

# Chapter VI: Economic Development

## Background

The Niagara County Department of Economic Development (NCDED) and the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA) have cooperated extensively to facilitate economic development within the County since 2003. Together, these two entities comprise the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (NCCED), located in the Vantage International Pointe (VIP) Industrial Park in the Town of Wheatfield.

The consolidation of a staff and resources at NCCED provides “one stop” economic development services under a single roof. The combined efforts of the NCCED has resulted in significant cost savings to County residents, enhanced responsiveness to business opportunities, and is considered a model for a team-centered management approach to providing economic development services to residents, businesses and prospective employers in Niagara County.

The NCCED is also the coordinative center of the Niagara County Economic Development Alliance (NCEDA) which was formed in 1993. The NCEDA is a working group of more than 30 agencies that provide support services and project coordination to the business community.

The NCCED is charged with the responsibility for economic development from a countywide perspective. The Center actively partners with many agencies and organizations in providing effective economic development services, and is somewhat unique among economic development agencies due to its focus on both job retention and job creation. Niagara County, led by the Niagara County Department of Economic Development, is one of only a few counties in New York State that emphasizes business and job retention and as part of the effort to facilitate job retention routinely surveys existing businesses in the County to better serve their needs.

The Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA) is a public benefit corporation and represents the funding arm for economic development projects in

the County. The NCIDA utilizes a variety of financing mechanisms, tax incentives, site location assistance, and job training programs to facilitate economic growth and development. Funding mechanisms include: Industrial Revenue Bonds; Lease/Lease Transactions; Revolving Loan Funds; Economic Development Funds; and the Microenterprise Assistance Program.

In 2007, the NCIDA approved 26 projects, creating 511 new jobs and retaining over 1600 existing jobs. These projects represent over \$172 million in new private sector investment in Niagara County. In 2006, the Office of the New York State Comptroller issued a report on the performance of IDA's across New York State. The report identified the NCIDA as one of the highest ranking IDA's in the State. It ranked 9th out of the State's 62 counties in the creation of new jobs (a total of 2,486 jobs) and 6th in the State in the number of projects (91).

In 2008, the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA) assisted numerous projects in the manufacturing sector, as well as additional projects related to training and administration, financial services and senior housing.

The Niagara County Microenterprise Assistance Program was created in 1995 for the benefit of low-to-moderate income individuals and small businesses with 5 employees or less. Since that time, the NCIDA has provided 26 rounds of training to local entrepreneurs. The program has an excellent record of success, with over 1500 applications received since its inception and 550 individuals graduating from the educational portion to date. Over \$2.3 million in loans have been approved since 1995. For 2008, 8 loans were approved totaling \$250,000, creating 40 new jobs and retaining 27 jobs.

In 2008, the NCDC (the lending arm of the NCIDA) closed one loan for \$200,000. This project retained 19 jobs and will create 7 new jobs within 3 years. During the year, the NCIDA successfully closed on 11 lease and bond projects, projecting to create over 200 jobs within 3 years and retaining over 175 jobs, with a total investment of over \$83,000,000.

Key business development initiatives by the NCCED during 2008 included:

- Ongoing Business Retention and Growth Initiatives – In the past 8 years, 447 existing companies in Niagara County communities have been contacted. The NCCED averages about 50 to 60 calls on local companies per year. At least 51 business development projects resulted from these visits.
- Canadian Marketing Campaign – In 2007, a total of 2,093 Canadian companies were contacted and three parcels were sold to Canadian companies in the Vantage International Pointe (VIP) Industrial Park in Wheatfield. One Canadian firm has built a 24,000 sq. ft. building employing approximately 10 full-time employees. The Industrial Park's success continues toward full build-out of its 158 acres.
- Domestic Marketing Campaign to "Water Starved States" – In 2008, this campaign focused on marketing Niagara County's access to fresh water, targeting businesses in the south and southwestern U.S. that were facing severe water shortages. The water starved initiative targeted the power generation, energy, chemical, and food and beverage processing sectors in the southeast U.S. Staff conducted in-depth research, conducted focus groups with local industries, attended

the Metalform trade show in Alabama, and sent a direct mail marketing piece to 1,060 companies. By year's end, the drought situation in the southern U.S. had eased.

- Empower Niagara Program - Empower Niagara is a not-for-profit development corporation formed to provide low cost electricity for business growth and development throughout Niagara County. The Niagara County Center for Economic Development serves as the administrative organization to review and select applicants to receive this low cost power. The program is an important addition to the incentives that are currently available to businesses locating and expanding in Niagara County. Applicants must meet the following qualifying criteria:

- Business must be located in Niagara County
- Business must not already be a recipient of low cost power through existing State programs or receive a separate allocation during the term of the contract with Empower Niagara
- Business must be planning to acquire or expand an existing facility, or build a new one
- Project must create at least 75kW of new net load
- Project must result in the retention and/or creation of jobs and the applicant must be willing to commit in writing to create and maintain these jobs
- Proposed use of the power must result in an economic benefit for Niagara County
- Project must be completed within 2 years, with construction beginning within 1 year of application approval

## Niagara County Economic Development Services

Detailed, up-to-date information regarding Niagara County Economic Development services, initiatives, partnerships, and on-going projects is provided on the County's website at [www.niagaracounty.com](http://www.niagaracounty.com) and at the Department of Economic Development website at [www.nccedev.com](http://www.nccedev.com). The information that follows highlights additional information relative to recent economic development initiatives and services in Niagara County.

### **Mission Statement**

*The mission of the Niagara County Department of Economic Development is to provide high quality professional planning services to the municipalities, citizens and organizations of Niagara County; to promote orderly growth and development through the dissemination of information, preparation of plans, projects and programs and provision of technical services.*

*The Department will promote sustainable economic development in harmony with the natural environment, creating and retaining jobs, expanding the tax base, and improving the quality of life for Niagara County residents under the direction of the Niagara County Manager and policies of the Niagara County Legislature.*

### **Planning and Technical Assistance**

The Department provides planning/technical assistance to local levels of government. These include:

- Special project planning services
- Transportation planning services
- State of the art graphic and mapping services
- Staff support to over 30 boards and committees
- Public requests for census information and data
- Technical assistance and grant support

### **Niagara County Business Assistance**

The Department of Economic Development heads an effort to strengthen and solidify Niagara County business and industry by setting up meetings with a team chosen by the Department to assess the needs of local businesses. The idea behind these meetings is to take a proactive approach to retention by addressing needs before a business decides to close or transfer to another area. In addition, the Department works in conjunction with the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency to search for possible new business enterprises and opportunities for Niagara County by initiating contact with prospects, providing them with marketing information, and follow up.

### **State Affiliate Data Center**

The Department, in cooperation with New York's Empire State Development, participates in a program that provides access to statistics on Niagara County's economy, housing, and population. As an affiliate member of Empire State Development's New York State Data Center, Division of Policy & Research, the Department maintains an extensive library of U.S. Census and other publications. The data can be provided directly, upon request, to local governments, businesses, and individuals. Under this program the Department of Economic Development is a major source of data for firms conducting marketing studies and for companies and individuals interested in establishing businesses in Niagara County.

### **Niagara County Economic Development Alliance (NCEDA)**

The Alliance is a consortium of economic development organizations, utilities, public entities and municipalities. The mission of the Niagara County Economic Development Alliance is to maintain the quality of life for Niagara County citizens by providing services necessary to keep business in the County and to attract new business into the area. The principal purpose of the NCEDA is to provide a wide range of supportive services to business and to coordinate and facilitate the provision of those services. The long-range goal is to provide a singular business-friendly referral service in which all business support services are linked and into which all business can link in order to resolve operational problems, which could endanger their continued operation in Niagara County. The Alliance members are listed, along with contact and program information, in the Connections for Business brochure available through the Niagara County Department of Economic Development.

