

# BUILDING A PEOPLE CENTERED ECONOMY

ULSTER 2040 WORKING GROUP FINAL REPORT

SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

Version 1.0



AGRICULTURE,  
FOOD & BEVERAGE



MAKERS & CREATORS



CLEAN ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT



HEALTH, WELLNESS & CARE



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## 2 LETTER FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

This report captures the creative thinking of a group of Ulster County residents, whose collective experiences and perspectives in many ways represents the diversity of this county of 180,000 full-time residents, as they reimagined Ulster County's economic future. Our ultimate goal was to work together to set a bold vision for what our economy – and by extension our community – could and should look like by 2040, because it takes a compelling vision to push us toward a better future.

The vision that is outlined in this report represents the intersection of our natural strengths – our environment, our history, our geography – and our values as a community. It is designed to spark the imagination and to point to what's uniquely possible here, in Ulster County. It is an affirmation of every resident's right to thrive, when so many today feel like they have to struggle just to keep their heads above water. It is a reminder that putting the wellbeing of our people front and center is not only the morally right thing to do, it will also position us to emerge from the challenges of 2020 as a stronger, more resilient, and more equitable community.

As we look ahead to the steps that will help us achieve our vision for the future – a people-centered economy – we recognize that the path won't be a straight line. There will be challenges to overcome, and times when we are tempted to take shortcuts. But with this report we have taken a bearing on a north star, a future vision, so that at every twist and turn in the path ahead we can return to our collective vision to guide us forward.

I invite you to join us in envisioning this exciting and ambitious future for our County, and to commit with us to the steps ahead that will lead us there.

*Patrick K. Ryan*  
Ulster County Executive

## 3 BACKGROUND

### 3.1 ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document was prepared by the Ulster 2040 Working Group, with technical assistance and support from the staff of the Office of the Ulster County Executive, Patrick K. Ryan and the Ulster County Department of Economic Development. Tim Weidemann, Director of Innovation was the principal advisor for the project, with assistance and support from Deputy County Executive Evelyn Wright and Lisa Berger, Director of Economic Development.

In addition to the Working Group, interviews and discussions with many local and regional stakeholders informed the process and development of this report. Two public meetings were held in 2019, where participants helped shape the initial direction of this report by sharing their visions for the future, their sense of our challenges and opportunities, and their priorities for economic development.

As outlined further in the following sections, this report only represents the beginning of a process, not the final step. Even as the input synthesized here will

guide the County's near-term priorities and resource allocation decisions, the development of an economic development strategy is continual and many important decisions have yet to be made. Future input and its incorporation into this strategy will ensure that it continues to evolve as the perspectives, opinions and values of our communities change.

#### The Ulster 2040 Working Group

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## 3.2 THE ULSTER 2040 PROCESS

Ulster County's prior economic development strategy was determined through a process called "Ulster Tomorrow," which concluded in 2007 and culminated in the Ulster County's adoption of the Ulster Tomorrow report as part of its Comprehensive Plan in 2009.

As opposed to the expensive and time-consuming, multi-year process used to develop the Ulster Tomorrow report, the Ulster 2040 process has followed an alternative project development methodology that emphasizes a rapid-prototyping and design-thinking approach.

The Working Group held regular meetings over the course of the past year to develop this report. The Group's process began with an assessment of the current conditions of the County's economy and its economic development structures. In this task, the efforts of countless local and regional organizations formed a foundation for the group's work. The "Out of Alignment" report authored by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress<sup>1</sup>, the United Way's ALICE report<sup>2</sup>, the County's 2015 Target Industry Analysis<sup>3</sup>, the Mid-Hudson Regional Sustainability Plan<sup>4</sup>, the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council's 2019 Progress Report & Plan Update<sup>5</sup>, and the Hudson Valley Regional Council's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy<sup>6</sup> are just a few of the documents the group reviewed in assessing the current landscape of economic development in the greater region.

While the strategy evolves, this report will guide Ulster County's actions, investments, and priorities as they relate

### The Ulster 2040 Process

**Task 1:** Assessing the Current Situation

**Task 2:** Mission, Values and Vision for Economic Development

**Task 3:** Strategic "Perspectives" (e.g. Growth and Equity) and "Vectors" (Industries/Clusters)

**Task 4:** Objectives and Performance Indicators/Key Results

**Task 5:** Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Investments/Initiatives

**Task 6:** Implementation and "Localization" of the Strategy

<sup>1</sup> [www.hvoutofalignment.com](http://www.hvoutofalignment.com)

<sup>2</sup> [www.unitedforalice.org/new-york](http://www.unitedforalice.org/new-york)

<sup>3</sup> <https://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/economic-development/Fairweather%20Industry%20Targeting%20Report112015.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [www.orangecountygov.com/300/Mid-Hudson-Regional-Sustainability-Plan](http://www.orangecountygov.com/300/Mid-Hudson-Regional-Sustainability-Plan)

<sup>5</sup> <https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/2019MidHudsonProgressReport2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://hudsonvalleyregionalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HVRC-CEDS-FINAL-112019.pdf>

to the development of our economy. It will provide the criteria that elevate one idea over another, one project over another, one priority over another. And it will establish the measures of our success, at least at the ultimate level – the refinement of discrete measures of success or failure will evolve over time as the actions, investments and strategies selected determine them.

We believe that this is a responsible approach – it conserves taxpayer dollars, it minimizes the risk of project failure, and it capitalizes on the value of time (both in terms of opportunity costs and the time-value of money).

This report's conclusion will be followed by an implementation effort that includes engagement with local residents and businesses whose input will further contextualize our goals and priorities and identify additional actions, as well as partners and resources to help us implement those actions and accomplish our shared economic goals.

This report lays out a long-term vision for where we need to go, but we also recognize that this is a 20-year journey, so it will require us to take many small steps over a sustained period of time. The path may not be perfectly linear, but if we can arrive at the destination we will have built something truly special.

