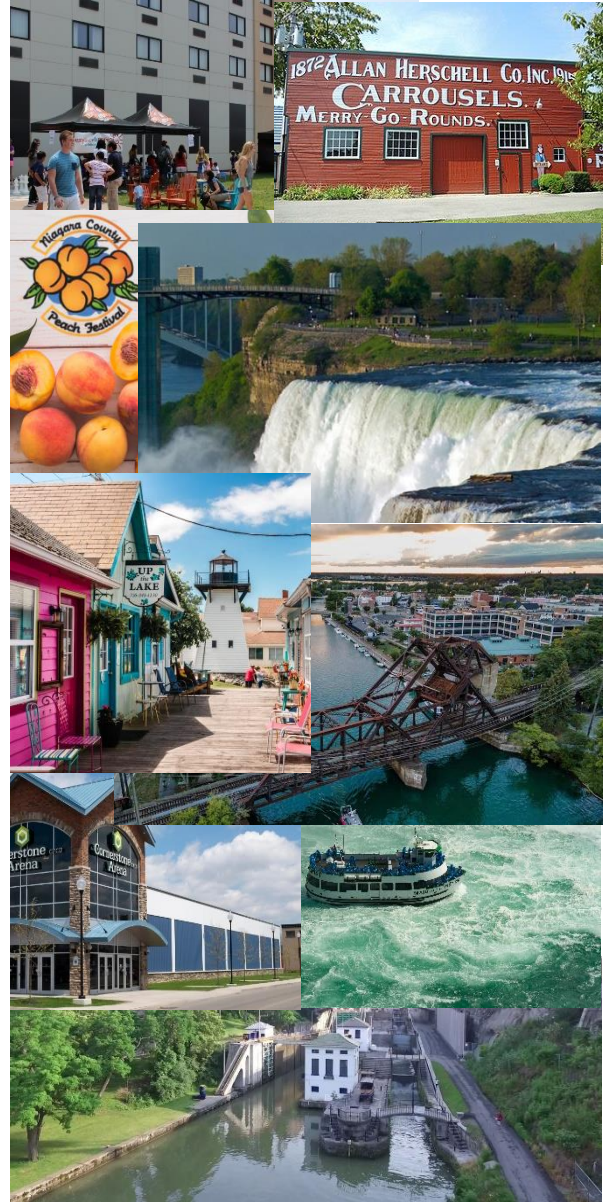


NIAGARA COUNTY

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2025



Niagara County
Center for Economic Development

Prepared by:

The Harrison Studio
Lockport, NY

Executive Summary

The Niagara County Center for Economic Development, working in collaboration with a wide variety of community stakeholders, has prepared the 2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Niagara County. The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires that each CEDS be updated every five years to ensure the County maintains relevant economic development goals with a strategy to address the most critical issues facing the County.

The core of the CEDS is the Action Plan, which sets clearly defined and achievable goals, objectives, and action items for the County. A robust strategic planning process – consisting of demographic and socioeconomic data analysis, a County SWOT analysis, stakeholder information surveys, review of local and regional plans, and guidance from a project steering committee – informed the development of the CEDS Action Plan.

The CEDS also places particular emphasis on the County’s resilience to shocks or disruptions to the regional economy. The COVID-19 pandemic recently proved that every region must enhance its ability to withstand, respond to, and recover from a major economic disruption. Niagara County’s CEDS emphasizes channels of communication and information sharing, utility infrastructure, housing affordability, pre-disaster planning, and emergency services as areas where additional investment will strengthen Niagara County’s economic resilience.

The 2025 Niagara County CEDS lays out the strategic direction that Niagara County and its partners will pursue from 2025-2029. Following the Action Plan to achieve the outlined goals and objectives will put Niagara County on a path to achieving its economic development vision.

“Niagara County aspires to achieve a forward-thinking, proactive, responsible economic development model that will build a prosperous, sustainable future. This model will emphasize brownfield redevelopment, environmental sustainability, quality neighborhood development, living wage jobs, and regional collaboration and cooperation.”



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Acknowledgements

The development of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document for Niagara County was made possible by the insightful guidance and direction of the CEDS Committee. The diversity of interests represented by the CEDS Committee and their shared vision for the future of Niagara County ensured the development of an achievable plan built on a vision of Niagara County as a sustainable, prosperous region

Many organizations and County government departments provided input critical to the analysis of data and development of the vision statement and program goals. Chief among these are the Niagara County Department of Economic Development and the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency. Gratitude is owed to all those who assisted in this collaborative effort to devise a strategy to bring sustainable prosperity to the people of Niagara County. Special appreciation is extended to the chief elected officials, municipal clerks, and community development directors of Niagara County's twenty cities, towns, and villages. The U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's effort to promote cohesive planning, community reinvestment, and economic development is greatly appreciated throughout Niagara County. Recognition of the importance of comprehensive economic development planning is illustrated by the timely and thoughtful priority projects submitted by each community. The Niagara County Legislature, on behalf of the citizens of Niagara County, wishes to thank all organizations and individuals who participated in the preparation of this important document.

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SUMMARY BACKGROUND



SUMMARY BACKGROUND

DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIOECONOMICS

Niagara County is located in northwest New York State on the shores of both Lake Ontario and the Niagara River and is home to the world-renowned natural wonder Niagara Falls. The County's three cities of Niagara Falls, Lockport, and North Tonawanda are historic urban centers with a proud manufacturing legacy. Much of the rest of the County is suburban and rural, and agriculture is a critical part of the community fabric. Connected by three bridges across the Niagara River, Niagara County is an international gateway and has a strong economic and tourist connection to Ontario, Canada.

For additional details on the demographics and socioeconomics of Niagara County, see Appendix A: Background & Demographics

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Niagara County's total population was estimated at 212,666 in the 2020 US Census. The population has remained relatively stable in recent decades with a slight decrease of 1.75% since 2010.

Niagara County experienced post-World War II suburban growth and urban decline as seen in much of the rest of the country. A significant milestone occurred at the 2000 decennial census, when the suburban and rural population became the majority (52.7%) in Niagara County.

Niagara County is the 24th oldest out of New York's 62 counties and has a median age nearly 4 years older than the State's median (39.3 years).



212,666

INCOME, POVERTY, AND EDUCATION

Median household income in Niagara County rose by 2.7% from 2017 to 2022, from \$51,656 to \$53,048 (adjusted for inflation). Similarly, per capita income rose by 3.7% during the same period, from \$28,395 to \$29,435 (adjusted). New York State outpaced Niagara County slightly in both metrics, seeing a 4.4% increase in median household income and a 6.2% increase in per capita income over the same period.

The County's poverty rate fluctuated slightly but gradually declined by 2023 to a rate of 12.4%. Niagara County's poverty rate was lower than the rate for all of New York State (13.6%) but was higher than the national average of 11.1%.



41.2%

From 2017 to 2022, Niagara County saw improvements in educational attainment among its adult population. The percentage of Niagara County's adult population with a college education increased from 36.1% to 41.2%, while the percentage of the adult population with only a high school education or lower decreased from 43.7% to 40.1%.

Despite these gains, Niagara County lags behind New York State as a whole in educational attainment. This is particularly evident in higher education where in 2022, 38.8% of adults in New York State held a bachelor's degree or higher (including graduate and professional degrees), compared to only 27% of adults in Niagara County.

WAGES AND EMPLOYMENT

Niagara County's annual unemployment has followed the same pattern as both the national and State unemployment rates. Niagara County's unemployment rate was slightly higher than the State and national averages prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced a similar spike in unemployment at the outbreak of the pandemic, and has gradually returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022 and 2023 the County experienced unemployment rates of just 3.9% and 4.1%, respectively, which are the lowest unemployment rates in two decades.

The breakdown of Niagara County's workforce by employment sector remained relatively constant from 2017 to 2022. Education & Healthcare employs the largest share of the County workforce at 24.5% in 2022. Manufacturing (13.9%) and Retail Trade (12.8%) are second and third largest, with the three sectors combined employing just over half of the County's total workforce.

The largest growing workforce sectors included Construction which increased from 5.9% to 6.6% of the County's workforce (gaining 680 jobs) as well as Professional, Scientific, and Management, which increased from 8.3% to 9.1% of the workforce (gaining 744 jobs). The two sectors to significantly decrease in share of the County workforce were Education & Healthcare and Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation. Education & Healthcare declined from 25.5% to 24.5% of the County workforce, a loss of 1,101 jobs, while Arts, Entertainment, & recreation declined from 10% to 8.5% of the County workforce, a loss of 1,585 jobs.



From 2018 to 2022, Niagara County generally experienced payroll growth across most industry sectors with the exception of 2020 when nearly all sectors experienced a decline in annual payroll as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While gross annual payroll rebounded and rose significantly in most sectors in the years following the pandemic, annual payroll in Niagara County did not keep pace with the unusually high inflation felt across the American economy during this period. As a result, most sectors of Niagara County's workforce experienced an effective wage decrease of -5.1% from 2018 to 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic shocked local economies in numerous ways. Many key industry sectors in Niagara County suffered business downturns during the pandemic which resulted in job losses and wage stagnation for employees. Following the pandemic, the U.S. national economy experienced unusually high rates of inflation, further complicating the post-pandemic recovery process. The total number of jobs in the County remained relatively constant through the pandemic. However, a review of gross annual wages indicates that wages for Niagara County employees stagnated during the pandemic.

SWOT ANALYSIS



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) related to Niagara County's economy was completed in coordination with the CEDS Committee to ensure that Niagara County's CEDS has a clear objective informed by a comprehensive understanding of the County's capabilities and capacity. This analysis identifies the County's assets that give Niagara County a competitive edge in the national and global economies, as well as outlines those internal and external factors that could keep Niagara County from realizing its potential.

Niagara County's SWOT analysis considers a wide array of areas fundamental to economic growth: quality of life, natural and cultural resources, geographic location, business incentives, cost of business, infrastructure, real estate availability, business development, international trade, workforce availability, and local and State regulations.

STRENGTHS

The strengths listed below are indigenous assets unique to Niagara County that allow for a competitive advantage over other regions.

Geographic Location – Proximity to Canada and Buffalo

One of Niagara County's biggest strengths is its geographic location, with access to key population centers both domestic and international. Over 81,000,000 people live within 300 miles of Niagara County including major American and Canadian metro areas such as New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Detroit, Toronto, and Montreal. International trade with Canada is a particular strength with three major border crossings in Niagara County. More than \$88 billion worth of goods travels through the Buffalo-Niagara Falls international freight gateway by highway and rail each year. It is the fourth largest freight gateway between the U.S. and Canada and the 13th largest international freight gateway in the United States.

Conversely, Niagara County is home to a number of Canadian companies that have established operations here for better access to U.S. markets. These companies contribute positively to the local economy through new capital investment, job opportunities, and tax revenue. Canada is also a source of visitors who travel to Niagara County for shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Low-cost Hydropower

The New York Power Authority's (NYPA) Niagara Power Project in the Town of Lewiston is the largest hydroelectric power plant in New York State and the third largest in the U.S. It is the largest supplier of energy in the region. Industries using large amounts of electricity in the production process are eligible to apply for special low-cost power incentives from NYPA.

Ecology and Freshwater Resources

As part of the Great Lakes ecosystem and bounded by the Niagara River, Erie Canal, and Lake Ontario, Niagara County has access to abundant freshwater resources. This water availability drives critical industries including agriculture, fishing, recreation, and manufacturing as well as greatly enhancing the quality of life for local residents.

Niagara Falls, one of the natural wonders of the world, makes Niagara County a world-renowned destination. Annual tourist visitor spending in the region recently surpassed \$1 billion, driven by visitors from around the world coming to see the spectacular falls.

Niagara County's geographic location as well as its abundant freshwater resources also position the County to attract new residents seeking environmental sustainability.

Quality of Life

Niagara County offers a high quality of life to those who live, work, and visit here. Niagara County boasts attractive, walkable communities in which to live with good schools, numerous institutions of higher learning, relatively affordable housing prices, and short commute times in relation to many other American metro areas.

Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station

The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS) is Niagara County's largest employer, with over 3,000 personnel, including active duty, Reserve, National Guard, civil servants, and contractors. The base manages over \$1 billion in federal assets and contributes \$300 million annually to the local economy, including a \$100 million payroll and \$200 million in operating expenses.

WEAKNESSES

The following weaknesses are areas that currently inhibit Niagara County from realizing its full economic development potential.

Regulations and Business Environment

The national perception of New York State's business environment is one of relatively high taxes and regulatory burdens, which presents challenges for Niagara County to attract and retain businesses. Higher minimum wage rates, prevalence of organized labor, and labor laws in need of reform create increased costs for construction in New York, especially on public projects. Numerous regulations fuel the rise of property and personal income taxes. Businesses have a difficult time attracting qualified labor and economic development agencies struggle with these impediments in their effort to attract new businesses.

Lack of Developable Sites

The region has a lower vacancy rate for industrial real estate as compared to the national average. The price per square foot rent for industrial space has doubled since 2020 and continues to rise as a result of the high cost of construction as well as the overall lack of available vacant land to build new industrial facilities. This is a challenge

to manufacturers or distributors seeking immediately occupiable space. In the current financial environment, building on spec is cost prohibitive.

Contaminated properties are also a problem across Niagara County, a legacy issue that will take generations to reverse. While there are tax benefits available to property owners willing to partake in the cleanup of parcels, this is a lengthy and costly process that requires professional specialization.

Infrastructure Capacity

Like many regions across New York State, Niagara County faces aging and underfunded infrastructure that impacts roads, bridges, and public transit systems. The County's three international bridges in particular face seasonal congestion challenges that can hinder cross-border mobility during peak tourism periods.

Among the top infrastructure priorities identified by the CEDS Committee is electric power transmission capacity. While Niagara County benefits from access to abundant hydroelectric generation, the infrastructure needed to reliably and efficiently deliver this power to end users must be enhanced to support future economic growth. This challenge reflects a broader national trend, as utilities across the country work to modernize systems in response to rising industrial energy demands, grid decarbonization efforts, and electrification across sectors. Addressing these needs will require coordinated investment from utilities, state agencies, and local stakeholders to ensure Niagara County is prepared for the next generation of energy users.

OPPORTUNITIES

The following areas identify economic development sectors that Niagara County is poised to capitalize on given the County's strengths and assets.

Business Recruitment and Development

Niagara County has numerous opportunities to promote entrepreneurship and increase business development throughout various industry sectors including value-added agricultural products, agritourism, energy, advanced manufacturing, tourism, logistics, and information technology. Incentive programs facilitated by the Niagara County Center for Economic Development including low-interest financing, grants, tax abatements, and low-cost sustainable hydropower, gives Niagara County a robust tool-kit to attract and support both existing and start-up companies.

Niagara County has and should continue to focus efforts on "economic gardening" – supporting the growth of existing local companies. The County's business retention program, which collects valuable input and data from existing companies is a key tool that keeps Niagara County in touch with the nuances of the local economy and allows the County to be responsive to both internal threats and growth opportunities.

International Trade

Given Niagara County's close proximity to the majority of the Canadian population, the international bridge crossings, the existing Foreign Trade Zone in the County, and an international airport with a runway able to accommodate cargo flights, international trade has long been a significant component of Niagara County's economy. While uncertainty exists regarding the future of U.S. foreign trade, Niagara County is poised to capitalize on any future increases in international commerce.

Site Development and Brownfield Remediation

Niagara County's industrial history has left a legacy of pollution and environmental concerns. These brownfield sites can be challenging and cost-prohibitive to redevelop. However, the County, and the greater Buffalo-Niagara region as a whole, faces a shortage of available, shovel-ready real estate for development. This presents an opportunity for site development with the support of Federal, State, and local brownfield redevelopment programs and funds. The Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation has an established track record of successful site remediation throughout the County and is positioned to assist new developers and companies looking to establish operations in Niagara County.

Leveraging Significant Investments

A number of large development projects currently in progress are bringing over \$500 million in investment and over 1,000 new jobs to Niagara County. With a nearby airport, easily accessible border crossings, and available hydropower and other incentives, Niagara County is poised to leverage these investments to become a hub for shipping and logistics in the region, while also supporting and developing related and complimentary businesses.

THREATS

Although external in nature, the following forces have the potential to impede economic growth in Niagara County.

Regulations and Business Environment

Already mentioned in the Weaknesses section above, relatively high taxes and regulatory burdens placed on private businesses exist as both a current weakness for Niagara County as well as a future threat to the County's economic prosperity.

New York State adopted the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019. The law requires the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to establish greenhouse gas emissions limits and develop regulations to reduce emissions 85 percent by 2050. Concern exists that the new law will lead to higher costs and create a competitive disadvantage for businesses in New York State. Niagara County supports an all-of-the-above approach to energy usage, especially in our region where relatively harsh winters increase the concern for reliability and cost for space heating needs.

Beginning in 2025, New York is implementing updated freshwater wetland regulations. This update expands the NYS DEC's jurisdiction over smaller local wetlands and expands the definition of what meets criteria to be considered a jurisdictional wetland. Additional delays or costs associated with real estate development as a result of this updated regulation has the potential to negatively impact future business and economic growth in Niagara County.

Aging Population and Declining Workforce

Niagara County's total population has been slowly but steadily declining since its peak in 1960. This gradual but consistent population loss coupled with the population's median age, which is over 4 years older than the State median, presents a significant challenge for Niagara County to meet the workforce needs of private companies. These demographic factors also present a challenge for Niagara County's housing stock, as older residents may require accessible housing units or rely on the support of various social services to meet their needs.

Electrical Infrastructure Capacity

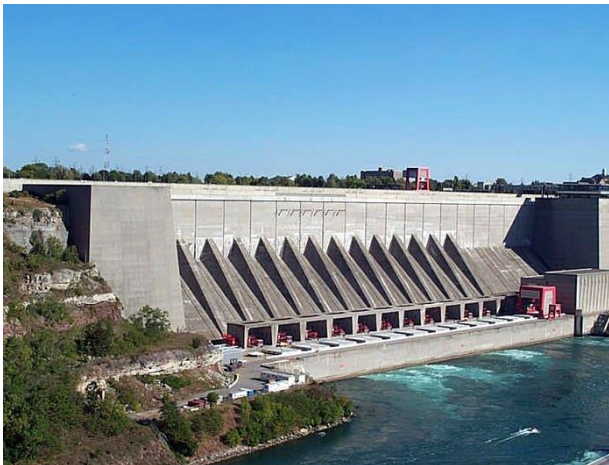
Niagara County, and New York State as a whole, lack sufficient electrical grid capacity to meet the demands of future end users. This is a threat for Niagara County's future development, as needed upgrades to the utility infrastructure will require significant investment in both time and public resources to accomplish.

The New York State Independent Service Operators (ISO) 20-year outlook estimates that energy generating capacity will need to triple in the next 20 years to meet expected user demand. Compounding the issue, traditional fossil fuel generation systems are retiring faster than clean energy sources are coming online to replace them. This has the potential to create reliability issues in addition to not keeping up with energy service demands.

A recent compounding factor for this threat is the establishment of data centers and cryptocurrency mining operations. These developments are major power users and place significant demand on the transmission system without providing much significant public benefit in the form of jobs, spin-off development, or increased tax revenue.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic location – proximity to major markets including Southern Ontario and Buffalo • Quality of life – quality education, affordable housing and cost of living, and cultural assets • Available low-cost hydropower • Environment and fresh-water resources – Great Lakes ecosystem, fishing and water recreation, Niagara Falls • Available business incentives • Transportation infrastructure • Agricultural industry • Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations and business environment • Lack of developable sites • Contaminated properties • Infrastructure and electric utility capacity • Workforce skills gap and population loss • Regional perception • Lack of public transportation • Low supply of available housing • Competition from other regions • Access to healthcare
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business recruitment and development • International trade • Leveraging significant investments • Brownfield remediation and shovel-ready site development • Agriculture and related agri-business development • Workforce training • Tourism industry • Available hydropower and water resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations and business environment • Aging population and declining workforce • NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act • Electrical grid infrastructure • International trade disruptions • Cryptocurrency mining facilities • Future changes to the operations of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve station

STRATEGIC DIRECTION



STRATEGIC DIRECTION:

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & ACTION PLAN

The Strategic Direction of Niagara County's CEDS is articulated by the Vision Statement, the Goals and Objectives that must be pursued to achieve that vision, and the Actions Plan that will get us there. Niagara County's Vision Statement expresses the need for proactive involvement, regional cooperation, and conscientious decision-making to build sustainable economic prosperity for all Niagara County residents, now and into the future. The Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan of this CEDS were developed to ensure Niagara County achieves this vision.

