highway system connecting major cities across the U.S. During the same period, the Federal Housing Administration offered mortgage programs that took the risk out of buying a house. Both the building of interstates and mortgage programs helped create an era where suburbanization boomed. Policies post WWII era significantly shaped Amherst into the town it is today.



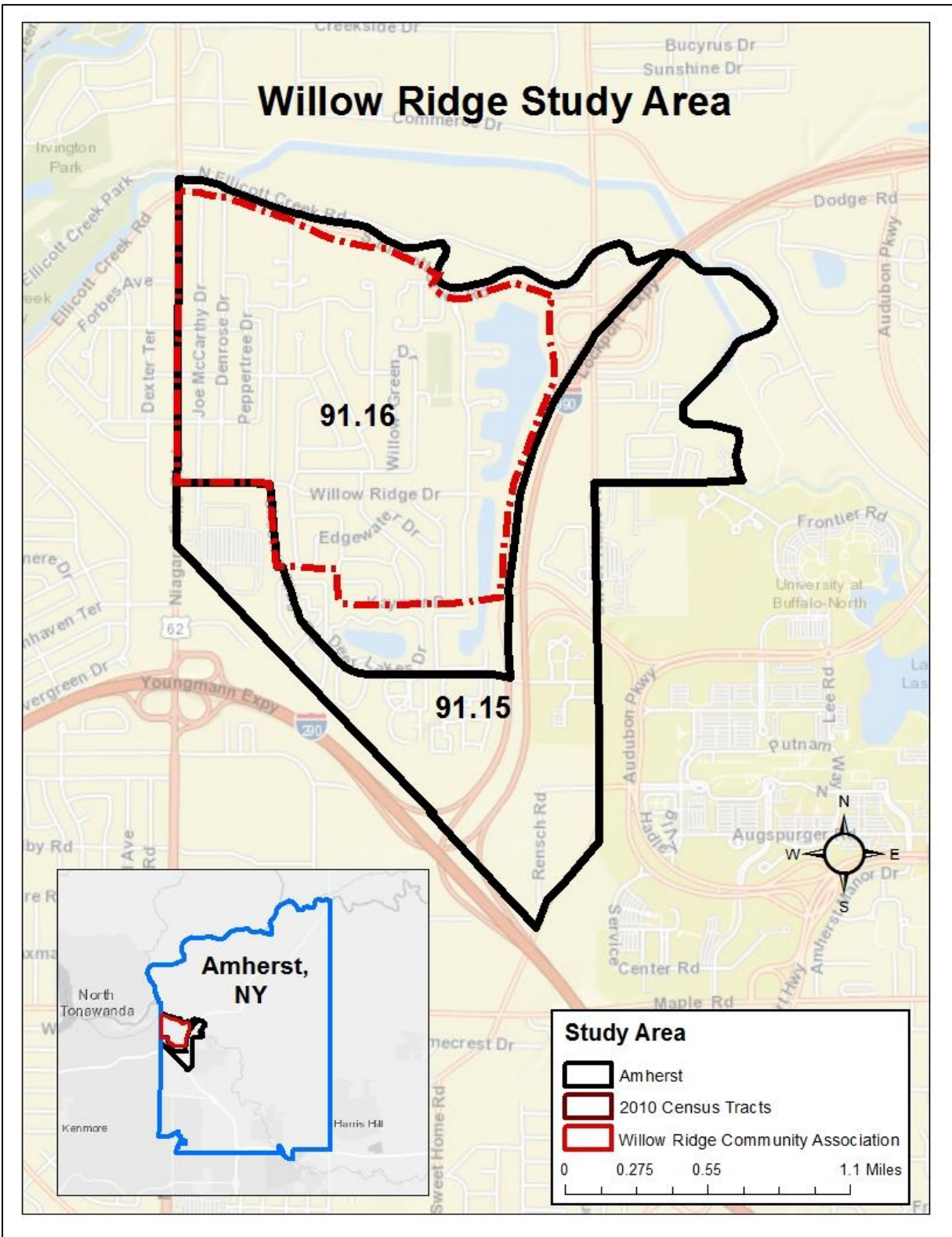
## Neighborhood Setting and Regional Context

### Willow Ridge Neighborhood Character and Setting

#### Regional Context

The Willow Ridge community is located in the northwestern part of Amherst. It is bordered by South Ellicott Creek Road to the north; Interstate 290 to the south; Sweet Home Road to the east; and Niagara Falls Boulevard to the west. Willow Ridge is a mixed-use community which consists of residential, business, and commercial development, with dense commercial development along the Niagara Falls Blvd. corridor. Figure 1 on the next page shows an outline of the study area and its location in Amherst.

Figure 1 – Willow Ridge Study Area



# Community Engagement

## Ellicott Creek Neighborhood Summit

The Ellicott Creek Neighborhood Summit was held by the Town of Amherst on May 14, 2018 as a means to receive feedback about the neighborhood. There were 30 Willow Ridge residents who participated in a survey and provided feedback about the community through an exercise conducted at the neighborhood summit. In this survey the residents were asked several questions about the conditions of their community.

First, attendees were asked which street they live on and whether they were a homeowner or a renter. Every resident that completed this survey was a homeowner. Next, they were asked how long they had been living in this neighborhood. There was only one resident living there one to three years and another resident living there four to 10 years there. Two other residents have been living there eleven to twenty years and the other 23 residents have lived in the neighborhood for over twenty years.

The next question was “What are the most significant changes that have taken place in the neighborhood since they moved in?” The most frequent response was too much unneeded development (nine), followed by student housing development (seven), increased traffic (six), lack of greenspace (four), and one response each for too much noise; the development of the park behind the school sidewalks; and the University at Buffalo. Following this, residents rated the overall conditions of the housings and buildings in the neighborhood. The results were good conditions (13), minor repairs (three), some deterioration (12), with no votes for either major deterioration or dilapidated.

The residents then rated the overall condition/quality of the following neighborhood amenities, using this scale: one = good condition, two = adequate, three = needs improvement, four = poor condition, and five = completely lacking. The average results ranked from good condition to bad ranked as follow:

1. School Property - 1.54
2. Public Safety - 1.68
3. Parking - 2.10
4. Street Lights - 2.21
5. Street Trees - 2.38
6. Access to Public Transportation - 2.41
7. Parks/Public Green Space - 2.54
8. Sidewalks - 3.11
9. Appearance of Shops/Businesses - 3.32

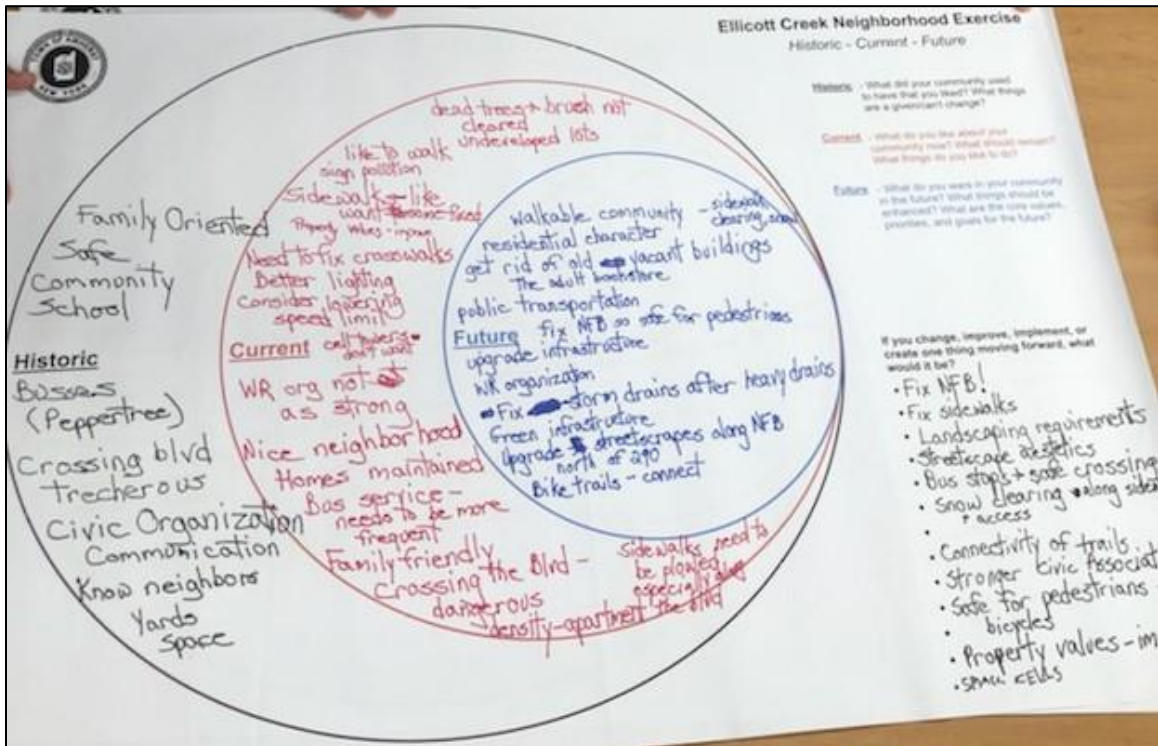
The next question was “What are some amenities that are missing in your neighborhood that you desire?” The most frequent responses were green space (four), sidewalks (three), bike paths (two), and public parks (two). Other responses included bus shelters along Niagara Falls Boulevard, a smaller grocery store, trash bins along Willow Ridge Road, better police patrol, and to have the Amherst bike path connect without going over the Niagara Falls Boulevard bridge.

Residents were then asked, “What are some of your concerns not being addressed in your neighborhood?” The most frequent responses were the lack of safety for pedestrians along Niagara Falls Boulevard (seven); the removal of the cell towers in the neighborhood (seven); the amount of student housing in the neighborhood (five); the amount of vacant property not being dealt with in the neighborhood (five); the amount of traffic and speeding along Niagara Falls Boulevard (three); the want of removing the adult store from the neighborhood (two); and single responses for the amount of dead trees and debris in the neighborhood; better infrastructure; and fix the abundance of potholes in the neighborhood.

The last question on the survey gave residents the opportunity to share their own comments and concerns. The residents’ final concerns and comments consisted of clean up the rental properties in the neighborhood (four); stop building hotels along Niagara Falls Boulevard (two); the ABC rental business machine cleanup/runoff is running into the woods and is moving closer to the private homes backyards on Denrose Drive (two); and the need for better lighting on the ramps for the I-990.

Separate from the survey, some residents participated in a concentric circles activity. In the activity residents were asked to describe the historic, present, and future of Willow Ridge. The historic circle asked what did your community used to have that you liked? What things are a given/can’t change? The present circle asked what do you like about your community now? What should remain? What things do you like to do? Lastly, the future circle asked what do you want in your community in the future? What things should be enhanced? What are the core values, priorities, and goals for the future? The residents were then asked if you could change, improve, implement or create one thing moving forward, what would it be? Figure 2 is an example of a completed concentric circle exercise.

Figure 2 – Ellicott Creek Neighborhood Concentric Circle



Some of Willow Ridge historic features included the neighborhood being quiet and safe with a good school district. Willow Ridge offered an abundance of green space as well as community activities. Present day Willow Ridge experiences more traffic, especially along Niagara Falls Boulevard. It is still a safe area with the availability of police and fire. Willow Ridge consists of maintained homeowners and some student housing. Willow Ridge is walkable but has sidewalks that are in poor condition. These sidewalks are uneven, and/or not plowed, making the area less safe to travel. Some things the residents would like to see in the future are more developed bike trails. The residents would also like to see less development and a balance with the student housing. Residents would like “zombie” properties cleaned up as well as an upgrade in infrastructure. The residents would like to get rid of the adult store and cell towers in the neighborhood. They were also asked to pick one thing to move forward with in the neighborhood. The most popular responses were removing the cell towers, less development, development of bike paths, and create better pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

#### Willow Ridge Community Association Neighborhood Engagement

Willow Ridge is a unique community with its own concerns, ideas, and desires. Because of the unique nature of the community, the Willow Ridge Community Association (WRCA) was created to “benefit all living in the Willow Ridge Subdivision”. The goals of the association are to promote a sense of community, preserve property values, and to work with Town of Amherst agencies. Members of the association must be residents who live in a single family or duplex within the bounds described by the bylaws of the WRCA. The bounds include Ellicott Creek,

Chestnut Ridge Road, Niagara Falls Boulevard, and Kaymar Drive. Figure 1 depicts the bounds identified by the WRCA.

To reaffirm the information from the community outreach described above, and potentially gain additional feedback, Buffalo State students attended WRCA meetings and engaged with residents. Students discussed community concerns and meeting findings with residents. The concerns of the WRCA maintain many similarities with the community summit findings. Major concerns mentioned by the WRCA include student housing and the transformations of single-family homes into apartments; sidewalk maintenance; building appearances and uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard; and safety concerns in the neighborhood. Land use and zoning will be discussed later in this report along with building appearance. Other concerns include speed of cars driving in the community and cars not obeying traffic laws (not stopping at stop signs).

Student housing has been an increasingly concerning issue according to members of the community. With the University at Buffalo located less than a mile from the community, many students seek off-campus housing in the Willow Ridge community because of its location. Apartment complexes have been developed along Chestnut Ridge Road and single-family homes have been converted into apartments according to residents. Members of the WRCA believe the number of students living in the community, the converted homes, and the apartment complexes are negatively impacting the community and causing issues for residents. Some issues include the increase of traffic in the neighborhood, notably along Chestnut Ridge Road, and the number of cars blocking sidewalks in the community. Many residents brought up the issue of too many cars being parked in a driveway. These cars block the sidewalk and force people to move around them by walking in the street. This causes a safety issue because pedestrians are forced off the sidewalk onto the roadway.

By talking to residents and members of the WRCA, another issue emerged. Cell towers was a recurring topic. At the beginning of this assessment it was believed the issue with cell towers centered around the large standing cell towers between Chestnut Ridge Road and the I-290. However, upon further investigation, the issue with cell towers was not pertinent to these existing cell towers, but rather with new 5G cell infrastructure. This new infrastructure is being referred to as “small cells” and are small in comparison to current 4G infrastructure. For 5G internet connection, boxes roughly the size of a recycling bin, will be placed on existing infrastructure. According to a report called “Proposed Rules to Streamline Wireless Infrastructure Deployment” by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 5G or fifth-generation of mobile internet is a part of wireless infrastructure which seeks to drastically improve internet speeds. Currently, many of the large cell towers that can be seen are hundreds of feet tall and are 4G. New 5G wireless infrastructure will be much smaller in comparison but will occupy a denser space.

This new form of connection uses shorter radio wavelengths to transmit data. These wavelengths carry more data than previous 4G and 3G types of connections but are more easily disrupted by elements such as trees. Therefore, a need for a dense population of new 5G “small cells” is needed to create a strong signal. This new technology opens the opportunity for

substantial connection both to the internet and technologies such as smart cars. A strong push is being made for this technology because of the potential significant increase in internet speeds and connections throughout a data driven era.

To further understand this problem, Verizon Wireless was contacted. After discussing with a representative from Verizon, 5G infrastructure will be implemented on existing cell towers and telephone poles. If there is no existing structure, Verizon offers to buy land from homeowners to place new infrastructure, however, homeowners have the option to decline the offer.

# Willow Ridge Community Profile and Inventory

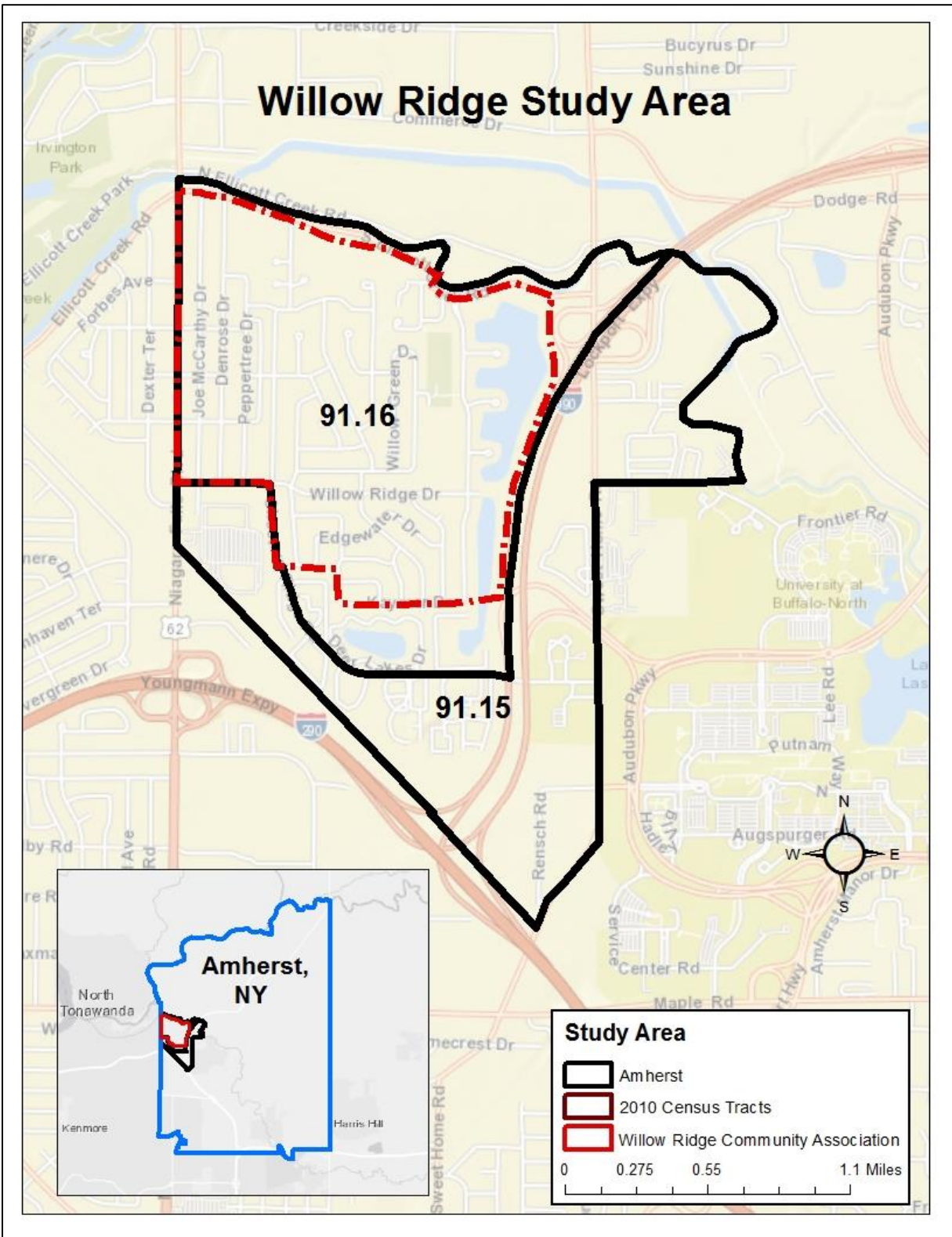
## Data Sources and Methods

For this study socioeconomic, housing, and transportation data was collected from the 2000 and 2010 Decennial Census as well as the 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2010 and 2017. The data collected was at the tract level (Tract 91.08 for 2000 and Tracts 91.15 and 91.16 for 2010 and 2017) due to the availability and the similar boundaries between neighborhood data and WRCA defined boundaries. It is important to note here that between 2000 and 2010 the census geography changed for Willow Ridge. In 2000 Tract 91.08 denoted Willow Ridge and in 2010 the census tract was split into Tract 91.15 and 91.16. All data displaying monetary values have been adjusted for inflation and calculated into 2017-dollar values. For the transportation portion of the study, data was also obtained from the Decennial Census and ACS as well as from local and state agencies, including the Niagara-Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) and the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC). At the state level, transportation data was obtained from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). From these data sources certain topics that were deemed to have importance by the group were focused on and then the data was obtained for those topics specifically.