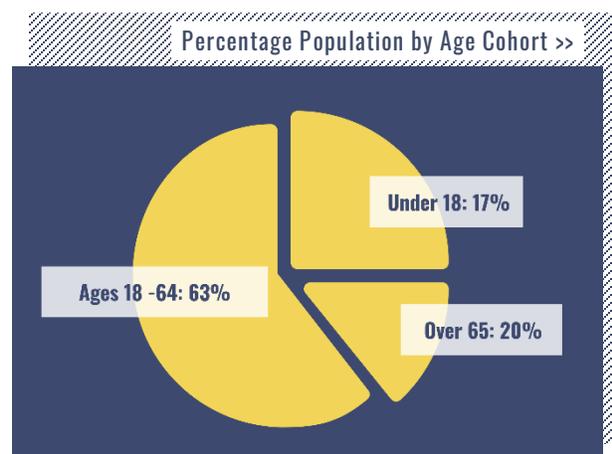
## 4 WHY WE NEED A NEW WAY

In the decade following the Great Recession, Ulster County's economy saw modest but steady growth, with declining unemployment, steadily rising GDP and the development of an undeniable buzz as increased wealth and incomes drove renewed investment in homes and neighborhoods, main streets, office parks and industrial plants. Our efforts to support business development and attraction, as well as promotion of our undeniable tourism appeal, paid off with steady growth in business numbers, visitors, and our accommodations, food and beverage, and recreation businesses, along with our arts and cultural communities.

Already a County composed mainly of small businesses, the past decade saw an increasing trend toward micro-enterprise, with the average firm size declining and a clear uptick in the number of self-employed residents, freelancers and 'solo-prenuers.'

Projections hypothesize a slow population decline over the past decade, but anecdotal evidence suggests that throughout the latter half of the 2010s many communities throughout the County saw a quiet surge in the number of transplants deciding to settle to live – and often work – in Ulster County, primarily arriving from New York City. Many of our communities have seen a substantial increase in the number of Hispanic and Latinx residents, which represents but the latest chapter in a long story of immigration that has contributed to our region's cultural heritage and economic success.

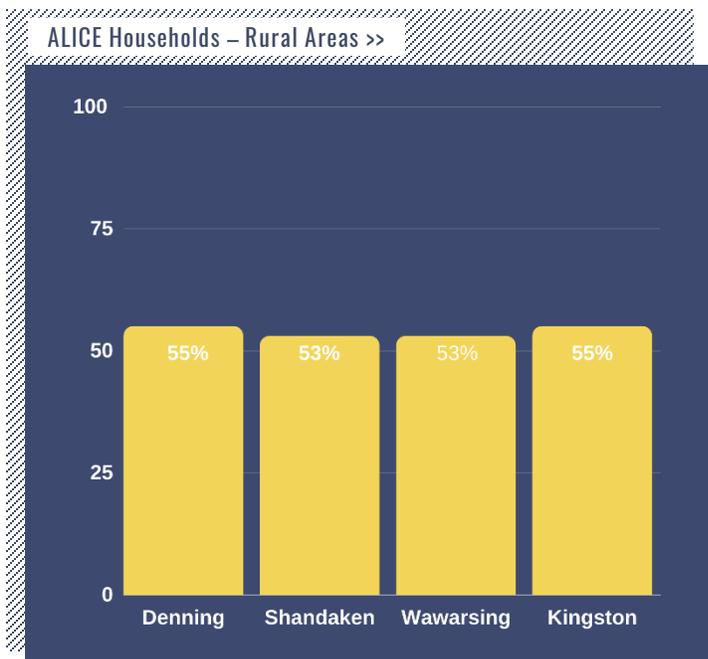
However, as the County's economy appeared by conventional measures to be getting along at a reliable pace, structural changes in global, national and regional economies are increasingly leaving many Ulster County residents behind.



Almost as quickly as they graduate high school, an increasing fraction of our children choose to leave the area to pursue education or career, depleting our communities of the vitality, creativity and drive that make 18-34 year-olds a cohort coveted by any region. And while their departure is offset by in-migration across age cohorts, our senior population continues to grow, with future projections pointing to a substantial increase in the age cohort over age 70.

The County's poverty rate has increased over the past two decades faster than in other counties throughout the state, rising to 14.3% in 2018 and placing Ulster County in 53<sup>rd</sup> place among the state's 62 counties. Even as poverty rates climbed, research from the United Way's ALICE<sup>7</sup> report reveals that far more households were hovering just above the official poverty line. In 2018, more than 2 in 5 households in the County were either under the poverty line or working

but struggling to make ends meet.



The County's rural towns, including Denning (55%), Shandaken (53%) and Wawarsing (53%) and the City of Kingston (55%) had the highest rates of ALICE households. Black and Hispanic households were even more likely to fall within the ALICE thresholds, with rates over 60% compared to just 40% for White households. Income inequality, which disproportionately affects

women, minorities and rural residents, has risen steadily in Ulster County over the past decade, too.

Low unemployment rates and increasing GDP and median incomes have obscured the simple fact that too many

<sup>7</sup> The ALICE report describes financial challenges experienced by households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed – also known as “working poor.” These are households whose incomes are above the Federal Poverty level, but still struggle to make ends meet. More information is available at <https://www.unitedforalice.org/new-york>

people in our neighborhoods and communities are struggling more and more each year, falling into a spiral of debt and financial insecurity from which they are unlikely to recover, or simply giving up and moving elsewhere in search of greater opportunity. Despite the challenges, many have carved out hard-won successes for which they deserve tremendous credit, but we can all agree that it should not be so hard to make a living, to raise a family, to retire, or to start and grow a business here.



And then the coronavirus pandemic hit. Ulster County residents and businesses stepped up in an unprecedented show of support for each other. Manufacturers repurposed their production lines to fill the gaps in personal protective equipment. Volunteers stepped in to help in countless ways, staffing the County's hotline and delivering tens of thousands of meals to people who were afraid to leave their homes. Our values came into focus as we responded to friends, neighbors and coworkers in need.

SUNY New Paltz Advanced Manufacturing Center >>



But there can be no doubt that we are only beginning to understand the impacts that COVID-19 will have on all levels of our economy and society. Some businesses have already been forced to close, and some will never reopen. Some of Ulster County's strongest sectors – food services, accommodations, recreation, the arts and entertainment – were the worst hit, and will continue to struggle for the foreseeable future.

As enhanced unemployment benefits disappear, as financial assistance for employers runs out, and as a web of supports enacted at the state and national level fades away, we will face an unprecedented set of economic and social challenges. Compounding those new challenges are the longstanding ones we never addressed – the institutionalized racism that disenfranchises Black and

Brown communities throughout our nation, and even here at home, too. The Black Lives Matter movement is an issue of racial justice, but at its roots it is also an issue of economic justice.