VISION STATEMENT

"Niagara County aspires to achieve a forward-thinking, proactive, responsible economic development model that will build a prosperous, sustainable future. This model will emphasize brownfield redevelopment, environmental sustainability, quality neighborhood development, living wage jobs, and regional collaboration and cooperation."

GOAL 1: PROVIDE THE INFRASTRUCTURE NECESSARY FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Transportation, municipal utility, and energy infrastructure are critical components of an effective economy. The SWOT Analysis found Niagara County's infrastructure lacking the quality and capacity needed for the County to sustainably grow.

Objective A: Direct development to sites already served by transportation and utility infrastructure

Action Plan

- i. Identify available development sites served by existing infrastructure and promote these sites as faster and affordable development opportunities
- ii. Encourage and support the construction of multi-tenant spec buildings and industrial suites in areas served by existing infrastructure

Objective B: Reinvest in existing infrastructure to create new development opportunities

Action Plan

- i. Promote new development opportunities in areas served by existing infrastructure

- ii. **Redevelop strategic properties in the Buffalo Avenue corridor of Niagara Falls**
- iii. **Rehabilitate or reconstruct 14 identified bridges throughout the County**

Objective C: Make strategic investments in new infrastructure at key development sites such as planned business and industrial parks

Action Plan

- i. **Design and construct Lockport Harbor and Marine Center**
- ii. **Extend necessary infrastructure to development sites on Tonawanda Island in North Tonawanda to support mixed-use developments**
- iii. **Support the development of a new 48-acre shovel-ready industrial park in the Town of Cambria**
- iv. **Support the IDA South industrial park in the Town of Lockport**

Objective D: Continue to address the growing electrical demand to support industry while preparing for impending energy mandates

Action Plan

- i. **Support utility-led maintenance and upgrades to electric distribution and transmission infrastructure, in partnership with public agencies and private developers, to ensure grid reliability and long-term resilience.**
- ii. **Prioritize and guide projects that integrate modern electricity generation, energy storage, and smart grid technologies in locations that can accommodate such uses with minimal community and environmental impact.**
- iii. **Align incentives and local support with projects that deliver proportional community and economic benefits relative to their energy consumption, especially in energy-constrained areas of the grid.**

Objective E: Activate and enhance rail infrastructure, rail-served sites, multi-modal shipping facilities, air-traffic infrastructure, and large-scale logistics operations to support industry

Action Plan

- i. **Market and promote the inventory of available rail-served sites in the County**
- ii. **Work with Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council to identify rail infrastructure improvements necessary to support local industry**
- iii. **Support the development of an international cargo port in Somerset**
- iv. **Support taxiway and runway improvements at the Niagara Falls International Airport and collaboration between the NFTA and the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station**

Objective F: Invest in roads, bridges, and other infrastructure critical to the movement of people, goods, and services

Action Plan

- i. Design and construct a reconfiguration of Twin Cities Memorial Highway in North Tonawanda to include traffic calming measures, multi-modal pathways, and expanded green space
- ii. Assess and if necessary invest in potential upgrades to the Durkee Bridge in North Tonawanda to support potential future traffic needs on Tonawanda Island
- iii. Continue efforts to maximize the utility of River Road in North Tonawanda including traffic calming measures and multi-modal usage opportunities
- iv. Improve drainage infrastructure to protect the structural integrity of roads, rural areas, commercial areas, industrial sites, and agricultural areas
- v. Implement Niagara County DPW's plan for rehabilitation and replacement of significant bridges throughout the County

Objective G: Expand broadband access to all parts of the county and attract more service providers

Action Plan

- i. Utilize State and Federal resources to subsidize expansion of broadband internet infrastructure into rural and underserved areas

GOAL 2: INCREASE AND PROMOTE LAND AND BUILDINGS AVAILABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities for businesses to locate and grow in Niagara County are limited by the lack of available sites. Whether due to environmental contamination, lack of infrastructure, or cost of development, many viable development sites are currently off the market.

Objective A: Utilize resources such as the Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC), Niagara County Brownfield Programs, grant programs, and other resources to make more land and buildings available for development

Action Plan

- i. Continue the efforts by NORLIC to repurpose properties, reduce community blight, and improve neighborhoods
- ii. Create new areas for industrial growth by capitalizing on the agreement between NORLIC and NYS DEC that minimizes environmental liability associated with acquisition of tax delinquent contaminated parcels

- iii. Continue participation in Invest Buffalo Niagara's the WNY Industrial Real Estate Development Strategy Committee
- iv. Conduct Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments through the Niagara County Brownfield Assessment Program to identify environmental conditions that may be hindering property development
- v. Utilize the Niagara County Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Program to provide low-interest loans and grants to assist with clean costs at brownfield sites
- vi. Support strategic land acquisition activities by USA Niagara in the City of Niagara Falls
- vii. Remediate strategic properties in the Buffalo Avenue corridor of Niagara Falls

Objective B: Make strategic infrastructure investments such as utility and transportation improvements to create development-ready sites

Action Plan

- i. Extend infrastructure to any planned business or industrial parks to assist in making the sites shovel-ready
- ii. Support the establishment of a new industrial park in the Town of Lockport
- iii. Develop a 48-acre shovel ready business park in the Town of Cambria

Objective C: Analyze market needs and determine if adequate property exists to support current and future commercial and industrial development.

Action Plan

- i. Undertake a countywide study of the supply of commercial and industrial land, determine land availability and status, and make recommendations to municipal officials
- ii. Promote policies which will preserve valuable agricultural land
- iii. Explore opportunities around Niagara Falls International Airport for further development in this critical business corridor

Objective D: Provide outreach to developers on available incentives, showcase successful projects, and highlight development opportunities

Action Plan

- i. Prepare and update fact sheets for high priority development sites
- ii. Promote development opportunities through the NCCED website, local development corporations, commercial listing services, site selectors, real estate brokers, and other channels
- iii. Host a countywide site tour for developers and support local efforts to market sites and opportunities directly to developers

Objective E: Find redevelopment opportunities for owners of vacant and underutilized properties, especially commercial and industrial sites

Action Plan

- i. Foster redevelopment of Tonawanda Island and other properties in the NT Momentum Downtown Revitalization Initiative in North Tonawanda
- ii. Complete projects associated with the Lockport Downtown Revitalization Initiative which will improve walkability, tourism, and access to the Erie Canal along with the redevelopment of significant mixed-use properties within downtown Lockport
- iii. Implement the Brownfields Coalition Assessment Grant to assess the environmental conditions and strategize the redevelopment of the Highland and Mid-Town areas of Niagara Falls, the West End area of Lockport, and the Oliver Street corridor in North Tonawanda
- iv. Support projects that further implement the Niagara Falls Bridge District plan through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative
- v. Continue the dialogue with property owners along the Buffalo Avenue Corridor of Niagara Falls to foster redevelopment efforts at vacated sites

Objective F: Identify and promote mixed-use development projects

Action Plan

- i. Work with municipal partners to update comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to encourage and allow mixed-use development
- ii. Explore development of Niagara University student housing on Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls

GOAL 3: RETAIN EXISTING BUSINESSES AND ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES

Niagara County has a strong business retention and attraction program. Continuing to leverage this strength while further developing the County's assets will provide the opportunities for companies to grow sustainably in Niagara County.

Objective A: Enhance existing business recruitment efforts, especially recruitment of Canadian companies and U.S. companies outside of New York State

Action Plan

- i. Collaborate with World Trade Center Buffalo Niagara, Invest Buffalo Niagara, Niagara USA Chamber, and Global NY on business recruitment efforts
- ii. Participate in tradeshow and Select USA events to promote Niagara County as a desirable business development location

Objective B: Develop new communication tools to support business outreach efforts

Action Plan

- i. Identify direct and indirect outreach mechanisms that can be utilized to reach new and existing companies including digital marketing, direct mail, cold calling, newspaper and magazine ads, television and radio ads, social media, e-mail marketing, and other channels
- ii. Expand the Virtual Business Workshop Series to highlight important topics in key industries
- iii. Utilize Global NY personnel and resources to promote exporting assistance to existing companies

Objective C: Market incentives and resources to attract, retain, and grow companies

Action Plan

- i. Promote Niagara County's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (C-PACE) to companies seeking alternative financing for energy efficiency and building-scale renewable energy projects
- ii. Continue to market and promote infrastructure and energy efficiency incentive programs to area businesses through National Grid, National Fuel, NYSEDA, New York State Electric & Gas, and the New York Power Authority
- iii. Market, promote, and coordinate the appropriate use of grants, low-interest financing, and tax incentives from agencies such as Empire State Development and NYS Office of Community Renewal to assist Niagara County business growth
- iv. Utilize the resources and incentive programs of the NCIDA, Niagara County Department of Economic Development, Town of Lockport IDA, Greater Lockport Development Corporation, Lumber City Development Corporation, USA Niagara Development Corporation, and any other local agency to support local companies
- v. Support the establishment of a meat-processing facility in Niagara County

Objective D: Expand business retention efforts through outreach and incentives

Action Plan

- i. Continue the Niagara County Business Growth and Retention Program, whereby economic development professionals conduct direct outreach efforts to keep companies informed of various programs available to them in their efforts to invest in their facilities, and retain and create jobs

GOAL 4: ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE A SKILLED WORKFORCE

As Niagara County's population has aged and demographics have shifted, companies are having a difficult time finding available qualified employees. Niagara County must work to align education and workforce development initiatives with the in-demand careers of the future economy to meet the needs of current and prospective employers.

Objective A: Identify skills gaps for key industries and develop workforce training programs to fill those gaps

Action Plan

- i. Continue collaboration between educational institutions, the Workforce Development Board, and local resource partners as well as the private sector to identify skills gaps in key industry sectors including advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, health and life sciences, data analytics and cyber security, hospitality & tourism, skilled trades, and logistics
- ii. Continue to meet with local businesses to identify workforce development and skills training needs

Objective B: Better coordinate and utilize existing education and training programs to ensure an adequate workforce for current and future industries

Action Plan

- i. Continue implementation of the Dream It Do It (DIDI) Advanced Manufacturing Program
- ii. Continue to collaborate with Invest Buffalo Niagara and the "Be in Buffalo" campaign to attract ex-pats and retain college students to our County and Region
- iii. Continue to connect businesses and job seekers to training in occupations that are in demand in Niagara County, including promotion of on-the-job training funds and classroom training funds assigned through the Workforce Development Board
- iv. Launch the School of Cybersecurity and Applied Artificial Intelligence

Objective C: Develop and improve complimentary services to better connect people with available jobs and support a sustainable workforce

Action Plan

- i. Continue to foster dialogue between the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and Connect Niagara to make connections where needed for local businesses and job centers
- ii. Work with local groups to investigate ride-sharing opportunities to help fill transportation gaps for employees
- iii. Support the development of accessible and affordable childcare facilities throughout the County

GOAL 5: DIVERSIFY NIAGARA COUNTY'S ECONOMIC BASE TO ENSURE RESILIENCE

Niagara County ranks in the top 10% nationally in economic diversity. Maintaining a diverse economy is critical to withstanding the shocks and challenges from any future unforeseen economic disruptions.

Objective A: Identify and attract companies in growing sectors such as health and life sciences, information technology, agribusiness, and others

Action Plan

- i. Attend trade shows and place specialized marketing content in target industry sectors
- ii. Implement Niagara County's Meat Processing Facility Market and Economic Analysis

Objective B: Market available incentives and resources to growing industry sectors that are not well represented in Niagara County

Action Plan

- Expand the placement of advertising in trade magazines, site selector publications, and targeted online media in specific industries

Objective C: Encourage startup companies and microenterprises through training and funding

Action Plan

- i. Continue to administer the Niagara County microenterprise grant program to support start-up and small businesses
- ii. Continue the Niagara Falls Small Business Property Improvement program in the City of Niagara Falls
- iii. Support and promote existing microenterprise grant programs in Lockport, Niagara Falls, and North Tonawanda
- iv. Continue to provide Small Business Development Center services which include business planning, marketing, global strategies, financial analysis, and training services, which are critical to startups and small businesses

Objective D: Support businesses throughout growth cycle

Action Plan

- i. Expand the utilization of the Niagara County Economic Gardening program to assist second stage or emerging growth companies

- ii. Support development of flex-space and business incubator facilities

GOAL 6: IMPROVE ACCESS TO, AND AFFORDABILITY OF, DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS

Quality, safe, affordable housing is the backbone of healthy, vibrant communities. As the State and nation face challenges with housing supply and affordability, Niagara County recognizes that improving access to affordable housing will strengthen its communities and invigorate its economy.

Objective A: Encourage appropriate housing development throughout the County

Action Plan

- i. Collaborate with local municipalities during any land use planning or zoning process and encourage a diversity of housing options
- ii. Support the development of healthy communities where housing, employment, childcare, healthcare, and other services are available and accessible

Objective B: Ensure an adequate supply of diverse housing types that appeal to different ages, incomes, and lifestyles

Action Plan

- i. Support community development efforts in local municipalities, recognizing housing is a significant driver in the retention and attraction of millennials and younger generations
- ii. Support dense, walkable new development in downtown North Tonawanda and traditional mixed-use development in North Tonawanda's Oliver Street neighborhood
- iii. Promote the uniform adoption of the NYS 485-a mixed use real property tax exemption to encourage mixed-use developments and a diversity of housing options throughout the County
- iv. Support a variety of incoming housing developments including the 78 Bridge Street and Riverfront Vista projects in North Tonawanda and the Westcott Estates project in the Town of Lockport
- v. Explore development of Niagara University student housing on Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls
- vi. Support the reuse of the former Eastern Niagara Hospital in the City of Lockport as housing units

Objective C: Reduce sprawl and promote smart growth, sustainable development patterns

Action Plan

- i. Encourage in-fill residential development within Niagara County's existing developed urban neighborhoods.

- ii. Repurpose existing underutilized assets – such as former school buildings, hospital facilities, manufacturing facilities, and vacant sites – in Niagara County’s three cities as opportunities for new urban housing development
- iii. Support ancillary projects – such as sidewalk repair, pedestrian improvements, traffic calming, public lighting – that allow people to live in dense, walkable, and safe communities
- iv. Support additional public transportation throughout Niagara County, focusing on transit options that connect households to neighborhood goods and services
- v. Support NORLIC’s housing stabilization and Main Street initiatives in the City of Niagara Falls

GOAL 7: GROW AWARENESS OF NIAGARA COUNTY AS A WORLD-RENOWNED DESTINATION

Beyond the majesty of thundering Niagara Falls, Niagara County offers a wide variety of natural, cultural, and recreational assets and amenities.

Objective A: Coordinate local, regional, and international marketing efforts to promote the strong quality of life within Niagara County to investors and tourists

Action Plan

- i. Continue Destination Niagara USA’s regional and international tourism marketing efforts
- ii. Expand utilization of the Niagara Falls Convention Center
- iii. Encourage collaboration in promotion and events between the County’s non-profit and cultural assets and organizations
- iv. Work with Invest Buffalo Niagara, Destination Niagara USA, Empire State Development, and other marketing agencies to ensure promotion of Niagara County in marketing efforts
- v. Work with regional economic development partners to create a marketing campaign capable of promoting Niagara County’s strengths to local, regional, and international markets
- vi. Collaborate with professional, collegiate, and youth sports and athletic organizations throughout the region to promote sports tourism

Objective B: Promote the natural and cultural assets of the region

Action Plan

- i. Complete the Flight of Five restoration project in the City of Lockport, upgrades to Gateway Harbor in North Tonawanda, and promote tourism and utilization of the Erie Canal throughout the County
- ii. Expand the Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda as part of downtown tourism development
- iii. Ensure recruitment materials provided by regional economic development agencies to potential new companies and residents include information on the quality of Niagara County’s natural and cultural assets
- iv. Complete projects associated with the Lake Ontario Regional Dredging Program, including regular dredging of Wilson and Olcott harbors.
- v. Promote the variety of abundant freshwater fishing opportunities throughout Niagara County

Objective C: Establish additional infrastructure and assets that support a growing tourism industry

Action Plan

- i. Support the development of hotels and lodging options where appropriate throughout Niagara County
- ii. Support the development of the Centennial Park sports and entertainment complex in downtown Niagara Falls

GOAL 8: LEVERAGE AND CAPITALIZE ON SIGNIFICANT PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENTS

As significant investments are made in Niagara County, it is critical that the County be prepared to leverage and support the ancillary activities including supply chain businesses, transportation and logistics services, and expanded infrastructure needs.

Objective A: Invest in infrastructure to support business growth and new investments in Niagara County

Action Plan

- i. Invest in public infrastructure located near and/or supporting private investments such as runway enhancements to the Niagara Falls Airport to support warehouse and distribution activities like the new investment by Amazon
- ii. Continue to capitalize loan and grant funds to provide gap funds to support private sector investment and expansion
- iii. Support the development of an international cargo port in Somerset

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Evaluation Framework is an important element of Niagara County's ongoing planning process. It is designed to answer the questions, "How are we doing?" and "What can we do better?" It is structured around key metrics that serve as indicators of success in achieving our goals and objectives. These performance measures help monitor our progress in implementing the CEDS. The Evaluation Framework includes both Overarching Performance Measures and Goal-Specific Performance Measures, which are detailed below.

OVERARCHING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Overarching performance measures are those that provide a broad indication of Niagara County's economic health. They include conventional measures of growth and prosperity commonly used to compare local, regional, state, and national trends such as unemployment rate and median household income. They also include county-specific benchmarks like gross county product. Overarching performance measures are as follows:

- **Average annual unemployment rate**

A high level of unemployment is a strong indicator of economic distress in a region. Niagara County's 2023 unemployment rate was 4.1%, slightly below the New York State figure but higher than the national average.

- **Median household income**

Niagara County's median household income rose 2.7% from 2017 to 2022, increasing at a higher rate than the national average but not keeping pace with New York State.

- **Percent of population below the poverty line**

Niagara County's poverty rate in 2023 was 12.4%, lower than the New York State rate but higher than the national average.

- **Gross domestic product**

Niagara County's GDP in 2023 was \$9,964,309,000, a 0.2% decrease from 2022. Niagara County ranks 19th of New York's 62 counties in total GDP.

GOAL-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Goal-specific performance measures are those that provide an indication of our progress in achieving the goals outlined in the previous section. Each performance measure is also designed to address one or more objectives. These measures more specifically address Niagara County's success in implementing the CEDS.

Goal 1: Provide the Infrastructure Necessary for Growth and Development

- **Percent of the County's bridges that are rated as 'deficient'**
- **Percent of the County's lane-miles of road rated as 'poor'**
- **Percent of households in the County with broadband internet access**

Employers rely on physical infrastructure—such as roads, broadband, and electrical power—to operate efficiently and remain competitive. Niagara County has identified transportation, telecommunications, and electric power infrastructure as three critical pillars of economic development and are a priority for regional growth. Addressing challenges in close coordination with utility providers and state agencies ensures infrastructure reliability, public safety, and cost-effective development.

The Niagara County Department of Public Works current 5-year capital plan include replacement or rehabilitation of 14 bridges throughout the County.