For this project there are two delineations for Willow Ridge, as shown in Figure 3. The distinct difference with these delineations occurs when viewing the southern portion of the community. Based on census geography, Willow Ridge includes parcels between Chestnut Ridge Road and the I-290. There is also a portion of the map that extends the east, past the I-990 and before the University at Buffalo campus. On the WRCA delineation, the community of Willow Ridge is bound by South Ellicott Creek Road, Niagara Falls Boulevard, I-990, and Kaymar Drive.



Figure 3 – WRCA & Willow Ridge Boundaries



## Physical Inventory

By using existing maps and conducting field visits, a map (Figure 4) was created which depicts the assets of the Willow Ridge community. This map includes the Willow Ridge Park, bike paths, a highway system, and the street tree system in the community. Each element was chosen because they positively impact Willow Ridge's character, the movement of people, and/or the environment.

The transportation system provides quick and simple access to and from Willow Ridge. Downtown Buffalo can be accessed by using the adjacent I-990 or I-290. Niagara Falls Boulevard, on the western end of the community, provides bus routes for public transportation. With a mixture of public, private, and alternative forms of transportation this community has great access to the surrounding municipalities and cities. An in-depth analysis of the transportation system is located in the "Transportation Profile" section of this report.

The park and tree system provide green and open space to community members which appeals to residents of the neighborhood. There are also multiple bodies of water that further the natural experience. Some infrastructure is not visible due to it being buried. Telephone wires are an example, there are few telephone poles and wires in the Willow Ridge community.

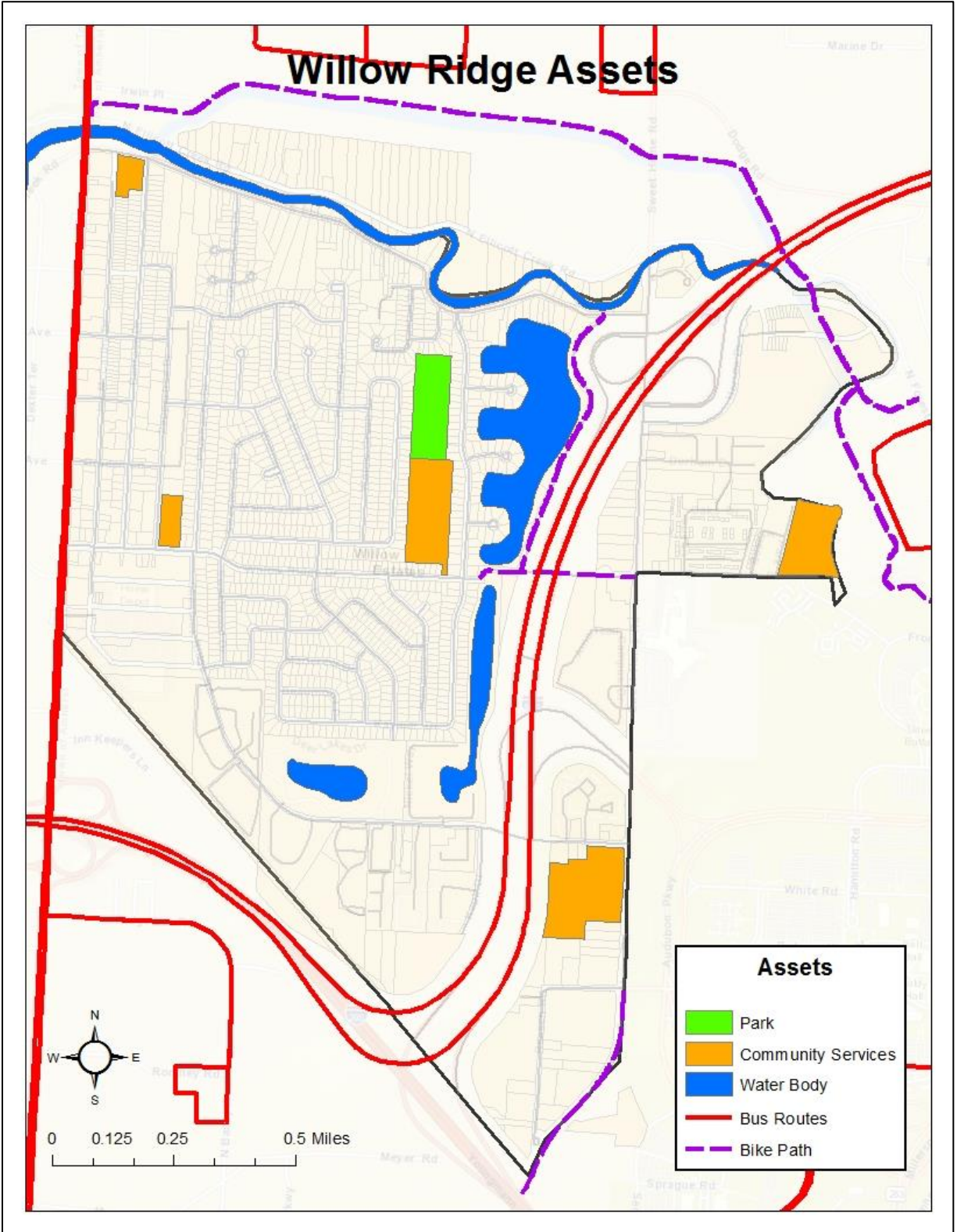
Denoted by a purple line in Figure 4 are bike paths. They can be used for activities such as walking, biking, rollerblading. The bike path located in the northern portion of the map is significant because of the connection with an extensive system of bike paths in Erie County. This bike path allows for users to travel to Canalside, downtown Buffalo, and eventually the Erie canal which can be used to then travel to Albany.

Along with the bike routes, Ellicott Creek can be used by a kayakers and canoers as a method of transportation or as an outdoor activity. With launch points located just off Ellicott Creek Road North, kayakers and canoers can use the creek without leaving the neighborhood. Access to this amenity is an important asset for neighborhood residents. A water feature, such as Ellicott Creek, that can be used for recreational activity adds value to a community.

Continuing with the idea of recreation and leisure activity, another asset identified is Willow Ridge Park located on Rockdale Drive. This park currently contains vast amounts of open space, a playground, and a tennis court. The park connects to the current sidewalk infrastructure, so it can be used by most in the Willow Ridge community.

Lastly, on the map there are several shapes with an orange color, these shapes are assets that act as a community service. These services include the Willow Ridge Elementary School located on Willow Ridge Drive and the Ellicott Creek Volunteer Fire Company located on South Ellicott Creek Road. They are considered assets based on location within the neighborhoods and impact on social structure. Schools are considered an asset because of the potential for increase in human capital and higher education. The Ellicott Creek Volunteer Fire Company building provides a safe and useable location for WRCA meetings.

Figure 4– Willow Ridge Assets



## Socio-economic and Demographic Profile

This section of the report uses data variables from the Decennial and American Community Survey programs to understand changes in the population. Data variables collected in 2000, as well as others for 2010, are full counts which provide an initial understanding of the population. To understand changes since 2000 and 2010 ACS 5 – Year estimates were used.

### Population

Table 1 presents population change in the Willow Ridge community and provides context to its changes by drawing comparisons with Amherst and Erie County. The population of Willow Ridge continually increased from 2000 through 2013 - 2017. The population increased by 10.7% from 2010 through 2013 - 2017, which is a smaller percent change than the increase in population from 2000 through 2010. The rate of population change in Willow Ridge was greater than it was in Amherst over both time periods. It is also important to note that the population in Erie County from 2010 through 2013 – 2017 experienced a positive population change in decades.

**Table 1 – Population: 2000-2017**

	2000 <sup>a</sup>	2010 <sup>a</sup>	2013 – 2017 <sup>b</sup>	Percent Change, 2000 - 2010	Percent Change, 2010 – 2013-2017
Willow Ridge	7,238	8,533	9,445 (+/- 580)	17.9%	10.7% (+/- 6.1%)
Amherst <sup>c</sup>	105,944	113,833	115,579 (+/- 1,587)	7.5%	1.5% (+/- 1.3%)
Erie County	950,265	919,040	923,995 (+/-2,626)	-3.3%	0.4% (+/- 0.3%)

<sup>a</sup> US Decennial Census

<sup>b</sup> American Community Survey, 5- Year Estimates

<sup>c</sup>Amherst counts do not include Willow Ridge

Figures in ( ) in this report represent margin of error of the 5-year estimate

By using census tracts delineated by the U.S. Census Bureau, Willow Ridge can be broken into two different geographies which allow for further analysis of the community. Tract 91.15, located in the southern portion of the neighborhood (see Figure 1, page 2), consists of apartment complexes or high-density housing. Tract 91.16 consists of residential housing internal to the community with extensive commercial use along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Table 2 shows that from 2010 through 2013 – 2017 a 23.2% increase in population occurred in tract 91.15, which is significantly higher than the 2.8% increase in tract 91.16. This significant increase in this tract is likely attributed to the increased development of student housing.



**Table 2 – Willow Ridge Population by Tract: 2010-2017**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013 - 2017</b>	<b>Percent Change, 2010 – 2013-2017</b>
Census Tract 91.15	3,308	4,074 (+/- 369)	23.2% (+/- 9.1%)
Census Tract 91.16	5,225	5,371 (+/- 453)	2.8% (+/- 8.4%)

## Age

To determine a change in the age composition of the neighborhood, population pyramids were created. The graphs below depict Willow Ridge in three different time periods, 2000, 2010, and 2013-2017. Male population is on the left of the graphs and female populations are on the right, each group is displayed based on five-year age intervals.

When using age data, it is important to consider demographic transition. The reason demographic transition is important because of its impacts on society. Demographic transition can be described as the change in mortality, fertility, and growth rates of any given geography. It uses these criteria to determine the type of change in a population. For example, a high fertility rate and low death rate signifies a rapid growth in population. When a population undergoes a significant change the resources for the population must allow for this change. There will also be a change in the resources available for the population. In planning this is especially important, due to resource management. One example of this is the school population. An increase in women of fertility age can help predict a change in school enrollment, giving schools the ability to plan for future enrollment changes.

Demographic analysis is not bound to just planners, it can be used in the field of marketing and economics. Marketing seeks to target specific demographics to push products they believe will sell. Age is one key aspect of the analysis; younger generations want and need products that the older generation may not and vice versa. So, understanding the trend of a population in terms of age allows markets to adjust the goods produced. This further has an impact on the economy. Services and goods will need to change based on the aging populations. By understanding this change, an economy can adjust and attempt to predict changes or problems.

Beyond the economy, analysis on the age of a population is widely used by schools, universities, and local governments. By determining the number of people in specific age groups assumptions can be made to allow for future planning initiatives. For example, a middle school may decide it needs to expand its building size and classroom size based on a significant increase in the population of individuals between the ages of 10-14 years old. The assumption is that this population will age in place and will use local resources such as the school, thus meaning the school will need to accommodate for a larger population than it typically would.

The following figures provide a visualization of the population in 2000, 2010, and 2013-2017 broken down into male (grey) and female (blue) age groups. There are minor changes

throughout the age groups between years in most categories except the 20-24 year olds. Looking at the population pyramids for 2000 (Figure 5, page 8), 2010 (Figure 6, page 9), and 2013-2017 (Figure 7, page10) it is clear that there is a significant change in the population of people aged between 20 and 24 years old for both the male and female populations. From 2000 to 2010, the male population (grey) increased from roughly 10% to 30% percent while the female population in blue changes from 10% to 25% . While this is a significant change it can be explained.

We must remember that between 2000 and 2010 the Willow Ridge community changes in terms of census geography, it was broken into two tracts in 2010 rather than being a single tract. Tract 91.16 consists of a majority of single famil homes and Tract 91.15 consists of student housing. Therefore, when we further investigate the change in the population pyramid, it is clear to see that the high number of 20 to 25 year olds in Willow Ridge in 2010 and in 2013-2017 is caused by the number of them living in Tract 91.15. Of the population that lives in this census tract, nearly 40% are male and over 30% are female in both 2010 and 2013-2017. These high percentages are skewing the data and causing the pyramids to show a lage change in the age group when comparing 2000 to 2010 and 2013-2017 data.