How we respond throughout the county matters. Will we continue to show up to support those in need? Will we rebuild an economy that does more to level the playing field, more to protect our most vulnerable residents? Will we learn the lesson

that an economy built to serve the most wealthy and privileged, in the end serves no one?

From the experiences we have all shared over the first months of a new decade, will we choose to develop a more just and human-centered economy?

Ulster County Project Resilience >>



## 5 WHAT IS OUR NEW WAY?

The consensus of the Ulster 2040 Working Group is that our new way must be a people-centered economic development strategy that generates not only growing GDP and job numbers, but creates opportunity, prosperity, and a high quality of life for all our residents. The Working Group has designated four industry clusters that build on and strengthen the natural and cultural assets that have made Ulster County such a special place to live and to visit. They respond to our shared values and together create the foundations for the healthy, vibrant community we want to live in. The Working Group has also identified a set of cross-cutting strategies that will streamline our economic development toolkit, make it easier to start and grow a business, and support career opportunities across the economy.

### 5.1 OUR VISION (OR WHERE WE ARE GOING)

A good vision statement sets a clear and compelling direction by appealing to people's beliefs and values. But when stated in its most concise version, it can seem too abstract to accomplish what any good vision must – to capture the imagination and motivate a commitment to its accomplishment.

Part of the purpose of this report is to start the journey to the right vision statement. Later in this document, we elucidate the vision statement as it relates to several important sectors of our local economy. Through narrative stories that imagine Ulster County at a point 20 years in the future, we put substance behind the abstraction of our simple vision statement.

#### Co-Creation

When it comes to complex problems, the best solutions involve partnership, collaboration and cooperation. No one person or organization can solve them alone. In order to pursue our vision, we will work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, sharing both the risks and the rewards with them and recognizing that cooperation relies

Our Economic Development Vision >>

**We will co-create  
a people-centered  
local economy**

on trust and mutual respect – building-blocks that we have not always valued appropriately.

### **Resiliency and Sustainability**

Shocks to our local economy are nothing new – the advent of the personal automobile was a shock to the transportation industry that fueled much of Ulster County’s growth in the nineteenth century. The departure of IBM in the 1990s was a shock that rippled through the networks of suppliers, customers and employees who depended on Big Blue for their livelihoods. The ferocious speed with which

COVID-19 disrupted our daily lives is an ongoing shock.

Each shock reinforces the need to plan for disruption and upheaval. We can expect that the coming decades will bring even bigger challenges, as climate change drives seismic upheavals across the entire planet, as racial and social justice movements compel us to re-think our cultural institutions, and as technological acceleration transforms the nature of work throughout all industries and occupations.

In the face of these challenges, we will focus our efforts on making our economy more resilient and sustainable. We will consider its vulnerabilities, and we will develop solutions that enable it to withstand future shocks. Where we can, we will go a step further – we will develop a local economy that is regenerative, that goes beyond sustainability by recognizing that some of the foundations of prosperity have been eroded and require rebuilding and reinvestment.

We will strive to see these challenges as opportunities rather than threats, and use our ingenuity, our creativity and our compassion to lead the way to a better, stronger economy.

#### **Where Will We Be in 2040?**

The following quotes are from Working Group members and participants at our public meetings, who described Ulster 2040 in their own words...

**“A resilient local food system...”**

**“Affordable healthcare, childcare, eldercare...”**

**“We’re a leader in the green economy...”**

**“A true middle class...”**

**“A diverse and colorful community...”**

**“We invest in our own communities...”**

**“Housing and careers so our kids can stay...”**

**“Young people want to come back...”**

**“I can still afford to live here...”**

**“We balance environment, equity and development...”**

**“Good jobs for everyone...”**

**“We take care of each other...”**

## Localism

Globalization and technological change have transformed economies throughout the world over the past quarter century. There is no going back – our patterns of work, investment and consumption are intertwined with networks of commerce that extend far beyond the borders of our County. We cannot, and should not try to close ourselves off from the broader economy, because local economies rely on each other in order to flourish.

Yet we can remain connected to the broader economy while emphasizing the local networks of trade and commerce that have the greatest impact on our communities. Global supply chains fail, and when they do, we will depend on our neighbors and our local businesses to help us get by. The global coronavirus pandemic reminded us to think AND act locally, in order to thrive in a challenging global environment.

## 5.2 OUR MISSION (OR HOW WE WILL GET THERE)

The mission statement outlines the journey we have in order to pursue our vision. If the vision is the ultimate destination, the mission is our hypothesis of the best route to get there.

In the realm of traditional economic development, the primary objective is to maximize gross domestic product, or another similar measure of the dollar value of an economy's output. There is power in the simplicity of this approach, and in many meaningful ways it has served us well for the past 100 years. But its shortcomings are becoming clear; human well-being depends on more than material wealth, especially when that wealth is measured in the aggregate rather than the individual or community level, where it could at least account for the impacts of disparity and inequality.

Our mission explicitly calls for greater **equity** – a proportional allocation of resources based on need. We will weight our priorities in favor of those options that address inequities. The industries we target, the ways we support businesses, even the way we plan for economic

Our Economic Development Mission >>

**We will seek  
equitable gains in  
opportunity and  
prosperity for all  
residents**

development will seek to remove the barriers that prevent people of color and low-income individuals from fully participating. This distinction from past approaches is where we must place a new, visible emphasis.

In the vein of recent attempts to replace GDP and growth as a primary metric, our vision expands the definition of success with references opportunity and prosperity. Here, we take **opportunity** to mean the broad set of circumstances that make it possible for individuals to prosper. And by **prosperity**, we establish a deliberate reference to the growing body of research in the economic development literature that defines the ultimate objective of any economy as a multi-dimensional mix of factors that contribute to human well-being (e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Goals or the Legatum Institute's *Prosperity Index*).

Although it may seem that broadening the ultimate purpose of our economic development efforts would detract from our ability to achieve the goal, a mounting body of evidence suggests the opposite; only by expanding our definition of success can we create the kind of inclusive economy that will be robust to the shocks and threats we have already experienced and that are likely to increase in the future.

## In 2040...

Taking into account our County's past experiences and successes, and looking at our current challenges and opportunities, the Working Group members each contributed by describing their vision for the future of Ulster County in 2040. This visioning process is a powerful way to align people behind a common sense of direction, and it helps us by suggesting short-term steps that can move us toward the long term goals. Throughout 2021 we will continue to ask residents and business owners throughout the County to help us paint a picture of our future – what will Ulster County's economy look like in 2040?