### **Special Planning Efforts**

The Department continues to work in conjunction with and expand special planning efforts in the following strategic areas:

- Farmland Protection in conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Erie Canal Recreationway in conjunction with local communities, NYS Thruway, NYS Canal Corporation and the National Park Service

- Lake Ontario Shoreline in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Niagara River Greenway in conjunction with the Niagara River Greenway Commission
- Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station in conjunction with the Military Affairs Council
- Brownfields Development in conjunction with the Brownfields Working Group
- Cayuga Creek in conjunction with City of Niagara Falls, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeepers and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Homeland Security funding in conjunction with Niagara County Emergency Services and Niagara County Sheriff's Department

### **Transportation Assistance**

The Department plays an active role in transportation issues, including:

- Participates with Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Committee on 2025 Long Range Transportation Plans
- Assists in the development of a 5-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)
- Participates in special studies related to transportation issues
- Monitors and analyzes the activities of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority in Niagara County, especially at the Niagara Falls International Airport
- Participates in efforts to stabilize railroad activities and lobby for rail infrastructure improvements
- Facilitates regular meetings between the Greater Niagara Manufacturers Association and CSX Railroad

### **Environmental Assistance**

The Department maintains a library of environmental data that includes information on wetlands, floodplains, soils, hydrography, bedrock geology, land use characteristics, etc. The data can be provided directly, upon request, to local governments, businesses, individuals, and community organizations to assist with planning and development initiatives.

### **Brownfields**

The Department also administers Niagara County's Brownfields Program. The purpose of the program is to collaborate with all levels of government and create public-private partnerships that lead to identification and remediation of brownfield sites so that they can be returned to productive use. The Brownfields Program covers assessment, end-use planning, and remediation. The Department maintains an extensive inventory of brownfields including sites identified by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as well as locally identified sites. The Department also participates in a regional brownfields consortium that includes the City of Niagara Falls, City of Buffalo, and Erie County.

### **Tourism Development**

The Department works closely with the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation (NTCC) and Niagara County Sportfishing to promote Niagara County as a world-class sportfishing destination through attendance at key sportfishing/outdoor trade shows, in strategic sportfishing/outdoor print and electronic media and through public relations programs such as hosting outdoor writers and fishing derbies and tournaments.

## General Characteristics and Trends

Positive economic growth and development activity is the lifeblood that is so critical to sustaining healthy local and regional economies. Fiscal management, in combination with sound economic, land use and transportation policies can be the impetus to creating strong economies and a solid tax base in the County that in turn enhances the region's quality of life, attracts new investment, and retains existing businesses and residents. The information that follows highlights some additional economic development activities and trends in Niagara County.

Strategic partnerships and intergovernmental and inter-municipal cooperation are critical to building strong economies and successful business retention and recruitment programs. Niagara County, in collaboration with a long list of economic development partners that has formed over the years, is realizing significant success brought about through regional and local economic development collaboration. These partnerships and their collaborative efforts need to be expanded to continue and sustain recent economic development success. As the nation's economy declined in the latter half of 2008 these partnerships and collaborative efforts have become more important than ever.

This section provides a summary of important characteristics and recent trends in Niagara County with regards to economic development. Issues remain, however, and these issues and the many diverse opportunities for further growth have been identified by stakeholder groups and individuals through the comprehensive planning process.

Much of the background information in this chapter has been provided by the Niagara County Department of Economic Development, including information contained in its most recent 2008 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report. The CEDS report is submitted annually to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Further information on economic development initiatives and projects in the County is available at [www.nccedev.com](http://www.nccedev.com) and information on the 2008 CEDS Report is available at [www.niagaracounty.com/docs/2008CEDSRpt.pdf](http://www.niagaracounty.com/docs/2008CEDSRpt.pdf).

As pointed out in the County's 2008 CEDS report, recent trends indicate Niagara County has been experiencing some very positive signs of its economic potential in spite of the recession that the United States is currently experiencing. Niagara County continues to be very active in promoting available low-cost hydropower from the New York Power Authority. In 2008, NYPA allocated nearly 60 megawatts of low-cost hydropower to five existing and three start-up companies in Niagara County. These allocations will support the creation of 763 new jobs and help retain 304 jobs in Niagara County, while seeing these companies invest over \$326 million in their facilities over the next three years. Niagara County will continue its efforts to promote low-cost hydropower from NYPA, an extremely important tool in its economic development toolkit.

The Niagara County Center for Economic Development also serves on the "Western New York Advisory Group" (WNYAG), which was created in 2004 by a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the process to coordinate the marketing and allocation of New York Power Authority hydropower known as Expansion Power (EP) and Replacement Power (RP). Other positive aspects of the economy of Niagara County are described below.

### *Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel*

A major catalyst to the development of downtown Niagara Falls and Niagara County in general is the Seneca Niagara Casino and Hotel, which has emerged as a world-class casino and resort destination since its grand opening in 2002. The original casino opened on December 31, 2002 in the former Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Center. The Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel opened on December 31, 2005. The 26-story luxury hotel became fully operational in the spring of 2006, at a cost of about \$235 million. With the expansion, the employment level at the Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel increased to nearly 2,900 employees, making it the largest employer in Niagara County, surpassing the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station with 2,752 employees.

### *Niagara Wine Trail*

Another example of recent positive economic trends is the success of the Niagara Wine Trail which runs through the heart of Niagara County. The Wine Trail grew to twelve wineries in 2008. The Wine Trail is host to seasonal wine tastings and community events including live music performances, an art show, jazz, blues and classic concerts, and a harvest festival. The Trail complements local communities' annual festivals, fairs and other popular local and tourist venues. Niagara Wine Trail brochures are available locally and detailed information including events is also available online at [www.niagarawinetrail.org](http://www.niagarawinetrail.org).

### *Artpark*

Artpark, located in Lewiston, is also experiencing a much welcomed “renaissance” in recent years. The Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, the Lewiston Council of the Arts, and the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation (NTCC) have been actively involved in promoting this unique venue. Artpark is a New York State park in existence since 1974. The park plays host to local and national performing artists, plays, and its “Tuesdays in the Park” series.

### *Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor*

The Erie Canal, which traverses several Niagara communities, is now widely recognized as a significant cultural, recreational and economic resource for Canal communities and the Niagara region in general. The Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor was established by the New York State Legislature in 1999 as part of the New York State Heritage Area System. This Heritage Area includes all the municipalities of Wayne, Monroe, Orleans, Niagara and Erie counties along with a 136-mile section of the Erie Canal.

In 2000, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor was established by the U.S. Congress as one of only 37 federally designated National Heritage Areas. This designation will help preserve and revitalize interest in the historical, natural, scenic, and recreational resources of the Canal, celebrate its national significance, and facilitate further revitalization of canal-side communities. Information on Western Erie Canal Management Plan can be found at [www.eriecanalheritage.com/content/News](http://www.eriecanalheritage.com/content/News) and at [www.eriecanalway.org/background.asp](http://www.eriecanalway.org/background.asp).

### *Niagara River Greenway*

Similar to the recognition of the Erie Canal as a valuable resource, the Niagara River corridor is also being recognized as a tremendous resource for economic development and tourism. In 2004, the Niagara River Greenway Commission was established by State legislation and charged with the responsibility of creating the Niagara River

Greenway Plan.

Subsequently, the Niagara River Greenway Plan was adopted in 2007. The Greenway Plan establishes a common vision for the Greenway as well as setting forth a variety of principles for connecting communities and the many natural and cultural resources within Greenway boundaries. These resources include the Seaway Trail, the Niagara Wine Trail and the Erie Canalway. The Greenway Plan encompasses several river communities within Niagara County. These include: the Towns of Porter, Lewiston, Niagara and Wheatfield; the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown; and the cities of Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda.

#### *Niagara Power Project*

Another important milestone event occurred after five years of open and publicly inclusive efforts by the New York Power Authority (NYPA), State and Federal agencies, and over 100 stakeholders from across Western New York, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved a new 50-year license for the Niagara Power Project on March 15, 2007. The project will continue to result in significant economic, environmental, and recreation-tourism benefits to the Niagara Frontier. The new 50-year license assures continued production of low-cost hydroelectricity, that is estimated to be tied to several tens of thousands of local jobs.