Figure 5 – Willow Ridge 2000 Population Pyramid

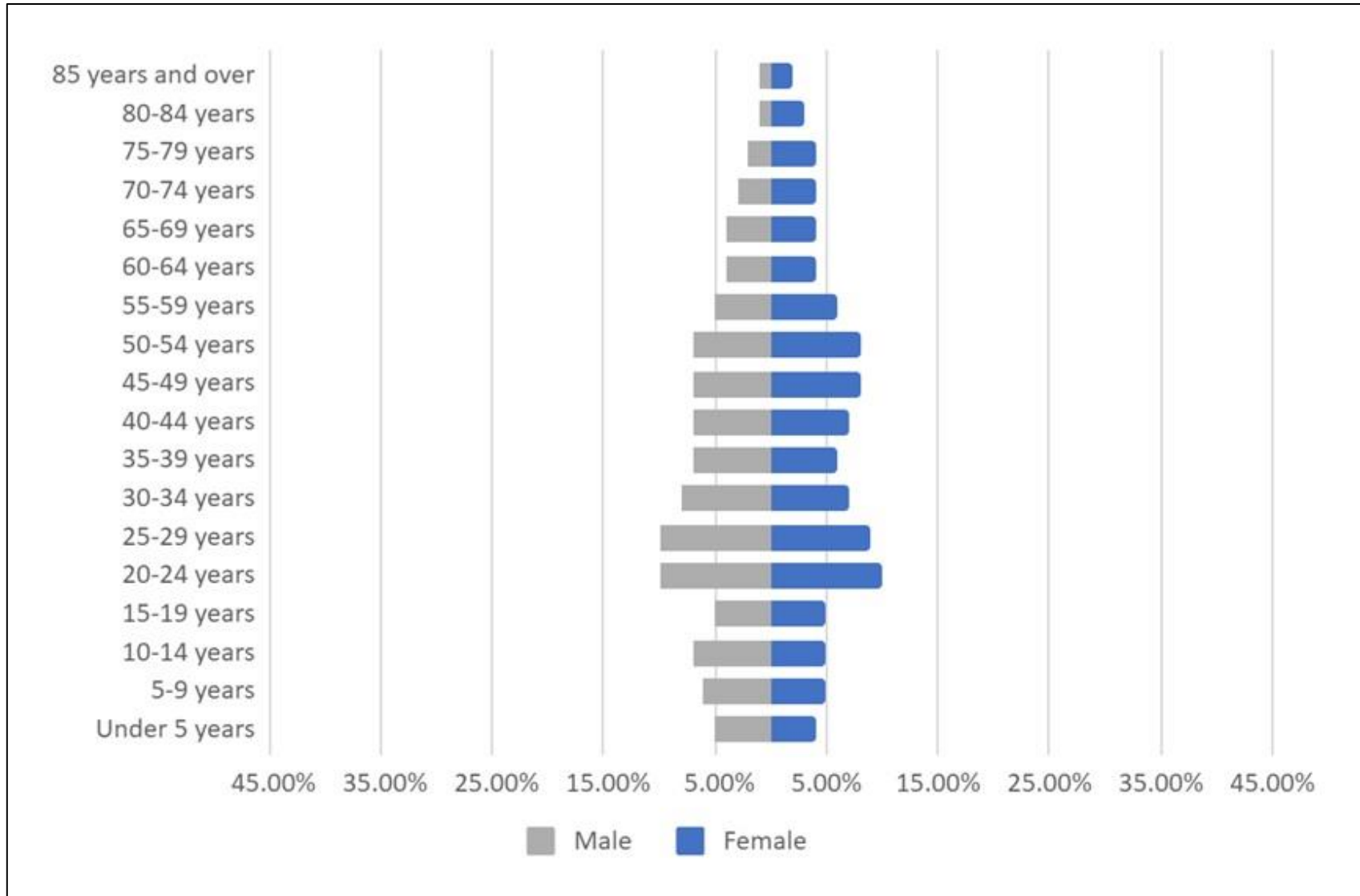


Figure 6 – Willow Ridge 2010 Population Pyramid

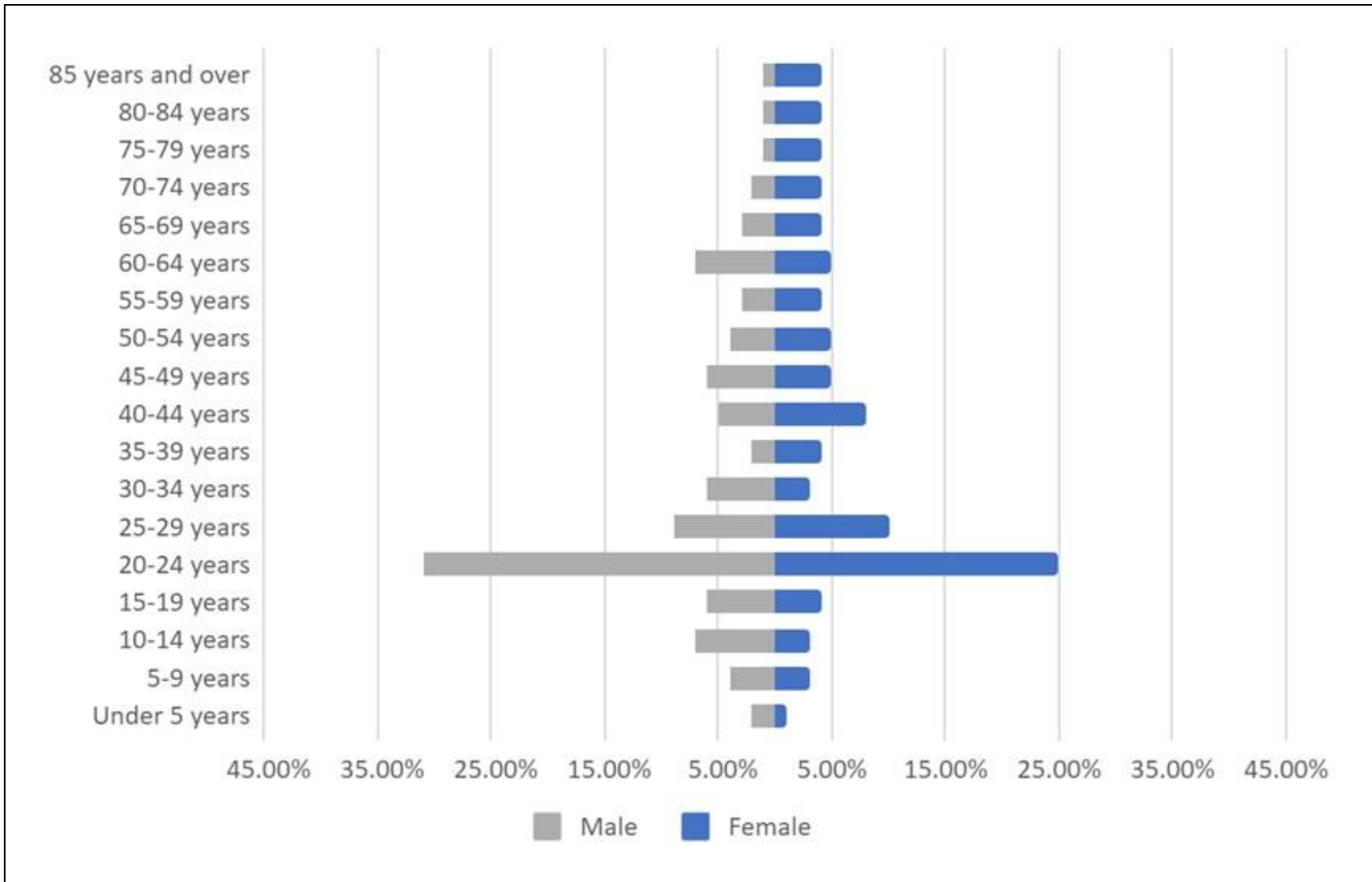




Figure 7 – Willow Ridge 2013-2017 Population Pyramid

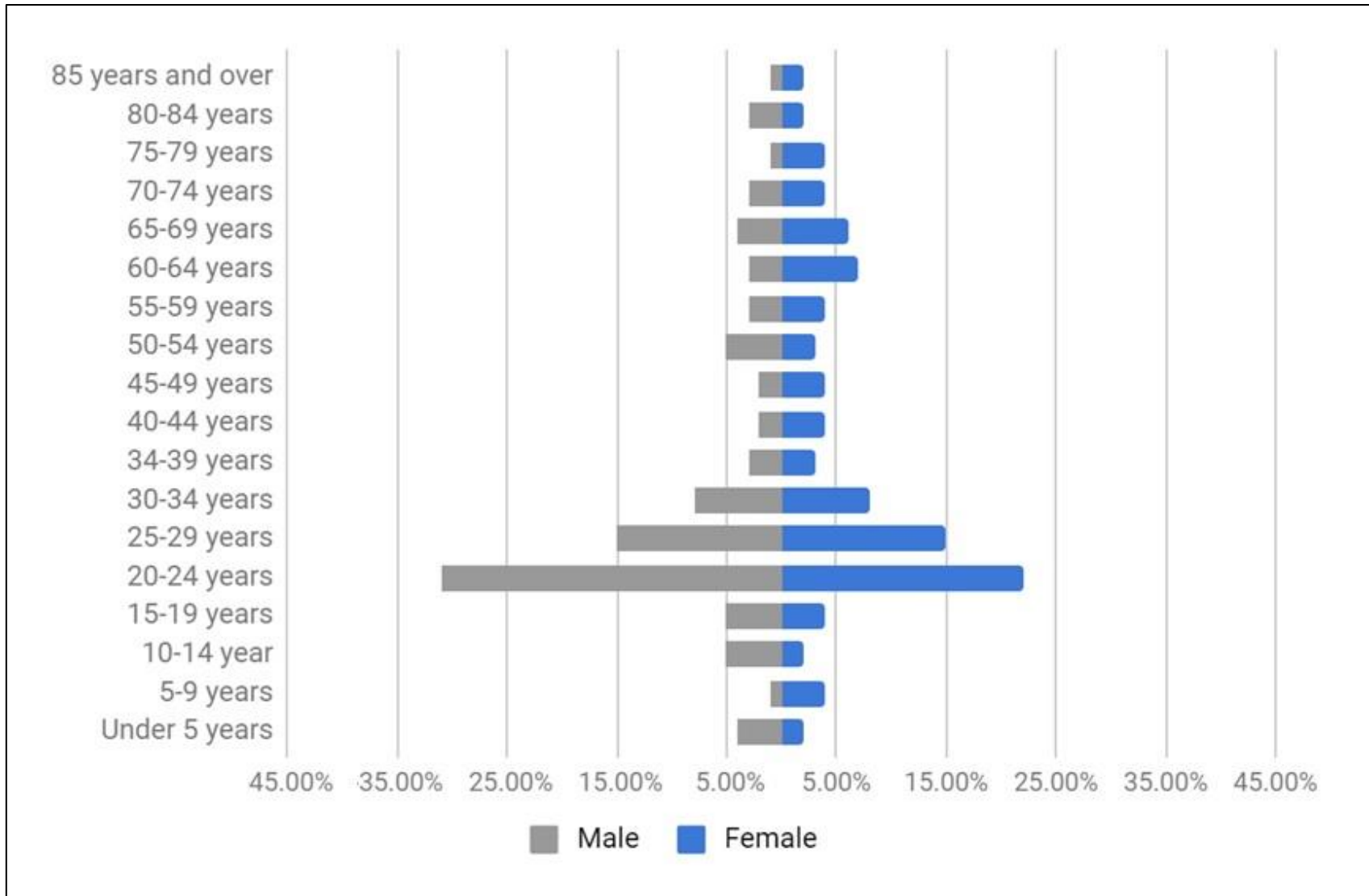


Figure 8 – Tract 91.15 Population Pyramid (2010)

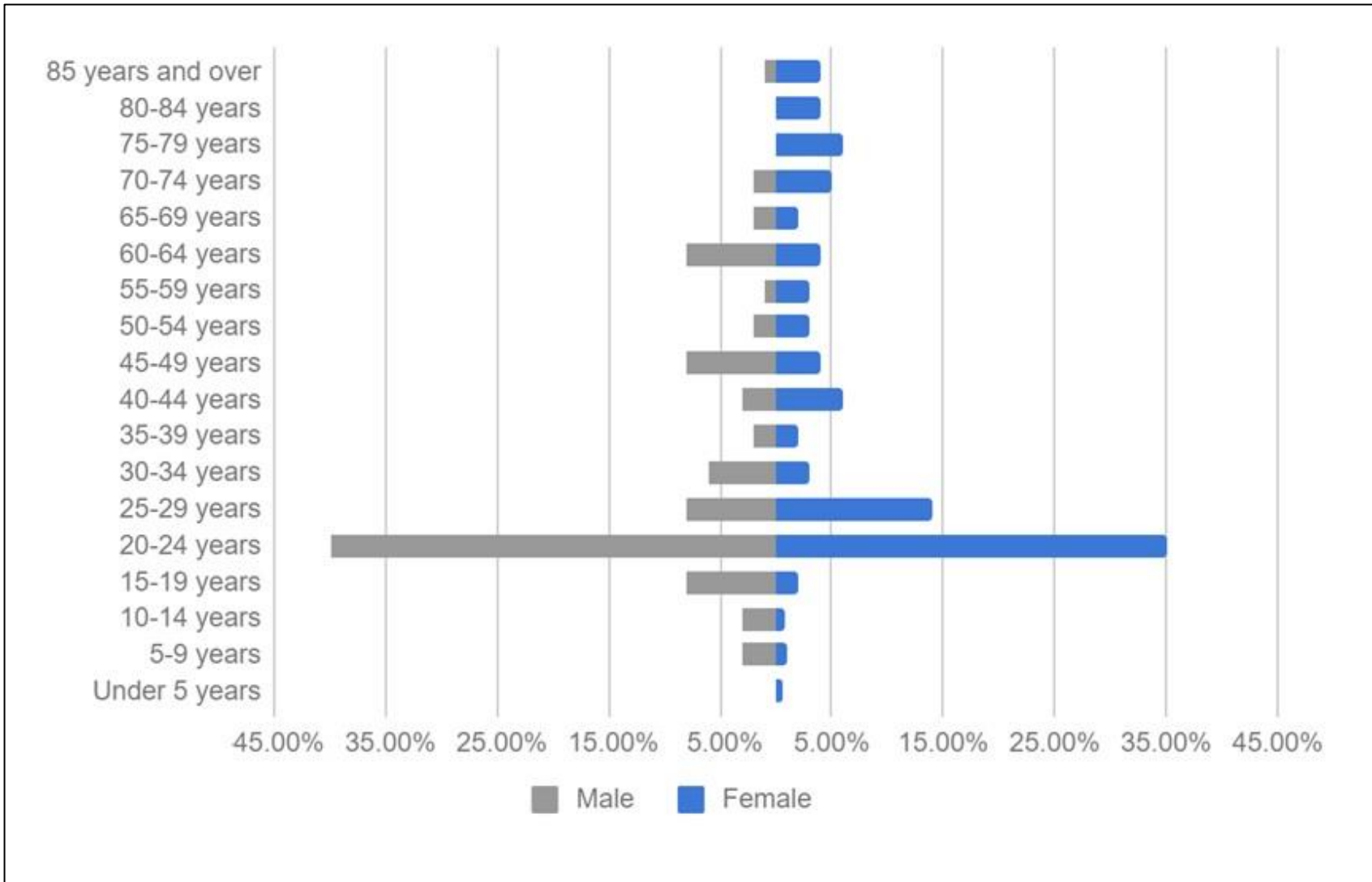


Figure 9 – Tract 91.16 Population Pyramid (2010)

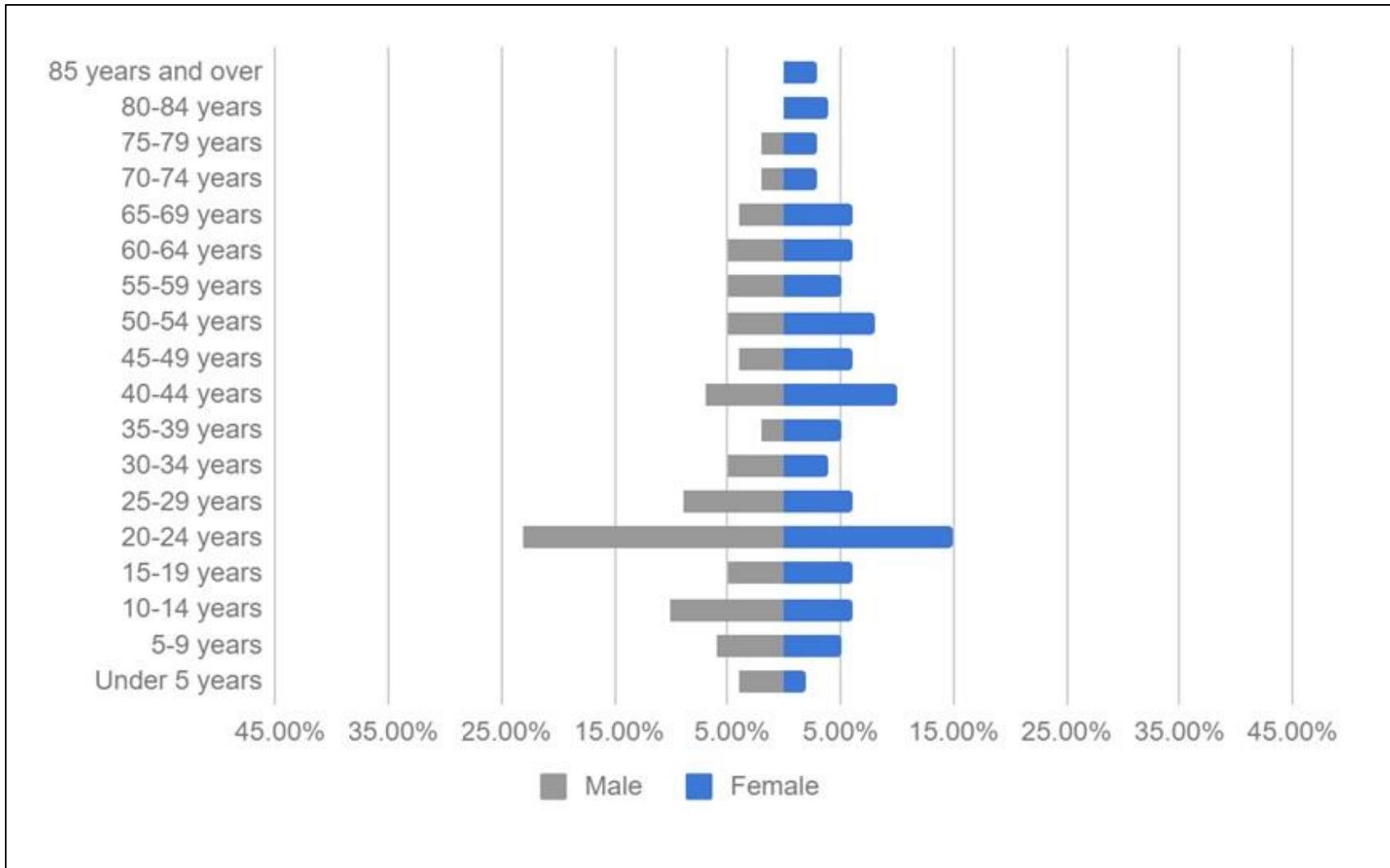
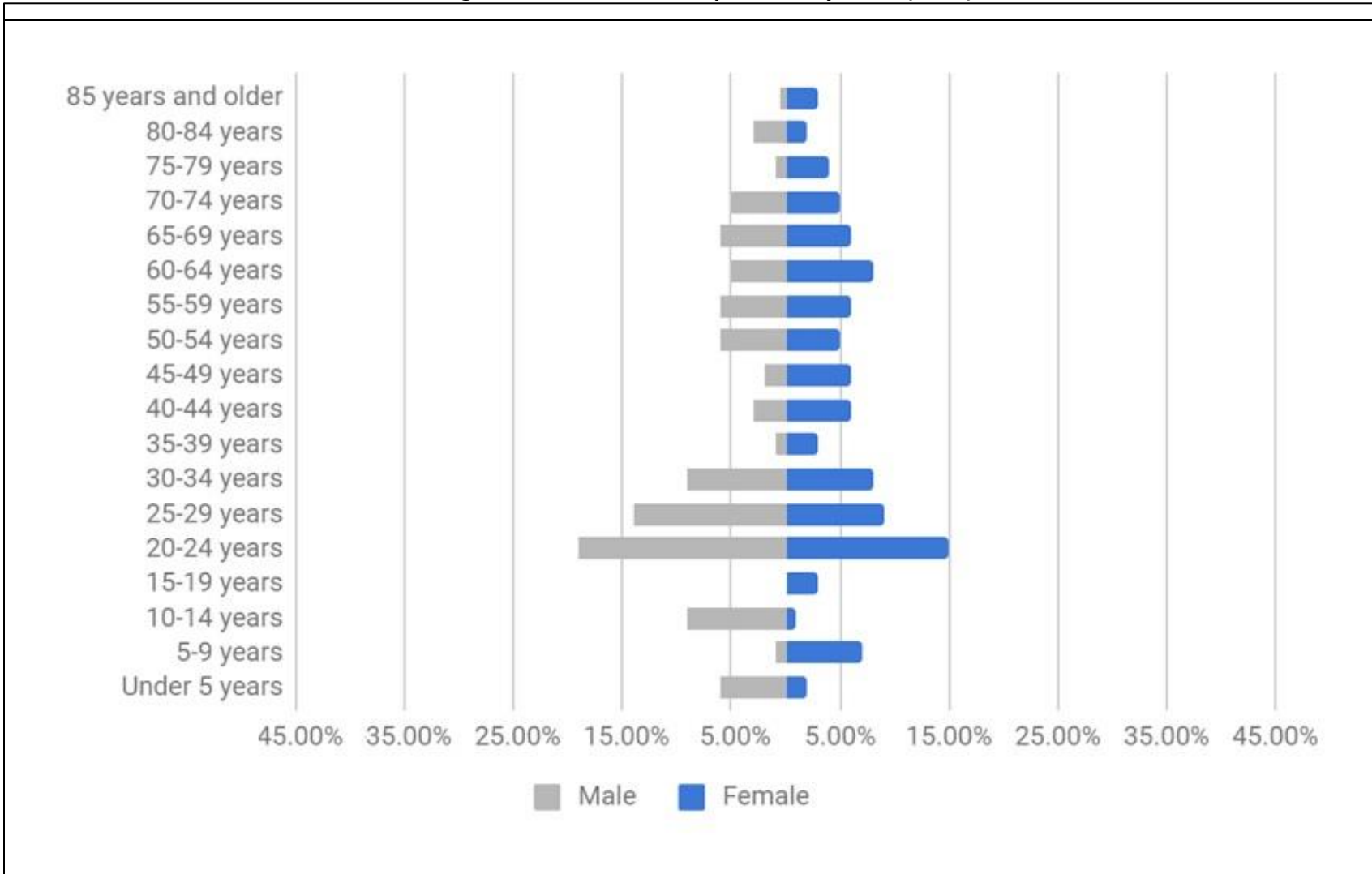


Figure 10 – Tract 91.15 Population

Figure 11– Tract 91.16 Population Pyramid (2017)

Pyramid (2017)



## Race

It is important to understand race and its change over time due to the overtones of the subject in a community. Diversity and changing ethnic groups are also an important aspect of community planning and engagement, communities with differing groups maintain unique social values that should be considered during the planning process. Furthermore, race and population can be connected and used to understand the concern of a growing student population brought forth in neighborhood meeting and the WRCA.