Historical context is particularly important as we consider how Ulster County's economy might be developed in the future. Check out the parallels to our current situation that are evident in a 1941 paper delivered by New York State Historian Arthur Pound to the Ulster County Historical Society, titled *Down-Rent War in Olde Ulster*.

>> [www.jstor.org/stable/23134762?seq=1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23134762?seq=1)

## 6 HOW WE BEGIN

### 6.1 WALKING THE WALK

If we really commit to putting our community's values at the core of our economic development strategy, then we have to walk the walk.

First, we have to put our **people at the center** of our economic development work. That doesn't mean we abandon efforts to attract new businesses, or that we pull up the drawbridge and seek to isolate ourselves from the surrounding regional, national and global economies. Every investment and every choice we make about how we develop our economy, though, should be evaluated by the ways it impacts our people, with careful consideration and weighing of the trade-offs that are inherent in all impactful decisions.

Second, and by extension, we have to take steps to **engage more people** in the decision-making process. Economic development decisions are often made by people with privilege, whose decisions have the greatest impact on those without that privilege. Even the best-intentioned policy-makers, funders and program developers are prone to bias, and the long term impact of biased economic development decisions is compounding inequity. Equity is as equity does.

Third, we have to **encourage responsible risk-taking**. A healthy local economy requires entrepreneurship and innovation, since these are the drivers of real economic value. Too little risk-taking leads to stagnation, just as too much risk-taking leads to collapse; neither will permit us to accomplish our vision. But these risks are borne by people, and the best way to encourage a healthy entrepreneurial climate is to support the people who are willing to build something new.

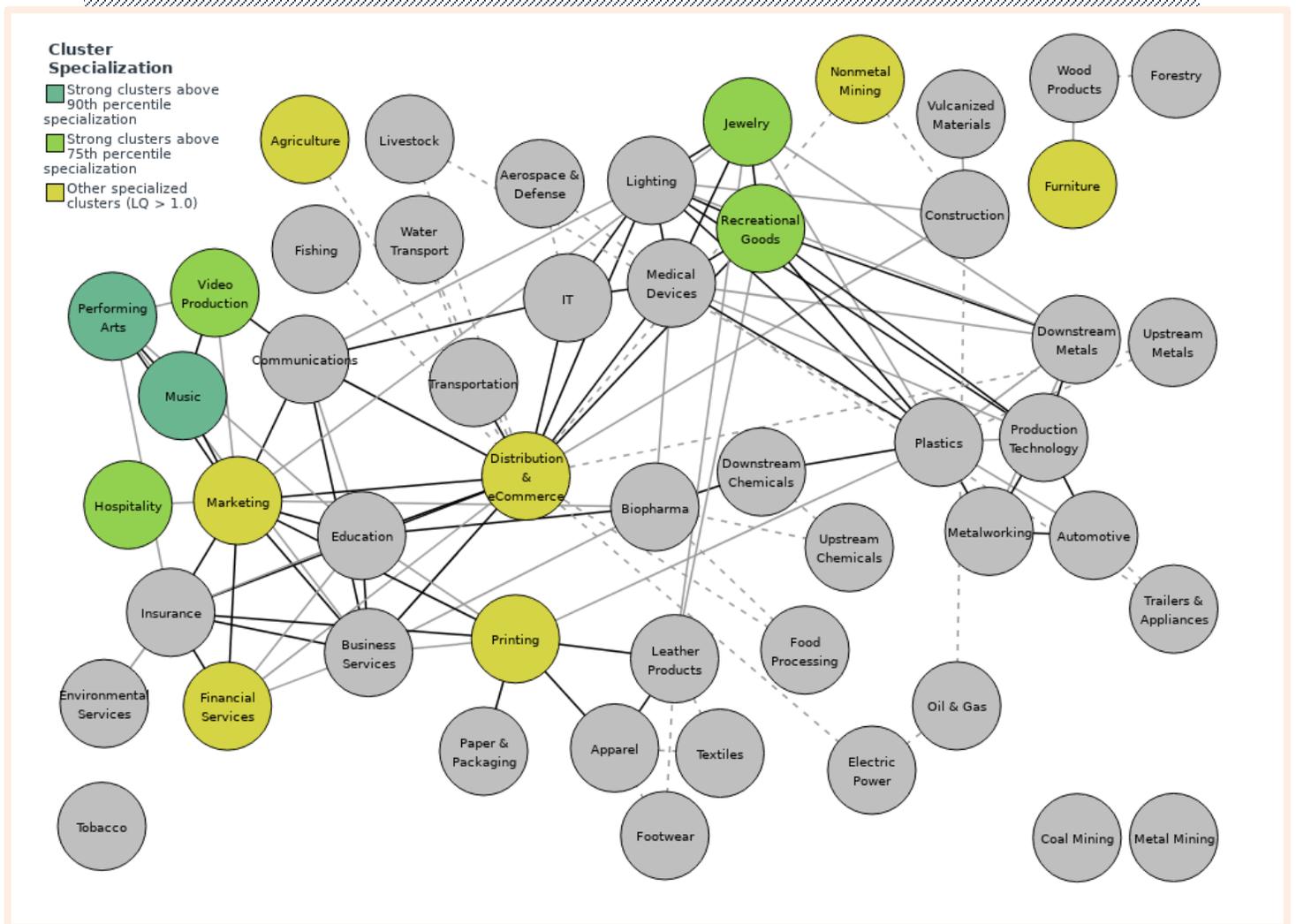
And fourth, we have to commit to **realign our economic development tools and structures** so that they are equipped to respond to the needs and challenges of the future. We have to streamline the way we provide support to businesses, recognizing that we can be both

accountable to our residents AND responsive to the needs of our businesses.

## 6.2 FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS

Our values define how we conduct the business of economic development in Ulster County, but also, when coupled with our natural assets, they point toward our most promising opportunities for future prosperity. The industries that have fueled our economy in the past have been forged in equal parts by the passions and talents of our people and the particular advantages of our geographic location.

### Our Industry Specialization >>



## **Our Advantages**

One of our greatest advantages is our proximity to the New York City metro area, which serves as both a lucrative market for export of goods and services and a perennial source of new ideas and new residents. While we have a habit of emphasizing its negative impacts, which do present real challenges, New York City's proximity provides immeasurable value and will be a defining feature of our economic future.