The Niagara Power Coalition (NPC), consisting of Niagara County, the Towns of Lewiston and Niagara, the City of Niagara Falls, and the Lewiston-Porter, Niagara Falls and Niagara-Wheatfield school districts signed a Host Communities agreement with NYPA in June 2005. This agreement provides that NYPA shall make available to the Host Communities 25 mw of power (of which Niagara County will receive 9 mw), establish a Host Community Fund of \$5 million per year for 50 years, and allocate \$3 million per year for 50 years for Greenway consistent recreation/tourism projects in Niagara County.

Niagara County, as a member of the Niagara Power Coalition, is involved in distributing Niagara County's 9 mw share of power to its County-owned sites. Additionally, the Niagara County Department of Economic Development is assisting local businesses to retain and/or receive low cost power allocations for business expansion. The Niagara County Legislature has authorized the use of its hydropower allocation, received from the agreement, for economic development. As a result, "Empower Niagara" was established as a not-for-profit Development Corporation authorized to enter into agreements for the purposes of providing certain electric power benefits to those companies that meet eligibility criteria. In the meantime, the allocation is being used to lower the County's electric bills at County-owned sites.

Other important recent economic indicators that provide a snapshot of the local economy are provided below.

- The unemployment rate as measured by percentage of total workforce for Niagara County was 5.3% in 2007, down slightly from a rate of 5.4% in 2006. Although the County's unemployment rate improved slightly, the rate continued to exceed the non-seasonally adjusted 2007 rates of both New York State (4.5%) and the U.S. (4.6%). These unemployment rates were prior to the nationwide economic downturn experienced during the latter half of 2008. The rate for the first eleven months of 2008 was at 6.8% and rose significantly higher at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009.
- Per-capita income in Niagara County in recent years has consistently trailed that of



*Niagara County, as a member of the Niagara Power Coalition, is involved in distributing Niagara County's 9 mw share of power to its County-owned sites and in assisting local businesses with low cost power.*



New York State and the United States. Per capita personal income in Niagara County in 2005, the most recent year for which information is available, was \$27,923. This compares to \$39,967 in New York State, \$34,471 in the United States, and \$32,071 in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). In current dollar terms, not adjusted for inflation, personal income increased an average of 3.9% per year in Niagara County from 2004 to 2005. This compares to a 3.7% increase in per capita personal income for the Buffalo-Niagara Falls MSA, a 4.1% increase in the United States, and a 3.8% increase in New York State for the same time period. These numbers suggest that Niagara County has closed the gap slightly in per capita personal income growth from 2004 to 2005, but still lags behind when compared to the region and the nation.

- Growth sectors & clusters in the economy that show positive signs for the future include hospitality & tourism; advanced manufacturing (chemical/plastics, metal, fabricating/machining); agriculture/food processing; telecommunications/call centers; health care/social assistance; medical products; medical technology research and development; high tech/emerging industries; forest and wood products; printing; logistics, warehousing & distribution; and aerospace/defense have been identified as the region's top growth sectors and industry clusters.
- Major categories that continue to significantly contribute to the economy of Niagara County include manufacturing, services, public utilities, tourism and agriculture. Within these are various subcategories that can be considered on a stand-alone basis by virtue of the role they may play in the future prosperity of the County.

- Manufacturing remains a strong component of Niagara County's economy, with the greatest number of employees and the highest payroll, despite a relative smaller number of total establishments. The future of the manufacturing sector is uncertain, at best, but should not be totally discounted because of resources like low-cost hydropower, availability of fresh water, location, infrastructure and other advantages for which Niagara County has traditionally been known.

- The service industries are increasing in importance in Niagara County. Service industries include: Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services; Company and Enterprise Management Services; Administrative Support, Waste Management, Remediation Services; Education: Health Care & Social Services; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; and Accommodation & Food Services. The Health Care and Social Services sector has seen continued growth and leads other service industries in total annual payroll, number of employees and number of establishments. The number of establishments in this sector grew from 462 in 1998 to 516 in 2005. Annual payroll in this sector also increased from \$191 million in 1998 to \$268.8 million in 2005. Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC) has become an economic engine in the sector in Niagara County and the region. In 2006, NFMMC opened a \$20 million ER One Facility and Heart Center of Niagara, significantly expanding its campus and employment opportunities. NFMMC is currently Niagara County's sixth largest employer, with 1,200 jobs. Over the past five years, NFMMC has invested \$26 million in capital projects and has an additional \$30 million in capital projects in various stages of development.

- The tourism and hospitality industry has benefitted greatly from growth in disposable income in the Country as a whole. This industry may be affected by the recent economic downturn. Though it has always been a significant part of the

local economy, many initiatives are underway across the County to cultivate tourism potential, including the Niagara River Greenway Plan and the Western Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. This sector continues to have great potential for Niagara County. Linking the conventional attractions, such as Niagara Falls and Fort Niagara, with the more contemporary visitor destinations like the Erie Canal is seen as critical to the future of the County's economy. Historic preservation is also an important element of the future development of the County. The Western Erie Canal Corridor, rural villages and hamlets and city centers are rife with historic amenities that tell the story of the Niagara Frontier. Several individuals and organizations have joined in the effort to retain and enhance these assets.

- Agriculture continues to be an important factor in the Niagara County economy. In 2007 agriculture injected nearly \$104 million in product sales into the economy according to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture. As the oldest and most steady sector of the economy, farming is seen as increasingly threatened by low commodity prices and sprawl from the regions urban centers. This is borne out by the fact that the average size of farms and total farm acreage in Niagara County declined between 2002 and 2007 from 185 acres per farm in 2002 to 165 acres in 2007. Total farmland acreage in 2002 of 148,041 acres fell to 142,636 acres in 2007. Efforts are underway to protect the valuable agricultural land in Niagara County and steps are being taken to identify opportunities to enhance the viability of existing farming operations and attract additional producers and value-added businesses. The future of agriculture in the County is seen as sustainable given certain circumstances. Many collateral quality of life and security benefits are also associated with future growth in this sector of the economy.

- Utilities are another of Niagara County's strengths. Three of the State's largest utilities, New York Power Authority (NYPA), National Grid, and New York State Electric & Gas (NYSEG), supply electricity to County businesses and residents. With the onset of deregulation, there are several smaller suppliers of electricity available to business and consumer alike. Natural gas service is supplied by NYSEG to the eastern portion of Niagara County and by National Fuel Gas Distribution Corporation to the western portion of Niagara County. National Grid, NYSEG and National Fuel Gas Distribution Corporation all have economic development staff able to assist new and existing businesses within the County. In addition, blocks of low cost hydro power are available to business and industry through the Empower Niagara program which offers hydroelectric power at some of the lowest rates in the U.S.

- Niagara County has been making a genuine effort to reduce the effects of property taxes on development. Sound fiscal policies including streamlining government and budget efficiencies has allowed the County Legislature to hold the amount raised by taxation to an average of 3.59% per year from 1997 through 2007.
- The Niagara County Industrial Development Agency concluded another strong year in 2007, completing projects in manufacturing, warehouse/distribution, tourism, health care, transportation, and educational sectors. The IDA successfully closed on 12 lease and bond projects projected to create over 130 jobs within 3 years and retain over 1,200 jobs. Total investment for these projects is over \$82 million. Nine additional projects were approved, but did not close by the end of the year. These projects are projected to create 300 jobs within 3 years and retain over 150 jobs with a total investment of \$87 million. In 2007 the IDA closed on 7 loans totaling \$1.9 million projected to create 49 jobs within 3 years and retain over 240 jobs.

- The Niagara County Microenterprise Assistance Program was created in 1995 for the benefit of low-to-moderate income individuals and small businesses with 5 employees or less. Since that time, the NCIDA has provided 24 rounds of training to local entrepreneurs. The program has an excellent record of success, with over 1400 applications received since its inception and 525 individuals graduating from the educational portion to date. Over \$2,000,000 in loans have been approved since 1995.

### *Brownfields Redevelopment*

Niagara County is very active in brownfields redevelopment with its brownfields program to help spur the redevelopment of key properties that have been contaminated in the past. Most municipalities in the County contain at least one, if not many, brownfield sites. While contamination of these properties may present obstacles to their redevelopment, brownfield programs offer courses of action to clean these sites and attract productive uses to Niagara County’s communities. There are few tracts of undeveloped, uncontaminated land remaining for development within the County’s major urban centers, making brownfield cleanup imperative for economic growth. Redeveloped, brownfields can be catalysts for community revitalization and sustainable development.

