



Economic Development & Planning Annual Report 2021

Introduction

The Wayne County Economic Development and Planning Department consists of staff working together and across economic development and planning areas to improve the economy and quality of life in the County. Planning staff conducts County Planning Board review, completes land use and other planning studies, manages state and federal grant programs, and assists in the implementation of economic development initiatives. Economic Development staff fosters business attraction, expansion, retention, and small business development across the County and provides staffing to the County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) and the Wayne Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). The WEDC manages commercial finance programs on behalf of the County, and the IDA provides benefits to companies locating or expanding in Wayne County who meet certain qualifying criteria.

Economic Development

This past year continued to present challenges to our efforts by restricting travel and other business interactions, but we made considerable progress in a number of areas while continuing to work on development and implementation of programs that best served the County's economic prosperity. The Economic Development department continues to measure progress with a focus on three key economic development areas including business retention and expansion, workforce development, and new business development.

□ Business Retention and Expansion - There were numerous business expansion projects in 2021, and the most notable was Pace Electronics relocation and expansion including a \$4.3 million investment. Despite the current challenges, businesses across the County are poised for growth.

□ Workforce Development - Issues related to workforce continue to hinder growth potential across the national economy. That being said, we continue to address workforce development from a broad, long-range perspective with an eye on local and more immediate efforts where the opportunity presents itself. The Edge Factor platform continues to serve as a way of disseminating information and opportunities for the pre-college and next-gen workforce. The Pal-Mac Central School District and BOCES P-Tech have full Edge Factor memberships going into 2022, furthering dissemination and use of the platform.

There are also significant regional efforts underway aimed at securing additional funding through the Good Jobs Challenge from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The nine-county regional initiative is aimed at supporting programs focused on healthcare and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades.

□ New Business Development - New business development is receiving a renewed focus going into 2022, with a number of efforts in 2021 that paved the way. The most notable change is the development and hiring of an Economic Development Specialist. This new position is focused on business attraction efforts, working closely with real estate professionals, regional partners, and property owners. To support this effort, we applied for and were awarded a grant to study and identify projects that will increase our preparedness for business attraction opportunities including infrastructure expansion and other site specific studies.





We continued efforts aimed at new small business development through the Wayne Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) third annual Pitch Competition where concept or early stage businesses submitted executive summaries of business plans. Five finalists were chosen for a live pitch-fest where participants made three-minute “pitches” to a panel of judges. The program was a great success again this year. The winner was from Sodus Point with a start-up business called Sodus Bay Outfitters, which is a seasonal recreation equipment rental shop offering daily use of kayaks, canoes, stand up paddle boards, and beach bicycles.

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In addition to these specific department initiatives, economic development staff continue to work on utilization of WEDC loan funds where they can assist local businesses to invest and grow. WEDC loan funds have been adjusted over the last several years so as to not compete with local lenders but rather to enhance and fill gaps in resources available for Wayne County businesses, including gap financing, ag-specific low interest financing, and microloan funding. An application was made to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2021 for capitalization of an additional loan fund that would be used to fund investigation and clean-up work at brownfields across the County, with particular attention to properties currently under the EPA Community-wide Assessment Program managed by planning staff.

The WEDC main loan funds were capitalized with CDBG grants from the County in 1983 and 1994 and continue to revolve, utilizing initial capital and accrued interest payments. In an effort to address COVID related issues, WEDC offered deferred payments for all loan fund customers with many accepting the deferral. The loan portfolio remains strong and staff are exploring ways to offer support during the economic recovery. WEDC is currently managing 18 different loans made from all of our existing loan funds.

The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) continues to provide project assistance in the form of tax benefits for projects meeting qualifying thresholds including job creation and significant real estate investments. Staff is currently managing 36 PILOTS with several pending projects underway as we head into 2022.