Our geographic location also provides us with exceptional natural resources, such as clean drinking water, high-quality soils for agriculture and diverse settings for outdoor recreation. It also defines our historic pattern of growth, which has been defined by the movement of goods and people, first via our waterways, later by railroad and today by automobile.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our quality of life, location and skilled workforce made Ulster County a natural home for one of the pioneers of technological innovation: IBM. Its subsequent departure, however, has left us searching for what's next. As we have searched, we have continued to hold true to the values described earlier in this report, which have already proven themselves to be valuable advantages in the economic development arena, inspiring a diverse ecosystem of small businesses that defines Ulster County's economy today.

Our commitment to the environment has spurred local investments in renewable energy generation, transport electrification, and other clean technologies. The New York City watershed, which comprises nearly one-third of Ulster County's land area, is a world-leading example of the value of protecting the natural services provided by a healthy ecosystem.

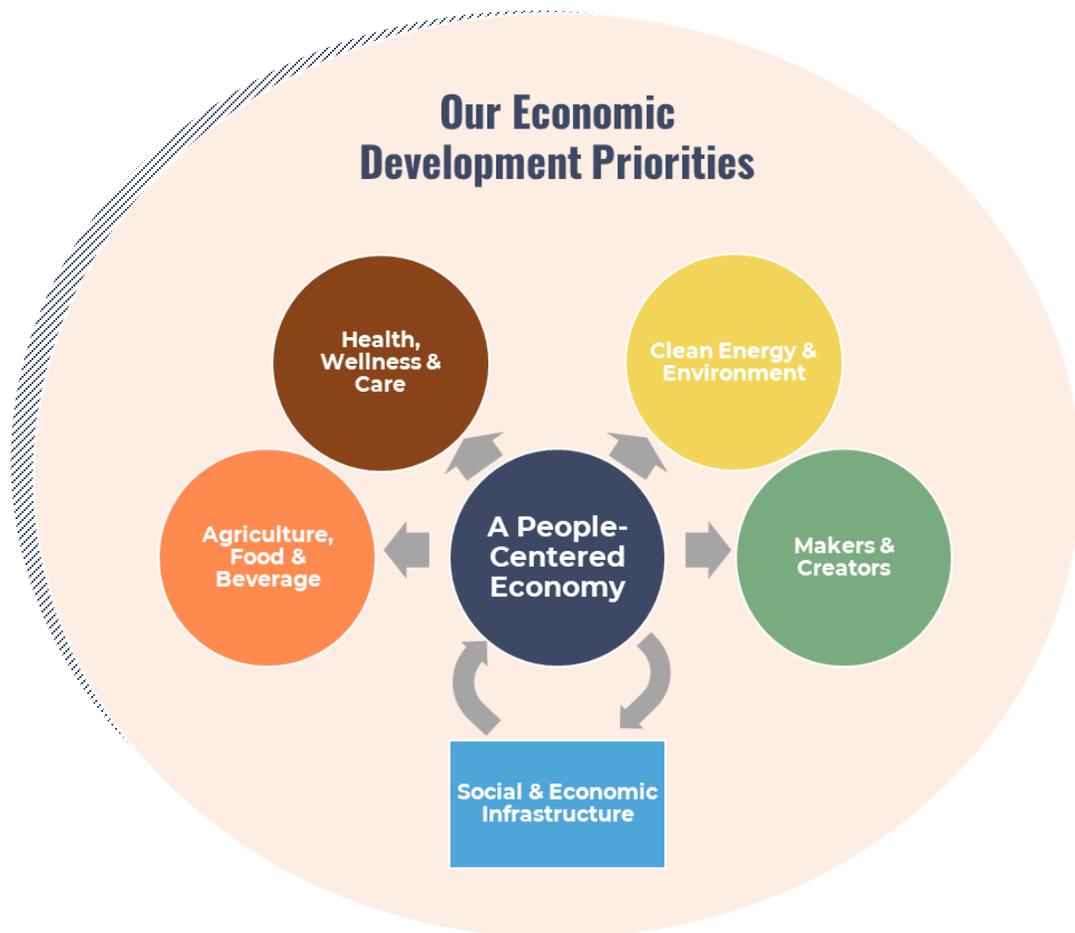
Our commitment to working farms has helped us weather a nationwide surge toward consolidation that threatens smaller farms everywhere, with a stable and productive agricultural sector contributing to our local and regional food system.

Our artists, artisans and arts organizations have continued to bring new vitality to buildings, neighborhoods and even crafts that were previously on the decline, leading the way

for new business opportunities and investment. These natural and cultural assets, and our commitments to protect and strengthen them, have cultivated in many ways our county's highly successful tourism brand, which contributes over half a billion dollars annually to our economy.

### **Our Target Clusters**

Over time, these factors have led to specialization in several key sectors within our economy, where businesses here tend to find the right mix of ingredients necessary to thrive. Some of these industry clusters have existed for generations, while others have only recently emerged. Their successes, combined with the potential for future growth and their contributions to a healthy, sustainable community, make them logical places where we should focus our economic development efforts.



## *Agriculture, Food & Beverage*

Farming is as Ulster County as apple pie. At its height, Ulster County's land area comprised nearly 230,000 acres of productive farm and grazing land.

And although for decades our small family farms have been disappearing as societal values prioritized low cost and convenience over nutrition and local food systems (and as rising land values provided an enticing alternative to cash-strapped farming families), the seasons are changing.

Driven partly by changes in consumer preferences (local is back!) and partly by strategic steps to improve food security in the greater NYC metro area, area farms are stabilizing and depletion of our farmland is slowing. Our farms and our food and beverage producers have become one of the most important drivers our tourism industry, as repeat visitors seek landscapes and experiences that are both beautiful and nourishing. There's much more to do, though, if our time-honored tradition of farming is to survive.

Our investments in agriculture, food and beverage are intended to strengthen the entire supply chain, from the farms and land where food is grown and the people who grow it to the grocery stores, bodegas, markets, restaurants who sell it, and – coming full circle – to the ways in which we dispose of it: gleaning, composting and converting it into biofuels.

Through these efforts, we envision a local food system that is efficient enough to expand its local market share and abundant and resilient enough to contribute to the overall region's food security.

**Key strategies** for this cluster include building robust infrastructure across the value chain, expanding access to local and regional markets, and investing in protecting and ensuring access to farmland.