Brownfields redevelopment will broaden the County’s tax base, attract new industry and create thousands of new jobs. The benefits of brownfield development are numerous and include:

- Reuse of existing infrastructure.
- Protection of public health and the environment.
- Innovative reuse of sites can increase the sense of place and community in Niagara County.
- Positive effect on Niagara County’s growth patterns by encouraging the redevelopment of abandoned properties within the urban core and discouraging development of green space in outlying areas.
- Several Federal and State initiatives offer significant financial incentives for brownfield remediation and redevelopment projects.

With the County Legislature’s support, the Niagara County Department of Economic Development established a brownfields program in 1999 with the following goals:

- Identify and create a countywide inventory of brownfield sites
- Create collaboration between all levels of government and the private sector
- Engage the public in the brownfields identification and assessment process
- Identify funding sources and find innovative ways to finance brownfield redevelopment
- Develop creative reuses for brownfield sites

The County and many communities have been quite successful in implementing its brownfields program. To date, millions of dollars in funding have been awarded to Niagara County by State and Federal brownfield programs, and these funds have been used to investigate and clean-up many of the County’s priority brownfield sites. By prioritizing sites for redevelopment, investigating the nature and degree of contamination present on these sites, applying remediation measures if necessary and feasible, and marketing them to encourage redevelopment, the County has successfully navigated a number of brownfield sites through the redevelopment process, resulting in the development of clean and productive uses on these once-contaminated properties.

*According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency “Brownfields are real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties takes development pressures off of undeveloped, open land, and both improves and protects the environment.”*

While substantial progress has been made, several hundred Niagara County brownfield sites remain in need of environmental assessments, notably Phase I Environmental Site Assessments, which are used to inform prospective owners of the environmental history of a site and to determine the potential need for further environmental investigation. According to Niagara County's 2006 brownfields inventory, 41 hazardous waste sites are still in need of Phase I investigations, as are approximately 200 petroleum-contaminated sites. Niagara County will continue to seek State and Federal funding to complete the necessary investigations required to advance the redevelopment of brownfield sites throughout the County.

To facilitate brownfield redevelopment, Niagara County partnered with the City of Niagara Falls to jointly receive a \$1 million Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund from the U.S. EPA. The Fund will provide loans and subgrants to eligible borrowers and applicants in need of assistance in remediating brownfield sites in Niagara County. Funds provided can be leveraged to advance brownfield sites to the next level of redevelopment.

The County's Brownfields Program needs to be promoted to be most effective in identifying and remediating priority brownfields. Promotion can be accomplished through several different media including brochures, meetings, business workshops and public information campaigns. The County recently created the position of Public Information Officer. This position can facilitate the dissemination of information on brownfields and other economic development programs and incentives. In 2009 the Public Information Officer will be assisting in business workshops sponsored by the NCCED and its partners. Information on the County's Brownfields Program can be obtained at [www.nccedev.com](http://www.nccedev.com).

New York State, through the Department of Environmental Conservation, also provides significant brownfield remediation opportunities through programs for both the public and private sectors. Information is available at [www.dec.state.ny.us](http://www.dec.state.ny.us). The Department of State also offers substantial assistance through its Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program to communities and community-based organizations. Information is available at [www.nyswaterfronts.com/grantopps\\_BOA.asp](http://www.nyswaterfronts.com/grantopps_BOA.asp).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also offers several Federal brownfield programs to assist the public and private sectors. Information on Federal programs is available at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields).

The State and Federal brownfields programs offer significant economic and financial incentives to identify, remediate and redevelop brownfield sites. The County's program in combination with these State and Federal programs are having a major positive economic impact on Niagara County since program incentives include tax credits and release from liability offered through the State program are the driving force behind the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

Some recent brownfield successes include:

- The Wurlitzer Site in North Tonawanda
- Niagara Falls Transportation Center in Niagara Falls
- The Wendy's Restaurant in Niagara Falls

Several brownfield projects are underway:

- Santarosa Holdings in Niagara Falls
- Northern Ethanol in Niagara Falls

- Globe Specialty Metals in Niagara Falls
- Remington Rand in North Tonawanda

### *Canadian Tourism*

A number of forces, including tourism coming into the County from outside the U.S. are driving the local economy. The U.S. dollar continues to fluctuate relative to the value of the Canadian dollar. Niagara County realizes an economic increase in the local tourism sector based on any increased strength of Canadian currency, with a corresponding increase in the amount of retail sales and bed tax revenue being collected. Sales taxes are less in New York State compared to the Province of Ontario, Canada for example, further attracting Canadian buying power.

The growth of Canadian tourism is driving that sector throughout the Niagara region on both sides of the border. According to the Niagara Economic & Tourism Corporation, there are currently \$6 billion in tourism-related projects underway in the Niagara Region of Ontario, Canada. These can be viewed as both an opportunity and a challenge for Niagara County, NY. Canadian projects include:

- The Fallsview Casino Resort is Niagara Falls, Ontario's newest casino, joining Casino Niagara, which celebrated its 10th year in business in 2007. According to the operators of the Ontario casinos, a majority of their patrons come from U.S. markets; most of which drive through Niagara County, NY. Creating new attractions and venues that entice the casino patrons to stay on the U.S. side of the border is a real opportunity, and one that is being explored in earnest by County economic development officials.
- New hotels are being constructed in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Attractions like the Butterfly Conservatory have been built and there are plans to build a new convention center in Niagara Falls, Ontario within the next three to five years. This convention center would compete with Niagara Falls, NY for the very lucrative, but limited convention business.

### *Workforce Investment*

Niagara County has developed and updated a comprehensive local plan under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. This plan was implemented July 1, 2000 and has developed a universally accessible workforce development system that serves the area's job-seeking customers as well as provides services to business. The plan's vision is to present a seamless service with rapid response to all of the community, and help to improve the economic well being of individuals and the local economy. The plan covers businesses, jobseekers, employed workers, and youth employment needs.

The Niagara County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) focuses its services in demand occupations to respond more quickly to businesses' needs, and to best utilize its resources to support local industries. It aligns with the western NY regional effort in working to transform the regional economy in supplying workforce needs in the areas of Advanced Manufacturing and Life Sciences. The local WIBs are taking a leadership role in addressing this need.

Businesses, as well as individuals seeking employment/upgrading, are served through the One-Stop Centers, which bring together the resources of WIA and Department of Employment & Training Services staff. Partner programs are also represented. Core services are made available to everyone, along with intensive training services for those who need additional assistance. Training is provided in demand occupations

based on local needs. Funding cuts over the past five years have decreased the level of funded training services that can be provided, but the programs' universal customer services and business connections will continue to be maintained.

Niagara County must focus on the retention of its remaining manufacturing base, while promoting brownfields redevelopment as a means of attracting new industry to the County's abundant spaces available to industry. Assisting Niagara County manufacturers in the transition to "advanced manufacturing" with techniques like lean manufacturing and other innovative practices is crucial in the retention of the manufacturing base.

Green industries involved in producing sustainable technologies represent a blossoming pool of new-age manufacturing companies promising to expand in the future, and Niagara County should focus on recruiting and meeting the needs of such these manufacturers. Promoting the expansion of low cost power availability for industry is essential. Currently, there are numerous opportunities for retaining and expanding businesses as a result of the relicensing of the Niagara Power Project.

#### *Tourism Travel and the Niagara Falls International Airport*

Niagara Falls is a world renowned travel destination. The Niagara Region is suitably positioned for increased tourism and to take advantage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Niagara County's proximity to Canada and the majority of that nation's industry strategically positions Niagara County in the international marketplace. Niagara County is also within a days drive to such markets as Buffalo, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Toronto and Montreal. The proximity to the large, growing metropolitan area of Toronto creates a unique economic opportunity for the Niagara Region.

The underutilized Niagara Falls International Airport (NFIA), and the relocation of the Amtrak station closer to the U.S./Canadian border, will expand the modal opportunities available in Niagara County, and will open doors to advance tourism and commerce in the Niagara region.