Goal 2: Increase and Promote Land and Buildings Available for Development

- **Total acres of vacant land zoned for commercial development**
- **Total acres of vacant land zoned for industrial development**
- **Total number of commercial and industrial building permits issued annually**
- **Total dollar value of commercial and industrial building permits issued annually**
- **Number of 'development-ready' sites**

The greater western New York region is lacking sufficient available sites for development, particularly in the industrial sector. Many potential sites are known or suspected brownfields and have limited viability. Through the Niagara County Brownfield Cleanup program and a variety of shovel-ready initiatives, Niagara County aims to increase both the number of and quality of sites available for development.

Goal 3: Retain Existing Businesses and Attract New Businesses

- **Total number of business establishments**
- **Total number of companies contacted through Niagara County's Business Retention Program**
- **Total dollar value of capital investments from County and Town IDA PILOT projects**

The U.S. Department of the Treasury estimates that up to 80% of net new job growth comes from existing companies. Niagara County has long recognized the significance of its existing employer base and has established a robust and active Business Retention Program. This program is coupled with a variety of business start-up

support programs and business attraction incentives, giving Niagara County a full toolkit for economic development.

Goal 4: Enhance Educational Opportunities to Ensure a Highly Skilled Workforce

- **Annual graduates from select ONBOCES programs**
- **Anticipated enrollment in select SUNY Niagara and Niagara University programs that align with the County's in-demand occupations**
- **Enrollment in the Dream It Do It Advanced Manufacturing program**

As Niagara County's population has aged and declined in recent decades, finding sufficiently skilled employees has become a challenge for local companies. A variety of County agencies and educational institutions are working to better align the local education programs with Niagara County's most growing and in-demand industry sectors including healthcare, hospitality and tourism, and advanced manufacturing.

Goal 5: Diversity Niagara County's Economic Base to Ensure Resilience

- **Economic Diversity Index**
- **Total annual employer payroll**

Niagara County currently ranks in the top 10% of most economically diverse counties in the entire country. Maintaining a diverse economy, with jobs in a variety of sectors and a variety of pay scales and education levels, is critical to helping Niagara County residents weather future significant economic disruptions and challenges.

Goal 6: Improve Access to, and Affordability of, Diverse Housing Options

- **Total number of occupied housing units and vacancy rate**
- **Ratio of rental versus owned housing units**
- **Gross rent as a percentage of household income**

Throughout New York state and much of the country, access to affordable housing has become a significant challenge. Niagara County has an older housing stock in need of investment to remain a viable part of the housing market supply.

Goal 7: Grow Awareness of Niagara County as a World-Renowned Destination

- **Total dollar value of bought media campaigns**
- **Total dollar value of earned free media**
- **Average daily reach of NCDED social media posts**
- **Daily web traffic and social media interactions for Destination Niagara USA's online content**

Hospitality and tourism is a strong and growing sector of Niagara County's economy. While the majestic Niagara Falls have long been known around the globe, there are historical, cultural, and natural tourism assets throughout the County. Continued support and promotion of these assets will drive visitors to stay longer, explore communities throughout the County, and spend their visitor dollars at local businesses.

Goal 8: Leverage and Capitalize on Significant Private Sector Investments

- **Total net new jobs in Niagara County**
- **Total annual payroll in major industry sectors**

Economic development projects don't happen in a vacuum. Major investments and new businesses impact the local supply chain, transportation network, and housing and development patterns around them. Niagara County endeavors to engage these major projects with a holistic approach and maximize their ancillary benefits to County residents.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE



ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND MEASUREMENT

Through the preparation of this CEDS document, Niagara County's economic development partners are working together to build capacity for economic resilience. Economic resilience planning aims to better prepare regions to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of economic shock, disruption, or stress it may experience. Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity

In the event of a shock or disruption to Niagara County's economic base, these local partners will be critical in providing post-incident coordination, disseminating information, responding to external inquiries, and undertaking recovery initiatives. Niagara County's efforts to build capacity for economic resilience can be divided into four main categories: planning for and implementing resilience, establishing information networks, pre-disaster recovery planning, and measuring resilience.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING RESILIENCE

Planning for and implementing resilience through economic development requires coordination and cooperation among economic development agencies and partners throughout Niagara County. Niagara County's CEDS seeks to accomplish this through four primary action items:

Task 1: Identify Persistent Economic Challenges or Deficiencies

What are Niagara County's economic vulnerabilities?

- Regulations and Business Environment– The biggest challenge to Niagara County's economy is the high cost of doing business in New York State. According to the Tax Foundation's 2025 State Business Tax Climate Index, New York State has the worst business tax structure in the United States. The report indicates high personal income tax, high sales tax, high property tax, and relatively high unemployment insurance tax, and notes "...high rates and a burdensome and nonneutral tax structure."
- Poverty Rate – People in poverty, both living in urban and rural communities, are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of a significant economic crisis. Persistent urban poverty is also a significant challenge within the region. In the City of Niagara Falls, the largest city in Niagara County, the poverty rate is 23.7%. This is nearly double the 12.4% poverty rate of Niagara County and 13.4% poverty rate of New York State (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates). The City of Lockport's poverty rate of 15.9% is also higher than the County and State, while the City of North Tonawanda's current poverty rate is 12.1%.
- Lack of Developable Sites - The region has a lower vacancy rate for industrial real estate as compared to the national average. The price per square foot rent for industrial space has doubled since 2020 and continues to rise as a result of the high cost of construction as well as the overall lack of available vacant land to build new industrial facilities. This is a challenge to manufacturers or distributors seeking immediately occupiable space. In the current financial environment, building on spec is cost prohibitive. Contaminated properties are also a problem across Niagara County, a legacy issue that will take generations to reverse. While there are tax benefits available to

property owners willing to partake in the cleanup of parcels, this is a lengthy and costly process that requires professional specialization.

- Electrical Grid Infrastructure – As Niagara County advances toward New York State’s mandated clean energy goals, meeting future electricity demands will require coordinated investment and planning across the entire energy ecosystem. Electric utilities are actively investing in modernizing infrastructure and expanding capacity to support these goals; however, system-wide challenges persist, including the accelerated retirement of fossil fuel generation and the need for significant new transmission and distribution infrastructure to support energy integration. The New York Independent System Operator (NYISO) projects that energy demand will increase substantially over the next two decades, underscoring the importance of strategic, collaborative planning with state agencies, regional authorities, and local stakeholders. This is a threat for Niagara County’s future development, as upgrades to the utility infrastructure will require significant investment in both time and public resources.
- Workforce/Population Aging and Loss - Niagara County’s total population has been slowly but steadily declining since its peak in 1960. This gradual but consistent population loss coupled with the population’s median age, which is over 4 years older than the State median, presents a significant challenge for Niagara County to meet the workforce needs of private companies. These demographic factors also present a challenge for Niagara County’s housing stock, as older residents may require accessible housing units or rely on the support of various social services to meet their needs.

Task 2: Prepare for Disruptions by Identifying Early Warning Tools

Does Niagara County have an “anticipatory focus” that will help it react quickly when confronted with potential disruptions and challenges?

There are a number of key data sources that inform our economic development efforts and our economic resiliency. Among them are ongoing reports from our economic development partners that measure economic performance at the local and regional levels and identify challenges facing the business community. These reporting tools were developed as part of separate, but interrelated, economic development initiatives. They are designed to measure progress in achieving goals and objectives for growing our economy, strengthening our quality of life, and improving our business environment, but they can also serve as early warning tools, signaling economic stress and identifying looming challenges. In addition to the resources below, this CEDS includes a number of key indicators of the state of our economy. It will be updated every three to five years, serving as an important early warning tool.

- WNY Regional Economic Development Council Annual Progress Report – measures progress in achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan. This dashboard report is instrumental in gauging the economic health of the five-county Western New York Region.
- Niagara County Business Survey – Annual outreach which helps gauge the needs of businesses. The results drive programs and advocacy for the region.
- Niagara County Annual Economic Development Address – serves as an update to the Niagara County Legislature on economic development initiatives undertaken by the Niagara County Center for Economic Development. This annual report includes key metrics on business retention, marketing, business expansion, and new business recruitment activities. The data provides a baseline for comparing economic development activities year over year.
- Buffalo Niagara Partnership Advocacy Agenda – BNP advocates for economic development and business policies on behalf of its members, which include government, businesses, and nonprofits. The BNP’s Advocacy

Agenda, which is released annually, includes a number of metrics on key challenges facing businesses, which underlie their advocacy efforts.

- USA Niagara Chamber Advocacy Agenda – Produce annually, the USA Niagara Chamber of Commerce’s advocacy agenda reflects the Chamber’s ongoing commitment to serving as the leading voice for businesses in Niagara County at the local, state and federal levels.

Task 3: Build Mechanisms that create Flexibility

Do the local governments have detailed and tested disaster response and recovery plans?

Niagara County, through both its Public Health Preparedness and Emergency Services offices, serves as the central clearinghouse for disaster planning and recovery. Resources, links, and information are readily available for both the members of the public and partner agencies on topics including:

- Extreme heat
- Influenza, COVID-19, and other public health pandemics
- Emergency and fire services
- Severe weather
- Hazardous materials
- Infrastructure, traffic, and property
- Natural disasters

The Niagara County Department of Emergency Services has recently launched the “Prepare Niagara” mobile app. The Prepare Niagara app serves as an efficient way for the Department of Emergency Services to connect with Niagara County residents and visitors, providing information to anyone with a smartphone. The app offers quick access to items of public interest including:

- Receive instant push notifications for severe weather
- Submit a damage report
- Quickly browse maps/shelter locations
- Connect to the organization’s social media platforms
- Read the latest news and press releases
- Browse available fire training and submit applications from their phone
- Research COVID-19 information (Vaccine/testing sites, CDC information)
- Quickly pull up your location in case of an emergency

As evidence by the economic disruptions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, disaster preparedness, mitigation, management, and response requires coordination across all levels of government. Niagara County will endeavor to work with local municipalities, specifically the three cities of Lockport, North Tonawanda, and Niagara Falls, to develop disaster response and recovery plans.

Task 4: Promote a Positive Vision for the Region

Is the messaging about the region's assets and opportunities positive, to encourage investments in both times of tranquility and disruption?

Niagara County Economic Development, along with partner economic development agencies and Destination Niagara USA, makes a consistent effort to market and promote Niagara County to investors, developers, and business prospects in a wide range of industries.

<https://www.niagaracountybusiness.com/high-quality-of-life>

<https://www.niagaracountybusiness.com/why-niagara>

Social media is a growing medium for marketing and promotion. Agencies throughout the County have active social media accounts which positively promote County-wide assets including: Niagara USA Chamber, Lumber City Development Corporation, Niagara County Economic Development, Destination Niagara USA, Greater Lockport Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas, and many others.

Additional resources available on the Niagara County Center for Economic Development website which promote and encourage investment in the County include a free resource guide for Canadian businesses, navigable incentives resource page, and a regular email newsletter.

ESTABLISHING INFORMATION NETWORKS

In addition to identifying regional vulnerabilities and specific actions to address them, Niagara County Center for Economic Development is working to establish mechanisms to facilitate active and regular communication between the relevant sectors to collaborate on common challenges.

Niagara County has established several mechanisms to facilitate active communication between relevant stakeholders in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Niagara County also serves as a data repository and hub for information through its Center for Economic Development, which developed and deployed capabilities to keep businesses and workers informed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stakeholder collaboration and information exchange are critical during times of crisis. Niagara County has a number of unique outlets for communicating with stakeholders and disseminating information, particularly in the government and business sectors. In times of economic crisis, Niagara County can leverage these channels to coordinate an effective response effort.

- Economic Development Alliance – Established by the Niagara County Legislature in 1993 as a working group of economic development professionals in the region representing over 30 agencies. The group meets quarterly with the sole purpose of providing a wide range of supportive services to business and to coordinate and facilitate the provision of those services.
- Niagara County Center for Economic Development – Developed as a one-stop-shop and centrally located within Niagara County, the Center for Economic Development includes the Niagara County Department of Economic Development which provides information support for businesses and the public including technical data related to land use, zoning and planning; Niagara County Industrial Development Agency, which provides tax abatements, economic development loan funds, and microenterprise assistance grants; Niagara USA Chamber of Commerce, Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation, and the SUNY Niagara Small Business Development Center.

- Invest Buffalo Niagara – The Niagara County Department of Economic Development is a member of Invest Buffalo Niagara (InBN), an organization representing the eight counties of WNY whose mission is to attract new employers to the region through outreach to growing companies around the world with a unified response to regional economic development opportunities.
- Office of Emergency Services – The Niagara County Office of Emergency Services (OES) ensures, through coordination with all First Responders that the county is prepared to respond to, and recover from, all natural and man-made emergencies for our citizens, employers and visitors. OES will provide leadership, training and support to reduce the loss of life and property through an all-hazards emergency management program of planning and preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery throughout Niagara County.
- Elected Officials – Elected officials throughout the County, including each city's mayor's office, many town supervisors, State and County legislators, and the Niagara County public information officer, all have some form of newsletter, email service, or social media presence available for the distribution of information.
- Center for Economic Development Media Channels – Social media is an important avenue that we utilize to share resources, services and programs with businesses and the community. Our three main channels include X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn, and these are utilized both independently and in tandem to reach an even larger audience.
- Chambers of Commerce – Niagara County has three Chambers of Commerce operating in local communities, with the Niagara USA Chamber representing businesses across the entire county. They are strong advocates for the businesses in Niagara County and provide many key services that businesses depend on for success.
- Online Outreach – Outreach to businesses continues to grow through virtual platforms. Through the use of email newsletters, blogs, and the Center's website, the Niagara County Center for Economic Development has been able to provide key information on important programs and resources to a much larger audience in the business community.

PRE-DISASTER RECOVERY PLANNING

Niagara County aims to integrate its economic development strategies, sustainability principles, communication procedures, and hazard mitigation planning to build economic resilience throughout the County.

With its temperate weather and geographic location, Niagara County is fortunately not prone to frequent natural disasters or episodes of extreme weather. The most common threats to Niagara County include significant winter snow events due to its location in the Great Lakes system as well as the possibility of significant flooding due to the County's relatively flat topography. Nonetheless, the unpredictability of natural disasters, as well as other disasters such as public health crises, make it critical that every region endeavors to develop plans and response systems to coordinate the immediate response and future recovery following a disastrous event.

A variety of resources exist to support Niagara County's efforts to develop disaster recovery plans, including:

- FEMA Preparedness Toolkit and National Preparedness System - The National Preparedness System outlines an organized process for everyone in the community to move forward with their preparedness activities and achieve the National Preparedness Goal. The Preparedness Toolkit is an online portal that provides the community with tools to aid in implementing all six areas of the National Preparedness System.

- HUD Disaster Preparedness Virtual Toolkit - The HUD Disaster Preparedness Virtual Toolkit is an online tool to help Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) prepare for and respond to disasters. This toolkit is intended to ensure that PHAs can maintain operations and obligations to the families they serve as severe weather events, local disasters, and national emergencies such as COVID-19 occur more frequently.
- US EPA Regional Resilience Toolkit - The Regional Resilience Toolkit promotes an inclusive, coordinated approach to disaster planning. It is designed to help multiple jurisdictions and levels of government, as well as non-governmental partners and local groups, collaborate on regional-scale actions.
- HUD Community Resilience Toolkit - The HUD Community Resilience Toolkit is a guide to help recipients of HUD funds identify opportunities to use their federal dollars to mitigate the impacts of natural related hazards.
- SBA – The SBA provides online resources for businesses to prepare for, manage, and recover from disasters.

MEASURING RESILIENCE

Niagara County will utilize the Evaluation Framework outlined in this CEDS document as a tool for measuring the County's economic resilience. As the County's overall economic health and the well-being and quality of life of its citizens improves, so too will the County's economic resilience.

Economic resilience is a measure of the County's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from a major disruption. Niagara County feels strongly that a stable economic base with high levels of employment, low levels of poverty, good access to essential services including transportation, healthcare, food, and energy are critical to building an economically resilient community. To measure the County's resilience, Niagara County will monitor data including:

- Economic diversification index (EDI) – Economic diversity measures the degree to which a region possesses a broad mix of economic activities and industries. The highest level of economic diversity is achieved when all industries are equally represented in a region. Economic diversity ensures the county is not overly reliant on any one industry sector and is resilient to economic shocks. Niagara County has a diversified economic base and even though the region has been slow to grow it has not been subject to the more national level fluctuations. Niagara County's EDI ranks it 339th out of 3,280 counties in the United States, which puts it near the top 10% most economically diverse counties in the U.S. Maintaining this diversification will allow the county to continue experiencing a stable economy.
- Unemployment – Unemployment negatively impacts the disposable income of families, erodes purchasing power, and decreases an economy's output. Reduced purchasing power can often lead to unemployment for other workers, creating a cascading effect that ripples through the economy. Niagara County has been fortunate in maintaining a relatively low unemployment rate. By monitoring the unemployment rate, more informative decisions can be made about ways to counter unemployment and steer the economy in a positive direction.
- Median household income – Median income reflects the income status of the majority of households and is a good representation of economic health of an area. Changes in median income reflect several trends including an aging population who are no longer working, evolution of the household and family composition, changing work and schooling patterns, and both long- and short-term trends in the economy itself.
- Percent of population below poverty line – The number of people below the poverty line indicates the percentage of Niagara County's population that does not have the minimum level of income needed to meet daily needs. People below the poverty level typically require governmental intervention so a higher poverty rate correlates to a greater amount of governmental services required.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX



Goal 1: Provide the Infrastructure Necessary for Growth and Development

Objective: Direct development to sites already served by utility and transportation infrastructure					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Identify available development sites served by existing infrastructure and promote these sites as faster and affordable development opportunities	NCCED	High	Short-term	\$	
Encourage and support the construction of multi-tenant spec buildings and industrial suites in areas served by existing infrastructure	NCCED	High	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Reinvest in existing infrastructure to create new development opportunities					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Promote new development opportunities in areas served by existing infrastructure	NCCED	High	Short-term	\$	
Redevelop strategic properties in the Buffalo Avenue corridor of Niagara Falls	NCCED	Medium	Long-term	\$\$\$	
Rehabilitate or reconstruct 14 identified bridges throughout the County	NCDPW	High	Mid-term	\$\$	NYS DOT, US FHWA

Objective: Make strategic investments in new infrastructure at key development sites such as planned business and industrial parks					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Design and construct Lockport Harbor and Marine Center	City of Lockport	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	
Extend necessary infrastructure to sites on Tonawanda Island in North Tonawanda to support mixed-use developments	City of North Tonawanda	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	
Support the development of a new 48-acre industrial park in the Town of Cambria	Town of Cambria, NCCED	High	Short-term	\$\$	ESD, National Grid, US EDA
Support the IDA South industrial park in the Town of Lockport	Town of Lockport	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	

Objective: Continue to address the growing electrical demand to support industry in Niagara County while preparing for impending energy mandates					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Support utility-led maintenance and upgrades to electric distribution and transmission infrastructure, in partnership with public agencies and private developers, to ensure grid reliability and long-term resilience.	Niagara County, National Grid, NYSEG, NYPA	High	Mid-term	\$\$\$	NYPA, National Fuel Gas
Prioritize and guide projects that integrate modern electricity generation, energy storage, and smart grid technologies in locations that can accommodate such uses with minimal community and environmental impact.	Niagara County, National Grid, NYSEG, NYPA	High	Mid-term	\$\$\$	National Grid, NYSEG, NYPA, NYSERDA
Align incentives and local support with projects that deliver proportional community and economic benefits relative to their energy consumption, especially in energy-constrained areas of the grid.	NCIDA, Town of Lockport IDA	High	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Activate and enhance rail infrastructure, rail-served sites, multi-modal shipping facilities, and large scale logistics operations to support industry					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Market and promote the inventory of available rail-served sites in the County	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Work with Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council to identify rail infrastructure improvements necessary to support local industry	NCDPW	Low	Short-term	\$	
Support the development of an international cargo port in Somerset	NCCED, Town of Somerset	Medium	Short-term	\$\$\$	Private, U.S. DOT
Support taxiway and runway improvements at the Niagara Falls International Airport and collaboration between the NFTA and the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station	NFTA, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, NIMAC	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$\$	U.S. DOD