**Next steps** will include gathering more input from stakeholders across our food systems to help us shape investment priorities.

### In 2040...

Ulster County will have the most dynamic and resilient food system in the nation, where local growers work together with local food and beverage manufacturers, distributors and retailers to supply an array of healthy products that not only sustain our residents, but provide food security for New York City and the surrounding region.

**Table 1: Agriculture, Food & Beverage Cluster Priorities**

Cluster Goals	Potential Investments
Enhance the sustainability of local agricultural businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to land and capital for new farmers</li> <li>• Protect high-priority farmland</li> <li>• Help farms connect with value-added processing to diversify and expand revenue</li> <li>• Maximize use of existing benefits that are designed to protect farmland</li> <li>• Grow agritourism and food/beverage tourism sector</li> </ul>
Expand local capacity for value-added processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create shared incubator kitchens or processing lines</li> <li>• Support food/bev entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Expand existing food processors to help producers align with market demand</li> <li>• Fill key gaps in the local value chain, including aggregation and storage</li> </ul>
Expand cluster access to local and regional markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cooperative models to enhance distribution and marketing</li> <li>• Establish or adopt a local or regional brand(s) for ag, food and bev products</li> <li>• Increase local products in currently under-served markets (farm-to-school, farm-to-institutions, fresh local foods into current food deserts)</li> </ul>
Capture value from waste stream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish or support commercial composting programs</li> <li>• Explore waste-to-energy alternatives</li> <li>• Connect all levels of the value chain to waste-diversion programs</li> </ul>

## *Makers & Creators*

Ulster County has always been a place where people actually **make** their living. From reviving the ancient craft of cooperage to designing digital fonts to fabricating neon installations for the Musee D'Orsay, today's makers throughout Ulster County are carrying on a tradition that has been the basis of our economy for centuries, from the cement factories and brickyards that fueled New York City's 18<sup>th</sup>-century rise to Big Blue and the birth of big tech.

Making things of beauty, making things that last, and making things that improve people's lives – the creativity and artistry that our makers share is more important now than ever. It creates aesthetic value, economic value, and – with relatively low barriers to entry – it represents a promising opportunity to improve economic equity.

And our deliberate focus on designers, coders, crafts people, filmmakers, artists, musicians, performers, makers and specialized manufacturers builds on a community of people who are here, making things already.

It is also central to a resilient local economy. We experienced the critical value of local production networks during the COVID-19 crisis. The ability not just to make, but to collaboratively problem solve, design, and supply locally turned out to be crucial when brittle global supply chains are revealed to be unreliable.

**Key strategies** for this cluster include making affordable space available for cluster businesses and improving the reach and the effectiveness of our workforce training and business support programs.

**Near term projects** include the redevelopment of the former Tech City property as a hub for maker & creator businesses and working with a wide range of cluster businesses to understand and meet their training needs.

### In 2040...

The "Made in the Hudson Valley" brand will be a world-renowned symbol of our success, proving that it is possible to make and create in a way that is regenerative to our communities rather than extractive. From creative arts to software, from film & TV to furniture, and from additive manufacturing to sustainable clothing, we will prove that we can sustain high quality jobs by making high quality products.

**Table 2: Makers & Creators Cluster Priorities**

<b>Cluster Goals</b>	<b>Possible Investments</b>
Encourage firm collaboration to maximize economic impact and resiliency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure availability of affordable production and retail space where artists, makers and creators can connect with each other and customers</li><li>• Selectively recruit firms or support new/existing firms to fill gaps in the supply chain</li><li>• Expand outreach to business owners who are people of color, women and local immigrants</li><li>• Establish a one-stop shop for artists, makers and creators to get business support services (including financing, site assistance, advisory services, marketing and workforce development)</li></ul>
Expand access to qualified labor pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop specialized training and recruitment programs to improve access to qualified candidates</li><li>• Provide funding/financing to support firms' "first hire"</li><li>• Support employers' recruitment efforts for hard-to-fill quality jobs (above average wages by occupation)</li></ul>
Support small firms to increase profitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a brand for locally-made products and support marketing efforts to expand access to consumer markets</li><li>• Create "artist in residency" program to spur innovation</li></ul>

## *Clean Energy & Environment*

Ulster County has always been an environmental leader. From the Hudson River School painters of the mid-19th century to the environmental movements of the mid-20<sup>th</sup>, we've been at the forefront of defining the cultural value of protecting our landscapes and our natural resources. The New York City water system is a leading example of the wisdom of protecting natural systems for the economic value they produce, studied by researchers and water managers worldwide. In recent years, Ulster County has emerged as a clean energy leader, becoming the first carbon neutral county government in New York State, supporting the deployment of renewable energy and building out a robust network of electric vehicle charging stations.

In the next twenty years, communities across the globe will face an uncertain future. Water shortages, climate chaos, and the resulting famine, flooding, migration, and social upheaval. We must prepare for these crises and their local impacts.

But these challenges also present opportunities. New York State's 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act sets some of the most ambitious carbon-neutral goals in the country. Meeting the goals will require an unprecedented build-out of renewable energy, clean energy storage, and robust energy distribution networks. It will also require upgrading our aging building stock to 21<sup>st</sup>-century energy efficiency standards, lowering utility bills and creating much healthier indoor environments. There is *a lot* of work to be done.

We have the opportunity now to position Ulster County businesses and residents to do this work and reap the economic rewards. Markets that are already shifting towards clean energy will continue to transform, accelerating demand for energy installers, device manufacturers, building retrofitters, and research and development. Over the 2040 time horizon, the buildout of local renewable energy and aggressive energy efficiency will make our energy systems far more self-sufficient and

### In 2040...

Ulster County will definitively prove that a Green New Deal is the best path toward a sustainable future for our community.

Our position at the center of one of the largest unfiltered drinking water systems in the world will allow us to become an international center of excellence for water-related technology, research and innovation. And our commitment to clean energy and the environment will make green careers the fastest growing occupations in our economy.

resilient, insulating us from the shocks of global energy markets and keeping our energy dollars circulating in the local economy. We need to invest in our workforce and our businesses in engineering, the construction and building trades, green building materials production, and energy management and build on our world-leading water management capabilities to create research and innovation centers for the coming green and blue economies.

In the birthplace of the modern environmental movement, even though we may at times bemoan the regulatory burdens, the environmental reviews, the steady encroachment of land conservation that rankles our sense of fairness and liberty, we all know that this place where we live is worth protecting. We all know that if we want endless parking lots and traffic jams we only have to move a few miles south. And we all know that to squander our environment would be to fatally harm what makes Ulster County's economy work in the first place.