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority is currently in the midst of a \$43.9 million improvement project at the Niagara Falls International Airport, featuring a new state-of-the-art terminal, with improvements to the apron and surrounding area. Designed to better accommodate modern passenger jets and improve passenger's security experience, the facility is scheduled to open September 2009 (information available at [www.niagarafallsairport.com/newterminal.asp](http://www.niagarafallsairport.com/newterminal.asp)).

The new terminal at 69,430 square-feet will more than triple the size of the current one, with a second story to facilitate jet bridges. Security and processing operations will take full advantage of new technologies to make the airport efficient and user-friendly for passengers. The creative design of the new terminal will reflect the grandeur of the Niagara community, promoting a positive "Gateway Image" to the region. The two-gate facility will provide for efficient, customer friendly passenger processing, a two level layout for jet bridge boarding, food/beverage concessions, fully functional TSA inspection facilities, in-line baggage screening, eight stationary ticket counter stations, car rental and a multi-modal Metro transit center. Other improvements include access roads, a circulatory road, walkways and parking.

The terminal will provide the operational capability to simultaneously process

international and domestic flights and fully accommodate 747-400 and 757-300 aircraft. The innovative split-level holdrooms with initial seating for 280 (design provides for additional seating) will provide all passengers with an outstanding level of customer service regardless of aircraft size. Functionally, the design takes cues from the Federal Aviation Administration and International Air Transport Association guidelines.

NFIA is well positioned to take advantage of a new terminal. It is located within 500 miles of 55% of the U.S. population and 62% of Canada's population. It is just 15 minutes from Niagara Falls and 10 miles from two international border crossings. At 10,000 feet in length, the airport has one of the longest runways in the State, making it capable of accommodating the largest aircraft in the world..

#### *Partners and Resources for Economic Development*

As stated previously, present success of Niagara County and local economic development initiatives is attributable to strategic partnering with a variety of municipalities, groups and organizations. Facilitating these partnership opportunities is critical to future successes as well. The following list, although it may not be entirely inclusive of all partners working together towards increased economic growth and development, is representative of the diverse range of stakeholders needed to promote, facilitate and sustain healthy economic activity.

Partners and Resources for Economic Development include, but are not limited to:

- Niagara County Legislature
- Niagara County Department of Economic Development
- Niagara County Economic Development Alliance
- Niagara County Industrial Development Agency
- Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (BNE)
- Buffalo Niagara Partnership
- Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas
- City of Lockport Greater Lockport Development Corporation
- City of Niagara Falls Empire Zone
- City of Niagara Falls Renewal Community
- Empire State Development (USA Niagara)
- Insyte Consulting
- Local and Regional Chambers of Commerce
- Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce
- Lumber City Development Corporation
- NCCC Small Business Development Center
- New York Power Authority
- New York State Department of State
- New York State Economic Development Council
- New York State Association of County Planning Directors
- Niagara County Department of Employment & Training
- Niagara County Workforce Investment Board (WIB)
- Niagara Falls Bridge Commission
- Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation (NTCC)
- Niagara USA Chamber
- Town of Lockport Industrial Development Agency
- Town of Niagara Industrial Development Agency
- University of Buffalo Regional Institute
- USA Niagara Development Corporation

- WNY Advisory Council
- WNY Regional Education Center for Economic Development

Niagara County also works closely with the following agencies and organizations in providing important resource information related to existing economic activity and potential economic opportunities. These include:

- Cornell University Cooperative Extension – Niagara County
- International Joint Commission (IJC)
- New York State Data Center
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- Niagara County Farm Bureau
- Niagara County Soil & Water Conservation District
- United States Department of Agriculture
- Various local and regional committees

## Issues & Opportunities

Further indication of the status of economic development in Niagara County in 2008 was obtained through the comprehensive planning process that asked Niagara communities and stakeholders to identify what they saw as issues and opportunities specifically related to economic development in the County. The information gathered from these stakeholders is summarized below by planning subregion.

### Eastern Communities Subregion

Town of Hartland, Town of Royalton & Village of Middleport

Primary issues and challenges identified include:

- “From the farm to the factory – a need for keeping it local!” What is being produced locally should stay local and marketed locally (referring to a greater need for relying on more local food production, processing, packaging, shipping, marketing, etc.)
- Small businesses expansion of existing businesses and enticing new businesses is needed along with better marketing of existing small local businesses.
- Upgrade infrastructure facilities, including sewer services, to support economic development.
- Only NYS Routes 31 and 104 corridors have natural gas service - there is a need to expand gas service to support development.
- Roads need improvements for trucking and shipping farm products, etc.
- Need to expand public knowledge to a great community – come and stay – we need a marketing campaign to promote local communities.
- Need to address concerns with vacant buildings – either demolish and/or beautify these buildings to enhance the attractiveness and promotion of areas such as along the Canal

Key assets and opportunities of the communities in this subregion include:

- Agri-tourism offers a means to draw visitors to the area.
- The Erie Canal has historic significance and economic development potential.
- Existing parks and recreation facilities have a need to expand and improve some of their facilities.
- Schools and public parks share athletic facilities now - need to increase this



potential.

- Opportunities for beautification of the many older buildings that can still be restored and saved.
- Existing wildlife and conservation areas need to be protected.

### **Central Communities Subregion**

Town of Cambria, Town of Lockport, City of Lockport, Town of Pendleton

Primary issues and challenges identified include:

- Taxes are a disincentive to development – the property tax rate is too high
  - The overabundance of education related taxes (schools taxes) – Town of Cambria, for example, has 5 school districts, 5 also in the Town of Lockport - creates disincentive to live and work here.
  - Municipalities are paying other municipalities for services, i.e., water treatment
  - An aging infrastructure hinders development - gas, water, sewer, etc.
  - The challenges faced due to the loss of people in the County
  - The need for improving “shovel ready sites” vs. the red tape, bureaucracy and delays in getting projects done in New York State, especially compared to other states

Key assets and opportunities of the communities in this subregion include:

- The importance of the Niagara Wine Trails
- The availability of higher educational facilities like NCCC
- The historic canal locks in Lockport (a unique site on the Erie Canal)
- The Transit Road corridor and our historic (heritage) corridors

### **Lakefront Communities Subregion**

Town of Somerset, Village of Barker, Town of Newfane, Town of Wilson, Village of Wilson

Primary issues and challenges identified include:

- A general attitude in the area of “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) and negative attitudes toward any development proposals and change in general.
- The overall lack of sewers and natural gas in entire towns
- Villages of Barker and Wilson have good infrastructure coverage, but coverage is poor in the towns of Wilson and Somerset
- Newfane has good infrastructure coverage and it shows in more commercial use
- Distance from main transportation systems is a hindrance to development
- Employers are leaving the area
- Parkways are for non-commercial use - hindering development: Robert Moses Parkway should allow commercial traffic
- Excessive taxes

Key assets and opportunities of the communities in this subregion include:

- The existing harbors and the Ontario lakefront itself
- Opportunities to expand sportfishing and tourism based economies
- The existing road systems for transporting goods and services
- The potential for other uses at the AES facility in Somerset
- The large areas that are zoned industrial, but not being used as such

### **Lower River Communities Subregion**

Town of Lewiston, Town of Porter, Village of Lewiston, Village of Youngstown

Primary issues and challenges identified include:

- The need to facilitate tourism
- Obstacles to businesses – bureaucracy, high taxes, energy costs
- Cross-river Ferry is needed
- Connection to other areas is needed
- Cross-tourism (international – easier access across border needed)
- The need to maintain regional employment levels
- Keeping residents in the area
- Dealing with the needs of an aging population
- Youngstown – sewer plant capacity is an issue
- Town of Porter – more promotion of agriculture needed
- There are too many State properties that cannot be developed - Fort Niagara Joseph Davis Park, etc.
- Chemical Waste Management (CWM) / Modern Disposal concerns
- Need to facilitate new industries such as in the Town of Lewiston – hydroponics & greenhouses
- Need a “people mover” transportation system from Niagara Falls to Lewiston