Planning

The Wayne County Planning Department staff continues to manage the County Planning Board Article 239 (L) and (M) reviews. Board appointments are made by the Board of Supervisors with Board participation open to representatives from all 15 towns. The County Planning Board reviewed 121 referrals (151 total actions) of which 66 (54%) were deemed to have “no significant countywide or inter-county impact,” often referred to as NCI. Of the remaining referrals, 33 received approval with comments, while 22 were denied approval, withdrawn, canceled, or determined to be exempt.

The Director and Planning staff worked on several additional and ongoing initiatives in 2021:

□ The Department completed a Brownfield Inventory in early 2021, leading toward implementation of our \$600,000 EPA Community Wide Assessment Grant. Funding is being used to complete phase I and phase II studies at priority brownfield sites across the County. In collaboration with the County Land Bank, staff has been working to identify sites best suited for this investment, with priorities driven by their impact on current conditions, market interest, and other economic and community factors.

□ The County Broadband Study was completed in 2017 with a core focus on identifying unserved areas and providing a detailed breakdown by town on the number of unserved residents. At the time of completion, the study estimated 6,828 households (50% of total county households) as unserved. The State broadband program along with local provider Spectrum (formerly Time Warner) had a requirement to provide new service to 145,000 households statewide. This made a significant impact in closing the service gap, leaving approximately 1,500 unserved households with a significant concentration on the east side of the county.

In an effort to close the gap and address connectivity issues highlighted by the recent pandemic, the Department issued an RFP in July 2021 to solicit proposals from Internet Service Providers (ISP) to provide an estimated cost of delivering service to remaining unserved areas of the County. Going into 2022, staff and the County Broadband Committee are working on bringing a final proposal to the Board of Supervisors, which will aim at bringing the most cost competitive proposal to the County.

□ Our Department Agricultural Development Specialist continues to assist with Ag District amendments and application for rural preservation grants. Ag industry support is a continued focus of this department, with efforts underway to bolster and support farmers and value-added agriculture industry in the County.

□ Starting in 2020, a comprehensive and affordable housing analysis has become a new area of focus for this department, and this is increasing in importance heading into 2022. Housing is the lifeblood of our communities. An aging housing stock and lack of attention have become significant areas of focus in our planning and economic development efforts.

In 2021 we had an opportunity to evaluate the current conditions of our affordable housing stock through a grant from Enterprise Community Partners. Among other findings, the study found that the County has a large proliferation of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH), with the majority of affordable housing units identified as single-family or duplex properties. As a result of the grant, the Department was able to establish two new programs, being implemented with partner organizations Pathstone and the Greater Rochester Housing Partnership. These programs will establish a loan fund for developers to do a market study and a landlord rehab grant program to repair existing housing. Both are in the final stages of development and will be ready to launch in early 2022.

In addition, we applied for and are being awarded a grant from NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) to complete a comprehensive Housing Study in 2022 aimed at taking an all-inclusive look at housing across the County. The study will evaluate currently available and future demand for housing across income levels and to guide policy and decision making at the County and local level.

□ The Planning Department, in cooperation with Real Property Tax and numerous other County Departments, is working to establish a GIS system for County, local government, and public authority use to better use data to assess and evaluate current and future conditions. Geographic Information System (GIS) is a computer-based digital system that analyzes and displays geographically referenced information. It uses data that is attached to a unique location and can create, manage, analyze, and map all types of data by connecting data to a map, integrating location data with all types of descriptive information. This provides a foundation for mapping and analysis of data useful to every department at all levels of government by helping users to understand patterns, relationships, and geographic context. The benefits include improved communication and efficiency as well as better management and decision making.



The Planning Department applied for and is being awarded a \$450,000 grant from NYS Department of State (DOS) through its Local Government Efficiency (LGE) program to develop and implement a shared GIS database across County and local government. Staff will work with the new GIS coordinator and other county departments to develop and implement the scope of work under the grant.

Conclusion

The past year presented challenges to our work. As a department we continue to consistently evaluate and identify funding opportunities, develop resources, and direct staff time toward areas we feel will have the most substantial impact on improving the economy and quality of life in Wayne County. I am proud of our staff and the work we are doing. I look forward to continuing to serve the County and its tax payers in addressing issues and improving the economy.