Now we just have to teach the rest of the world these same lessons.

**Key strategies** for this cluster include positioning our businesses and our workforce to make 21<sup>st</sup>-century green infrastructure investments and developing centers of excellence in the research and development of clean energy and water technologies.

**Next steps** include building on our Green Careers Academy initiative to develop robust training pathways for green infrastructure jobs and engaging with university and industry partners to explore opportunities for collaboration.

**Table 3: Clean Energy & Environment Cluster Priorities**

Cluster Goals	Potential Investments
<p>Capture more economic benefits of large infrastructure projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create programs to build workforce specialization in water infrastructure construction and maintenance</li> <li>• Support firm creation/expansion in key sectors related to clean energy, environmental/green infrastructure, and clean tech</li> <li>• Advocate for local purchasing preferences for large infrastructure projects</li> </ul>
<p>Improve financial viability of locally-generated renewables</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase 100% of County Government electricity from local renewable sources</li> <li>• Encourage and support local municipalities to purchase local renewable energy</li> <li>• Engage with industry and local partners to accelerate timelines and reduce development costs for renewable energy projects</li> </ul>
<p>Dramatically improve building energy efficiency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for state/federal funding for deep energy retrofits</li> <li>• Strengthen financial incentives to improve ROI and payback period for energy efficiency investments</li> <li>• Align workforce and business development systems to support the building efficiency sector</li> </ul>
<p>Develop an industry/university R&amp;D presence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with existing industry/university partners to explore feasibility</li> <li>• Advocate for state/federal funding for local research &amp; development</li> </ul>

## *Health, Wellness & Care*

Health care is one of Ulster County's largest economic sectors, in terms of sheer size, number of jobs, and economic output. It is also foundational to our overall wellbeing and our long-run economic productivity. The

### **In 2040...**

COVID-19 vividly highlighted the fragile points in our healthcare system and made clear that we need a fundamental shift in how we care for one another.

In response to rising costs and reduced quality of care, we will take on the audacious goal of developing something better - a local care system where seniors can age in their communities, our kids grow up healthy in body, mind and spirit and our care workers - who put their lives on the line during the pandemic - can afford to live in the communities they work to serve.

unfolding COVID-19 pandemic has vividly revealed our current system's strengths and weaknesses. We see now how important it is to have local control, and we understand that our own health and wellbeing cannot be left in the hands of large insurers, health care practices or national health agencies – we have to do more to build a local system of care.

The future will reveal even greater challenges, though they will probably be less dramatic. Our population will continue to age, and the provision of care for seniors will either prove an opportunity to build a more resilient care economy or a huge drain on our collective financial and human resources. As we emerge from the pandemic, our already-strained mental health system will be stretched further and will require new solutions in order to prevent a secondary crisis that could create a rise in “deaths of despair.” And our care

workers – who shoulder an incredible burden with little support or recognition – will struggle to afford to live in a community where costs of living continue to rise.

These challenges are difficult for Ulster County to address on its own – they are structural to our national economy and our models for managing and paying for care. And yet the crucial importance of this sector means that we cannot ignore the challenge.

And there are strengths to draw upon here, too. As anchor institutions in our communities, our health care providers represent major economic and social forces, whose buying power, service innovation, and leadership can be mobilized to strengthen both care provision and our broader economies. Around the country, health care institutions are leading community wealth-building efforts by shifting their

considerable purchasing dollars to local businesses, worker-owned cooperatives, and local food producers, strategies we can make better use of here in Ulster County. And we have long been pioneers in complimentary medicine and innovators in alternative modes of exchange for health care services.

We do not expect our current, highly strained systems to survive the next 20 years unchanged. Ulster County will engage in the active shaping of new models, building on our strengths and values, to ensure better, more equitable care for all our residents.

**Key strategies** for the cluster include improving care access to residents throughout the County and supporting opportunities for career growth for cluster workers.

**Next steps** include strengthening training programs and career ladders throughout the cluster and convening stakeholders from across the cluster to develop strategies and test prototypes of new models.

**Table 4: Health, Wellness & Care Cluster Priorities**

Cluster Goals	Potential Investments
Improve health outcomes for vulnerable/low-income households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support ongoing COVID-19 public health response</li> <li>• Expand broadband access in rural areas to facilitate tele-medicine</li> <li>• Support local, community-based health hubs to increase access to preventive/non-acute care</li> <li>• Convene stakeholders to develop an economic development agenda for the Health, Wellness &amp; Care cluster</li> </ul>
Reduce the cost of care to consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce turnover and increase availability of workers in key occupations</li> <li>• Increase access to state and federal funding</li> </ul>
Improve wages and earnings for direct care workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop improved career pathways with training programs to support retention and increase earnings</li> <li>• Pursue collaborative approaches to solve challenges around transportation, insurance, sick leave, etc for direct care workers</li> </ul>

## *Economic & Social Infrastructure*

In order for our local economy to provide the widespread benefits we seek, we need to invest in the basic economic and social infrastructure that enables that success. Businesses can't thrive if they don't have electricity or roads or internet access. But they also can't thrive if they don't have access to a well-developed pool of people. In fact, if we put people first – their security, wellbeing, education and self-actualization – our businesses will thrive.

### In 2040...

Just as our region pioneered modern forms of municipal infrastructure to provide safe and reliable drinking water, we must now serve as a pioneer in building the new infrastructure that enables equitable growth: effective job training programs, broadband access, affordable housing, quality care for our kids and our seniors, restorative justice, and vibrant arts, culture, and recreation.

Investments in traditional infrastructure will continue to be important over the next 20 years. But the greater impact will come from the new forms of infrastructure that will become relevant to our economic development efforts: education and training, child and senior care, broadband access, public spaces, affordable housing, arts and culture, recreation and justice.

If we continue to ignore these needed investments, we should expect to see a continuation of the challenges that plague many of our businesses today: they have jobs to fill, but – especially for entry-level positions – they are unable to find reliable and qualified candidates to fill them. Even as they increase hourly wages, these increases cannot keep up with rapidly-increasing costs of basic needs. And when a family is struggling to make ends meet, it is often difficult to meet the demanding expectations of today's workplace.