Objective: Invest in roads, bridges, and other infrastructure critical to the movement of people, goods, and services					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Design and construct a reconfiguration of Twin Cities Memorial Highway in North Tonawanda to include traffic calming measures, multi-modal pathways, and expanded green space	NYS DOT, City of North Tonawanda, GBNRTC	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$\$	NYS DOT
Assess and if necessary invest in potential upgrades to the Durkee Bridge in North Tonawanda to support potential future traffic needs on Tonawanda Island	City of North Tonawanda	Low	Long-term	\$\$	NYS DOT
Continue efforts to maximize the utility of River Road in North Tonawanda including traffic calming measures and multi-modal usage opportunities	City of North Tonawanda	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	NYS DOT
Improve drainage infrastructure to protect the structural integrity of roads, rural areas, commercial areas, industrial sites, and agricultural areas	NCDPW	Medium	Long-term	\$\$	
Implement Niagara County DPW's plan for rehabilitation and replacement of significant bridges throughout the County	NCDPW	High	Mid-term	\$\$	NYS DOT

Objective: Expand broadband access to all parts of the County and attract more service providers					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Utilize State and Federal resources to subsidize expansion of broadband internet infrastructure into rural and underserved areas	Niagara County	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Goal 2: Increase and Promote Land and Buildings Available for Development

Objective: Utilize resources such as the Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC), Niagara County Brownfield Programs, grant programs, and other resources to make more land and buildings available for development					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue the efforts by NORLIC to repurpose properties, reduce community blight, and improve neighborhoods	NORLIC, Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and Lockport	High	Short-term	\$\$	NYS HCR, ESD
Create new areas for industrial growth by capitalizing on the agreement between NORLIC and NYS DEC that minimizes environmental liability associated with acquisition of tax delinquent contaminated parcels	NORLIC, NCCED, Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and Lockport	High	Short-term	\$	
Continue participation in the WNY Industrial Real Estate Development Strategy Committee	NCDED	High	Short-term	\$	
Conduct Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments through the Niagara County Brownfield Assessment Program to identify environmental conditions that may be hindering property development	NCDED	High	Short-term	\$	
Utilize the Niagara County Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Program to provide low-interest loans and grants to assist with clean costs at brownfield sites	NCDED	High	Short-term	\$	U.S. EPA
Support strategic land acquisition activities by USA Niagara in the City of Niagara Falls	USA Niagara Development, City of Niagara Falls	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	ESD
Remediate strategic properties in the Buffalo Avenue corridor of Niagara Falls	NCCED, City of Niagara Falls	Medium	Long-term	\$\$\$	NYS DEC, ESD

Objective: Make strategic infrastructure investments such as utility and transportation improvements to create development-ready sites					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Extend infrastructure to any planned business or industrial parks to assist in making the sites shovel-ready	Niagara County, National Fuel, NYSEG, National Grid	High	Mid-term	\$\$	
Support the establishment of a new industrial park in the Town of Lockport	Town of Lockport IDA	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	ESD
Develop a 48-acre shovel ready business park in the Town of Cambria	NCCED	High	Short-term	\$\$	ESD

Objective: Analyze market needs and determine if adequate property exists to support current and future commercial and industrial development					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Undertake a countywide study of the supply of commercial and industrial land, determine land availability and status, and make recommendations to municipal officials	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Promote policies which will preserve valuable agricultural land	Niagara County, local municipalities, Niagara County Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension	High	Short-term	\$	
Explore opportunities around the Niagara Falls International Airport for further development in this critical business corridor	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Provide outreach to developers on available incentives, showcase successful projects, and highlight development opportunities					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Prepare and update fact sheets for high priority development sites	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Promote development opportunities through the NCCED website, local development corporations, commercial listing services, site selectors, real estate brokers, and other channels	NCCED	High	Short-term	\$	
Host a countywide site tour for developers and support local efforts to market sites and opportunities directly to developers	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Find redevelopment opportunities for owners of vacant and underutilized properties, especially commercial and industrial sites					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Foster redevelopment of Tonawanda Island and other properties in the NT Momentum Downtown Revitalization Initiative in North Tonawanda	Lumber City Development	Medium	Short-term	\$\$\$	ESD, NYS DOS
Complete projects associated with the Lockport Downtown Revitalization Initiative which will improve walkability, tourism, and access to the Erie Canal along with the redevelopment of significant mixed-use properties within downtown Lockport	City of Lockport	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	ESD, NYS DOS
Implement the Brownfields Coalition Assessment Grant to assess the environmental conditions and strategize the redevelopment of the Highland and Mid-Town areas of Niagara Falls, the West End area of Lockport, and the Oliver Street corridor in North Tonawanda	NCDED	High	Short-term	\$	US EPA
Support projects that further implement the Niagara Falls Bridge District plan through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative	City of Niagara Falls	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	ESD, NYS DOS
Continue the dialogue with property owners along the Buffalo Avenue Corridor of Niagara Falls to foster redevelopment efforts at vacated sites	NCCED, USA Niagara Development, City of Niagara Falls	Medium	Mid-term	\$	

Objective: Identify and promote mixed-use development projects					
Action Plans	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Work with municipal partners to update comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to encourage and allow mixed-use development	NCDED	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Explore development of Niagara University student housing on Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls	Niagara University, City of Niagara Falls, NORLIC	High	Mid-term	\$\$	

Goal 3: Retain Existing Business and Attract New Businesses

Objective: Enhance existing business recruitment efforts, especially recruitment of Canadian companies and U.S. companies outside of New York State.					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Collaborate with World Trade Center Buffalo Niagara, Invest Buffalo Niagara, local Chambers of Commerce, and Global NY on business recruitment efforts	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Participate in tradeshow and Select USA events to promote Niagara County as a desirable business development location	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Develop new communication tools to support business outreach efforts					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Identify direct and indirect outreach mechanisms that can be utilized to reach new and existing companies including digital marketing, direct mail, cold calling, newspaper and magazine ads, television and radio ads, social media, e-mail marketing, and other channels	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Expand the Virtual Business Workshop Series to highlight important topics in key industries	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Utilize Global NY personnel and resources to promote exporting assistance to existing companies	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Market incentives and resources to attract, retain, and grow companies					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Promote Niagara County's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (C-PACE) to companies seeking alternative financing for energy efficiency and building-scale renewable energy projects	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Continue to market and promote infrastructure and energy efficiency incentive programs to area businesses through National Grid, National Fuel, NYSEDA, New York State Electric & Gas, and the New York Power Authority	NCCED, National Grid, National Fuel, NYSEDA, NYSEG, NYPA	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Market, promote, and coordinate the appropriate use of grants, low-interest financing, and tax incentives from agencies such as Empire State Development and NYS Office of Community Renewal to assist Niagara County business growth	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	NYS OCR, ESD
Utilize the resources and incentive programs of the NCIDA, Niagara County Department of Economic Development, Town of Lockport IDA, Greater Lockport Development Corporation, Lumber City Development Corporation, USA Niagara Development Corporation, and any other local agency to support local companies	NCCED, NCIDA, local economic development agencies	High	Short-term	\$	
Support the establishment of a meat-processing facility in Niagara County	Niagara County Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NCDED	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	

Objective: Expand business retention efforts through outreach and incentives					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue the Niagara County Business Growth and Retention Program, whereby economic development professionals conduct direct outreach efforts to keep companies informed of various programs available to them in their efforts to invest in their facilities, and retain and create jobs	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Goal 4: Enhance Educational Opportunities to Ensure a Highly Skilled Workforce

Objective: Identify skills gaps for key industries and develop workforce training programs to fill those gaps					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue collaboration between educational institutions, the Workforce Development Board, and local resource partners as well as the private sector to identify skills gaps in key industry sectors including advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, health and life sciences, data analytics and cyber security, hospitality & tourism, skilled trades, and logistics	NCDED, Niagara Worksource One, Niagara WDB	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Continue to meet with local businesses to identify workforce development and skills training needs	NCDED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Create additional micro credentials in IT, logistics, and hospitality to meet industry needs	Niagara University, Worksource One	Low	Mid-term	\$	

Objective: Better coordinate and utilize existing education and training programs to ensure an adequate workforce for current and future industries					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue implementation of the Dream It Do It (DIDI) Advanced Manufacturing Program	NCDED, Niagara Employment & Training, Dream It Do It WNY	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Continue to collaborate with Invest Buffalo Niagara and the “Be in Buffalo” campaign to attract ex-pats and retain college students to our County and Region	NCDED, Invest Buffalo Niagara	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Continue to connect businesses and job seekers to training in occupations that are in demand in Niagara County, including promotion of on-the-job training funds and classroom training funds assigned through the Workforce Development Board	NCCED, Niagara WBD, Worksource One	Low	Short-term	\$	
Launch the School of Cybersecurity and Applied Artificial Intelligence	Niagara University	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	

Objective: Develop and improve complimentary services to better connect people with available jobs and support a sustainable workforce					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue to foster dialogue between the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and Connect Niagara to make connections where needed for local businesses and job centers	NFTA, NCDPW	Medium	Mid-term	\$	
Work with local groups to investigate ride-sharing opportunities to help fill transportation gaps for employees		Low	Short-term	\$	
Support the development of accessible and affordable childcare facilities throughout the County.		Medium	Mid-term	\$	

Goal 5: Diversify Niagara County's Economic Base to Ensure Resiliency

Objective: Identify and attract companies in growing sectors such as health and life sciences, information technology, green technology, agribusiness, and others					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Attend trade shows and place specialized marketing content in target industry sectors	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Implement Niagara County's Meat Processing Facility Market and Economic Analysis	Cornell Cooperative Extension, Niagara County Farm Bureau, NCDED	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Market available incentives and resources to growing industry sectors that are not well represented in Niagara County					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Expand the placement of advertising in trade magazines, site selector publications, and targeted online media in specific industries	NCDED, Niagara USA Chamber	Low	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Encourage startup companies and microenterprises through training and funding					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue to administer the Niagara County microenterprise grant program to support start-up and small businesses	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	NYS OCR
Continue the Niagara Falls Small Business Property Improvement program in the City of Niagara Falls	City of Niagara Falls	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	ESD
Support and promote existing microenterprise grant programs in Lockport and North Tonawanda	Lumber City Development, Greater Lockport Development	Medium	Short-term	\$	NYS OCR
Continue to provide Small Business Development Center services which include business planning, marketing, global strategies, financial analysis, and training services, which are critical to startups and small businesses	Niagara SBDC	Medium	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Support businesses throughout growth cycle					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Expand the utilization of the Niagara County Economic Gardening program to assist second stage or emerging growth companies	NCDED, Invest Buffalo Niagara	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Support development of flex-space and business incubator facilities	NCIDA, Town of Lockport IDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara	Low	Mid-term	\$	

Goal 6: Improve Access to, and Affordability of, Diverse Housing Options

Objective: Encourage appropriate housing development throughout the County					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Collaborate with local municipalities during any land use planning or zoning process and encourage a diversity of housing options	NCDED	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Support the development of healthy communities where housing, employment, childcare, healthcare, and other services are available and accessible	Local municipalities	Medium	Mid-term	\$	

Objective: Ensure an adequate supply of diverse housing types that appeal to different ages, incomes, and lifestyles					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Support community development efforts in local municipalities, recognizing housing is a significant driver in the retention and attraction of millennials and younger generations	Niagara County	Medium	Mid-term	\$	
Support dense, walkable new development in downtown North Tonawanda and traditional mixed-use development in North Tonawanda's Oliver Street neighborhood	Lumber City Development	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	ESD, NYS DOS, NYS OCR
Promote the uniform adoption of the NYS 485-a mixed use real property tax exemption to encourage mixed-use developments and a diversity of housing options throughout the County	Niagara County, local municipalities	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Support a variety of incoming housing developments including the 78 Bridge Street and Riverfront Vista projects in North Tonawanda and the Westcott Estates project in the Town of Lockport	Local municipalities	Low	Short-term	\$	
Explore development of Niagara University student housing on Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls	Niagara University, City of Niagara Falls, NORLIC	High	Mid-term	\$\$	
Support the reuse of the former Eastern Niagara Hospital in the City of Lockport as housing units	City of Lockport	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	

Objective: Reduce sprawl and promote smart growth, sustainable development patterns					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Encourage in-fill residential development within Niagara County's existing developed urban neighborhoods.	Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and Lockport	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Repurpose existing underutilized assets – such as former school buildings, hospital facilities, manufacturing facilities, and vacant sites – in Niagara County's three cities as opportunities for new urban housing development	City of Niagara Falls, City of North Tonawanda, City of Lockport	High	Long-term	\$\$	NYS HCR, ESD
Support ancillary projects – such as sidewalk repair, pedestrian improvements, traffic calming, public lighting – that allow people to live in dense, walkable, and safe communities	NCDPW	Low	Mid-term	\$\$	NYS HCR
Support additional public transportation throughout Niagara County, focusing on transit options that connect households to neighborhood goods and services.	NCDPW	Medium	Mid-term	\$	
Support NORLIC's housing stabilization and Main Street initiatives in the City of Niagara Falls	NORLIC, City of Niagara Falls	High	Short-term	\$	NYS HCR

Goal 7: Grow Awareness of Niagara County as a World-Renowned Destination

Objective: Coordinate local, regional, and international marketing efforts to promote the strong quality of life within Niagara County to investors and tourists					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Continue Destination Niagara USA's regional and international tourism marketing efforts	Destination Niagara USA	High	Short-term	\$\$	
Expand utilization of the Niagara Falls Convention Center	Destination Niagara USA	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Encourage collaboration in promotion and events between the County's non-profit and cultural assets and organizations	Destination Niagara USA	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Work with Invest Buffalo Niagara, Destination Niagara USA, Empire State Development, and other marketing agencies to ensure promotion of Niagara County in marketing efforts	NCCED, Destination Niagara USA	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Work with regional economic development partners to create a marketing campaign capable of promoting Niagara County's strengths to local, regional, and international markets	NCCED	Low	Mid-term	\$	
Collaborate with professional, collegiate, and youth sports and athletic organizations throughout the region to promote sports tourism	NCCED, Destination Niagara USA	Low	Mid-term	\$	

Objective: Promote the natural and cultural assets of the region					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Complete the Flight of Five restoration project in the City of Lockport, upgrades to Gateway Harbor in North Tonawanda, and promote tourism and utilization of the Erie Canal throughout the County	City of Lockport, City of North Tonawanda, Destination Niagara USA	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	NYS DOS, NYS Canal Corp, NYPA, ESD
Expand the Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda as part of downtown tourism development	Lumber City Development	Medium	Short-term	\$\$	ESD, private
Ensure recruitment materials provided by regional economic development agencies to potential new companies and residents include information on the quality of Niagara County's natural and cultural assets	NCCED	Low	Short-term	\$	
Complete projects associated with the Lake Ontario Regional Dredging Program, including regular dredging of Wilson and Olcott harbors.	Orleans County, Niagara County, Town of Newfane, Town and Village of Wilson, Local Marinas and Yacht Clubs	High	Short-term	\$\$	USACE, USDA, NYSDOS, Municipal, Private
Promote the variety of abundant freshwater fishing opportunities throughout Niagara County	NCCED, Destination Niagara USA	Low	Short-term	\$	

Objective: Establish additional infrastructure and assets that support a growing tourism industry					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Support the development of hotels and lodging options where appropriate throughout Niagara County	NCIDA, Town of Lockport IDA	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$	
Support the development of the Centennial Park sports and entertainment complex in downtown Niagara Falls	City of Niagara Falls	High	Mid-term	\$\$\$	

Goal 8: Leverage and Capitalize on Significant Private Investments

Objective: Invest in infrastructure to support business growth and new investments in Niagara County					
Action Plan	Agencies	Priority	Timing	Cost	Funding Sources
Invest in public infrastructure located near and/or supporting private investments (ex. runway enhancements to the Niagara Falls Airport to support warehouse and distribution activities such as the new investment by Amazon)	NCDPW, NFTA	High	Short-term	\$\$\$	
investment and expansion	NCCED	Medium	Short-term	\$	
Support the development of an international cargo port in Somerset	Town of Somerset, World Trade Chamber	Medium	Mid-term	\$\$\$	

APPENDICIES

Background & demographics

Alignment with other plans

**Stakeholder survey and
response summary**

Priority projects

Funding opportunities



BACKGROUND & DEMOGRAPHICS

Background Information and Demographics

Demographics and Socioeconomics

Population and Demographics

Niagara County's total population, which peaked in 1960, was estimated at 212,666 in 2020 according to the United States Census Bureau (2020 Decennial Census). The population has remained relatively stable in recent decades with a slight decrease of 1.75% since 2010.

Niagara County's population peaked in 1960 with 242,269 residents. This period of post-World War II economic growth led to significant industrial development in the City of Niagara Falls and the construction of the Niagara Power Project between 1957 and 1960. The City of Niagara Falls' population also peaked in 1960 at 102,394. The departure or downsizing of large companies in the steel, aircraft and aerospace, automotive, chemical, specialty ceramics, and paper industries resulted in significant population decline, particularly in the City of Niagara Falls. According to the United States Census Bureau, the City of Niagara Falls' population was 48,671 in 2020, a 52.4% loss from 1960. The population of the City of Lockport also peaked in 1960 at 26,443 but fell 21% to 20,876 in 2020. The City of North Tonawanda's population peaked in 1970 at 36,012 and fell 15.3% to 30,496 in 2020.

Niagara County's three cities combined total population peaked in 1960 and have been on the decline since. Meanwhile, the total population of Niagara County's numerous towns and villages has steadily increased since 1940, reaching a peak of 120,664 residents in the suburban and rural areas of the County in 2010. This figure declined slightly to 119,419 suburban and rural residents in 2020.

As the population trends above indicate (Figure 1), Niagara County experienced post-World War II suburban growth and urban decline as seen in much of the rest of the country. A significant milestone

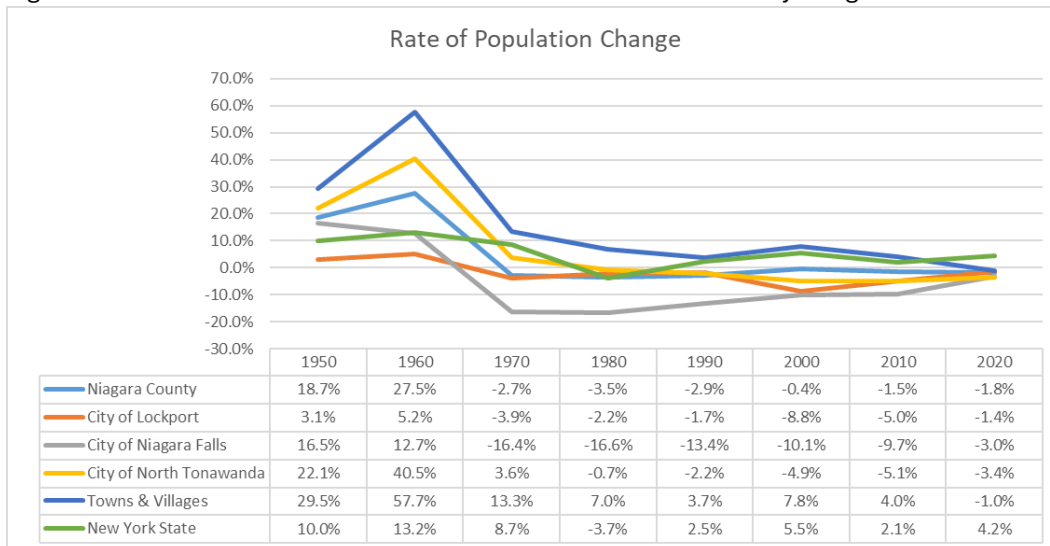


Figure 1

occurred at the 2000 decennial census, when the suburban and rural population became the majority (52.7%) in Niagara County.