As indicated in Table 3, the majority race has been consistently white in Willow Ridge, Amherst, and Erie County. However, in the latest dataset published by the American Community Survey in 2017, the white population in Willow Ridge significantly declined by over 20 percentage points from 2000 through 2013 - 2017 while there was only a slight decrease in the number of white residents. One factor responsible for this change is the increase in Asian population from 764 in 2010 to 2,354 in 2013-2017.

Using Table 4 on page 16, it is seen that the increase in Asian population in Willow Ridge is heavily influenced by Tract 91.15. According to the ACS 5- Year Estimate for 2010 the Asian population was 22.2% of the total population, then during 2013 – 2017 the population was 40.1%. One reason for this change is because of the increase in enrollment of diverse cultures at the University at Buffalo. Many students are seeking off campus housing and may be responsible for this increase in the Asian population in Willow Ridge

**Table 3 – Race**

Race	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017
White	6,323 (87.4%)	6,744 (79.0%)	6,112 (64.7%) (+/-580)	94,827 (89.5%)	95,814 (84.2%)	94,714 (82%) (+/- 1,669)	781,935 (82.3%)	735,244 (76%)	721,101 (78.0%) (+/- 1,184)
African American	271 (3.7%)	496 (5.2%)	581 (6.2%) (+/- 305)	3,988 (3.8%)	6,513 (5.7%)	7,606 (6.6%) (+/- 959)	122,928 (12.9%)	123,931 (13.5%)	124,101 (13.4%) (+/- 994)
Asian	537 (7.4%)	1,075 (12.6%)	2,354 (24.9%) (+/-6475)	4,964 (4.7%)	8,600 (7.6%)	8,823 (7%) (+/- 788)	12,893 (1.4%)	23,789 (2.6%)	31,935 (3.5%) (+/- 722)
Other	107 (1.5%)	218 (2.6%)	398 (4.2%) (+/- 178)	2,165 (2.0%)	2,906 (2.6%)	4,436 (3.8%) (+/- 677)	32,509 (3.4%)	36,076 (3.9%)	46,858 (5.0%) (+/-1,995)

**Table 4 – Willow Ridge Race**

Race	91.15 Tract		91.16 Tract	
	2010	2013 - 2017	2010	2013 - 2017
White	2,319 (70.1%)	1,807 (44.4%) (+/- 354)	4,425 (84.7%)	4,305 (80.2%) (+/- 462)
African American	156 (4.7%)	394 (9.7%) (+/- 280)	340 (6.5%)	187 (3.5%) (+/- 123)
Asian	734 (22.2%)	1,635 (40.1%) (+/- 314)	341 (6.5%)	719 (13.4%) (+/- 359)
Other	99 (3.0%)	238 (5.8%) (+/- 122)	119 (2.2%)	160 (3.0%) (+/- 134)

#### Language

Language can be used to further support changes occurring in a community. As the race of the population in Willow Ridge changes, so too does the language speak at home. Table 5 below and Table 6 on page 17 illustrate this trend. While the population five years and over increased in Willow Ridge since 2000, people speaking English decreased. Between 2006 – 2010 through 2013 – 2017 the percent of English-speaking persons dropped from 82.1% to 70.6% while the number of people who speak English decreased by 75. A significant change can be found in the population that speaks Asian and Pacific Islander languages. In the 2006 – 2010 estimate, eight percent of the population spoke one of these languages and in the 2013 – 2017 estimate it increased to 22.1%.

**Table 5 - Language Spoken at Home**

	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2006 -2010	2013 - 2017
English only	5,974 (86.1%)	6,535 (82.1%) (+/- 513)	6,460 (70.6%) (+/- 319)	89,378 (89.2%)	92,121 (86.2%) (+/- 1,747)	93,940 (85.4%) (+/- 1,583)	812,588 (91.0%)	788,220 (90.4%) (+/- 2,151)	783,404 (89.7%) (+/- 1,998)
Spanish	165 (2.4%)	172 (2.2%) (+/- 227)	89 (1.0%) (+/- 72)	1,537 (1.5%)	2,062 (1.9%) (+/- 677)	2,652 (2.4%) (+/- 527)	26,315 (2.9%)	27,395 (3.1%) (+/- 1,069)	29,930 (3.4%) (+/- 1,129)
Other Indo-European languages	354 (5.1%)	603 (7.6%) (+/- 205)	502 (5.5%) (+/- 268)	6,123 (6.1%)	7,183 (6.7%) (+/- 839)	7,725 (7.0%) (+/- 792)	40,851 (4.6%)	35,230 (4.0%) (+/- 1,622)	31,428 (3.6%) (+/- 1,559)
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	340 (4.9%)	557 (7.0%) (+/- 320)	2,017 (22.1%) (+/- 427)	2,621 (2.6%)	4,552 (4.3%) (+/- 863)	4,270 (3.9%) (+/- 496)	7,582 (0.8%)	12,119 (1.4%) (+/- 929)	16,629 (1.9%) (+/- 1,015)
Other Languages	106 (1.5%)	92 (1.2%) (+/- 226)	78 (0.9%) (+/- 63)	561 (0.6%)	990 (0.9%) (+/- 818)	1,465 (1.3%) (+/- 390)	5,543 (0.6%)	8,906 (1.0%) (+/- 944)	12,291 (1.4%) (+/- 992)
Population 5 years and over	6,939	7,959 (+/- 486)	9,146 (+/- 582)	100,220	106,908 (+/- 1,742)	110,052 (+/- 1,516)	892,879	871,870	873,682 (+/- 29)

By analyzing the data from ACS for Tract 91.16 and Tract 91.16, the cause of the change in Willow Ridge can be determined. Willow Ridge experienced significant change in the number of people who speak English and the number of people who speak Asian or Pacific Islander. In Table 6, the number of people who speak in Tract 91.15 increases by 219 while the percentage decrease from 70.1% to 56.9% from 2006 – 2013 through 2013 -2017. The number of people speaking Asian and Pacific Islander increase by 1,084 from 12.2% to 36.1% during the same time. Tract 91.16 also experiences similar trends as Tract 91.16, but to a much smaller degree. This is important because when connecting this data to race, both Asian population and Asian language speakers increase. These data sets reinforce the concerns about a growing student population from Willow Ridge residents.

**Table 6 - Tract level Language Spoken at Home**

	2006 - 2010		2013 - 2017	
	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16
English only	2,058 (70.1%) (+/-321)	4,477 (89.2%) (+/- 402)	2,277 (56.9%) (+/- 169)	4,183 (81.3%) (+/- 272)
Spanish	23 (0.8%) (+/-175)	149 (3.0%) (+/-148)	45 (1.1%) (+/- 48)	44 (0.9%) (+/- 56)
Other Indo-European languages	461 (15.7%) (+/-193)	142 (2.8%) (+/- 80)	222 (5.6%) (+/- 109)	280 (5.4%) (+/- 246)
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	359 (12.2%) (+/- 251)	198 (3.9%) (+/- 202)	1,443 (36.1%) (+/- 329)	574 (11.1%) (+/- 274)
Other Languages	36 (1.2%) (+/- 127)	56 (1.1%) (+/- 189)	14 (0.4%) (+/- 31)	64 (1.2%) (+/- 57)
Population 5 years and over	2,937 (+/-347)	5,022 (+/-345)	4,001 (+/- 367)	5,145 (+/-452)

## Income

Income data an important part of this report because of its impacts on government planning, economic development, and housing. It can also be used to understand the change in total income of a community because per capita income is simply the total income divided by the population. While per capita income allows for interpretations about a community to be made, it has one notable drawback. According to a community assessment by Professor Jason Knight of SUNY Buffalo State, “persistent declines in population can strip income out of a community.”<sup>1</sup> It is important to acknowledge this drawback for the analysis of Willow because while per capita income is decreasing, the population is increasing. One reason for this decrease in per capita income may be the increased number of people with a low-income level.

Table 7 shows per capita income in Erie County and Amherst increased from the 2006 – 2010 through 2013 – 2017, reversing the decreasing trend from 2000 through 206 -2010. Willow Ridge on the other hand experienced a decrease in per capita income since 2000. The 2013 -2017 estimate shows that Willow Ridge per capita income is \$7,135 lower than the per capita income in Erie County.

<sup>1</sup> 2018 Town of Cheektowaga Community Inventory and Profile . 2018, 2018 Cheektowaga Community Inventory and Profile .



**Table 7 – Per Capita and Total Income**

Year	Per Capita Income			Total Income		
	Willow Ridge	Amherst	Erie County	Willow Ridge	Amherst	Erie County
2013 - 2017	\$23,948 (+/- \$3,990)	\$40,139 (+/- \$5,282)	\$31,083 (+/- \$329)	\$231,863,700 (+/- \$36,351,925)	\$4,784,536,700 (+/- \$674,967,447)	\$28,720,667,500 (+/- \$304,369,140)
2006 - 2010*	\$26,922 (+/- \$5,609)	\$38,365 (+/- \$4,417)	\$29,740 (+/- \$230)	\$225,561,751 (+/- \$22,290,291)	\$4,456,058,565 (+/- \$516,702,065)	\$27,396,091,123 (+/- \$213,070,770)
2000*	\$34,861	\$39,393	\$30,032	\$252,067,402	\$4,281,225,577	\$28,091,810,864

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

Per capita income at the Tract level in Table 8 displays this decrease in Willow Ridge per capita income. Both Tract 91.15 and 91.16 decreased. It also shows that Tract 91.16 accounts for more of the total income, \$72,374,500 to be exact.

**Table 8 – Willow Ridge Per Capita and Total Income**

Year	Per Capita Income		Total Income	
	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16
2013 - 2017	\$19,574 (+/- \$3,925)	\$28,322 (+/- \$4,055)	\$79,744,600 (+/- \$16,112,826)	\$152,119,100 (+/- \$20,239,099)
2006 - 2010*	\$23,545 (+/- \$4,325)	\$30,299 (+/- \$3,571)	\$69,340,636 (+/- \$10,474,763)	\$156,221,115 (+/- \$22,290,291)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

Comparing household income to per capita income portrays a similar narrative, Willow Ridge has experienced a decrease in both per capita income and household income. From Table 9, in Willow Ridge from 2000 through 2013 - 2017, the percent of households that make less than \$34,999 increased from 28.0% to 46.7%. During the same time the households that make more the \$125,000 decreased from 17.9% to 8.3%. This trend can be seen in Erie County as well. The rest of Amherst has experienced a similar trend, but it was less severe. With lower income levels, people have less capital to spend on community related elements such as home improvement. If the assumption is made that people use their money on other aspects of their life rather than their home, this is where disinvestment in the community occurs.

**Table 9 – Household Income**

	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2006 -2010	2013 -2017	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017
Less than \$34,999	934 (28.0%)	1,716 (45.5%) (+/- 272)	1,858 (46.7%) (+/- 291)	7,742 (19.2%)	9,815 (22.1%) (+/- 798)	10,890 (27.5%) (+/-669)	117,944 (31.0%)	127,136 (33.6%) (+/-2,706)	117,687 (37.3%) (+/-2,359)
\$35,000 - \$74,999	1,068 (32.0%)	1,005 (26.6%) (+/- 209)	1,196 (29.6%) (+/-195)	10,462 (25.9%)	11,952 (26.9%) (+/- 786)	11,764 (24.7%) (+/- 706)	120,636 (31.7%)	116,966 (30.9%) (+/-2,190)	104,179 (31.0%) (+/- 2,126)
\$75,000 - \$124,999	740 (22.2%)	570 (15.1%) (+/-142)	637 (15.4%) (+/-137)	10,440 (25.9%)	11,230 (25.2%) (+/-640)	11,008 (23.4%) (+/- 644)	83,384 (21.9%)	80,395 (21.2%) (+/- 1,674)	71,363 (20.4%) (+/- 1,613)
More than \$125,000	593 (17.9%)	483 (12.8%) (+/-159)	356 (8.3%) (+/- 125)	11,738 (29.1%)	11,002 (24.7%) (+/-616)	12,163 (24.4%) (+/- 667)	58,927 (15.5%)	53,584 (14.2%) (+/-1,180)	43,270 (11.2%) (+/- 1,449)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

Further data collection at the Tract level shows that the trends in Willow Ridge relate more to census Tract 91.15, where most of the apartment complexes are located. Tract 91.16 household incomes follow the trend for the rest of Amherst. Table 10 shows that income over \$125,000 decreased in both Tract 91.15 and Tract 91.16.

**Table 10 – Willow Ridge Household Income**

	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017	2006 -2010	2013 - 2017
Less than \$34,999	1,021 (50.3%) (+/- 213)	1,047 (56.4%) (+/-172)	695 (34.2%) (+/- 169)	811 (37.0%) (+/- 235)
\$35,000 - \$74,999	481 (27.6%) (+/- 148)	558 (30.1%) (+/- 136)	524 (25.8%) (+/-147)	638 (29.1%) (+/-177)
\$75,000 - \$124,999	185 (10.6%) (+/-62)	210 (11.3%) (+/- 99)	385 (19.0%) (+/- 128)	427 (19.5%) (+/-123)
More than 125,000	56 (2.8%) (+/-128)	40 (2.2%) (+/- 48)	427 (21.0%) (+/- 94)	316 (14.4%) (+/-115)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

## Poverty

Poverty data is displayed in Table 11 and Table 12, it is important to study because poverty demonstrates aspects the economy. People living below the poverty line in Willow Ridge, Amherst, and Erie County has increased since 2000, when the poverty was 12.5% in Willow Ridge, 6.1% in Amherst, and 12.2% in Erie County. In 2017, poverty in Willow Ridge was estimated to be 32%, Amherst estimates were 9.0%, and Erie County estimates were 14.9%. Willow Ridge experienced the highest increase in poverty. This increase along with the increase in Amherst demonstrates that poverty is spreading outside urban communities and across suburban communities.

**Table 11 - Poverty Status**

Year	Willow Ridge		Amherst		Erie County	
	Living in Poverty	At or Above Poverty	Living in Poverty	At or Above Poverty	Living in Poverty	At or Above Poverty
2013 - 2017	2,966 (32.0%) (+/- 571)	6,301 (68.0%) (+/- 485)	9,713 (9.0%) (+/- 1,151)	98,018 (91%) (+/- 1,688)	133,648 (14.9%) (+/- 3,588)	763,917 (85.1%) (+/- 3,657)
2006 -2010	2,037 (25.2%) (+/- 423)	6,064 (74.9%) (+/- 446)	7,328 (6.9%) (+/- 916)	98,198 (93.1%) (+/- 1,523)	125,461 (14.0%) (+/- 3,681)	769,981 (86.0%) (+/- 3,887)
2000	898 (12.5%)	6,312 (87.6%)	6,024 (6.1%)	93,172 (93.9%)	112,358 (12.2%)	810,224 (87.8%)

Further breaking down the data into the two census tracts in Willow Ridge, it can be seen that high rates of poverty were concentrated in Tract 91.15 with an increase in people living in poverty from 40.2% in 2010 to 51.5% in 2017. Poverty also increased from 16.5% to 17.9% in Tract 91.16. This is significant because the high poverty levels may be attributed to those living in Tract 91.15. Remembering that Tract 91.15 consists of student housing, the high concentration of poverty is due to the high concentration of students. Since student's income is typically low, they are more likely to be categorized as living in poverty.

**Table 12 - Willow Ridge Poverty Status**

Year	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	Living in Poverty	At or Above poverty	Living in Poverty	At or Above poverty
2013 -2017	2,005 (51.5%) (+/- 360)	1,891 (48.5%) (+/- 296)	961 (17.9%) (+/- 420)	4,410 (82.1%) (+/- 385)
2006 -2010	1,184 (40.2%) (+/- 337)	1,761 (59.8%) (+/- 247)	853 (16.5%) (+/- 255)	4,303 (83.5%) (+/- 373)

## Housing and Land Use Profile

Land use and zoning is important to any community because of its impact on what type of land uses are allowed. For example, in Willow Ridge most of the land inward of Niagara Falls Boulevard is considered residential which mean that there are single family homes, multi – family homes, and apartment complexes. While allowed uses may be controversial, all uses are currently allowed under the Amherst codes.

As with other sections in this report, housing data from the Decennial Census and American Survey 5-Year estimates on topics such as tenure and vacancy status. These are important data sets because tenure and vacancy impact the housing condition for Willow Ridge. Furthermore, connecting back to population section, age also plays a role in the housing condition, specifically disinvestment.

### Land Use and Zoning

Major zoning and land use issues include the transformation of single-family homes housing into rental property, unwanted businesses, and apartment complexes. These concerns are prevalent along Niagara Falls Boulevard and the southern portion of Willow Ridge. Along Niagara Falls Boulevard land is zoned mostly General Business. The southern portion of Willow Ridge is zoned R-3 (Residential District 3) and MFR-5 (Multifamily Residential District 5.) These three zoning uses are the most frequently used uses in the community of Willow Ridge. While there are issues with buildings in the neighborhood all zones in Table 13 are currently allowed in the neighborhood.

Building appearance along Niagara Falls Boulevard was another concern for many of the resident in Willow Ridge. Currently, the buildings are in accordance with the Town Codes in terms of design and any landscaping required. Future plans to improve appearance along the boulevard include Imagine Amherst, which aims to provide community centers that are inspired by the resident. More information can be found in a future section in this report.