Key assets and opportunities of the communities in this subregion include:

- The beautiful geography and nature of the area
- Farm Museum - Town of Lewiston (Sanborn)
- The Niagara River, lakes, streams, and waterways
- The low cost of living, including low housing costs
- The untapped potential for the area in general

### **Upper River Communities Subregion**

City of Niagara Falls, Town of Niagara, Town of Wheatfield, City of North Tonawanda

Primary issues and challenges identified include:

- The “Oz” Project and what challenges it may entail:
  - Schedule – largest project in the area that is now on the boards
  - 4 years to develop project
  - Project will be the largest private employer in the County with 3,000 – 5,000 year round employees estimated creating jobs, but also traffic, housing needs
- Other issues in this area include a need for more diversity of housing and better quality of existing housing stock
- More support for agriculture and related businesses is needed – market fresh food/guests accommodations/agri-tourism
- Support for the hospitality industry – need for additional training for workforce
- Need more technology providers and trained workforce
- Public transportation services needed in Wheatfield
- Niagara Falls (between Main Street and Whirlpool) - Important issues center on brownfield clean-up and dealing with bureaucratic red tape that hinders redevelopment – need to better leverage investments already made in cities
- River property needs more public access needed to waterfronts
- Niagara Falls Boulevard needs corridor enhancements
- Overlay districts are needed to enhance redevelopment and aesthetics
- Businesses are needed that bring in other businesses

- Need for working together
- Maintaining farming in the area
- Right-to-farm laws are needed
- Smart growth development is needed
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Educating the development community about what is needed in a community

Key assets and opportunities of the communities in this subregion include:

- The Air Base
- New terminal at NFI airport
- International heavy jets that can be accommodated at the airport
- Spinoff opportunities and surrounding redevelopment potential from the airport
- Environmental clean-up and services – technical support from County is available when needed
- Williams Road medical corridor is an asset
- Multi-modal transportation in the Niagara Falls area
- The high cost of fuel should promote greater city growth
- The U.S. Customs House and its history
- Niagara Falls Experience Center
- Existing road infrastructure
- The Culinary Institute
- Opportunities surrounding the new Niagara Falls Public Safety Complex – and Main Street potential of the cities

## Strategies

Land use decisions and regulations are a local municipal responsibility under New York State Municipal Law (“Home Rule”), the County’s ability to guide development in towns, villages and cities is very limited. The County’s primary planning function is to provide guidance and recommendations to communities about future land use, as provided in this Comprehensive Plan.

***However, when it comes to economic development decisions at the County level, County officials, working in collaboration with local municipalities, should continue to encourage projects toward suitable development/redevelopment areas including brownfields. The County can also encourage compact, mixed-use forms of development and transit-oriented projects by assisting communities in updating zoning provisions that allow for these uses.***

***Locations identified as being poorly suited for development/redevelopment typically are in rural areas and may be rich in natural resources. These areas may be attractive to development for financial reasons because land values and acquisition costs may be substantially lower than elsewhere, but these locations may also be far from existing community centers and services. Many of these lands should be retained for their natural resource value with limited hamlet forms of low density rural development.***

Development/redevelopment areas will typically have access to existing road, water, drainage and sewer infrastructure along with the necessary support services to facilitate economic development, although system improvements and upgrades may be



***Collaborate  
with  
Municipalities***

necessary. These types of infrastructure improvements may be eligible for various State and federal funding mechanisms including economic stimulus packages.

Primary development/redevelopment areas are generally located in and directly adjacent to the County's 3 cities, 5 villages, the developed fringe areas of those cities and villages, suburban town centers and some hamlets/rural crossroads. Many of the targeted development/redevelopment locations identified in Chapter V of this Plan were identified from a review of local municipal plans, input provided by stakeholder communities and GIS mapping and land use analysis.

The cumulative effect of the development of valuable local resource and working lands, such as prime farmland, wetlands, and riparian corridors, may not be recognized until some time in the future after small developments on these lands are approved and constructed. By then the value of these lands from an environmental standpoint may already be diminished.

In economic terms, the cumulative fiscal effect of conventional forms of "leapfrog" development is ultimately increased by municipal and County costs for infrastructure extensions, added support services, such as roads, sewer, drainage systems, schools, fire districts, and increased demands on current transportation systems. These added costs translate into higher taxes on residents and property owners.

Inter-governmental cooperation and collaboration are critical to directing and encouraging development, preferably mixed-use forms of development, into those areas of each community that are considered most suitable for development/redevelopment. This will also make it easier to preserve important community characteristics, such as scenic open spaces in rural areas, environmentally sensitive lands, and working farmlands that can help make communities distinct from one another.

*Inter-municipal collaboration is also important in attracting and recruiting those businesses and industries that best complement the unique character of each community, whether they are urban areas, suburban communities, waterfront communities or farming communities. Economic development needs to be appropriate to the existing infrastructure and regional location of communities relative to the rest of Niagara County. For example large industrial uses and businesses that rely on extensive infrastructure and support services should be located in areas appropriately zoned for such uses and adequately served by existing infrastructure; tourism-based businesses along the area's many beautiful waterfronts should be located consistent with the Niagara River Greenway and Erie Canalway initiatives; and agriculturally-based businesses and home-based enterprises are best suited for rural communities.*

It should remain a priority to continue the countywide collaborative effort to prioritize improvements and upgrades to existing infrastructure first, especially with regards to water, sewer and transportation systems, before consideration of creating new infrastructure relative to economic development. This is being accomplished via the Niagara County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) as well as the Greater Buffalo Niagara Region Transportation Council (GBNRTC) through its Long-Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Obviously in cases where public health and safety are at risk, priorities must be different based on those local needs.

Giving high priority to the maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure over



**Collaborative  
Business  
Recruitment**

the creation of new systems, and directing development/redevelopment to where it already exists, is consistent with national planning principles and with State and regional planning initiatives. Agencies like the NYS Department of State Quality Communities Initiatives, the NYS Department of Transportation, the Greater Buffalo Niagara Region Transportation Council and others encourage this approach. By focusing on improving the infrastructure that is already in place, communities can inhibit and prevent sprawling development patterns.

When businesses decide where to locate their operations, they consider numerous factors, such as the availability of a prepared workforce, proximity to major transportation routes and markets, and other strategic advantages of a location. Quality of life factors can tip the scales in a given community's favor. The recommendations in this Plan can help ensure that Niagara County's communities can continue to both attract business opportunity and protect these quality of life factors.

## Goals, Objectives & Recommendations

Many of the goals and objectives in this chapter are also provided in the 2008 County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy report. Others have been developed in response to the issues and opportunities identified by stakeholders during the comprehensive planning process and others are provided based on planning research and best management practices. These goals and objectives should be considered "fluid" and need to be reviewed and updated periodically as economic development trends, needs and opportunities require their modification.

### **Goal – Attract and Retain Economic Activity by Preserving the County's Natural and Cultural Resources through Sustainable Practices**

To attract and retain economic activity by implementing sustainable development practices to improve the overall quality of life in Niagara County which will in turn result in increased economic activity. Long-term economic development can be strengthened by ensuring that Niagara County continues to be a naturally beautiful, as well as geographically advantageous place to live and do business. By revitalizing developed areas and preserving natural and cultural resources, a commitment to a higher quality of life for future generations will be demonstrated. A commitment to sustainable development practices will help make Niagara County more attractive to both economic activity and retention of a skilled labor pool.

#### **Objective**

- Continue to protect natural and cultural resources and examine ways to improve countywide stewardship of the environment. Reduce the County's "ecological footprint" or impact on the environment; strive for greater self-sufficiency by conserving energy, water, air and other natural resources; reduce waste generation; increase reuse and recycling of materials; and use local products, materials, agricultural goods, and other wares.

#### **Recommendations**

- Encourage communities to conserve environmentally sensitive lands and resources by adopting sustainable economic development practices focused on protecting fish and wildlife resources, significant floral and faunal habitat areas, and bio-diversity. The County as well needs to consider implementing sustainable development practices in

*An "ecological footprint" is a measure of demand on an ecosystem such as on the land, air and water resources of an area that is required to support and sustain a current lifestyle, economy, or the consumption patterns of a particular population. It includes the ability of that ecosystem to assimilate the waste that the population or economy produces.*



County economic development projects.