Race & Age

Population characteristics such as race and age did not change significantly in Niagara County between 2017 and 2022. In 2017, 86% of Niagara County's population identified as white, 7.1% as black or African-American, 2.7% as Hispanic or Latino, 1.9% as multi-racial, 1% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1% identified as Asian. In 2022 these figures were 83.6%, 6.4%, 3.6%, 4.4%, 0.6%, and 1.2% respectively.

The median age of Niagara County's population remained relatively constant at 43 years in 2017 and 43.1 years in 2022. Niagara County is the 24th oldest out of New York's 62 counties and has a median age nearly 4 years older than the State's median (39.3 years).

Income and Poverty

Median household income in Niagara County rose by 2.7% from 2017 to 2022, from \$51,656 to \$53,048 (adjusted for inflation). Similarly, per capita income rose by 3.7% during the same period, from \$28,395 to \$29,435 (adjusted). All of New York State outpaced Niagara County slightly in both metrics, seeing a 4.4% increase in median household income and a 6.2% increase in per capita income over the same period.

According to the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 13.4% of Niagara County's population fell below the poverty level in 2017 (see Figure 2 below). The County's poverty rate fluctuated slightly but gradually declined by 2022 at 12.4%. In 2017 and 2022 Niagara County's poverty rate was lower than the rate for all of New York State (15.1% and 13.4%, respectively) but was higher than the national average for both years (12.3% in 2017 and 11.1% in 2022).

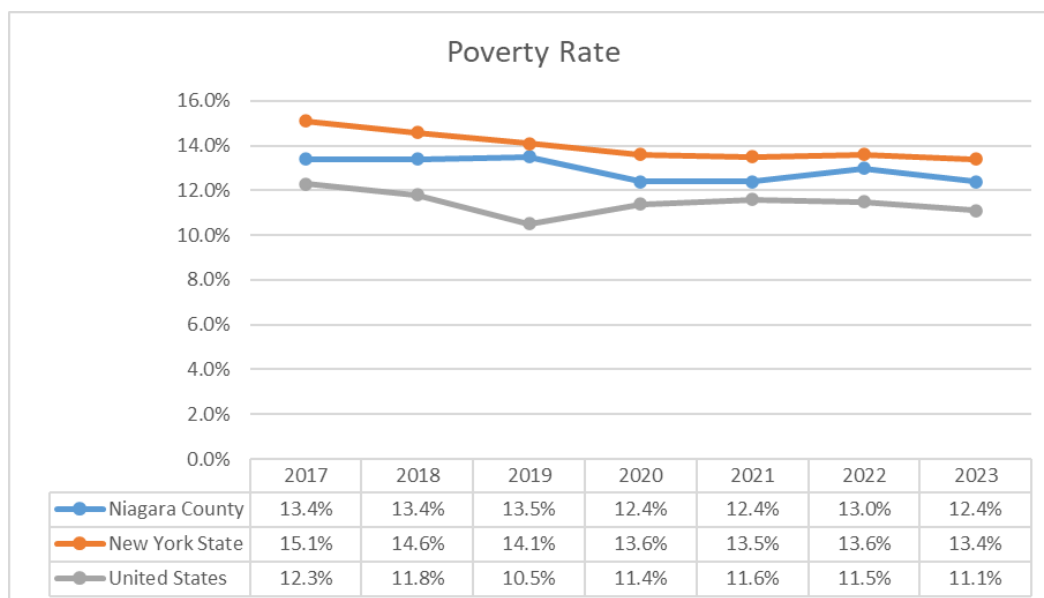


Figure 2

Educational attainment

From 2017 to 2022, Niagara County saw improvements in educational attainment among its adult population. The percentage of Niagara County's adult population with a college education (at least completed an Associate's degree) increased from 36.1% in 2017 to 41.2% in 2022, while the percentage of the adult population with only a high school education or lower decreased from 43.7% to 40.1%. The percentage of adults with a Bachelor's degree saw the most significant improvement from 2017 to 2022 with an increase of 2.2 percentage points (see Figure 3 below).

Despite these gains, Niagara County still lags behind New York State as a whole in educational attainment. This is particularly evident in higher education where in 2022, 38.8% of adults in New York State held a Bachelor's degree or higher (including graduate and professional degrees), compared to only 27% of adults in Niagara County.

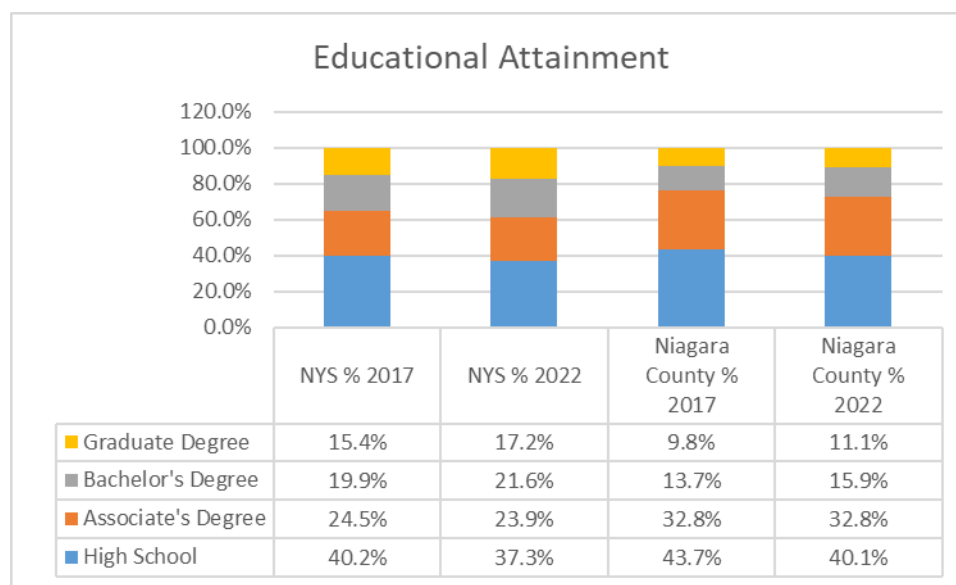


Figure 3

Natural and Cultural Resources

Geography and Environment

Niagara County is located in the northwestern corner of New York State and borders Erie County to the south, Genesee and Orleans Counties to the east, and Lake Ontario to the north. The Niagara River forms the County's western boundary and is an international border with the Province of Ontario, Canada. The County encompasses a total land area of 522 square miles incorporated into three cities, twelve towns, and five villages. Two Native American Indian Reservations, the Tuscarora Reservation located within the Town of Lewiston and the Tonawanda Reservation in the Town of Royalton, are located within the county.

Over 81,000,000 people live within 300 miles of Niagara County, including major American and Canadian metro areas such as New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Detroit, Toronto, and Montreal. Access to these major markets is critical to the County's economic success.

The northern temperate environment allows four season weather influenced by the Great Lakes. Humid, warm summers and long, cold winters with periods of lake effect snow are common. The temperate environment combined with Niagara County's abundant access to large bodies of freshwater make Niagara County a four-season tourist and visitor destination.

Environmental and Natural Resources

Niagara County is geographically and environmentally defined by its position in the Great Lakes ecosystem and its relationship to two major bodies of water: the Niagara River and Lake Ontario. The primary natural features that make Niagara County geologically unique are the Niagara Escarpment, the Niagara Gorge, and Niagara Falls. The Niagara River, connecting Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, is the primary drainage passage for the four upper Great Lakes. The Niagara River is a significant international waterway forming the boundary between the U.S. and Canada. Most significantly, the Niagara River's impact on the geological landscape has created the Niagara Gorge and one of the wonders of the natural world: Niagara Falls.

Although the Niagara River is only 37 miles long, its impact on the growth and development of the County has been enormous. This natural setting led to the development of relatively inexpensive hydroelectric power that has fueled industrial expansion and the economic base of the region.

The rich diversity of aquatic life in the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and many of the county's creeks makes the region a desirable sport fishing destination, providing additional tourism and associated economic opportunities.

The Niagara Escarpment is a sloping bluff-like geological formation that sits nearly 400 feet above Lake Ontario and runs east to west roughly parallel with the Lake Ontario shoreline.

Cultural Resources

Niagara County is rich with a variety of assets and resources that celebrate and commemorate the diverse social, artistic, scientific, and cultural impact that the Niagara region and its people have had on the nation.

Niagara Falls State Park is America's oldest state park and allows visitors to experience the beauty of Niagara Falls. The Park also provides education on the Falls and the Niagara River's important legacy of electrical power generation. Niagara Falls is also a substantial tourism destination for the region with over 8 million people visiting Niagara Falls State Park each year.

Artistic, historical, and cultural organizations have an enormous impact on Niagara County's economy and quality of life. The Castellani Art Museum, Old Fort Niagara, the Aquarium of Niagara, the Herschell Carousel Museum, the historic Erie Canal Flight of Five, Artpark, the Kenan Center, and the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center are just a few of the destinations offering year-round educational and cultural programming to the community.

Residents of and visitors to Niagara County also have easy access to world-renowned cultural assets throughout the broader western New York region such as the Albright-Knox Gallery, the Darwin Martin House, Shea's Performing Arts Center, the Chautauqua Institution, and many more.

Higher Education

The Buffalo-Niagara region is home to 20 colleges and universities, providing a broad spectrum of educational and vocational training opportunities. Two higher education institutions, SUNY Niagara and Niagara University, are located in Niagara County with a combined total enrollment of 7,621.

Orleans/Niagara BOCES, with eight sites throughout Niagara County, offers a variety of education services including high school equivalency, workforce development, adult and continuing education, and special education programs.

Additionally, residents of Niagara County can easily access any of the six public colleges and university campuses in Erie, Genesee, and Orleans Counties as well as any of the five private colleges in Erie County.

Infrastructure

Transportation

Western New York flourished during the nation's industrial revolution as a strategic and efficient transportation node. Today, Niagara County still benefits from the region's legacy as an international transportation center. From the late 19th to the mid-20th century, Niagara County's strategic location within the bi-national Great Lakes region and access to the Erie Canal made the region a major port, while development of the nation's rail network established the region as the second largest rail center in the world. In the later 20th century, construction of the U.S. Interstate Highway System diverted significant business from the traditional railroads, while the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Welland Canal diverted freight from local ports and negatively impacted the region's role in international shipping and logistics.

While the transportation industry has changed significantly over the past 100 years, the Buffalo-Niagara region remains a hub of interstate commerce and bi-national trade. According to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, in 2023 more than \$88 billion worth of goods travels through the Buffalo-Niagara Falls international freight gateway by highway and rail each year. It is the fourth largest freight gateway between the U.S. and Canada and the 13th largest international freight gateway in the United States. Major commercial border crossings in the region include the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, Peace Bridge, and International Railway Bridge, which account for nearly 10% of all trade with Canada by value.

Residents of the Buffalo-Niagara region as a whole experience significantly less traffic congestion and lower commute times than much of the rest of the county. The average commute time in the region is 21.8 minutes, 4.6 minutes lower than the national average. This ease of travel improves the local quality of life and efficiency in the local economy.

Water and Sewer

The Niagara River is the source of potable water in Niagara County. Through the Niagara County Water District, a dependable and safe supply of potable water is provided to approximately 150,000 residents and businesses throughout Niagara County and portions of Erie and Orleans Counties. The Niagara County Water District provides service to a total of twenty-two municipalities. Niagara County's three cities of Lockport, Niagara Falls, and North Tonawanda operate and maintain their own public water systems. Two percent of households in Niagara County utilize either drilled or dug wells as a primary water source.

Sewer service in the county is controlled by multiple providers. Niagara County Sewer District No. 1 owns, operates, and maintains the Water Pollution Control Center and associated wastewater collection system located in the Town of Wheatfield. The collection system serves six towns in the County, with more than 285 miles of pipeline. The system consists of more than 65 miles of interceptor sewers ranging from 12 to 66 inches in diameter, seven pump stations, and associated force mains. Each of the three cities and five villages operate their own sewage disposal infrastructure. Private sewage treatment is handled through on-site septic systems overseen by the Niagara County Health Department. Niagara County, like many older communities, has an aging combined stormwater and sanitary sewer system that is problematic during storm events.

Utilities

Electrical power in Niagara County is produced and distributed by several large and small suppliers. The largest distributor is National Grid, which services all of Niagara County except the City and Town of Lockport, which are serviced by New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG). Both of these companies offer economic development incentives for businesses for both energy efficiency and capacity upgrades.

The New York Power Authority's (NYPA) Niagara Power Project is the largest hydroelectric power plant in New York State and the third largest in the U.S. Industries using large amounts of electricity in the production process are eligible to apply for special low-cost allotments of electricity from NYPA. In early 2020 the coal-fired Somerset Generation Plant, a 675-megawatt capacity electric power plant which had been Niagara County's largest taxpayer, was permanently closed, leaving a \$17 million annual tax deficit.

National Fuel Gas is the local natural gas utility that provides natural gas service throughout most of Niagara County. National Fuel offers incentives for energy efficiency upgrades and economic development projects that also support the State's sustainability goals.

Commercial and Industrial Real Estate

The five-county Buffalo-Niagara region has a 6.3% vacancy rate in the industrial real estate market, according to the Q4 2024 Marketbeat report provided by Cushman & Wakefield. This vacancy rate is slightly lower than the national average of 6.6%. The report indicates the price per square foot rent for industrial space has doubled since 2020 and continues to rise as a result of the high cost of construction as well as the overall lack of available vacant land to build new industrial facilities. This is a challenge to manufacturers or distributors seeking immediately-occupiable space.

A 2021 Western New York Industrial Real Estate Development Strategy document prepared for Invest Buffalo Niagara found that the region has potential to invest in site readiness and pre-development of potential sites to better position the region to meet the needs of future industrial users. The report's key takeaways include: *"The Buffalo Niagara Metropolitan Area has underutilized zones located in prime urban areas that could potentially be redeveloped and intensified for industrial developers and occupiers, without negatively impacting neighboring land uses. Their redevelopment would bring new property tax revenue to the region. Overall, the Buffalo region needs to recommit to improve site readiness and speed of project execution in order to effectively prepare for state-of-the-art industrial property investment. Land development planning, policies, and procedures should be simplified and streamlined to facilitate investment attraction and project success."*

The Cushman & Wakefield Q4 2024 Office Marketbeat report indicates the Buffalo-Niagara region has a noticeably higher office vacancy rate (21.1%) than the national average (19.8%). Demand for office

space in the region is low, contributing to the high vacancy rate, however the average asking rent for leased office space in the region has risen slightly.

Industry Sectors

Employment

The annual unemployment rate, as provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, has shown Niagara County's unemployment rate to follow the same trend pattern as both the national and State unemployment rate. As seen in the figure below, Niagara County's unemployment rate was slightly higher than the State and national averages prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced a similar spike in unemployment at the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, and has gradually returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022 and 2023 the County experienced unemployment rates of just 3.9% and 4.1%, respectively, which are the lowest unemployment rates in two decades.

Employment by Sector

The breakdown of Niagara County's workforce by employment sector remained relatively constant from 2017 to 2022. Education & Healthcare employs the largest share of the County workforce at 24.5% (24,614 employees) in 2022. Manufacturing (13.9% or 13,946 employees) and Retail Trade (12.8% or 12,850 employees) are second and third largest, with the three sectors combined employing just over half of the County's total workforce.

The largest growing workforce sectors included Construction which increased from 5.9% to 6.6% of the County's workforce (gaining 680 jobs) as well as Professional, Scientific, and Management, which increased from 8.3% to 9.1% of the workforce (gaining 744 jobs). The two sectors to significantly decrease in share of the County workforce were Education & Healthcare and Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation. Education & Healthcare declined from 25.5% to 24.5% of the County workforce, a loss of 1,101 jobs, while Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation declined from 10% to 8.5% of the County workforce, a loss of 1,585 jobs.

Wages by Industry Sector

Consistent with their relative share of the County workforce as discussed above, Manufacturing, Education & Healthcare, and Retail Trade are the three sectors with the largest combined annual payroll in the County. Both Manufacturing and Education & Healthcare each supported over \$500,000,000 in payroll in Niagara County in 2022.

Annual payroll data by employment sector from 2018 to 2022 generally shows payroll growth across most sectors during the period with the exception of 2020 when nearly all sectors experienced a decline in annual payroll as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While gross annual payroll rebounded and rose significantly in most sectors in the years following the pandemic, annual payroll in Niagara County did not keep pace with the unusually high inflation felt across the American economy during this period. As a result, as shown in the table below, most sectors of Niagara County's workforce experienced an effective wage decrease of -5.1% from 2018 to 2022.

Employment and Wages

The COVID-19 pandemic shocked local economies in numerous ways. Many key industry sectors in Niagara County suffered business downturns during the pandemic which resulted in job losses and wage stagnation for employees. Following the pandemic, the U.S. national economy experienced unusually high rates of inflation, further complicating the post-pandemic recovery process.

A review of Niagara County's employment data from 2018 through 2022 indicates the total number of jobs remained relatively constant through the pandemic. Figure 4 below shows modest job growth in Niagara County's major industry sectors, however a review of gross annual wages indicates that wages for Niagara County employees stagnated during the pandemic.

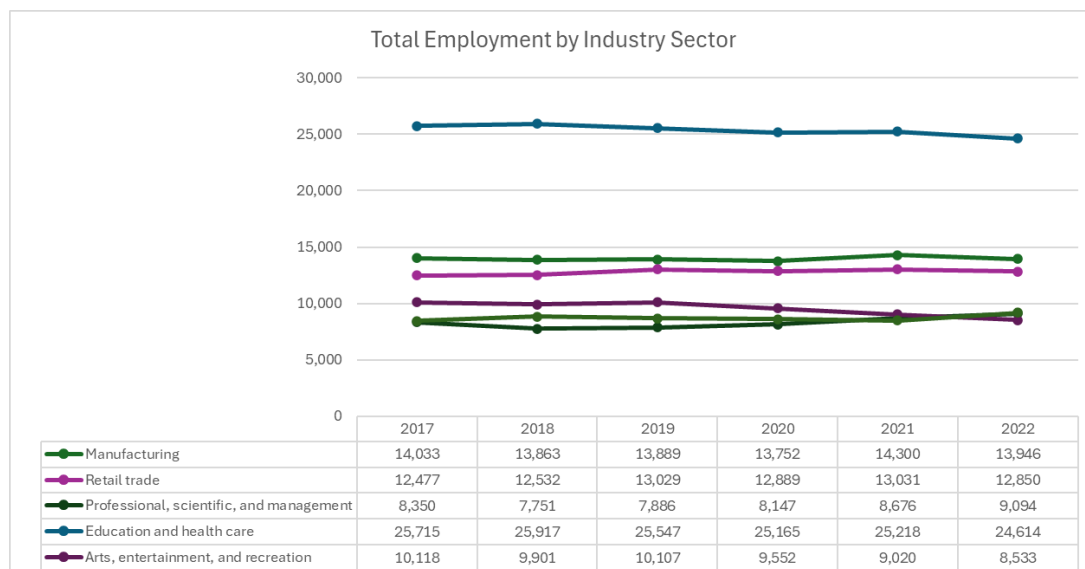


Figure 4

Manufacturing

Manufacturing remains a large and critical sector of Niagara County's economy, employing 13,946 people with a gross annual payroll of \$546,128,000 in 2022. By NAICS industry sector, manufacturing is the 2nd largest employment sector behind Education & Healthcare, while also having the largest gross annual payroll of any employment sector in Niagara County.