Table 13 – Zoning Districts

Base Zoning District				
Residential		Business	Special Purpose District	Industrial
Suburban Agriculture (S-A)	Multifamily Residential District Four-A (MFR-4A)	Office Business District (OB)	New Community District (NCD)	Research and Development (RD)
Residential District Three (R-3)	Multifamily Residential District Five (MFR-5)	General Business District (GB)	Community Facilities District (CF)	--
Residential District Four (R-4)	Multifamily Residential District 6 (MFR-6)	Commercial Service District (CS)	Recreation Conservation District (RC)	--
--	Multifamily Residential District Seven (MFR-7)	Motor Service District (MS)	--	--

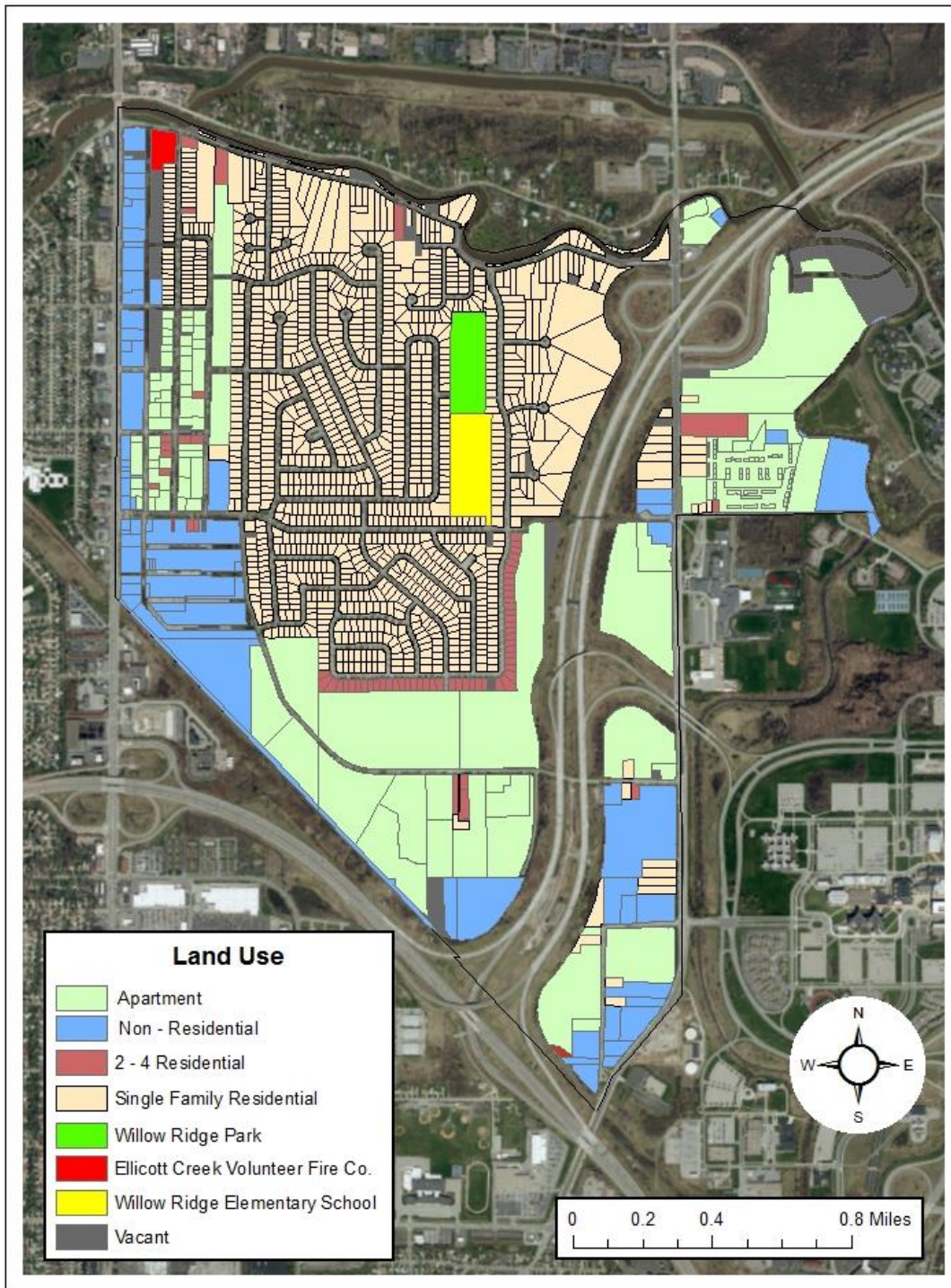
### Land Use Classification

Housing types is the breakdown of structure into use. The property type classification code in the Assessors’ Manual from the New York State Office of Real Property Services outlines all class codes. It breaks down all land uses into classifications and smaller subdivisions. For example, structures used as single-family homes are classified as “One Family Year-Round Residence “– 210, which means they are grouped in the Residential - 200

The most frequent land uses include, residential, business, and commercial. The residential use can dominantly be found throughout the northern portion of Willow Ridge. Business and commercial land use can dominantly be found along Niagara Falls Boulevard as well as the southern section of Willow Ridge. Figure 12 on page 24 outlines the areas of use in 2017 for Willow Ridge.

In both 2010 and 2017 most of the land parcels in Willow Ridge were determined to be in the Residential – 200 classification group which is living accommodations and includes apartments. Most of the parcels were classified as 210 which means that they are one-family year-round residences. From 2010 to 2017 there was a decrease in classification of 200. This is data is important because of its connection to structure values and will be discussed in a later section.

Figure 12 – Willow Ridge Land Uses



## Tenure

Tenure is the breakdown of housing units in owned and rented. In Table 14 Amherst and Willow Ridge from 2000 through 2013 - 2017, the percentage of owner-occupied units decreases from 52.2% to 41.8% in Willow Ridge and from 75.8% to 73.2% in Amherst. Contrary to this is Erie County where the percentage of owner-occupied units increased from 2000 through 2006 – 2010. Then, from 2006 -2010 through 2013-2017 the owner-occupied units decreased from 66.2% to 65.0%.

Table 14 - Tenure

Year	Willow Ridge		Amherst		Erie County	
	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner
2013 - 2017	2,355 (58.2%) (+/-183)	1,692 (41.8%) (+/- 152)	12,283 (26.8%) (+/- 551)	33,542 (73.2%) (+/- 495)	135,159 (35.0%) (+/- 1,539)	251,212 (65.0%) (+/-1,539)
2006 -2010	1,907 (50.5%) (+/- 176)	1,866 (49.5%) (+/- 141)	11,352 (25.5%) (+/- 537)	33,121 (74.5%) (+/- 532)	127,842 (33.8%) (+/- 1,977)	250,238 (66.2%) (+/- 1,873)
2000	1,594 (47.8%)	1,740 (52.2%)	10,114 (24.2%)	31,628 (75.8%)	132,093 (34.7%)	24,780 (65.3%)

It is important to understand what is causing the higher change in tenure in Willow Ridge than in Amherst. Table 16 shows that from 2006 – 2010 through 2013 -2017 the percentage of owner-occupied units decreases in both Tract 91.15 and Tract 91.16 from 43.0% and 55.0% to 34.6% and 48% respectively. This means that, contrary to what many other datasets in this report demonstrate, the increase number of students in Tract 91.15 is not the sole reason for the decrease in owner occupied property and increase in renter occupied property in Willow Ridge.

Table 15 - Willow Ridge Tenure

	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner
2013 - 2017	1,214 (65.4%) (+/- 106)	641 (34.6%) (+/- 91)	1,141 (52.1%) (+/- 180)	1,051 (48.0%) (+/- 124)
2006 – 2010	994 (57.0%) (+/- 129)	749 (43.0%) (+/- 97)	913 (45.0%) (+/- 120)	1,117 (55.0%) (+/-101)

## Vacancy

Vacancy status from the Decennial Census and ACS is useful because of its breakdown of vacant property into units that are on the market versus units that are not on the market. Units on the market include “For sale” or “For Rent”. Furthermore, properties that were denoted as “Other Vacant”<sup>2</sup> have been considered abandoned, blighted, and/or foreclosed.

<sup>2</sup> Schilling, Joseph, And Jonathan Logan. "Greening The Rust Belt: A Green Infrastructure Model For Right Sizing America's Shrinking Cities." Journal Of The American Planning Association 74, No. 4 (2008): 451-466.



Looking at Table 16, from 2000 to 2010 there was an increase in the percent of “For Rent” vacancies in Willow Ridge and Amherst from 49.6% to 54.6% in Willow Ridge and from 34.2% to 38.8% in Amherst. Erie County experienced a decrease during the same time frame from 37.5% to 34.2%. All three geographies experience a sharp decrease between 2010 and 2013 -2017. Willow Ridge decreased to 21.9%, Amherst decreased to 15.7%, and Erie County decreased to 15.6%.

While the trend in “For Rent” vacancies sharply decreased between 2010 and 2013 -2017, the “Other Vacant” vacancies sharply rose in all three geographies. Willow Ridge increased from 11.6% to 44.1%, Amherst increased from 22.2% to 43.4%, and Erie County increased from 44.0% to 64.1%. This is important because changes in vacancy require strategic planning methods to correct.

Another notable change occurred in Willow Ridge and Amherst from 2010 to 2013 – 2017, where the percentage of “Rented or Sold – Not Occupied” increased from 8.3% to 27.5% in Willow Ridge and 7.9% to 15.5% in Amherst.

These tenure datasets are important because vacancies that remain vacant for extended periods of time, specifically “Other Vacant” do not often see reinvestment and negatively impact community image. This is one way which disinvestment in a community is prevalent.

**Table 16 – Vacancy Status**

Vacancy Status	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017
For Rent	63 (49.6%)	66 (54.6%)	70 (21.9%) (+/- 52)	533 (34.2%)	840 (38.8%)	387 (15.7%) (+/- 191)	13,131 (37.5%)	12,596 (34.2%)	6,117 (15.6%) (+/- 562)
For Sale Only	10 (7.9%)	14 (11.6%)	10 (3.1%) (+/- 20)	351 (22.5%)	270 (12.5%)	332 (13.4%) (+/- 152)	4,824 (13.8%)	3,071 (8.3%)	1,689 (4.3%) (+/- 302)
Rented or Sold - Not Occupied	16 (12.6%)	10 (8.3%)	88 (27.5%) (+/- 107)	169 (10.9%)	172 (7.9%)	384 (15.5%) (+/- 119)	3,116 (8.9%)	1,918 (5.2%)	3,516 (8.9%) (+/- 484)
Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	23 (18.1%)	17 (14.1%)	11 (3.4%) (+/-22)	251 (16.1%)	401 (18.5%)	297 (12.0%) (+/- 142)	2,317 (6.6%)	3,036 (8.3%)	2,758 (7.0%) (+/- 377)
For Migrant Workers	0	0	0 (+/- 17)	0	0	0 (+/ 61)	18 (0.1%)	6 (0.0%)	58 (0.2%) (+/- 89)
Other Vacant	15 (11.8%)	14 (11.6%)	141 (44.1%) (+/- 129)	254 (16.3%)	481 (22.2%)	1,072 (43.4%) (+/- 296)	11,589 (33.1%)	16,183 (44.0%)	25,207 (64.1%) (+/- 1,142)
Total	127	121	320 (+/- 174)	1,558	2,164	2,472 (+/- 407)	34,995	36,810	39,345 (+/- 1,461)



Similar to Amherst and Erie County, Tracts 91.15 and 91.16 experience changes from 2010 to 2013 - 2017. This is seen in Table 18 where “Other Vacant” increases in Tract 91.16 from 10.7% in 2010 an 47.4% in 2013 – 2017. The study of vacant property is important because of the impact vacancies have on surrounding structure values, aesthetics, and in tax revenue.

Table 17 – Willow Ridge Vacancy Status

Vacancy Status	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2010	2013 -2017	2010	2013 - 2017
For Rent	32 (49.2%)	0	34 (60.7%)	70 (28.6%)
For Sale Only	7 (10.8%)	10 (13.3%)	7 (12.5%)	0
Rented or Sold - Not Occupied	3 (4.6%)	29 (38.7%)	7 (12.5%)	59 (24.1%)
Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	15 (23.1%)	11 (14.7%)	2 (3.6%)	0
For Migrant Workers	0	0	0	0
Other Vacant	8 (12.3%)	25 (33.3%)	6 (10.7%)	116 (47.4%)
Total	65	75	56	245

### Occupancy Status

Occupancy status is important to understand because of the impact of vacant units on a house values, taxes, and community appearance. In 2000 both Willow Ridge and the Town of Amherst maintained the exact same occupancy status by having 96.3% of their housing units occupied while only 3.7% of them were vacant. Then in 2010 Willow Ridge, Amherst, and Erie County all experienced decreases in the number of units that were occupied, meaning that more units were vacant. A possible cause that led to this shift was the economic recession of 2008 which made it harder for people to be able to purchase a home. If that were the case both Willow Ridge and Amherst did not take as big of a hit as Erie County did. From 2010 through 2013 – 2017, Willow Ridge occupancy decreased from 97.0% to 92.7%, Amherst decreased from 95.1% to 94.7%, and Erie County increased from 89.9% to 90.8%

Since then both Willow Ridge and the Town of Amherst are still experiencing a decrease in the number of occupants per unit while the vacancy rate per unit is steadily increasing. A reason for this to be happening in Willow Ridge and other parts of Amherst could be due to the increase in the amount of out of town ownership. Although this is not a huge increase a possibility for this to be the case is because people are starting to move out of the first-ring suburbs like certain parts of Amherst and are moving further out towards areas like Lancaster and Clarence.

**Table 18 – Occupancy Status**

Vacancy Status	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2010	2013 - 2017
Occupied	3,334 (96.3%)	3,858 (97.0%)	4,047 (92.7%)	45,076 (96.3%)	48,246 (95.1%)	49,872 (94.7%)	380,873 (91.6%)	378,080 (89.9%)	386,371 (90.8%)
Vacant	127 (3.7%)	121 (3.0%)	320 (7.3%)	1,727 (3.7%)	2,479 (4.9%)	2,792 (5.3%)	39,995 (8.4%)	42,532 (10.1%)	39,345 (9.2%)

Table 19 shows that between 2010 through 2013 - 2017 the occupied units in Tract 91.15 decreased slightly from 96.3% to 96.1 % while there was a 181 increase in the number of occupied units. Conversely, Tract 91.15 experienced a decrease during the same time from 97.5% to 90% while the number of occupied units increased by eight. This is important to note because it has been Tract 91.15 that impact overall trends in Willow Ridge, but for occupancy status Tract 91.16 in influencing the trend. The increase in vacant units has risen in Tract 91.16 from 56 to 245 units.

**Table 19 – Willow Ridge Occupancy Status**

Year	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2010	2013 - 2017	2010	2013 - 2017
Occupied	1,674 (96.3%)	1,855 (96.1%)	2,184 (97.5%)	2,192 (90%)
Vacant	65 (3.7%)	75 (3.9%)	56 (2.5%)	245 (10.1%)

### Race of Householder

Race of householder is another way to look at change in a community. Table 20 displays the data for this section. Between Erie County, Amherst, and Willow Ridge most householders are white. In 2000 the white population was 87.4% in Willow Ridge, 91.3% in Amherst, and 83.8% in Erie County. In 2010, Willow Ridge remained at 87.4% while Amherst and Erie County decreased to 87.3% and 77.5 respectively. From 2006 – 2010 through 2013 -2017, Willow Ridge and Amherst experienced a decrease to 70.6% in Willow Ridge and 86.5% in Amherst, while Erie County increased to 80.8%. Since Willow Ridge is located within the Amherst, the percentage values are similar, with exception of the Asian population. In 2000, Willow Ridge had 7.9% Asian householders whereas Amherst only had 3.8%. In 2017, the Asian householder was 20.8% in Willow Ridge and 5.7% in Amherst. From 2000 to 2017, there was an increase in diversity of householders. Although most householders were white, more households are becoming African Americans, Asians, and people of other races.

Table 20 – Race of Householder

	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2006 -2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2006 -2010	2013 -2017	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017
White	2,963 (87.4%)	3,296 (87.4%) (+/- 184)	2,856 (70.6%) (+/- 237)	36,881 (91.3%)	38,828 (87.3%) (+/- 593)	39,629 (86.5%) (+/- 619)	319,318 (83.8%)	311,587 (77.5%) (+/-1,600)	312,175 (80.8%) (+/- 1,450)
African American	124 (3.5%)	49 (1.3%) (+/- 136)	201 (5.0%) (+/- 107)	1,390 (3.4%)	2,042 (4.6%) (+/- 340)	2,702 (5.9%) (+/- 331)	47,527 (12.5%)	49,401 (14.8%) (+/- 868)	51,691 (13.4%) (+/- 816)
Asian	217 (7.9%)	389 (10.3%) (+/- 126)	843 (20.8%) (+/-155)	1,545 (3.8%)	2,813 (6.3%) (+/- 399)	2,630 (5.7%) (+/- 272)	4,241 (1.1%)	6,865 (1.8%) (+/- 378)	8,934 (2.3%) (+/-379)
Other	30 (0.9%)	39 (1.0%) (+/-300)	147 (3.6%) (+/- 81)	582 (1.4%)	790 (1.8%) (+/- 977)	864 (1.9%) (+/- 241)	9,787 (2.6%)	10,227 (2.7%) (+/-658)	13,571 (3.5%) (+/-718)

By looking at the Tract level data, it can be determined if the increased population of Asian householder is due to the increased number of students living in Willow Ridge. Tract 91.15 shows a significant increase in Asian householders between 2006 – 2010 through 2013 – 2017 from 12.6% to 33.5%. While Tract 91.16 encounters a slight increase, it does not account for the overall increase meaning that the rise in student population in Tract 91.15 is prevalent.