- Encourage communities to establish minimum design standards, perhaps through LEED certification and use of “green” technologies for economic development projects that contribute positively to the natural environment, community character, neighborhood aesthetics, and local quality of life.
- Protect open space resources and encourage conservation of large contiguous natural corridors as designated greenways, blueways, and prime farmland resources of countywide importance through development of the Niagara River Greenway as well as through other local and regional initiatives.
- Encourage commercial and industrial development on vacant and underutilized lands including reuse of brownfield/greyfield sites as a countywide priority over “greenfield” development to protect open spaces and prime agricultural areas.
- Actively support the creation of local parklands and open spaces that are linked by greenways, blueways and multi-use trails.
- Support context sensitive design and redevelopment of areas appropriate to locations in proximity to cultural and historic resources and that are not detrimental to local community character or environmentally sensitive areas.
- Increase energy efficiency of County-owned facilities by considering the incorporation of green technologies, sustainable building and site design, and construction practices.

### **Goal – Increase Countywide Employment Opportunities**

To increase overall employment opportunities by encouraging the expansion of key economic sectors including industrial, tourism and agricultural sectors of the County’s economy and support the entrepreneurial spirit and efforts in cutting edge industries such as clean energy alternatives, green building technologies, and clean manufacturing practices.

#### **Objective**

- Support local efforts at improving industrial sector expansion and employment opportunities

#### **Recommendations**

- Request New York State to designate additional Empire Zone designations in the County.
- Encourage spin-off enterprises from large companies
- Continue to market and attract Canadian and other international investment
- Provide infrastructure improvements in existing industrial parks
- Expand the availability of industrial incubators and multi-tenant facilities

- Aggressively market low cost power allocations through the New York Power Authority, and for smaller industrial projects, when NYPA power is not an alternative, through the Empower Niagara Program
- Market the availability of fresh water to companies currently in water-starved states
- Market County buildings and sites through the filtered versions of the NYS Site Finder, found on the NCIDA and County websites
- Monitor studies expanding hydro-electric generating facilities in Lewiston
- Focus on countywide brownfield redevelopment opportunities through promotion of the Niagara County Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund program.
- Encourage growth of clean manufacturing and green technology industries

### **Objective**

- Improve tourism and tourism-based business opportunities throughout the County

### **Recommendations**

- Increase tourism promotion of the County and its diverse communities and subregions through development of multi-media materials in collaboration with the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation (NTCC) and local communities.
- Develop world class visitor attractions and tourist destinations in urban centers, to be premier centerpieces of natural and cultural heritage. (e.g. Niagara Experience Center, Erie Canal, Niagara Gorge, etc.).
- Continue to support the newly expanded Niagara County Wine Trail
- Support implementation of the Niagara County Greenway Plan and the Erie Canalway Plan.
- Develop the Niagara River Corridor as a National Heritage Area, and continue to encourage development and redevelopment of the Erie Canal Heritage Corridor as a premier tourist destination in the County.
- Work in collaboration with the City of Niagara Falls, USA Niagara Development Corporation, and other economic development agencies to lure four- and five-star hotels to the downtown Niagara Falls tourist district.
- Continue to support the Niagara County Community College's Hospitality & Tourism Center, the largest component of which will be the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute in downtown Niagara Falls.
- Support efforts to create physical linkages and link business information between Niagara County's communities that will help extend the stay of tourists, and thus spread economic wealth throughout the County.



### **Objective**

- Improve and support retention of the agriculture sector of the economy.

### **Recommendations**

- Pursue establishment of a Niagara County Agribusiness Fund through the proposed New York State Upstate Revitalization Fund.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County, in collaboration with the Farmland Protection Board should facilitate the update of the Niagara County Agricultural Farmland Protection Plan within the next two years by 2011.
- Strengthen the system for marketing fresh produce and value-added agricultural products in Niagara County, including activity with some city markets and high traffic tourism areas and corridors.
- Seek funding for a County agricultural economic development specialist.
- Seek grower assistance grants and assist individuals with rural business plans.
- Investigate branding opportunities for Niagara County agricultural products.
- Increase advertising in different media markets and via different media to promote greater consumption of locally grown foods and products.
- Support the efforts of organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension to develop and implement a farm-to-institution program.

### **Goal – Strengthen the County’s Competitive Position**

To strengthen the competitive position of countywide businesses involved in all sectors of the economy.

### **Objective**

- Reduce the cost of doing business in Niagara County.

### **Recommendations**

- Continue to provide financial assistance, such as revolving loan funds, bonds, guaranteed loans and other incentive programs to businesses through the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency.
- Retain low cost power “blocks” of hydro-power for large energy dependent companies and assist development of co-generation and alternative energy facilities
- Provide completely serviced sites and/or facilities for “just-in-time” suppliers to locate near existing manufacturing plants
- Re-certify agricultural districts as needed and investigate other potential farming incentive programs to allow for reduced tax rates on agricultural properties.





## Goal – Diversify the Total Economic Base of Niagara County

To support waterfront and rural-based business opportunities and other economic development initiatives to diversify the economies that may be specific and appropriate to the character of particular areas, corridors and resources of communities throughout the County.

### Objectives

- Facilitate greater public accessibility to waterfronts and natural features and support the development of water-oriented and rural-based businesses and uses.
- Enhance the diversification and sustainability of rural economies and small businesses through protection of natural and cultural resources, large contiguous working farms, woodlands, mineral resources and scenic (pastoral) landscapes.
- Implement actions designed to establish a countywide connections via inter-municipal multi-use trail systems that can be utilized year-round for diverse forms of recreation and transportation.

### Recommendations

- Foster local entrepreneurship by recognizing and celebrating local success stories of new businesses, new business ideas and student enterprises that are based on local opportunities and resources through public recognition, media coverage and financial/scholarship award programs offered through local educational institutions.
- Continue to support efforts to develop sites at and around the Niagara Falls International Airport for logistics companies (i.e. air cargo, warehousing and distribution centers, etc.).
- Support efforts to assist manufacturing companies in making the transition to advanced manufacturing techniques that will allow them to become more productive and more competitive in the global marketplace.
- Expand marketing efforts to attract new renewable energy companies to Niagara County, and promote opportunities that this sector could present to existing Niagara County companies.
- Conduct countywide competitions for creative approaches to “branding” local community produced and manufactured products.
- Support entrepreneurship in the development of nature-based business, tourism and recreational opportunities as well as other agriculturally based business enterprises, such as equestrian business opportunities in rural and suburban communities.
- Support business opportunities through regional and out-of-state promotional activities, public awareness campaigns, construction of interconnected multi-use trails, and incubator business assistance in support of rural businesses and support services.
- Expand marketing programs to attract Canadian and other foreign manufacturing, service, distribution, and office/administrative activities.
- Attract suppliers producing products that are used by the local automobile, chemical



and ceramic industries.

- Expand incubator facilities and technical assistance programs to encourage the development of new types of sustainable businesses, particularly in rural areas of the County that rely on renewable resources.

### **Goal – Enhance Countywide Education and Training Opportunities**

To develop comprehensive and integrated education and training programs to meet the near-term and long-term needs of businesses and industries.

#### **Objectives**

- Collaborate with local educators to develop educational policies and programs in local schools to provide enhanced employment and training opportunities based on local community assets and resources.
- Align education and training programs with key industry sectors and economic development priorities, especially new sustainable technologies and green-based businesses.
- Increase knowledge and awareness of sustainability planning and best practices including, but not limited to community planning principles such as New Urbanism, Transit-oriented Design and Traditional Neighborhood Development that can foster economic growth and community development.