Like all sectors of the economy, manufacturing was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While employment remained consistent pre- and post-pandemic, manufacturing sector wages did not keep pace with the high rate of inflation felt across the U.S. economy post-pandemic.

Hospitality and Tourism

The hospitality and tourism industry has always been a significant part of the local economy. According to data provided by Destination Niagara USA, the region's tourism and destination marketing agency, visitor spending exceeded \$1 billion in Niagara County in 2023. This helped to generate over \$100 million in tax revenue for the State and local governments. In addition, 15,918 people work in tourism-related industries in

Niagara County, and nearly 25% of all of Niagara County’s workforce is related to or dependent on the tourism industry.

Figure 5 below shows the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on Niagara County’s tourism industry. As expected, pandemic-related travel restrictions, social distancing limitations, and temporary closures or disruptions to food and beverage establishments had a significant negative impact on Niagara County tourism and the local economy. The recovery of the County’s tourism sector post-pandemic has been strong, as visitor spending has exceeded pre-pandemic levels and tourism industry employment has stabilized.

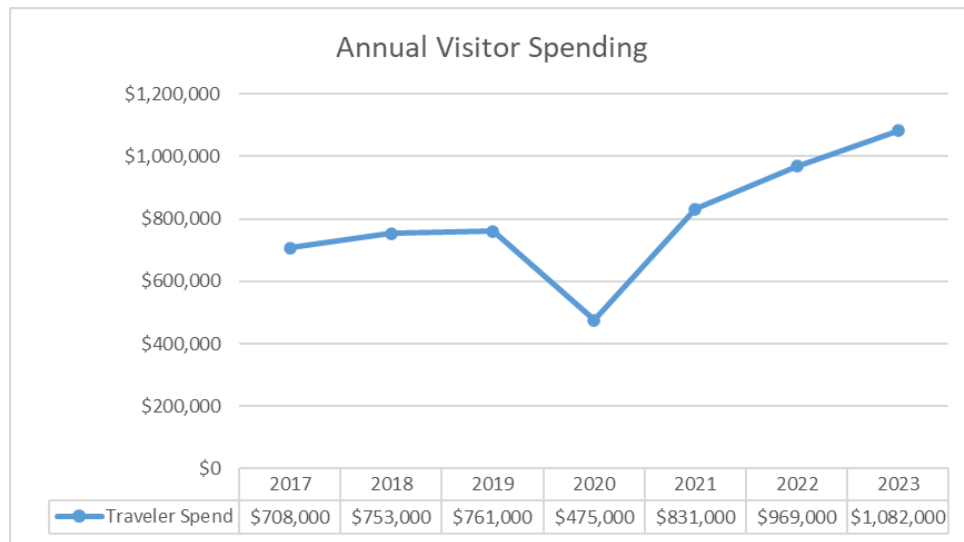


Figure 5

Significant recent investments have been made in the hospitality and tourism industry including: the opening of 9 new hotels in Niagara Falls since 2008, the opening of the Seneca Niagara Casino & Resort; redevelopment of the vacant former Rainbow Mall into the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute; construction of a new, state-of-the-art passenger terminal at Niagara Falls International Airport; and new exhibits at the Aquarium of Niagara and Niagara Power Vista. In addition, the Discover Niagara Shuttle has been instituted and following a successful pilot period, is now fully funded through a portion of the county’s hotel bed tax. The shuttle links 21 destinations along the Niagara River providing convenient transportation for visitors. Regional attractions such as Fort Niagara, the Erie Canal and Flight of Five Locks, Niagara Wine Trail, and others are helping to extend visitor stays, which is critical to Niagara County’s tourism economy.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a significant local industry for Niagara County. The County ranks in the top third of all counties nationwide in total agricultural production with 628 farms working a combined total of 121,516 acres of farmland (2022 USDA Census of Agriculture). As shown in Figure 6 below, the total number of farms and total acres of farmland have declined over the past two decades. Despite this, the value of Niagara County's agricultural production has remained relatively consistent.

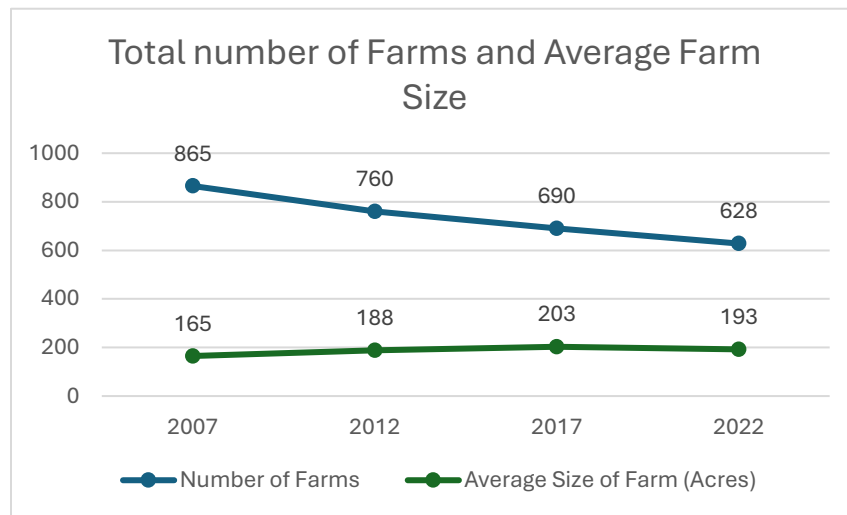


Figure 6

Out of New York State's 62 counties, Niagara County ranks: 20th in total agricultural product sales, 6th in sales from fruit trees, nuts, and berries, and 10th in sales from grains, oil seeds, dry beans, and dry peas. Niagara County is within the top third of counties nationwide in agricultural product sales. 96% of farms in Niagara County are family-owned.

As evidenced by the consistent loss of farmland acreage as shown above, Niagara County's agricultural sector is threatened by a variety of development pressures. Historically this has included suburban and rural population growth and sprawling development. More recently, available agricultural land is in growing demand for renewable energy production, particularly solar developments.

Employers

The ten largest employers in Niagara County as of 2024 are as follows:

1. Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station – 3,000
2. Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel – 2,560
3. General Motors Corporation, Lockport Facility – 1,632
4. Niagara Falls City School District - 1,452
5. Niagara County – 1,422
6. Fashion Outlets of Niagara – 1,339
7. North Tonawanda City School District – 704
8. Lockport City School District – 675
9. Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center – 637
10. Niagara University – 636

Regional and State Context

General

The Buffalo–Niagara metropolitan area, designated by the United States Census Bureau, encompasses both Erie and Niagara Counties. Buffalo-Niagara is the second-largest metropolitan area in the state with a total population of 1,166,902 as of the 2020 US. Census. The region’s gross domestic product (GDP) has grown from nearly \$72 billion in 2020 to \$90.7 billion in 2023.

The Buffalo-Niagara region experienced 2.8% population growth from 2010 to 2020. Significantly, this is the first decade in which the region gained population since 1960 – 1970. While this population growth rate was lower than New York’s State’s rate during the same period (4.2%) it is a significant development for a region which experienced consistent population loss for 50 years. It is likely there are a number of related factors that are responsible for the reversal of the region’s population trend including Buffalo-Niagara’s relatively affordable cost of living compared to other areas of the country, the region’s abundant natural and cultural resources, and regional economic development initiatives.

The Buffalo-Niagara region includes an international border and significant economic ties with the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) including Southern Ontario and the city of Toronto. The GTA is part of a larger geographic area referred to as the Golden Horseshoe due to its large economy and U-shape, which wraps around the western boundary of Lake Ontario and incorporates the regions of Hamilton and Niagara. The Golden Horseshoe is the most densely populated and industrialized region in Canada. Major industry sectors include: manufacturing (especially steel and automotive production), healthcare, information technology, tourism, food and beverage production, freight, and finance.

Regional Economic Development Council

Beginning in 2011, New York State developed ten Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) to strategize, prioritize, and guide economic development initiatives and transformative projects in each region of the State. Through the REDC’s annual consolidated application funding process over \$8 billion of State incentives have been awarded to economic development projects.

The Western New York REDC covers the five counties of Niagara, Erie, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, and Allegany. The Western REDC updated the region’s strategic plan in 2023 with a vision to develop Western New York through strategic and coordinated public/private investments in its people, unique places, innovative ideas and high-growth industries. The REDC also found three significant economic drivers for Western New York: implementing smart growth policies, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship, and developing the region’s workforce. As indicated in various planning activities throughout Niagara County (summarized below), these themes are significant development goals throughout Niagara County.

Planning

As discussed in the summaries below, communities throughout Niagara County are actively engaged in planning efforts to prepare for future development. Niagara County’s three cities, each with unique waterfront amenities and challenges posed by legacy former industrial sites and impacts, have engaged their local leaders and stakeholders to develop unique redevelopment visions for their communities.

City of Lockport DRI - On October 3, 2018, the City of Lockport was announced as the 2018 Western New York winner of the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI). The DRI was initiated to boost local economies across the State and emphasizes the importance of community support to drive the local market and future development. Based on Lockport's DRI application and solicited community input, the local planning committee (LPC) developed a vision statement that is reflective of future transformation and economic development goals for downtown Lockport:

"The City of Lockport envisions a growing, inviting, and vibrant downtown district that is filled to capacity, serves as the heart of the community, acts as a point of pride for residents, and attracts visitors of all ages.

This forward-thinking downtown, built around the Erie Canal, will offer diverse housing options and commercial employment opportunities including dining, shopping, art, entertainment, parks, and events in a friendly and welcoming environment.

The historic integrity and character of our unique canal community will be a showcase for the region, with revitalized buildings, attractive storefronts, and residential options – providing a walkable, livable, and sustainable community."

The City of Lockport, with guidance provided by the public, recommended 15 projects for DRI funding. The combination of these projects is anticipated to transform the downtown and catalyze additional development. Catalytic projects that can quickly help jump-start revitalization and investment in downtown were prioritized.

City of North Tonawanda 2022 DRI - The City of North Tonawanda has been building momentum at such a rate that the word has become their marketing slogan – NT MomeNTum. As one of Western New York's Round Five Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) winners, the City of North Tonawanda advanced their downtown revitalization by establishing an inventory, honing in on a vision, goals and strategies, engaging the public, and leveraging existing efforts within their downtown.

A new Vision for downtown North Tonawanda was developed to guide the DRI investment priorities and evaluate the slate of DRI projects. The vision captures the community's desire to advance downtown's renaissance with new and enhanced community spaces, arts, culture, housing, and recreation.

"Downtown North Tonawanda is an energetic, diverse, high quality, and unique city experience for residents and visitors. Downtown is a vibrant and welcoming mixed-use district centered on the confluence of two historic waterways, the Erie Canal, and the Niagara River. Downtown North Tonawanda is the hub for residential, commercial, employment, leisure and recreation wants and needs for the city and the region. Residents and visitors alike delight in our waterways, the beauty of our natural landscapes and the multitude of landside cultural and recreational amenities offered at this "Gateway to the Erie Canal."

In downtown North Tonawanda, on Tonawanda Island and throughout our urban waterways, we will energize, diversify, add value, and become incomparable."

City of North Tonawanda 2025 Comprehensive Plan – The City of North Tonawanda is nearing completion on a city-wide comprehensive plan. The document aims to guide the next decade of City policy and envisions a sustainable, affordable, environmentally responsible future for the growth and development of the City.

City of North Tonawanda 2025 LWRP Update – The City of North Tonawanda is also nearing completion on an update to the City's existing Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The LWRP focuses on waterfront access, pedestrian and bicycle trail connections, and sustainable development policies for North Tonawanda's Erie Canal and Niagara River waterfronts.

Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan - Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan 2030 is Niagara County's first-ever comprehensive planning document that is dedicated solely to the entire County and its twenty municipalities. Although the County and many communities within Niagara County have been actively involved in numerous local and regional planning initiatives in recent years, the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan is countywide in perspective and emphasizes a multi-municipal approach to planning and informed decision-making. This countywide perspective is sometimes lacking in other plans and initiatives that are rightfully focused on addressing specific needs, projects, locations or particular opportunities within the Niagara region.

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a framework for achieving five high priority goals:

- Encouraging desirable and appropriate growth and development
- Strengthening the local economy
- Improving the delivery of services
- Prioritizing and coordinating capital improvements
- Improving the quality of life for County residents

City of Niagara Falls Downtown Revitalization Initiative – Selected in 2019, the City of Niagara Falls secured \$10 million from the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative for the Niagara Falls Bridge District. The Bridge District extends 26 blocks immediately north of Niagara Falls State Park and is supported by an active Main Street Business District adjacent to the Niagara River and Niagara Gorge Trail System. The goal of the City's DRI is to enhance the Bridge District as an active and vibrant neighborhood with a walkable public realm, a diverse mixed-use hub of economic opportunity, and a welcoming neighborhood for both residents and visitors.

City of Niagara Falls 2024 LWRP - In partnership with the NYS Department of State, the City of Niagara Falls is preparing a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). The LWRP will explore how to develop the city's waterfront resources in a sustainable manner, with a focus on strengthening tourism, economic development, and protection of natural resources and cultural assets. Building upon previous planning and economic development efforts, including the recent removal of a portion of the Niagara Scenic Parkway (formerly Robert Moses Parkway), the Niagara Waterfront Brownfield Opportunity Area, and the Main Street Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), the LWRP will define a vision for lands along the Niagara River, Cayuga Creek, and Gill Creek. The LWRP will also help identify specific projects for future grant funding requests.

Town of Newfane 2024 LWRP – The Town of Newfane completed a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program to support significant waterfront projects in the Town, align Town and State policies on waterfront access and development, improve wayfinding and walkability, and increase economic development and tourism.

Evaluation Criteria Data

In addition to the baseline demographic and economic data summarized above, Niagara County will continue to track a variety of data points each year. These data points will be compared to the CEDS Evaluation Criteria, discussed in this document, to better inform discussions about Niagara County's economic health and progress towards achieving the goals and objectives established in this CEDS.

Vacant Land for Commercial and Industrial Development

This uses property classification codes from the County's assessment roll to identify and calculate vacant commercial and industrial acreage.

- Acres of vacant land zoned for commercial development: The data below reflects combined acreage of all parcels within Niagara County that were assigned codes 330 (vacant land located in commercial areas) and 331 (commercial vacant land with minor improvements) in the respective year's assessment roll.
 - 2015: 3,254.48 acres
 - 2019: 3,256.81 acres
 - 2021: 3,135.36 acres
 - 2024: 3,842.40 acres
- Acres of vacant land zoned for industrial development: The data below reflects combined acreage of all parcels within Niagara County that were assigned codes 340 (vacant land located in industrial areas) and 341 (industrial vacant land with minor improvements) in the respective year's assessment roll.
 - 2015: 5,588.15 acres
 - 2019: 5,240.30 acres
 - 2021: 5,153.41 acres
 - 2024: 4,809.36 acres

Average Monthly Page views for sites page of NCCED website

Month	2023	2024	2025
Jan	130	140	171
Feb	137	171	151
Mar	165	242	253
Apr	134	382	168
May	114	369	
Jun	192	220	
Jul	179	229	

Aug	155	203	
Sep	141	251	
Oct	194	174	
Nov	151	138	
Dec	135	144	
TOTAL	1827	2663	743
Monthly Avg.	152.25	221.92	185.75

Average Daily Reach of NCCED Facebook Posts

Source: Facebook Analytics.

- Total Reach for 2023: 30,697 (Avg. 84.1 daily)
- Total Reach of 2024: 69,026 (Avg. 188.6 daily)

Companies Contacted through Niagara County Business Retention Program

- 2023: 82 companies contacted
- 2024: 71 companies contacted

Capital Investments from NCIDA PILOT Projects

- 2023: 10 projects; \$77,500,000 total capital investment
- 2024: 3 projects; \$505,000,000 total capital investment

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER PLANS

Alignment with Other Plans

Niagara County's CEDS builds upon existing relevant regional and local planning documents, including the following:

- Western New York Regional Economic Development Council's (WNY REDC) 2023 Regional Strategic Plan
- Buffalo Niagara Partnership's 2025 Advocacy Agenda
- City of Lockport's Downtown Revitalization Initiative
- City of North Tonawanda's Downtown Revitalization Initiative and 2025 Local Waterfront Revitalization Program
- Niagara County's Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan
- City of Niagara Falls Downtown Revitalization Plan and Local Waterfront Revitalization Program
- UB Regional Institute's One Region Forward plan
- Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council's 2021 Regional Freight Plan
- Erie County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY & RESPONSE SUMMARY

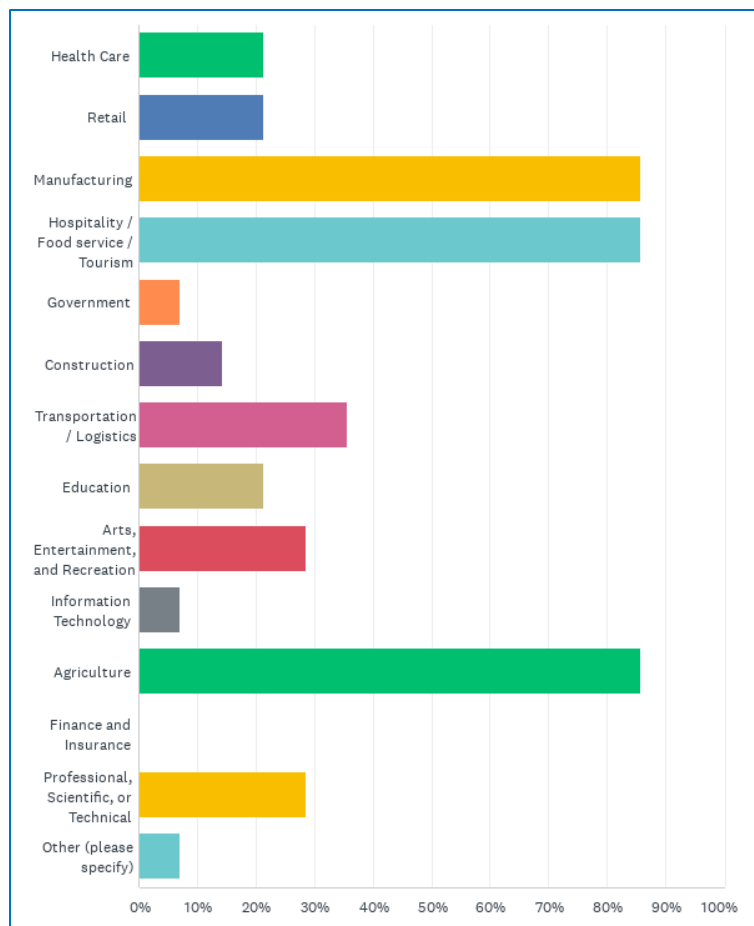
Niagara County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Stakeholder Survey Summary

In late 2024, Niagara County convened the CEDS Committee consisting of over 40 key stakeholders in local and regional economic development. The Committee included staff and leadership from various County departments, representation from the cities, towns, and villages throughout the County, leaders in areas such as workforce development, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, education, and skilled trades, representation from public utilities, and local elected officials and representatives.