Table 21 – Willow Ridge Race of Householder

	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2006 – 2013	2013 - 2017	2006 -2010	2013 – 2017
White	1,500 (86.1%) (+/- 139)	1,043 (56.2%) (+/-148)	1,796 (88.5%) (+/- 121)	1,813 (82.7%) (+/- 186)
African American	0 (+/- 123)	114 (6.2%) (+/- 85)	49 (2.4%) (+/- 39)	87 (4.0%) (+/- 66)
Asian	219 (12.6%) (+/- 106)	622 (33.5%) (+/- 114)	170 (8.4%) (+/- 70)	221 (10.1%) (+/- 107)
Other	24 (1.4%) (+/- 215)	76 (4.1%) (+/- 44)	15 (0.7%) (+/- 214)	71 (3.2%) (+/- 71)

## Housing Values

Housing values for Willow Ridge are shown in Table 22. From 2006 – 2010 through 2013 -2017 house value over \$300,000 increased in Erie County and Amherst from 7.1% to 10.8% in Erie County and from 9.7% to 14.7% in Amherst. Willow Ridge did not experience the same increase, it decreased from 5.9% to 2.8% during the same time frame. Willow Ridge experienced an increase in house values from \$150,000 – \$300,000 showing that values have dropped since 2006 – 2010.

**Table 22 – House Values**

	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2006-2010	2013 -2017	2000	2006-2010	2013 -2017	2000	2006-2010	2013 -2017
Less than \$49,999	0	59 (3.2%) (+/- 474)	29 (1.7%) (+/- 53)	148 (0.4%)	466 (1.4%) (+/-1,522)	674 (1.8%) (+/- 221)	13,876 (5.6%)	23,762 (9.5%) (+/- 966)	20,610 (8.2%) (+/- 880)
\$50,000 - \$99,999	293 (16.8%)	376 (20.1%) (+/- 294)	430 (25.4%) (+/- 121)	2,613 (8.6%)	4,355 (13.1%) (+/- 829)	3,603 (9.6%) (+/- 369)	52,527 (21.1%)	74,626 (29.8%) (+/- 1,582)	50,587 (20.1%) (+/- 1,363)
\$100,000 - \$149,999	434 (24.9%)	574 (30.8%) (+/- 135)	340 (20.1%) (+/- 100)	9,485 (31.2%)	9,003 (27.2%) (+/- 577)	9,219 (24.5%) (+/- 595)	98,344 (39.5%)	65,341 (26.1%) (+/- 1,620)	66,522 (26.5%) (+/- 1,460)
\$150,000 - \$300,000	945 (54.3%)	746 (40.0%) (+/- 255)	845 (49.9%) (+/-159)	15,444 (50.8%)	16,094 (48.6%) (+/- 830)	18,569 (49.4%) (+/- 766)	71,621 (28.8%)	68,802 (27.5%) (+/- 1,459)	86,312 (34.4%) (+/- 1,778)
More than \$300,000	67 (3.9%)	111 (5.9%) (+/- 329)	48 (2.8%) (+/- 67)	2,709 (8.9%)	3,203 (9.7%) (+/-1013)	5,540 (14.7%) (+/- 462)	12,413 (5.0%)	17,707 (7.1%) (+/- 788)	27,181 (10.8%) (+/- 1,027)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

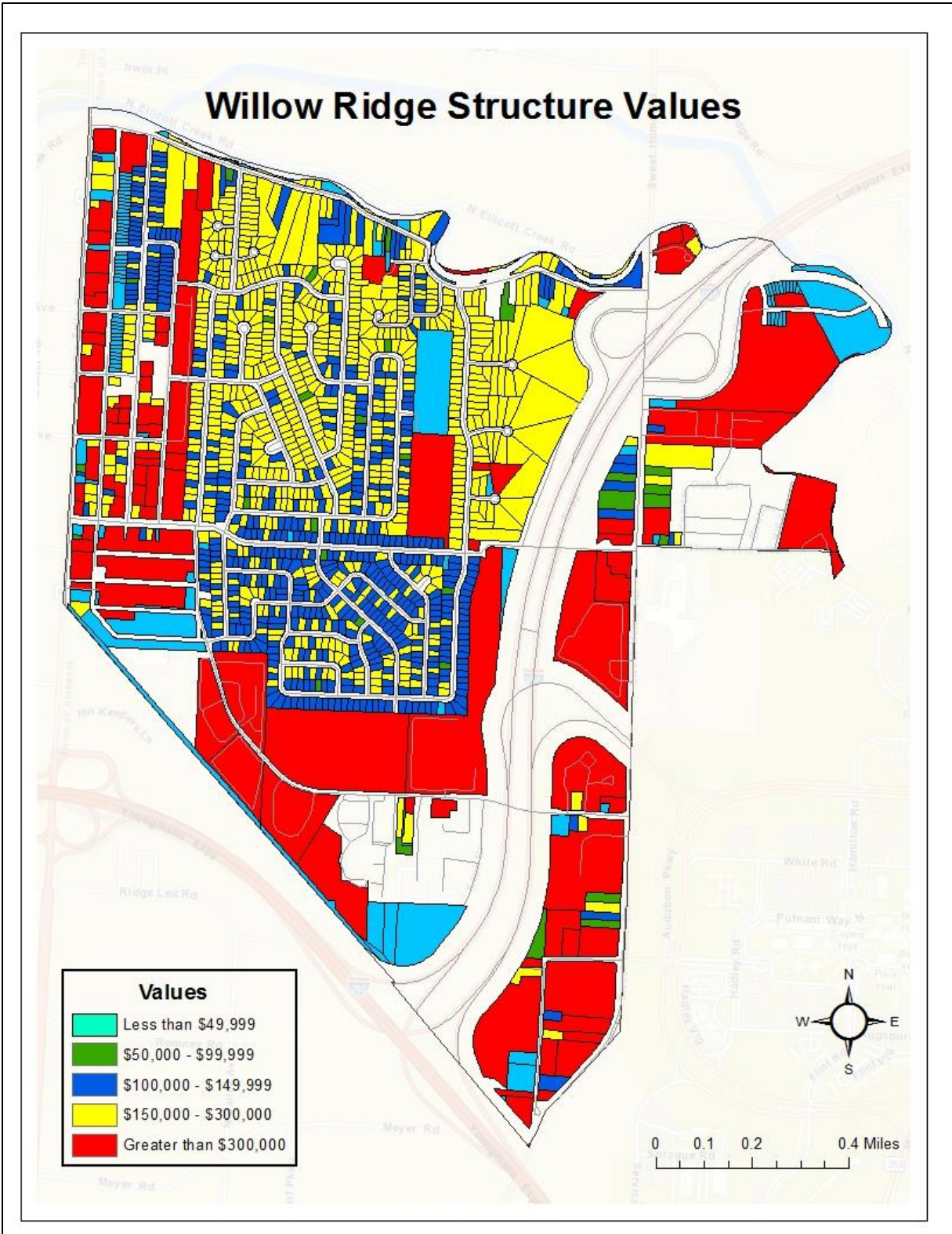
Referencing the above data and comparing it to each individual tract in Willow Ridge shows that the decline in house values over \$300,000 is not exclusive to one tract. In both census tracts, the highest value homes decrease. An interesting occurrence can be seen when comparing the middle house values from \$50,000-\$149,999. In this range, values in Tract 91.15 all increase while in Tract 91.16 values decrease. Lastly, house values from \$150,000-\$299,999 increase in Tract 91.16 and decrease in Tract 91.15 from 2000-2017.

**Table 23 – Willow Ridge House Values**

	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2006 - 2010	2013 -2017	2006 - 2010	2013 -2017
Less than \$49,999	59 (7.9%) (+/- 328)	17 (2.7%) (+/- 33)	0 (+/- 348)	12 (1.1%) (+/- 46)
\$50,000 - \$99,999	376 (50.2%) (+/- 113)	398 (62.1%) (+/- 112)	0 (+/- 275)	32 (3.0%) (+/- 51)
\$100,000- \$149,999	227 (30.3%) (+/- 89)	188 (29.3%) (+/- 58)	347 (31.1%) (+/- 103)	152 (14.5%) (+/- 51)
\$150,000- \$299,999	73 (9.7%) (+/- 89)	38 (5.9%) (+/- 29)	673 (8.7%) (+/- 139)	807 (76.8%) (+/- 159)
More than \$300,000	14 (1.9%) (+/- 247)	0	97 (8.7%) (+/- 223)	48 (4.6%) (+/-64)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

Figure 13 – Structure Values



Structure values allow for the visualization of overall household value in Willow Ridge. Figure 13 provides a visualization for the structure values in the Willow Ridge community. Values were calculated by subtracting assessed land value of a parcel from the total assessed value of a parcel. Key elements to note, while this data provides structure values the parcel data used contains assessed values of land and total assessment values for each parcel that may have been zero or may have been equal. This is significant because values that are equal will be shown on the map as being zero dollars. This is due to a building not being present on a given parcel. This data was obtained through the 2017 parcel data located on the Erie County website. Below are a series of maps which provide a breakdown of structure values based on three land use types, residential, business, and commercial.

Based on Figure 13 single family residential located in the northern part of Willow Ridge consist of most of the structure values between \$100,000 - \$149,000 and \$150,000 - \$300,000. Non-residential land uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard consist of mostly structure values that are greater than \$300,000. The reason this is important is because of the amount of tax revenue generated by all the land uses in Willow Ridge. While the apartments located along Chestnut Ridge Road are not favorable, they are valued over \$300,000 and generate a lot of revenue for Amherst.

## Rent

Rent is another important aspect of the neighborhood to consider because of the student population. From Table 24, it can be seen that between 2006 – 2010 through 2013 – 2017 the percentage of rent more than \$1,000 increase in Erie County, Amherst, and Willow Ridge. Currently, each geography is experiencing the highest percent in this data range with Erie County at 21.2%, Amherst at 48.3%, and Willow Ridge at 53.5%. This is important because while there are a lot of student living in Willow Ridge, the cost of rent is high.

These values are important because Willow Ridge is located in close proximity to the University at Buffalo campus, so students will look for prices in their range. Most colleges students cannot afford expensive apartment and will choose less expensive options. If the rent values in Willow Ridge decrease, then the area becomes more appealing for students because the price is right.

**Table 24 – Gross Rent**

	Willow Ridge			Amherst			Erie County		
	2000	2006 -2010	2013 - 2017	2000	2006 -2010	2013 -2017	2000	2006 - 2010	2013 - 2017
Less than \$499	120 (7.6%)	158 (8.3%) (+/- 416)	120 (5.1%) (+/-86)	1,040 (10.3%)	1,835 (14.1%) (+/- 1,647)	1,374 (11.1%) (+/- 323)	21,762 (16.6%)	25,696 (20.1%) (+/- 1,120)	19,381 (14.3%) (+/- 985)
\$500 - \$999	736 (46.4%)	1,218 (63.9%) (+/- 336)	904 (38.4%) (+/-210)	4,193 (41.6%)	6,812 (52.2%) (+/- 1,293)	4,304 (35.0%) (+/- 448)	84,542 (64.4%)	81,611 (63.8%) (+/- 2,105)	81,740 (60.5%) (+/- 1,928)
More than \$1,000	730 (46.1%)	481 (25.2%) (+/- 241)	1,259 (53.5%) (+/- 232)	4,456 (44.3%)	3,929 (30.1%) (+/- 938)	5,929 (48.3%) (+/- 564)	19,944 (15.2%)	15,669 (12.3%) (+/- 950)	28,697 (21.2%) (+/- 1,176)
No Cash Rent	9 (0.6%)	50 (2.6%) (+/- 41)	72 (3.1%) (+/-49)	379 (3.8%)	460 (2.5%) (+/-432)	676 (5.5%) (+/- 187)	5,024 (3.9%)	4,866 (3.8%) (+/- 473)	5,341 (4.0%) (+/- 406)

\* Reported in 2017 dollars

Using Table 25 to determine in Tract 91.15 is heavily influencing the overall data for Willow Ridge, it can be seen that it is not. For rent over \$1,000 in 2013 - 2017, Tract 91.15 and Tract 91.16 are over 50% with values of 54.7% and 52.1%, respectively.

**Table 25 – Willow Ridge Gross Rent**

	Tract 91.15		Tract 91.16	
	2006 – 2013	2013 - 2017	2006 -2010	2013 – 2017
Less than \$499	64 (6.4%) (+/- 309)	0 (+/- 32)	94 (10.3%) (+/- 286)	120 (10.5%) (+/- 83)
\$500 - \$999	678 (68.2%) (+/- 258)	509 (41.9%) (+/- 132)	540 (59.1%) (+/- 220)	395 (34.6%) (+/- 166)
More than \$1,000	229 (23.0%) (+/- 166)	664 (54.7%) (+/- 142)	252 (27.6%) (+/- 178)	595 (52.1%) (+/- 185)
No Cash Rent	23 (2.3%) (+/- 29)	41 (3.4%) (+/- 36)	27 (3.0%) (+/- 29)	31 (2.7%) (+/- 34)



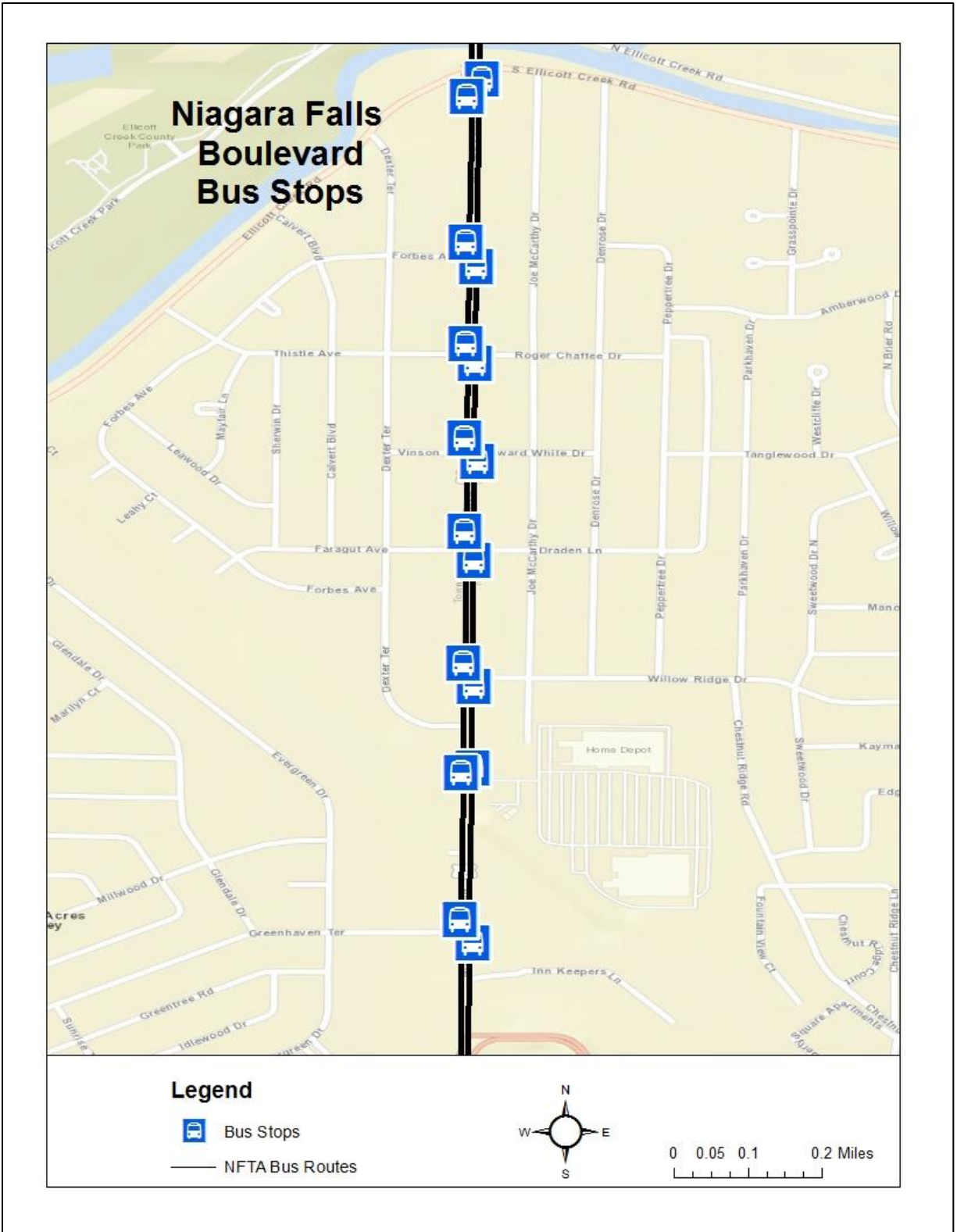
# Transportation Profile

## Public Transportation Access and Ridership

Willow Ridge has limited access to public transportation. Based on the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority's (NFTA) route map, Figure 14, there is only one bus route that directly services the Willow Ridge community: Route 34 Niagara Falls Boulevard. The route runs from University Station to Hazelwood and Wood Bridge, which is slightly North of Willow Ridge. The route extends past Hazelwood Drive on E Robinson Road

Route 34 is considered by the agency to be a secondary route, a route that does not have high ridership volumes. Ridership dictates how frequent buses serve a specific route, as well as influencing other potential future alterations made to existing routes.