We must engage with both employers and jobseekers to ensure that training programs meet their needs and provide real opportunities for ongoing career and wage growth. Even as we train and equip our people with the skills to succeed in the workplace, we must attend to the basic needs that always take priority. “Workforce” development has to be considered more broadly than just training and skills, but also must include aspects of community development, such as housing, childcare and transportation.

**Key strategies** for the cluster include strengthening connections between workers and employers to better

align skills and talent development programs with promising career opportunities and partnering with local municipalities to protect housing affordability, reduce transportation costs, and improve access to broadband internet.

**Next steps** include engaging partners in the areas of workforce, housing, child and senior care, transportation and broadband internet access to identify priority investments.

**Table 5: Economic & Social Infrastructure Priorities**

Cluster Goals	Potential Investments
Align education and training programs with cluster needs and create career opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support new models of workforce development that include micro-credentials and “bootcamp” style programs</li> <li>• Work with employers and labor groups by cluster to identify unmet training needs and develop more robust training infrastructure</li> <li>• Strengthen the connections between all educational providers to improve outcomes and address failures at transitions from primary to secondary to post-secondary education</li> <li>• Engage with workers to understand barriers and challenges and to design more customer-focused programs to ensure adequate labor pools for target industries</li> <li>• Prioritize development and utilization of existing workers, including underemployed and dislocated workers to encourage greater workforce participation rates</li> </ul>
Reduce costs and expand access to quality of life foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in strategies identified by the Housing Advisory Committee in its December 2020 report to expand housing access across all income levels</li> <li>• Evaluate options to expand access to reliable, affordable transportation</li> <li>• Work with child care providers to identify and pilot ways to expand access and reduce the cost of providing quality care</li> </ul>
Strengthen supports for entrepreneurship, business development and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline the Ulster County business support experience across County agencies and economic development partners</li> <li>• Work with education, business and economic development partners to expand access entrepreneurship education and support networks</li> <li>• Work with investor networks and community development partners to expand access to capital for local businesses</li> <li>• Support the development of innovative forms of capital and business structure, including worker ownership and cooperative business models</li> </ul>

## 7 HOW WE CONTINUE

### 7.1 NEXT STEPS

This plan identifies a range of short-, medium- and long-term objectives that we believe are essential to advance our County's economic development vision. Most immediately, there are several steps that should be pursued in order to set the stage for further action in the months and years to come.

#### **Establish Advisory Groups to Refine Action Plans**

The goals and objectives included in this report span a wide range of topics, and in order to implement the plan the County will require deep technical expertise only available through a partnership with our partners in business and industry. Over time, the County should establish Advisory Groups to guide implementation and to assist with refinement of goals and objectives presented in this report. Building on recent work by the Department of Economic Development, the County should consider immediate establishment of an Ag, Food & Beverage advisory group, and should consider convening a Health, Wellness & Care advisory group to further refine the goals and objectives for this important but rapidly-changing sector.

#### **Realign County Departments to Facilitate Implementation**

The implementation of this plan will require a coordinated effort involving several County Departments, including Economic Development, Tourism, Planning, Employment & Training, Health/Mental Health and Environment. Where appropriate, and in consultation with the County Legislature and labor representatives, the County Executive should consider steps to formalize coordination through joint planning efforts, inter-departmental projects and initiatives, cross-functional programs and department mergers and consolidations.

#### **Build Dedicated Support Team for Existing Local Businesses**

Although the County's economic development function has traditionally focused much of its time and resources on supporting local businesses, this needs to be an even greater priority for the department going forward. A

dedicated business support team should be developed, which will involve coordination between the Department of Economic Development, Office of Employment & Training, Tourism, and other departments that interface with existing local businesses. The team will employ modern tools and techniques to engage local businesses on a routine basis, to better understand their support needs and future goals. This team will leverage UCEDA's Salesforce licenses to develop a comprehensive CRM and database to enable its work.

### **Re-Engage County Economic Development Agencies**

The UCEDA and UCIDA/CRC have always been integral instruments of the County's economic development toolbox. Even as the set of tools needed has evolved over time, these special-purpose organizations have an important role to play in shaping Ulster County's economic future. The County should re-engage with these organizations to determine areas of overlapping interest and to explore creative new ways that the unique powers and authorities of these agencies can assist in the implementation of the County's economic development strategy.

### **Pursue Public/Private Partnership for Tech City Redevelopment**

The County's recent acquisition of two parcels on the west side of the former IBM campus in the Town of Ulster

Ulster County Enterprise West Redevelopment Project >>



presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for redevelopment of this strategic site. Given the site's potential, its track-record of failed private ownership, and the current turbulence in the commercial real estate market, the County should consider retaining some control over the site's future.

This is best accomplished through a partnership with a local development corporation, such as UCEDA, which can be held accountable to the County and its residents, but is

better positioned to active and market the site for commercial use in the near-term than the County itself.

## **7.2 ONGOING ULSTER 2040 PROCESS**

Although this report represents the end of the Ulster 2040 Working Group's process, the County will continue to refine its economic development strategy through an ongoing dialogue with local communities, industry partners and funders and policy-makers at the local, regional and state levels. In 2021, the Department of Economic Development will conduct a series of public meetings throughout the County to present this plan, gather and incorporate feedback and input, and forge ahead to identify high-priority actions and investments for the future.

In the meantime, one easy way for everyone to continue engaging in the Ulster 2040 process is to send your vision for 2040 to us at [ulster2040@co.ulster.ny.us](mailto:ulster2040@co.ulster.ny.us). We'll keep collecting your thoughts and dreams about Ulster County's future so that we can continue to shape our work to build a more people-centered economy.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The work of developing an economy is challenging. It takes time, it takes coordination, and it takes humility. We are bound to get it wrong in parts, but we cannot let that be an excuse for inaction. Too much is at stake.

Within our communities, we often struggle to define positively what we hope to achieve in our future, and instead we spend a greater share of our time and energy describing what we hope to avoid in the future, or what we hope to protect from change. That tendency is a sign of how much we have to be grateful for, a sign that our communities are precious to us.

But the paradox should not be overlooked – change is inevitable. If we do not anticipate the forces that precipitate that change and mold them toward a positive vision of our future, we will wake up one day to realize that what we held so precious has been loved to death. That vision may often elude us, and though the vision presented here may fall short, its recognition of the central role that our people play in making this place so special represents a departure from past approaches. We hope that distinction, at least, inspires a new direction.