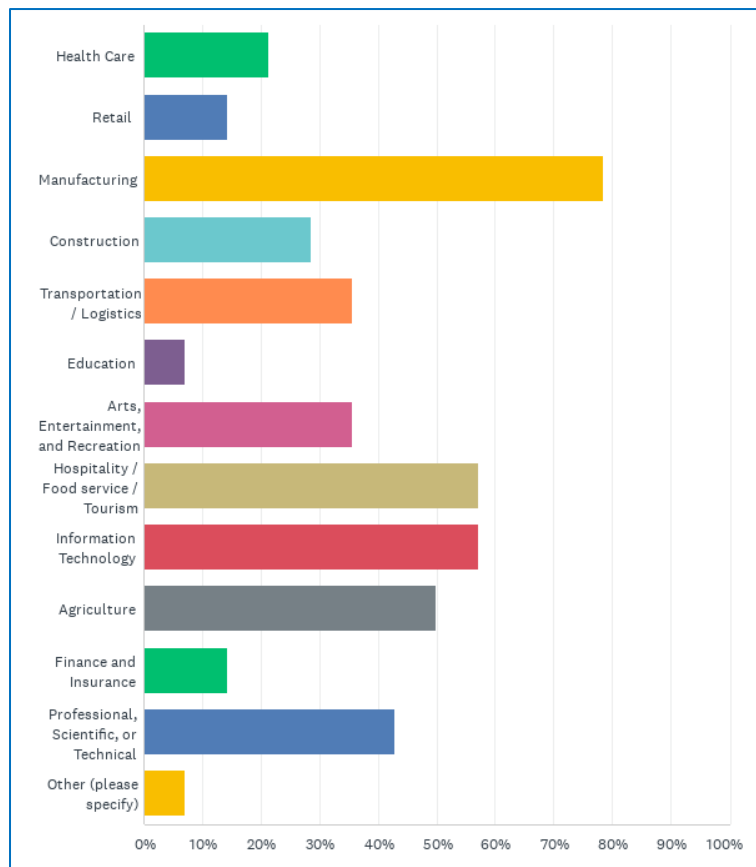
A survey was developed and issued to the CEDS Committee members seeking input on a wide range of County economic development issues as well as the County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to economic growth. The results of the survey, summarized below, informed the CEDS Committee meeting discussions and provided critical context for the development of the County's goals, objectives, and action plan.

Question 1: Which existing industries do you see as most significant to Niagara County's economy?



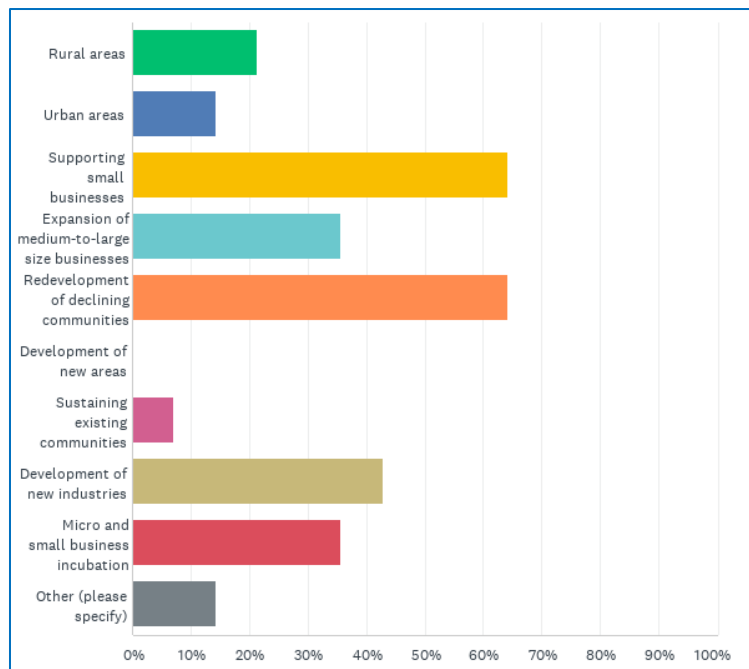
CEDS Committee stakeholders felt strongly that the three most significant existing industries to Niagara County's economy are manufacturing, hospitality & tourism, and agriculture.

Question 2: What types of businesses are most important to attract to Niagara County?



Manufacturing and hospitality & tourism, both identified in Question 1 as significant existing industries, were also industries that the CEDS Committee felt were important to attract to the County.

Question 3: What do you see as the most critical areas for economic development investment?

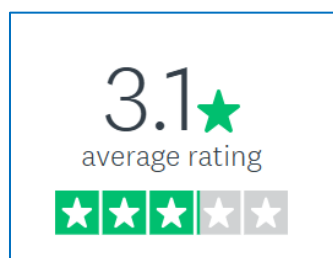


CEDS Committee members felt strongly that the two most critical areas for economic development investment in Niagara County are providing support for small businesses and the redevelopment of declining communities.

Question 4: Question number 4 asked Committee members to read the following statement and then rank a list of possible choices: "I would support the dedication of more time and resources to...".

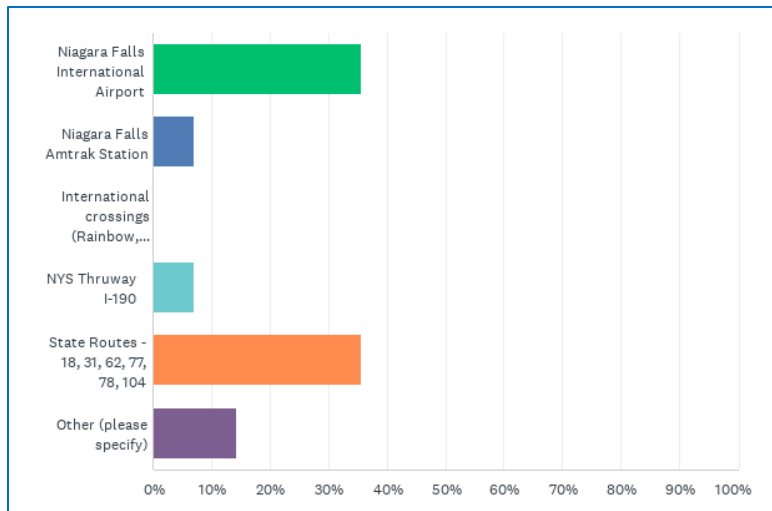
The two answers most frequently selected as "strongly agree" were: "helping to retain and expand existing businesses" and "growing and attracting advanced manufacturing companies".

Question 5: How would you rate the quality of transportation infrastructure in Niagara County?



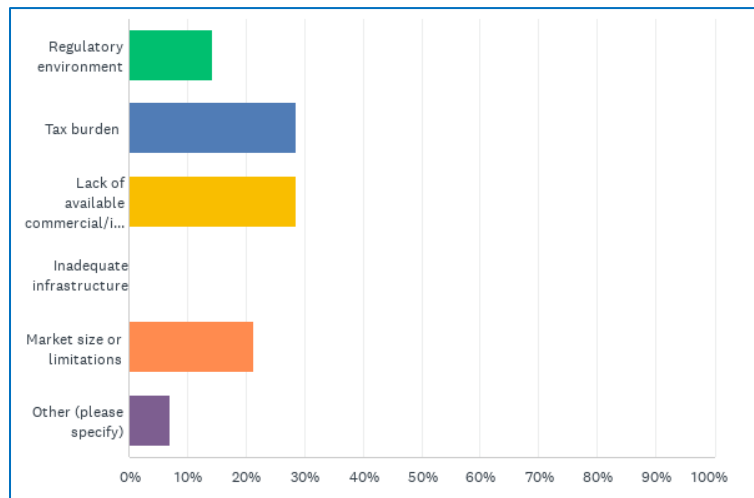
Asked to answer the above question on a 1 – 5 scale (1 being 'very poor' and 5 being 'excellent'), the CEDS Committee ranked Niagara County's transportation infrastructure at a '3.1', representing mediocre score.

Question 6: Which transportation infrastructure asset in Niagara County is the highest priority for additional investment?



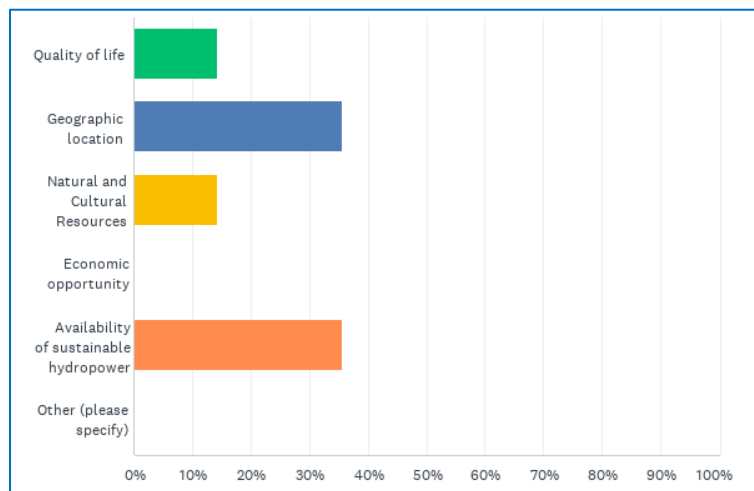
CEDS Committee members felt that the Niagara Falls International Airport and the various State routes throughout the County were the highest priority transportation infrastructure assets for additional investment.

Question 7: What do you feel is the biggest barrier to business development in Niagara County?



CEDS Committee members felt the largest barrier to business development in Niagara County is New York State's regulatory environment, tax structure, and bureaucratic processes.

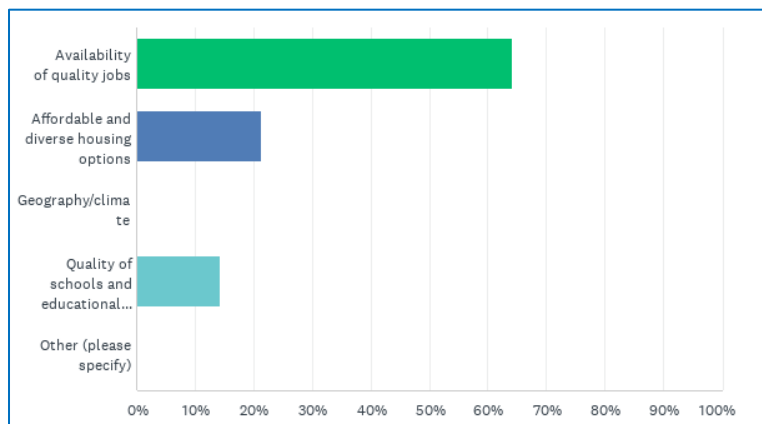
Question 8: Which of the following do you feel is Niagara County's most significant asset in support of economic development?



CEDS Committee members listed Niagara County's geographic location, including regional access to markets such as Toronto and New York City, as well as the availability of low-cost, sustainable hydropower as the County's most significant assets in support of economic development.

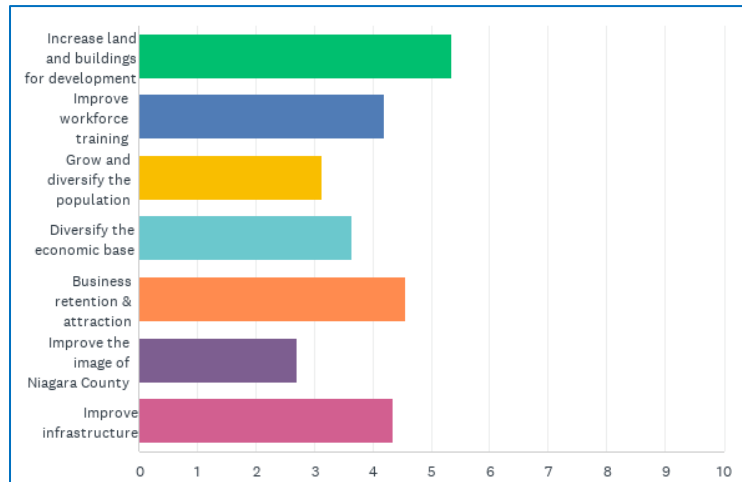
Question 9: This question asked CEDS Committee members how the CEDS strategy can address underserved communities. Answers to this question are reflected in the Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan.

Question 10: What is the most important factor in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce to Niagara County?



The CEDS Committee indicated that the availability of quality jobs is by far the most important factor in attracting a skilled workforce to Niagara County.

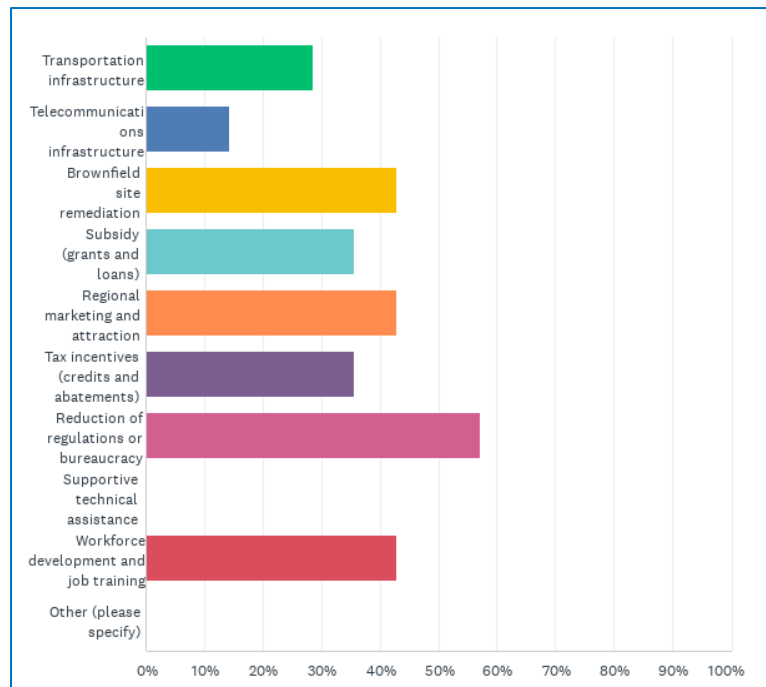
Question 11: Which economic development goals from the 2020 CEDS should still be prioritized in the 2025 CEDS?



Of the goals listed in the 2020 CEDS, the Committee felt most were still relevant to Niagara County in 2025. Increasing and promoting land and buildings available for commercial and industrial development.

Question 12: This question asked CEDS Committee members what the most promising opportunities are for attracting new businesses to Niagara County. Answers to this question are reflected in the Goals, Objective, and Action Plan.

Question 13: How can public funds and resources be best allocated to support economic development projects?



CEDS Committee members felt strongly that the best allocation of public resources to support economic development would be in the interest of reducing the regulatory and bureaucratic burden on local businesses. In addition, brownfield site remediation, regional marketing and business attraction, and workforce development and training were top priorities.

Questions 14 through 17 focused on Niagara County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and are further summarized in the SWOT Analysis section of this document.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

Priority Projects

Municipalities, development agencies, and stakeholders throughout Niagara County provided input on which significant projects they hope to see realized in the next five years. Below is a summary of priority projects supported by Niagara County which, if achieved, will advance the Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan of this CEDS.

Project Name	Twin Cities Memorial Highway Redesign and Reconstruction
Project Description	Redesign of 1.5-mile Twin City Memorial Highway (NYS-425) and Division Street with the goal of traffic-calming, reduced speed, improved pedestrian and vehicle safety, implementing multi-modal and pedestrian connections, and reducing congestion and vehicle emissions on this significant entrance arterial located in the center of the city.
Lead Agency	NYS DOT
Partners/Stakeholders	City of North Tonawanda, GBNRTC
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$25 million
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DOT, FHWA

Project Name	78 Bridge St. Redevelopment and Public Benefit Area
Project Description	73 market-rate apartments, 7 short-term rental units, and 1st floor commercial space in a new building constructed on a former fire training facility and brownfield site. The Public Benefit Area is to include public waterfront recreational access.
Lead Agency	Private – Visone Co. Development
Partners/Stakeholders	City of North Tonawanda, NYS DOS, NYS DEC
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$21,800,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative, NYS Brownfield Cleanup Tax Credits

Project Name	Riverfront Vista (235 River Road)
Project Description	87 market-rate apartments and commercial/retail space in a new development on a currently vacant brownfield site within downtown North Tonawanda.
Lead Agency	235 River Road LLC., (Alliance Homes)
Partners/Stakeholders	City of North Tonawanda, NYS DEC, Empire State Development
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$33,350,000

Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development, NYS Brownfield Cleanup Tax Credits, Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation
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Project Name	Oliver Street Walkability
Project Description	Design and construction of pedestrian safety improvements including bump outs, crosswalk enhancements, wayfinding and signage, street furniture, green infrastructure installations, and pedestrian scale lighting along the historic Oliver Street corridor.
Lead Agency	City of North Tonawanda
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2025
Total Project Cost	\$3,250,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DOS, National Grid, NYS EFC, NCBDC

Project Name	Smart Growth
Project Description	Enhancements at Charles Fleishman Park including a clock feature, landscaping, and pathways, as well as installation of EV charging stations in the Manhattan Street parking lot along with pedestrian scale lighting improvements.
Lead Agency	City of North Tonawanda
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2025
Total Project Cost	\$1,200,000
Potential Funding Sources	Niagara River Greenway, NYS DOS

Project Name	Erie Canal Bicycle Path Extension
Project Description	1.9 mile extension to an existing bicycle/pedestrian path on the north side of Tonawanda Creek/Erie Canal, connecting Mayors Park to the NT Botanical Gardens.
Lead Agency	City of North Tonawanda
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$2,079,500
Potential Funding Sources	Niagara River Greenway, DASNY, NYS DOS, NYS DOT

Project Name	Payne Park Aquatic Complex
Project Description	Construction of a new memorial aquatic complex at Payne Park including zero entry activity pool, play elements (sprayers, slides), pool accessories (ladders, ropes & railings), a lap pool with diving board and pool accessories (ladders, ropes & railings), a pool house with restrooms, concessions, storage and mechanicals, an additional parking area, and pool deck with shade structures.
Lead Agency	City of North Tonawanda
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$8,160,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Parks, US DOI

Project Name	500 Wheatfield Community Center
Project Description	Improvements to the existing building and construction of an expansion at 500 Wheatfield Street in order to consolidate the offices of NT Parks & Recreation, Senior Center, Youth Center, and Lumber City Development Corporation, as well as new community space and amenities.
Lead Agency	City of North Tonawanda
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$12,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	27 Main Street Redevelopment
Project Description	
Lead Agency	Private – Sunshine 5449 Holdings, LLC
Partners/Stakeholders	Lumber City Development Corporation
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$2,500,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS OCR, Empire State Development

Project Name	Port of Somerset
Project Description	An international shipping port at the site of a former power plant with the goal to reduce the time it takes for products made in Canada to reach the United States for further distribution.
Lead Agency	Beowulf Energy
Partners/Stakeholders	Hamilton Oshawa Port Authority
Expected Completion	2029
Total Project Cost	Unknown
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	IDA Park South
Project Description	Establish a new industrial park (25-40 acres in size) adjacent to the existing Town of Lockport Industrial Park. Predevelopment work underway – anticipate applying for a 2nd FAST grant for help with infrastructure needs – power, water, sewer.
Lead Agency	Town of Lockport IDA
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$2,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development

Project Name	Town of Lockport Town Center
Project Description	Establish a 4,000 sq. ft. Town Center in the former Carpenters Union Hall on Dysinger Rd as a part of the Town of Lockport campus. Town Center would be home to the Town of Lockport IDA Offices and two large meeting/community rooms and be accessible.
Lead Agency	Town of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	

Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$1,200,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Bison Bag Warehouse Expansion
Project Description	68,000 sq. ft. warehouse planned for 2026 by Bison Bag in Town of Lockport Industrial Park
Lead Agency	Private – Bison Bag
Partners/Stakeholders	Town of Lockport IDA
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$2,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Cimato Housing Development
Project Description	Proposed development of 180 single family homes off Old Beattie Rd. in the Town of Lockport.
Lead Agency	Private – Cimato Development
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$3,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	History of People's Existence Museum
Project Description	Proposed not-for-profit museum of humanity's existence from B.C. to modern day to be located at the corner of Upper Mountain Rd and Rt. 93.
Lead Agency	Private – non-profit
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$2,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Lake Ontario Regional Dredging Program
Project Description	Continue supporting Lake Ontario Regional Dredging Program projects, including the periodic dredging of Wilson and Olcott harbors, as part of a broader effort covering all 19 shallow-draft recreational harbors along Lake Ontario's southern shore.
Lead Agency	Orleans County
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara County, Town of Newfane, Town and Village of Wilson, Local Marinas and Yacht Clubs.
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	TBD
Potential Funding Sources	US Army Corps of Engineers, US Dept of Agriculture, NYS Dept of State, Municipal, Private

Project Name	Westcott Estates
Project Description	200-unit housing development on Raymond Rd in the Town of Lockport.
Lead Agency	Private – CL&F Development
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2026

Total Project Cost	\$2,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Niagara County Business Park
Project Description	Proposed 48-acre shovel-ready industrial park in the Town of Cambria
Lead Agency	Niagara County
Partners/Stakeholders	Empire State Development, National Grid, Town of Cambria
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$6,300,000
Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development, U.S. Economic Development Administration, National Grid

Project Name	Meat Processing Facility
Project Description	A 2024 study indicated a strong need for a meat-processing facility in the region
Lead Agency	Cornell Cooperative Extension
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara County Center for Economic Development, SUNY Niagara, Niagara USA Chamber
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$6,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development, NYS Agriculture & Markets, USDA

Project Name	Terra Capital Site Master Development Plan
Project Description	Explore opportunities around Niagara Falls International Airport for further development in this critical business corridor.
Lead Agency	Niagara County Center for Economic Development
Partners/Stakeholders	Invest Buffalo Niagara
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$500,000
Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development, U.S. Economic Development Administration, National Grid, National Fuel

Project Name	Dream It Do It Advanced Manufacturing Program
Project Description	Dream It Do It Advanced Manufacturing Program works to create a pipeline of qualified candidates to fill positions in advanced manufacturing. The focus is on targeting high school and middle school students, to get them excited about, and learning the skills necessary for a career in manufacturing.
Lead Agency	
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara County Employment & Training, NCDED, Private
Expected Completion	2028, 2029, 2030
Total Project Cost	\$150,000
Potential Funding Sources	Empire State Development, private foundations

Project Name	Main Street Initiative
Project Description	Projects includes pre-development and stabilization work of over \$700,000 annually on mixed-use and commercial properties.