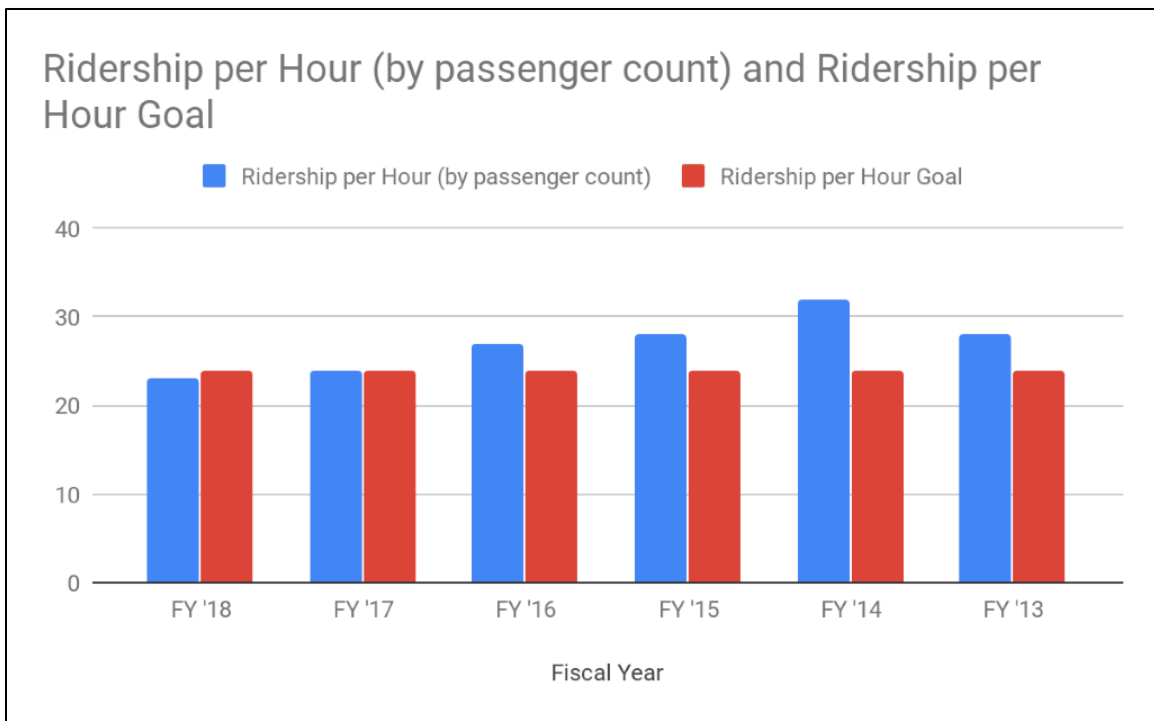
Figure 14 – Niagara Falls Boulevard Bus Infrastructure



On Niagara Falls Boulevard between Inn Keepers Lane and South Ellicott Creek Road, there are 16 bus stops (half inbound stops, half outbound stops). Each stop appears to be situated at or near major and minor intersections within the area, which provides other surrounding streets with access to the system in some capacity.

As of March 2018, Route 34’s weekday ridership has decreased by one passenger per hour in comparison to the previous year. On their annual performance report, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority reported that in Fiscal Year ‘17, its ridership for route 34 had reached their goal of 24 passengers per hour on weekday services, while decreasing to 23 passengers per hour during weekday services in 2018, indicating that ridership somewhere along this line is decreasing. In comparison to previous fiscal years, the count for route 34 has decreased since the 2014 count.

**Figure 15 – Ridership per Hour**



*NFTA Ridership* [source: <https://metro.nfta.com/About/Info.aspx> ] \*(View Metro Annual Performance Reports 2015-2018)

**Table 26 – Ridership**

Fiscal Year	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Ridership per Hour	23	24	27	28	32	28
Ridership per Hour Goal	24	24	24	24	24	24

Source: NFTA Annual Performance Reports 2013-2018; <https://metro.nfta.com/About/Info.aspx>

Roadway System

Vehicular Traffic Counts:

From a vehicular traffic standpoint, Willow Ridges sees an abundance of automobile traffic. Some responses from the concentric circles exercise indicate that traffic was an issue with the community. In order to address this claim, Annual Average Daily Traffic counts (AADT) were examined to understand current traffic counts. . Contrary to public concern and belief, traffic moving through Willow Ridge is decreasing. This finding is counterintuitive to proclamations made by residents.

**Figure 16 – Turning Movement Counts**

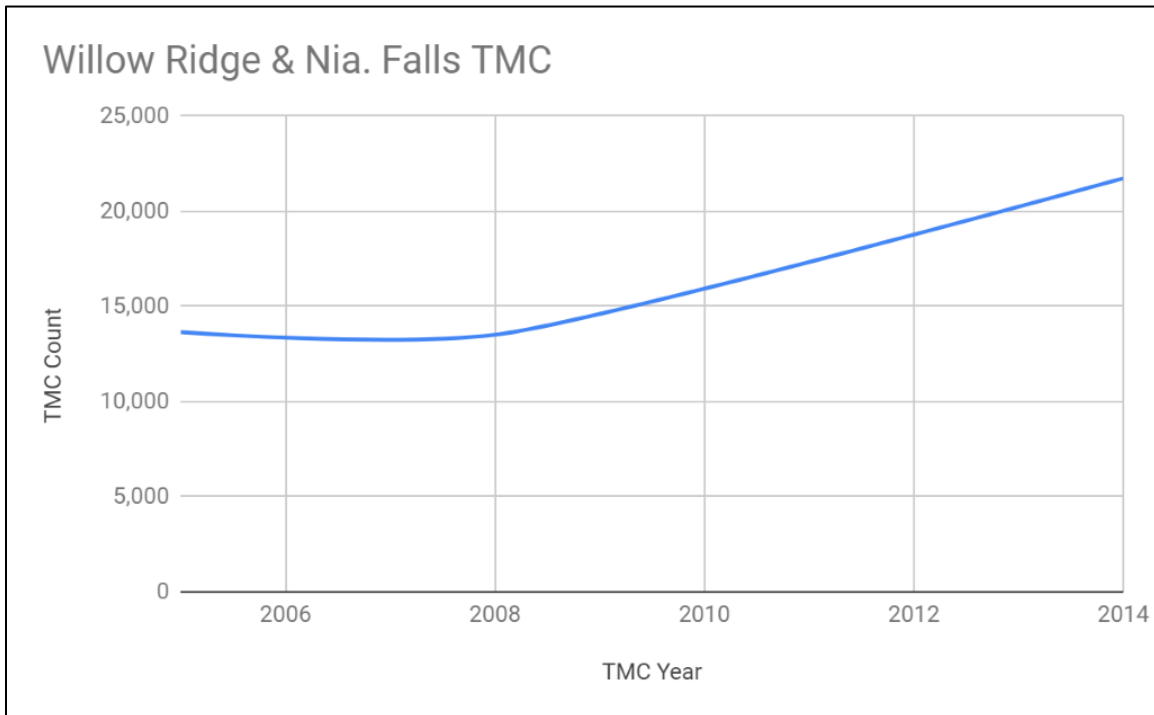
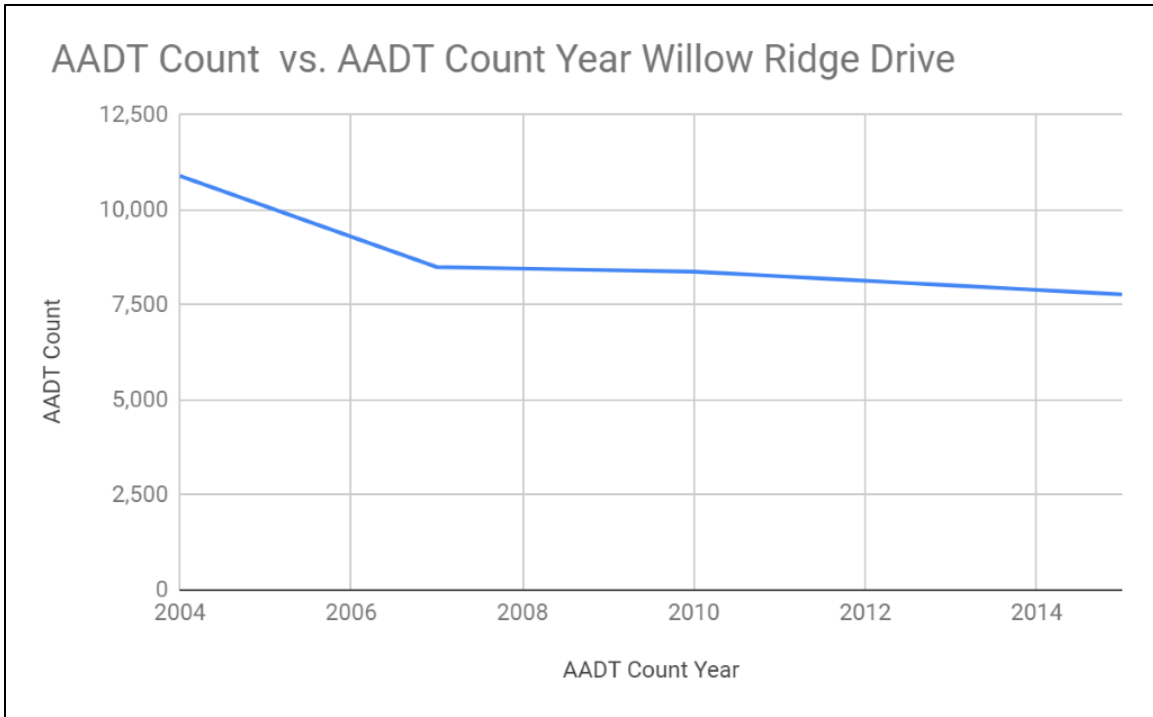


Figure 17 – AADT Count vs. Year



On the previous page are two figures (Figure 16 and Figure 17) that convey different traffic volume assessments. These charts address the concern of growing traffic within the neighborhood, as an approach to gauge the flow of traffic in and out of Willow Ridge. The first of the charts, Figure 16, is for the Niagara Falls Boulevard and Willow Ridge Drive intersection, one of the main entry points of the neighborhood. This intersection between 2005 and 2014 has seen some fluctuation in counts over the years, however, from 2008 to 2014 there has been steady growth in the number of vehicles counted within this intersection at the times the TMC (Turning Movement Counts/Counters) took the traffic counts. This specific chart indicates that traffic at the intersection of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Willow Ridge Drive has been on a steady increase over the years, confirming the claim that traffic is increasing.

Figure 17 is the graphical representation of traffic counts that were taken at a fixed position at the intersection of Willow Ridge Drive and Park Haven Drive, and accounts for the traffic that flows east and west on that street. The counts were recorded between 2004 and 2015, covering an 11-year span of change. Between 2004 and 2007, traffic was reported to have a steady decrease as shown above; this decrease being greater than the decrease following 2008, with a decrease of 2,400 vehicles within three years. In 2010, it was recorded that 8,380 vehicles had traveled on Willow Ridge in that given year. Another count was taken again in 2015, which is the most recent recording. It reports that 7,782 vehicles had traveled on Willow Ridge within a year, signaling a traffic volume decrease of nearly 600 vehicles within a five-year span (2010-2015). Though traffic volumes on the Boulevard have significantly increased, traffic on Willow Ridge has declined by a significant amount. The decline in traffic on roads within Willow Ridge are visible within documents, but it is unclear what has caused the fluctuation of

traffic within the community. This information can be useful in roadway management services, possibly as an indicator of what roads need to be serviced or maintained based on traffic volumes and design capacity.

### Means of Travel to Work

Another critical element worthy of assessment is the means residents use in order to get to work. Understanding the various ways that people travel within the community builds insight and character to a community's story.

Table 27 -Means to Travel to Work

Means of Travel	2000	2010	2013 - 2017
Car, Truck, Van	3,508 (93.1%)	3,657 (92.5%) (+/- 279)	3,701 (89.9%) (+/- 365)
Drove Alone	3,258 (92.9%)	3,493 (95.5%) (+/- 272)	3,349 (81.3%) (+/-339)
Carpooled	250 (7.1%)	164 (4.5%) (+/- 63)	352 (8.6%) (+/- 1.49)
Public Transportation	44 (1.2%)	51 (1.3%) (+/- 96)	282 (6.9%) (+/- 273)
Motorcycle	0	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 17)
Bicycle	31 (0.8%)	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/-17)
Walked	58 (1.5%)	117 (3.0%) (+/- 50)	81 (2.0%) (+/- 58)
Other Means	3 (0.1%)	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/-17)
Worked from Home	123 (3.3%)	128 (3.2%) (+/- 47)	53 (1.3%) (+/- 58)
Total Workers	3,767	3,953 (+/- 282)	4,118 (+/- 417)

Table 27 shows the percent of people who travel by car, truck, or van decreased slightly from 2000 through 2013 -2017 from 93.1% to 89.9%. During the same timeframe, public transportation has increase from 1.2% to 6.9%. These two points counter the claim that more people are traveling via car in the Willow Ridge area.

**Table 28 - Means of Travel to Work for Willow Ridge Census Tracts**

Means of Travel	2006 – 2010		2013 - 2017	
	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16	Tract 91.15	Tract 91.16
Car, Truck, Van	1,246 (90.0%) (+/- 273)	2,411 (93.9%) (+/- 284)	1,299 (80.4%) (+/- 272)	2,402 (96.0%) (+/- 249)
Drove Alone	1,177 (94.4%) (+/- 260)	2,316 (96.1%) (+/- 284)	1,032 (79.4%) (+/- 224)	2,317 (96.5%) (+/-259)
Carpooled	69 (5.6%) (+/- 64)	95 (3.9%) (+/- 62)	267 (20.6%) (+/- 133)	85 (3.5%) (+/-71)
Public Transportation	51 (3.7%) (+/-69)	0 (+/- 123)	221 (13.7%) (+/-268)	61 (2.4%) (+/- 64)
Motorcycle	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 11)	0 (+/- 16)
Bicycle	0 (+/- 57)	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 11)	0 (+/- 16)
Walked	62 (4.5%) (+/- 57)	55 (2.3%) (+/- 44)	56 (3.5%) (+/- 53)	25 (1.0%) (+/- 28)
Other Means	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 123)	0 (+/- 11)	0 (+/- 16)
Worked from Home	26 (1.9%) (+/-31)	102 (4.0%) (+/- 63)	38 (2.4%) (+/- 32)	15 (0.6%) (+/- 20)
Total Workers	1,385 (+/- 280)	2,568 (+/- 283)	1,615 (+/- 332)	2,503 (+/- 257)

[Source: American Community Survey & Census Bureau]

To further understand if the means of travel is impacted by the student population, Tract 91.15 and Tract 91.16 must be analyzed. From Table 28 it can be seen that the percent of people who travel to work has decreased for tract 91.15 from 2006 – 2013 through 2013 -2017 but increased for Tract 91.16. So, the student population is impacted the data for Willow Ridge.

#### Vehicular Ownership:

With the past two decades, automobile ownership has been increasing prior to 2010. As indicated in the Means to Work section, it was revealed that within a decade (2000-2010) the work force increased, as well as the amount of people that relied on some method of transportation to get them to their desired destinations. The automobile (summarizing cars, trucks and vans into one category) has seen a slight rise from the increase in workforce population.

Below is a chart that illustrates the aggregate value of households, by occupancy tenure, that owned at least one vehicle. Within the following table (Table 29), it is clear that homeowners were the dominant vehicle owners within the neighborhood up until the 2017 reported estimates.

**Table 29 – Number of Households w/ Vehicles Present**

Households	Year		
	2000	2010	2017
Renters	1,594	2,286	3,237
Owners	1,740	3,861	2,990
Total	3,334	6,147	6,227

In 2000, vehicle ownership was 3,334 and increased to 6,147 by 2010, then increased to 6,227 in 2017. What is noticeable about this increase is that between 2000 and 2010, the vehicle ownership nearly doubling vehicle ownership within the community. Between 2010 and 2017, the ownership increase had dropped down to just one percentage point, indicating some demographic shifts could be responsible for the decrease in how quickly vehicle ownership rates changed within the community.

It can be inferred that changes in the ages and tenure of the neighborhood residents is responsible for the noticeable changes in vehicle ownership levels. Senior citizen aged residents are more likely to not have a need to travel as frequently and it is also possible that renters, college students and younger residents within Willow Ridge are dominantly more reliant on having an automobile to get to their intended destinations within the region.

### Roadway Network: Willow Ridge’s Connections

With respect to site and situation, Willow Ridge has a prime location relative to some of the region’s most traveled thoroughfares and other major roadways that connect various communities. Willow Ridge is host to several roads of different functional class types that serve different purposes.

The Functional Class Map is provided by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), and it shows the designation of recognized roads within the state “Principal Arterial Interstates” are interstates are high volume highways that carry a significant amount of the region’s through traffic, connecting Willow Ridge to other areas such as Niagara Falls, Lockport, Clarence, and Buffalo. Interstate-290 also connects Willow Ridge to Interstate-90, which provides more access to places within and outside of this region. The following road class would be

“Principal Arterial Expressway” which in this instance is the connector between Interstate-990 and the University at Buffalo. This roadway is responsible for dealing with most of the college’s incoming and outgoing traffic.

The next class would be “Principal Arterial Other is given to roads that have properties of highways (higher road speed, more lanes, less traffic lights) which allows for more travel to take place within the area at a faster pace. Willow Ridge has access to three of these types of roads including Niagara Falls



Boulevard, Maple Road and Millersport Highway, which all have speed limits greater than 35 miles per hour and come accompanied with at least five traffic lanes total. This specific class is more responsible for moving traffic towards high density commercial sites such as business parks, stores, restaurants and other recreational facilities that create a demanding traffic base that occupies these roads.

Following the “Principle Arterial Other” class are the “Minor Arterial” which are more prevalent around Willow Ridge. These roads serve the purpose to move traffic from the higher function roads to lower function local roads, where most destination and trip origin points within and around the community can be found.

The last two road function types that can be found within and around the community are “Major Collectors”. The collector class roads are responsible for moving traffic from the local roads to the higher function roads, which increases the accessibility of Willow Ridge. The local roads are responsible for moving traffic in and out of the more residential communities to the higher functional roads extending out of Willow Ridge.

An extensive road network such as the one present within Willow Ridge is designed for an automobile-dependent constituency. The automobile is the most prevalent mode of transportation, given that this specific road network is most beneficial for automobile travelers. Within American suburban communities, it is not uncommon for a transportation network to be more designed for the automobile as opposed to public transportation or pedestrian/bicycle traffic. These communities tend to have greater distances between residential communities and other daily destinations such as places of employment, shopping centers, hospitals and other facilities in comparison to urban communities. Demonstrated on the last map, suburban communities such as Willow Ridge are not designed on the traditional spoke and grid street systems like urban communities. This makes vehicle ownership more of a necessity than a luxury item, as residents are more reliable on their automobiles to get them to their desired destinations.

## Bicycle and Pedestrian System

### Walkability and Bike-ability:

This transportation scope focused on pedestrian and bicyclist traffic within the area. In order to create a base to verify claims, data involving pedestrian and bicycle traffic were extrapolated from Walk Score. Walk Score is a trusted and accredited provider of pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit information. These data sets come from various algorithms that incorporate safety factors, commute timing, distance and convenience, along with several other aspects of pedestrian and bicyclist traffic into the scoring rubric. These data sets are available to the public to provide a clear understanding of the quality of pedestrian and bicycle related transportation within any defined geography.

Based on data derived from Walk Score, it can be determined that Willow Ridge was not designed to comfortably account for pedestrian traffic. The data that this organization has prepared for Willow Ridge Drive, and surrounding thoroughfares within the defined neighborhood, generally indicates that traveling to destinations within and around the area calls for the automobile to be used.

**Table 30 – Walk Scores**

<b>Street Name</b>	<b>Walk Score</b>	<b>Transit Score</b>	<b>Bike Score</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Willow Ridge Dr.	32	26	45	Almost all errands require an automobile; pubic transportations accessible
Chestnut Ridge Rd.	4	N/A	35	Almost all errands require an automobile; pubic transportations accessible
South Ellicott Creek Rd.	11	24	45	Almost all errands require an automobile; pubic transportations accessible
Kaymar Dr.	22	N/A	42	Almost all errands require an automobile
Community Average Score	17.25	12.5	41.75	N/A
New York City	89	84	68	New York City, NY

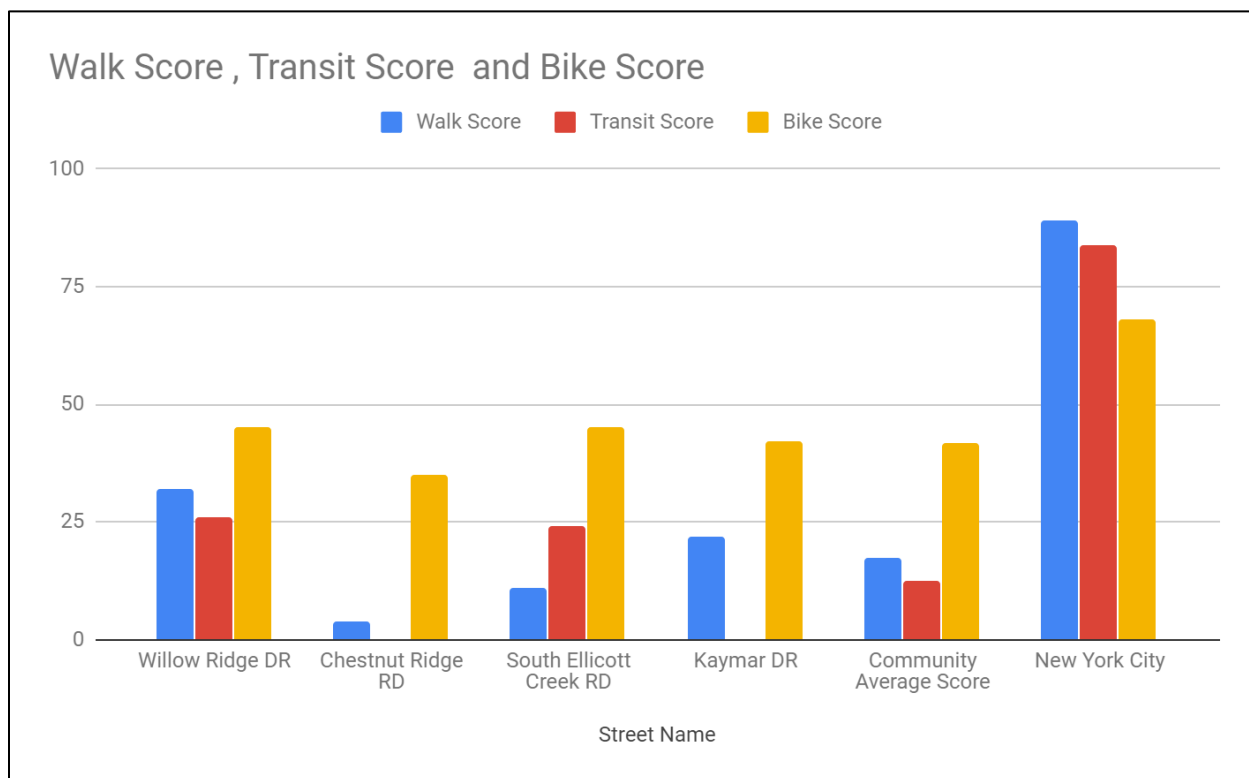
Source: <https://www.walkscore.com/score/willow-ridge-dr-and-denrose-dr-erie-ny-14228>

<https://www.walkscore.com/score/chestnut-ridge-rd-erie-county-ny-14228>

<https://www.walkscore.com/score/s-ellicott-creek-rd-erie-county-ny-14228>

<https://www.walkscore.com/score/kaymar-dr-erie-county-ny-14228>

**Figure 18 – Walk Score, Bike Score, and Transit Score**



When viewing Figure 18, the walkability data of Willow Ridge, the following streets were selected to provide some contextual basis; Willow Ridge Drive, Chestnut Ridge Drive, South Ellicott Creek Road, and Kaymar Drive. Additionally, the nation’s lowest scoring city (Fayetteville, NC) and the nation’s highest scoring city (New York, NY) were added to the graph to provide a comparative base to the situation. As seen above, the streets of Willow Ridge average between the nation’s lowest and highest scored geographies in certain categories. However, their general scoring is closer to the low scoring city, Fayetteville. It can be generalized that Willow Ridge does have a minor walkability issue, which can be attributed to distance and safety factors. A similar generalization can be made for the neighborhood’s level of bike ability; this score ranks relatively halfway between the national high- and low-ranking cities. This indicates that Willow Ridge does possess some favorable characteristics for those residents that frequently or casually bike as a means for transportation within and throughout the community.

The walkability of this neighborhood can be directly tied to the safety of walking, as well as the distance between trip origins and amenities. When discussing traveling distances and walkability, it is important to realize what defines the scope of walkability, from a time and spatial perspective. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the distance that draws the line between whether someone is likely to walk or drive to a place is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile, or roughly five minutes walking time. Any distance greater than that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile or exceeding a five-minute walk warrants the decision to drive to a destination rather than walk to it. Within Willow Ridge, most amenities such as shops, grocery stores and other businesses are located within plazas along the stretch of Niagara Falls Boulevard. Though these places appear to be relatively convenient for automobile owners, it is more inconvenient for those residents that are without automobiles for several reasons.

## Niagara Falls Boulevard: Strong Automobile Design, Safety Risks for Pedestrians

Focusing on pedestrian perspective, traveling along Niagara Falls Boulevard is not a pleasant trip. Identified by community members, public officials and news media outlets is the safety risk posed on pedestrians and cyclists along the boulevard. As of the end of 2018, there has been six confirmed automobile-related pedestrian fatalities within five years along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Niagara Falls Boulevard stretches North from Buffalo, through Amherst and Tonawanda and throughout Niagara County, terminating at the Rainbow Bridge. Out of these six fatalities, five have happened between dusk and dawn, where visibility is limited, accompanied with the low amount of street lighting that is alongside the high-volume roadway. Two of these fatalities happened at the same intersection within the same year. All six fatalities, however, were related to pedestrians attempting to cross the boulevard which is very dangerous across five to six lanes of traffic. Brian Kulpa, Supervisor of the Town of Amherst, stated that the boulevard was a “pedestrian wasteland” and “goes beyond dangerous”, indicating that elected officials are aware of the mounting safety concerns posed by the built infrastructure and plan to address the growing safety concern.

Niagara Falls Boulevard is a New York State road, which assigns the duty of maintaining and operating the road to the New York State Department of Transportation, while Amherst and Tonawanda are responsible for land use and zoning, sidewalk provision and management, as well as street lighting within the corridor. Local leaders have attributed these fatalities to the lack of street lighting infrastructure as well as poor pedestrian crossing infrastructure, which does assign some level of liability to the municipalities regarding the process of rectifying safety and infrastructure concerns. The joint pedestrian audit completed by Amherst and Tonawanda identify some of the key concerns and insufficiencies that are levied on their communities by Niagara Falls Boulevard.

### Pedestrian Audit Summary/Findings:

The Niagara Falls Boulevard Pedestrian Audit provides insight about pedestrian and bicyclist safety on “The Boulevard”, especially the span along the Willow Ridge Community. Safety concerns surrounding “The Boulevard” in Willow Ridge have been attributed to the following factors and insufficiencies; sidewalk obstructions, low lighting along sidewalks and bus stops, improper placement of ADA infrastructures and a lack of pedestrian crossing infrastructure. The pedestrian audit is focused on improving pedestrian safety and mobility on the portion of “The Boulevard” that spans from Ridge Lea Road and Koenig Road, terminating the northern intersection of East Robinson Road. These boundaries include Willow Ridge within the project. The following excerpt defines some of the hard goals of the proposed project, as well as some of the resources that have been allocated to further propel the project;

“The Town of Amherst has been provided Highway Safety Improvement Program funding to install street lighting along Niagara Falls Boulevard from Inn Keepers Lane to the north boundary line of Amherst with Niagara County. Amherst has partnered with the Town of Tonawanda to design street lighting on the west side in conjunction with their project as existing wooden utility poles owned by National Grid are available to add street lighting. Construction is anticipated in 2019 to install 4,000k level LED street lighting within the study area under PIN 5762.37.” [NFB Safety Audit 2018].

Some notable citations that were made in the audit include but are not limited to:

- Bicyclists were noted using sidewalks, as no significant bicycle accommodations are provided on the road
- Transit stops do not have shelter nor seating. A makeshift seat exists at the Willow Ridge south bound transit stop. Two northbound and two southbound bus stops exist in this segment. Loading areas and surfaces are substandard
- The intersection at Willow Ridge Drive does not have a crosswalk on the south leg. The westbound lane has an exclusive left turn lane and a shared left right turn lane but, through traffic into the plaza on the opposite site is not restricted. The location of the driveway north of Willow Ridge is too close to the crosswalk
- The intersection of Faragut and Draden is unsignalized. Transit stops exist on both sides of the boulevard indicating potential pedestrian desire lines to access stops. The nearest signalized intersection is 634 feet to the north
- There is no crosswalk on the south leg of either Ellicott Creek road intersections. ADA push buttons and detectable warning plates are improperly located or missing
- Parking lots were noted to be paved right to the back edge of sidewalks, typical along Willow Ridge. This effects adequate pedestrian buffer from parked vehicles and snow storage. A sidewalk encroachment was noted at the building at 2545 Niagara Falls Boulevard
- The signals at north and south Ellicott Creek Road are 312 feet apart and are interconnected to avoid queueing into each other's intersections during left turn phases from Ellicott Creek roads. Northbound and southbound left turn only phases get called without detection which increase overall cycle length and pedestrian crossing wait times

These citations further corroborate the claim that pedestrian and bicycle traffic were not planned for and are constantly impeded on in Willow Ridge. This indicates that there are infrastructural corrections and adjustments that need to be made to enhance the safety and mobility of pedestrian and bicycle traffic along Niagara Falls Boulevard, especially within Willow Ridge.

Not only are pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures insufficient in their service provisions, there are several noted deficiencies regarding the bus stops, which confirms the claims made in the concentric circles exercise regarding the lack of safety of the NFTA bus stops along Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Figure 19 – Edwards White Drive



[Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>]

Above in Figure 19 is the bus stop at the corner of Edward White Drive and Niagara Falls Boulevard, which demonstrates the safety concern of the bus stops. From what can be seen, there are no buffers that create a feeling of safety for pedestrians that are waiting on a bus; the stop is less than **five** feet away from the roadway, in which traffic is moving at 45 miles per hour (or even faster to be realistic). The above example would raise question on the placement of bus stops, as well as the creation or addition of safety features such as wider curb radii, enhanced curb buffers, or rumble strips in the pavement on the road.

### Transportation Profile Summary of Findings

After reviewing some of the key components of the neighborhood’s transportation system, there are some generalizations that can be drawn about Willow Ridge. Information taken from critical sources such as the concentric circles exercise, DOT traffic counts, the American Community Survey and a few other sources, it became quite clear what was going on within the area from a transportation point of view. Over time Willow Ridge has changed as a method to adapt to its ever-changing surroundings, therefore there are some obvious changes that redesigned certain aspects of the community.

From the automotive sector, there have been some changes within the area, as well as some issues that have stayed stagnant over time. Traffic volumes within the area have been shifting for quite some time, whereas the traffic going through the neighborhood has been on a decrease, while traffic along the

Boulevard has been increasing every year. Contrary to the shifting traffic counts, the vehicle ownership has slowed down in this half of the two-decade time period that our study has been oriented around. The built infrastructure within the area supports the heavy automobile traffic that moves through and around the defined geography of interest.

Pedestrians and bicycle infrastructure have lacking insufficiencies that contributes to the community's low ratings from Walk Score®. For bicycle traffic, there are some major improvements that needs to be made. Without the proper safety infrastructure in place, it can be an uneasy choice for people who prefer or would rather bike instead of drive. The bike lanes that exist within the area are very minimalist and provide no true protection from automobile traffic. The bike-ability score is based on the safety and effectiveness of bike infrastructure in the defined geography; Willow Ridge's current state proves there is room for improvement. The pedestrian aspect of this community is by far the system in the most need of repair and improvements. With sidewalk maintenance and repair being a responsibility of the property owners, the sidewalks can vary from property to property which creates impediments for pedestrians that make the most use of the sidewalks.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

A Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was completed to further understand the assets to the community and to determine where improvement can be made. A SWOT analysis is a technique used in strategic planning to analyze a place, business, or target area to prepare for future initiatives and change.

This SWOT was completed by the senior planners creating this report to obtain firsthand experience of the Willow Ridge neighborhood and to validate concerns of resident. Multiple field visits occurred to identify key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the Willow Ridge neighborhood. One person would be the notetaker while the other three people would discuss elements of the neighborhood that fit the four criteria, strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat.

**Table 31 - SWOT Matrix**

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connected to extensive bike trail system</li> <li>• Local park/playground in the community</li> <li>• A roadway system with streetlights, sidewalks, and street trees</li> <li>• Connected to UB/ City             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Next to highways I-990 and I-290</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmaintained roads/sidewalks are hazardous for pedestrians</li> <li>• Cars blocking sidewalks - specifically on the south side of the community</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community events to incorporate a variety of people/businesses</li> <li>• Development of the park to make it more desirable</li> <li>• Ellicott Creek remediation and development</li> <li>• Imagine Amherst – Comprehensive plan update</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic - specifically along Chestnut Ridge Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard</li> <li>• Rental prices rising outside of Willow Ridge</li> <li>• Declining retails businesses and increased vacancy</li> </ul>

Strengths in the Willow Ridge Community include a connection to an extensive bike trail system, a local par, an extensive sidewalk system, and a good roadway system. Some of these strengths were driving factors for community members who now reside in the Willow Ridge area.

Weaknesses include condition of sidewalks, there are stretched of the sidewalk that are unmaintained or poorly maintained. Connecting the sidewalk issue with cars blocking the sidewalk results in many pedestrians being forced off the sidewalk and onto the road. This is hazardous to pedestrians and drivers.



Willow Ridge maintains a strong community driven attitude. With the established WRCA there can be well organized community events that foster inclusion of all neighbors, not just those incorporated in the association or neighborhood bounds. This can further strengthen the sense of community and further establish a sense of place. A working community association can act as a voice for the community. Another opportunity revolves around infrastructure such as the Ellicott Creek and bike paths. Developing the Ellicott Creek will allow for users to access the area inside and outside of the community, making Willow Ridge even more of a desirable location.

Threats to the community are often external, one is the economy. Referring to Table 7, per capita income and total income have both decreased in Erie County since the year 2000. This is important because per capita income is one way to describe wealth. Since Erie County has been decreasing in per capita income it becomes less appealing to potential investors. This is significant because Willow Ridge is located in Erie County and is connected to the region's economy.

## Future Projects in Amherst

The Town of Amherst is currently undertaking a number of planning efforts to adequately address changing local and regional conditions. These projects offer residents the opportunity to get engaged in the planning process as well as during their implementation stages. The following briefly outlines a number of key plans being developed, potential futures plans being considering, and plans on the books that are in the implementation stages.

### [Niagara Falls Boulevard Pedestrian Safety Study](#)

In June of 2016 New York announced that it will be completing a comprehensive pedestrian safety plan. It is officially known as the New York State Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP) and will encompass communities outside of New York City. The scope for this project includes complying with complete streets regulations and the American with Disabilities Act to promote safety, accessibility, and mobility for all users.

In Erie County, a pedestrian safety study is being conducted for Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor (US Rte. 62 and Rte. 950K) from Kenmore Avenue to the Niagara county line. An engineering team is creating a draft report and will have it ready for review by the Department of Transportation by late spring.

### [Imagine Amherst](#)

The Town of Amherst is working on an update to the current Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code. This update is called Imagine Amherst and focuses on commercial and mixed - use centers. Its goal is to create community centers that feel like they belong in the community in terms of use and design while “encompassing the vision that residents desire”.

## Conclusions

In summary, Willow Ridge is a community which has established its own identity in Amherst. It is facing similar challenges and reaping the same rewards as the rest of Erie County, while working on solutions to further develop and strengthen the community.

Members of Willow Ridge identified concerns that they believe impact them negatively. Major concerns include the increase in student housing in the interior of the community and appearance and safety along Niagara Falls Boulevard. While other issues have been noted in this report, it seems like many issues stem from the student population in Willow Ridge and issue with Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Data collected about transportation shows that the ownership of vehicles in Willow Ridge has slowed and traffic counts along in the neighborhood have decreased since 2000. However, during the same timeframe traffic counts along Niagara Falls Boulevard have increased. New measures are being implemented to increase safety and improve appearance. The NYS DOT is working on a PSAP to improve safety, accessibility, and mobility. Amherst is completing an update to the Comprehensive plan through a report called Imagine Amherst.

By using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and American Fact Finder changes in the community can be noted from a statistical perspective. Gathering data from 2000, 2010, and 2017 presented the change in a noticeable manner the community in terms of population size, race, age, income, and poverty. Population increased overall, with the most noticeable increases occurring in the Asian population and in people aged between 20 to 24. This data is especially significant because people that fit this age range are most likely college student due to the proximity of Willow Ridge to the University of Buffalo. This data point drives the analysis for most of the data regarding Willow Ridge and the associated Census Tracts.

Along with demographic data collected, housing data was collected to further understand the change from a housing perspective. Willow Ridge land uses are predominantly residential, so a shift from owner occupied units to rent occupied units can signify an increased number of students living in the area. Looking at the housing data shows this trend. Rent data shows that the rent values in Willow Ridge have been increasing since 2010 and even with the rates increasing for rent, there is an increasing population of college students. Willow Ridge is situated perfectly for students interested in living off campus and it shows through this data.

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