Lead Agency	Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation, Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$3,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Homes & Community Renewal

Project Name	Niagara Falls Housing Stabilization
Project Description	Housing stabilization across the City of Niagara Falls represents \$600,000 of investment in housing.
Lead Agency	Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation
Partners/Stakeholders	City of Niagara Falls
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$600,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Homes & Community Renewal

Project Name	Locust Hamm Waterline Replacement
Project Description	Full waterline replacement with a new 10" waterline.
Lead Agency	Town of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$6,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Transit Road Sewer Upgrade
Project Description	Project will replace or slip line the sewer on the west side of Transit Road from Shimer Drive south to Robinson Road.
Lead Agency	Town of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$2,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	SUNY Niagara Campus Feasibility Study
Project Description	Niagara County, in conjunction with SUNY Niagara, will explore opportunities to further economic development in the County.
Lead Agency	Niagara County Department of Economic Development
Partners/Stakeholders	SUNY Niagara, Niagara County IDA
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$500,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Combined Operations Alert Facility
Project Description	A \$51 million dollar project currently in the design phase, this facility will consolidate operations for the 914th Operations Group on the flight line, improving command and control, training, and response times

Lead Agency	Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	
Total Project Cost	\$51,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	U.S. DOD

Project Name	Taxiway and Runaway Enhancements
Project Description	A proposed \$65 million project to upgrade airfield infrastructure, benefiting both NFARS and Niagara Falls International Airport
Lead Agency	Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
Expected Completion	
Total Project Cost	\$65,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	River Road waterfront park development
Project Description	Site remediation and establishment of a municipal park along the Niagara River
Lead Agency	Town of Wheatfield
Partners/Stakeholders	NCDED, NCBDC
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$1,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	Niagara River Greenway, NYS Parks, Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation

Project Name	Lockport Junction Road site cleanup and redevelopment
Project Description	Remediation of brownfield site in the Town of Cambria
Lead Agency	Private
Partners/Stakeholders	NYS DEC, Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation, Town of Cambria, NCIDA
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$80,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DEC, Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation

Project Name	Remediation of strategic sites on Buffalo Avenue
Project Description	Remediation of strategic sites in an industrial corridor in the City of Niagara Falls
Lead Agency	Private
Partners/Stakeholders	USA Niagara Development, City of Niagara Falls, Niagara County
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$130,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DEC, Niagara County Brownfield Development Corporation

Project Name	Repurpose brownfield sites
Project Description	Remediate and repurpose various tax delinquent sites throughout Niagara County
Lead Agency	Niagara County

Partners/Stakeholders	NORLIC, NCIDA
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$1,500,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DEC, NORLIC, EPA, NCBDC

Project Name	Flight of Five – Phase III
Project Description	The rehabilitation of two sets of additional lock gates and one additional lock chamber in the historic Flight of Five lock system. This will bring the total to 4 of the 6 gates and 3 of the 5 chambers completed.
Lead Agency	Lockport Locks Heritage District Corporation
Partners/Stakeholders	City of Lockport, GLDC, NYS Canal Corporation
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$3,600,000
Potential Funding Sources	ESD, NYS Canal Corporation

Project Name	Lockport Harbor and Marine Center
Project Description	Development of new dockage and a facility providing boater services such as water, electric, and shower facilities along the historic Erie Canal.
Lead Agency	City of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	NYS Canal Corp., LHDC, NYPA
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$7,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	U.S. FWS, NYS Canal Corp., NYS DOS

Project Name	Lockport Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail
Project Description	Expansion of the regional trail system to connect area both above and below the Niagara Escarpment that will enhance recreation within Lockport and enhance the Empire State Trail.
Lead Agency	City of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara River Greenway, Empire State Trail
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Parks, Niagara River Greenway

Project Name	Eastern Niagara Hospital redevelopment
Project Description	Redevelopment of the now-vacant hospital buildings to include a combination of affordable and market rate housing, office function, and supportive services.
Lead Agency	GLDC
Partners/Stakeholders	NYS HCR, City of Lockport
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$50,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS HCR, ESD

Project Name	Aaron Mossell Park
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Project Description	The conversion of a parking lot into a playground in an underserved area located blocks from downtown Lockport and adjacent to the new developments at the Harrison Place campus.
Lead Agency	City of Lockport
Partners/Stakeholders	GLDC, NYS Parks
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$1,500,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS Parks

Project Name	Centennial Park
Project Description	Construction of a multi-faceted, year-round event campus that would include a 6,000+ seat arena for sporting and entertainment events, a smaller arena for sporting and entertainment events, and a splash pad that could be converted into an ice-skating rink during winter months.
Lead Agency	City of Niagara Falls
Partners/Stakeholders	ESD
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$100,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	ESD

Project Name	County Bridge Rehabilitation and Replacement
Project Description	Significant rehabilitation or replacement of 13 bridges throughout Niagara County in accordance with the Niagara County Department of Public Works 5-year capital plan.
Lead Agency	Niagara County
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2026-2030
Total Project Cost	\$22,800,000
Potential Funding Sources	NYS DOT, US FHWA

Project Name	Main Street Economic Development & Streetscape Revitalization
Project Description	The Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency, in partnership with the State of New York, Niagara County, Niagara University, and the Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation, is actively working to revitalize distressed properties in the Main Street corridor of Niagara Falls. Streetscape improvements in the corridor will improve pedestrian safety, walkability, and economic viability.
Lead Agency	Niagara Falls URA & City of Niagara Falls.
Partners/Stakeholders	NCIDA, Niagara University, NORLIC, ESD, GBNRTC
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	\$11,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	ESD, NYS DOS

Project Name	LaSalle Streetscape Improvements
Project Description	Beautification and streetscape improvements in the LaSalle neighborhood of Niagara Falls.
Lead Agency	City of Niagara Falls
Partners/Stakeholders	Dormitory Authority of the State of New York

Expected Completion	2025
Total Project Cost	\$1,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	DASNY

Project Name	Niagara Scenic Parkway Removal Phase 3
Project Description	Third phase of the Niagara Scenic Parkway Conversion Project which will provide enhanced multimodal access and connectivity to natural and built destinations in the Niagara Gorge corridor and adjoining communities, while maintaining regional and local access and mobility.
Lead Agency	NYS Parks
Partners/Stakeholders	City of Niagara Falls, Village of Lewiston, Town of Lewiston, NYPA, NYS DOT, ESD, US FHWA
Expected Completion	TBD
Total Project Cost	TBD
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Hotel Niagara Redevelopment
Project Description	Redevelopment of the historic and long-vacant former Hotel Niagara building at 201 Rainbow Boulevard in downtown Niagara Falls.
Lead Agency	Private development
Partners/Stakeholders	City of Niagara Falls, USA Niagara Development, NCIDA
Expected Completion	TBD
Total Project Cost	TBD
Potential Funding Sources	ESD, NCIDA, USA Niagara Development

Project Name	Niagara County Sewer District Capital Upgrades
Project Description	Upgrades to critical sewer infrastructure throughout the County including force mains, pump stations, sludge thickeners, and storage tanks.
Lead Agency	Niagara County Sewer District
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$22,500,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	Niagara County Water District Capital Upgrades
Project Description	Upgrades to critical water distribution infrastructure throughout the County including treatment plant building improvements, pump stations, generators, and tank upgrades.
Lead Agency	Niagara County Water District
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2030
Total Project Cost	\$40,730,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	City Market Phase 1
Project Description	City Market is undergoing a transformation with the infusion of \$20M from the Regional Revitalization Partnership, including funding from USA Niagara and philanthropic donors. Having already completed the initial conceptual and business development plan, the City along with its partners, are engaging a firm for the design of phase 1 as identified in the concept plan, which includes a new market shed close to Pine Avenue, a new event space, and reconfigured East Market Street.
Lead Agency	City of Niagara Falls
Partners/Stakeholders	ESD
Expected Completion	2027
Total Project Cost	\$20,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	

Project Name	City-wide Park Restoration
Project Description	The City of Niagara Falls plans to transform various parks with updated shelters, play equipment, new courts and other amenities.
Lead Agency	City of Niagara Falls
Partners/Stakeholders	
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$2,400,000
Potential Funding Sources	Niagara River Greenway Commission

Project Name	520 Hyde Park Boulevard
Project Description	The City of Niagara Falls is anticipating demolishing the old public safety and courthouse building at 520 Hyde Park Blvd to make way for new development. This building was replaced by the newer building along Main Street, and current ideas for the replacement development are being carried forward in the City's Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan (LWRP) which is anticipated to be completed next year.
Lead Agency	City of Niagara Falls
Partners/Stakeholders	Niagara County IDA
Expected Completion	2028
Total Project Cost	TBD
Potential Funding Sources	TBD

Project Name	Historic Gateways
Project Description	Through USA Niagara Development, DeFranco Park along Main Street in Niagara Falls will be developed into more formal parkland with trails and new plantings, along with the inclusion of a proposed outdoor amphitheater for concerts and other events.
Lead Agency	USA Niagara Development
Partners/Stakeholders	City of Niagara Falls
Expected Completion	2026
Total Project Cost	\$12,000,000
Potential Funding Sources	ESD

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



Funding Opportunities

A wide variety of incentive programs are available to support community and economic development projects. Niagara County partners with Federal, State, and local agencies to leverage the appropriate resources needed to support critical local projects. The following is a catalog of available funding resources for projects in Niagara County.

Empire State Development

Empire State Development, New York State's economic development agency, offers a diverse range of incentives for businesses looking to start, locate, and grow in New York.

Linked Deposit

The Linked Deposit Program (LDP) helps existing New York State firms obtain reduced-rate financing so they can undertake investments to make borrowing less expensive. Eligible businesses can obtain loans from commercial banks, savings banks, savings and loan associations, farm credit institutions and the New York Business Development Corporation.

Capital Project Loan Fund

The Capital Project Loan Fund provides \$106 million in funding to provide direct loans for the growth of manufacturing and other eligible businesses within New York State, by assisting in financing a portion of the cost of acquiring and renovating existing buildings or constructing new buildings or purchasing machinery and equipment.

Main Street Capital Loan Fund

The Main Street Capital Loan Fund (MSCLF) makes term loans of \$100,000 or less available for start-ups and early-stage businesses, particularly businesses in or of communities that have historically faced challenges in obtaining adequate credit or favorable terms. MSCLF loans can be used for working capital, acquiring equipment and other essential assets, and hiring talent.

JDA Agriculture Loan Fund

The JDA Agriculture Loan Fund aims to alleviate economic barriers faced by many small NYS agribusinesses looking to grow and expand, including: value-added processors, food distributors, food aggregators, beverage producers and Food Hub participants.

JDA Direct Loan Fund

The JDA Direct Loan Program provides direct loans for the growth of manufacturing and other eligible businesses within New York State by assisting in financing a portion of the cost of acquiring and renovating existing buildings or constructing new buildings or purchasing machinery and equipment.

Restore NY Communities Initiative

The Restore New York Communities Initiative provides municipalities with financial assistance for the revitalization of commercial and residential properties. The program encourages community development and neighborhood growth through the elimination and redevelopment of blighted structures.

Excelsior Jobs Program

The Excelsior Jobs Program encourages businesses to expand in and relocate to New York while maintaining strict accountability standards to guarantee that businesses deliver on job and investment commitments. Firms in the Excelsior Jobs Program may qualify for five fully refundable tax credits: Jobs Tax Credit, Investment Tax Credit, Research & Development Tax Credit, Real Property Tax Credit, and Child Care Services Tax Credit.

FAST NY

The FAST NY program provides grants to prepare and develop sites statewide to jumpstart New York's shovel-readiness and increase its attractiveness to large employers, including high-tech manufacturing, particularly semiconductor manufacturing, interstate distribution and logistics businesses. The program will help diversify New York State's economy while propelling new investments for businesses, communities and job creation.

Capital Grant

Funding is for capital-based economic development initiatives intended to create or retain jobs; prevent, reduce or eliminate unemployment and underemployment; and/or increase business activity in a community or region.

New York State Homes and Community Renewal

The New York State Office of Community Renewal, primarily utilizing federal Community Development Block Grant funding, offers grants and incentives for affordable housing development, water and sewer infrastructure, business start-up and expansion, and neighborhood revitalization.

BEST

The Business Expansion and Start-Up program provides grants for eligible economic development projects using CDBG funding. The program is designed to support new job creation, critical job retention, and development in underserved communities. The program also provides funds to support the start-up and expansion of Microenterprise businesses.

CDBG Housing

Housing rehabilitation and first-time homebuyer support programs are available with CDBG funding.

Vacant Property Clearance Program

CDBG funds can be utilized to demolish vacant structures impeding community and economic development efforts in the community.

Public Facilities Infrastructure

CDBG funds are available to support municipal infrastructure and public facilities which primarily serve low-to-moderate income populations.

New York Main Street

The New York Main Street program provides grants to communities to redevelop properties in downtown and mixed-use corridors.

NYS Department of State

The New York Department of State provides support and funding to municipalities through a range of community planning and project implementation programs focused on areas such as waterfront revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, and downtown revitalization.

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

The DRI is an annual competition in which ten communities across the State are awarded \$10 million grants to transform downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and are magnets for redevelopment, business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity.

NY Forward

The NY Forward program provides annual grants with the goal of invigorating and enlivening downtowns in New York's smaller and rural communities—the type of downtowns found in villages, hamlets and other small, neighborhood-scale municipal centers.

Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

The LWRP program is a planning and implementation process which addresses local and regional (coastal or inland) waterway issues, improves water quality and natural areas, guides development to areas with adequate infrastructure and services away from sensitive resources, promotes public waterfront access, and provides for redevelopment of underutilized waterfronts.

Brownfield Opportunity Area

The Brownfield Opportunity Area Program provides communities with funding and technical assistance to develop community-driven, area-wide plans to effectively redevelop brownfields and other vacant, abandoned and underutilized property.

NYSERDA

The New York State Energy Research and Development Agency provides incentives to expand availability of capital for energy efficiency projects and facility upgrades.

National Grid

As the primary electric service provider throughout much of Niagara County, National Grid offers a range of economic development grants and energy efficiency incentives intended to spur economic development and support community revitalization.

Electric Capital Investment Incentive

The Electric Capital Investment Incentive Program provides funds to help offset the customer costs associated with upgrading utility infrastructure to accommodate a business expansion or new construction project.

Natural Gas Capital Investment Incentive

The Natural Gas Capital Investment Incentive Program provides funds to help offset customer costs associated with upgrading natural gas infrastructure to accommodate a business expansion or new construction project

Industrial Building Redevelopment

The Industrial Building Assistance program provides grants of up to \$250,000 to building owners undertaking efforts to retrofit the interior electric and gas infrastructure required to convert these buildings to multi-tenant industrial use. The grants will be made through local industrial development agencies or other quasi-public development corporations

ShovelReady Incentive

The ShovelReady Incentive program provides grants of up to \$250,000 for the installation of electric and natural gas infrastructure to New York state designated "Shovel Ready" BuildNow NY sites.

Brownfield Redevelopment

The Brownfield Redevelopment program provides grants to fund utility related infrastructure improvements and other costs that are necessary to progress the redevelopment of a brownfield site or vacant building

Main Street/Commercial District Revitalization

National Grid's upstate NY service territory includes a substantial number of small to medium sized urban centers and main street corridors that possess unrealized potential and are located where we often have excess utility infrastructure and capacity. As a result of public/private partnerships and planning initiatives, communities

are prioritizing and implementing unique projects that impact their competitive viability, attract investment and capitalize on their distinct development potential.

National Fuel Gas

As the natural gas service provider throughout much of Niagara County, National Fuel offers a range of incentives intended to spur energy efficiency, economic development and other funding opportunities for industrial and large commercial customers.

Conservation Incentive Program (CIP)

This program makes rebates available to National Fuel's residential customers when they install select energy efficient natural gas equipment. New builds are also eligible for rebates.

Non-residential Conservation Incentive Program (NRCIP)

This program makes rebates available to National Fuel's non-residential customers when they install select energy efficient natural gas equipment. New builds are also eligible for rebates.

Area Development Program (ADP)

The ADP program supports new and existing businesses in National Fuel's service territory that support economic development, job creation and New York's sustainability goals.

Partnership to Revitalize the Industrial Manufacturing Economy of Western New York (PRIME-WNY)

This program can assist customers seeking new or additional service from National Fuel or install incremental gas-fired equipment at their industrial or large commercial facilities.

NYS Canal Corporation

The New York State Canal Corporation maintains and operates the historic Erie Canal and provides funding to communities to implement projects within the Canal corridor.

Canalway Grants Program

The Canalway Grant Program distributes up to \$1.0 million dollars annually in competitive grants for communities located along the New York State Canal System for canal related capital projects.

New York Power Authority

The New York Power Authority is America's largest state power organization.

ReCharge NY

ReCharge New York is a statewide economic development power program designed to retain or create jobs through allocations of lower cost electricity to businesses and Not-for-Profit Corporations. There is also power available to be allocated to businesses that plan to expand operations in the state or are looking to relocate to New York State.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The U.S. EPA provides funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance on a wide range of environmental issues.

Brownfields Program

Through the Brownfields Program, EPA offers grants for: brownfield assessments, brownfield cleanup and remediation, revolving loan funds, job training, and technical assistance.

U.S. Economic Development Administration

EDA investments help to establish a foundation for long-term job growth and build durable regional economies throughout the United States.

Economic Adjustment Assistance

The EAA program can assist state and local entities in responding to a wide range of economic challenges through: Strategy Grants to support the development, updating or refinement of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and, Implementation Grants to support the execution of activities identified in a CEDS, such as infrastructure improvements, including site acquisition, site preparation, construction, rehabilitation and equipping of facilities. Specific activities may be funded as separate investments or as multiple elements of a single investment. Under EAA, EDA can also fund market and environmental studies, planning or construction grants, and capitalize or recapitalize Revolving Loan Funds to help provide small businesses with the capital they need to grow.

Niagara County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Prepared for the United States
Economic Development
Administration



2025