#### **Recommendations**

- Involve local educators, primarily those involved with institutions of higher learning such as NCCC and Niagara University in business and talent recruitment activities and marketing visits to prospective businesses and employers who may be considering locating to Niagara County to ensure that local training programs are aligned with the workforce needs of new business.
- Collaborate with local educators to establish curricula and training programs at the high school and college level that increase awareness of opportunities for employment in “green technologies” and other potential high growth business and high technology sectors.
- Continue to market and expand the efforts of the Niagara County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), Niagara County Employment and Training, and other agencies involved in workforce training programs to help facilitate the regional expansion of targeted growth industries.
- Provide for broad-based training of County officials and local municipal elected officials, board members and the public in strategic land use and transportation planning consistent with NYS DOT and NYS Quality Communities sustainable development practices and other sound planning principles that affect decision-making in regional and local capital improvements in public infrastructure, transportation, land use, and environmental protection.
- Continue and expand the provision of educational and training opportunities for local planning and zoning board members to ensure that members keep up to date on best planning and land use management practices.



## **Goal – Market the Diversity and Unique Qualities of All Niagara County Communities**

To aggressively market the diversity and amenities of all communities in Niagara County as offering something for everyone including prospective employers, employees and residents by emphasizing the different assets, resources, lifestyle and housing opportunities, low cost of living, and other quality of life attributes available in the County’s urban, suburban and rural communities.

### **Objectives**

- Develop multi-media materials and web-accessible information for use by economic development agencies, educational institutions, tourism-based businesses and others that graphically highlight to areas outside of Western New York the diversity and character of communities in Niagara County.
- Highlight the excellent quality of life available throughout the County’s diverse regions via various media outlets and markets by emphasizing the County’s opportunities including its proximity to international population centers, excellent and reliable water supply, trained workforce, urban waterfront opportunities, conveniently located suburban neighborhoods, and quiet rural lifestyles.

### **Recommendations**

- Encourage local communities to establish minimum development standards and design guidelines for public and private sector development projects to ensure that they contribute positively to community character, neighborhood aesthetics and local quality of life.
- Market developers in national markets to encourage their exploring the largely untapped redevelopment potential of existing developed urban centers and older inner ring suburban areas of the County where marketable populations are most dense and where public infrastructure and community services are already in place.

## **Goal - Link Economic Development to Multi-modal Transportation Alternatives**

To ensure that the County’s transportation systems provide for efficient and effective alternative modes of moving people and goods throughout the County via interconnected road networks; public transit facilities; pedestrian and multi-use trail facilities; and aviation, rail and marine facilities to support and enhance economic development opportunities.

### **Objectives**

- Establish measurable performance standards in collaboration with stakeholder agencies, such as the NYSDOT, GBNRTC, NFTA and transportation service providers to track the efficiency, use, short-term and long-term needs of the County’s overall transportation systems.
- Maximize flexibility and adaptability of the County’s transportation systems utilizing alternative modes to respond to emergency situations, such as natural disasters, or significant changes in supply or price of fuels in order to protect existing businesses and industries from unforeseen disruptions.

- Promote the creation and use of alternative modes of transportation of freight and passengers including greater accessibility to alternative forms of transportation, especially public transit for employees and residents.

### Recommendations

- Work with local transportation agencies (GBNRTC, NYSDOT, NFTA and others) and service providers to conduct public opinion surveys on the potential use of increased availability of public transit services and other transportation alternatives throughout Niagara County.
- Develop incentives to encourage developers to link development and redevelopment opportunities in preferred development centers and corridors to alternative modes of transportation, particularly in mixed-use projects.
- Encourage GBNRTC to undertake countywide corridor management plans integrating an extensive public involvement process for long-term land use/transportation planning for major road corridors that link communities across Niagara County, particularly NYS Routes 31, 104, 62 and 78.
- Integrate countywide transportation planning with land use planning to implement sustainable development practices as encouraged by stakeholder agencies, such as the NYSDOT Smart Growth initiatives and similar planning principles. These principles should promote where appropriate compact, mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-oriented development patterns that are complementary to each community's plans for enhancing its respective urban, suburban and rural characteristics in balance with economic development needs, as well as protection of natural environments and cultural heritage.
- Implement the recommendations of the GBNRTC *Niagara Frontier Urban Area Freight Transportation Study* to facilitate the safe and effective movement of freight by rail and highway throughout the region.
- Continue efforts to develop and implement Niagara County Planning Board project review guidelines based on the *Framework for Regional Growth*. Incorporate the strategies from this plan into the Planning Board guidelines.
- Examine the potential to encourage, through incentives or by other means, incorporation of multi-modal and transit-oriented components into public and private sector projects.
- Support the creation of a sustainable interconnected countywide transportation networks that include multi-modal transportation systems including highways, water-based modes, public transit, bikeways and multi-use trails that facilitate compact, nodal mixed-use development patterns in urban, suburban and rural communities. This interconnected system needs to physically link convenient public access via various modes to the region's major natural and cultural resources including, but not limited to the Niagara Greenway, Erie Canalway, Seaway Trail, Wine Trail, and Niagara Escarpment initiatives.
- Provide user accessibility for interconnections between different modes of transportation to encourage users to safely and conveniently transfer and utilize alternative modes such as through the provision of bike racks on public transit buses



and conveniently located transit stops at points of transfer from one mode, for example bus to rail, in centers of commerce and housing.

- Support tourism transportation needs and infrastructure (i.e. trolley system from Niagara Falls to Lewiston and cross-river ferry service from Youngstown, New York to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario).
- Support public transit and transit-oriented development in the developed neighborhoods of the cities and suburbs of the County to provide enhanced employee access between workplace and home.
- Connect employment centers with residential areas with multi-modal choices of commuting including public transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Work with local communities to ensure that transportation systems support local economic development initiatives via aviation, rail, highway and marine modes of transport of people, goods and materials.
- Work with the NFTA and others to develop the opportunities for increased tourism and air cargo capacity, as well as warehouse and distribution facilities in and around the new Niagara Falls International Airport terminal, scheduled to open in July/August 2009.
- Balance development requirements with employee needs and support services, such as locating daycare facilities in proximity to employment centers.
- Connect employment centers with residential areas and provide choices of commuting including public transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Support the Transit North Historic Canalway Corridor initiative currently underway.

**Goal – To Increase the Number of Economic Development Projects Being Implemented in the County**

**Objective**

- Leverage additional funding for projects

**Recommendations**

- Continue to appeal to the Federal government for direct funding via congressional appropriations, federal economic stimulus funds, etc.
- Continue to appeal to the State for direct funding via legislative earmarks.
- Appeal to the Federal and State governments for a greater share of available Federal and State funding.
- Establish stronger partnerships with Federal and State elected officials, especially members of the WNY delegation.
- Identify and apply for competitive Federal and State grants.

- Hire a full time grant writer/administrator for the County.
- Encourage New York State to create an Upstate Revitalization Fund.
- Identify foundations at the local, State and Federal levels, and appeal for funding as appropriate.

**Objective**

- Maintain up-to-date lists of economic development projects in the County.

**Recommendations**

- Maintain and periodically update lists of high priority and shovel ready economic development projects.
- Develop a priority ranking system for economic development projects.
- Continue to update the Niagara County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) annually and include lists of projects from local municipalities.
- As this Plan is updated, update the list of high priority economic development projects included in this Plan using the CEDS report.

**Objective**

- Continue to encourage implementation of high priority economic development projects and diversification of the economic base of the County.

**Recommendations**

- Assemble economic development teams to monitor projects, including funding levels, and meet regularly to discuss strategies for advancing projects.
- Enlist the support of the County Public Information Officer and increase public relation efforts in educating communities and the public on available economic development incentives and the importance of sustainable economic development projects and redevelopment of underutilized sites, such as brownfields, to the overall economic and environmental health and quality of life in Niagara County.
- Identify means to make greater use of the potential “synergy” afforded by the existing economic base of the County to foster increased diversity and spin-off business development opportunities through more partnerships and collaboration between and among public and private sectors of the economy.

## Funding Opportunities

Projects and needs identified in this chapter and elsewhere within this Comprehensive Plan, as well as projects that may be identified in other plans and reports, including the annual Niagara County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, require funding assistance to be implemented due to the fiscal constraints, such as budget limitations, of Niagara County and its communities. A variety of funding opportunities exist at local, regional, State and Federal levels of government as well as potential sources of assistance

from the private sector. Often the amount of funding needed to implement a project, however may be in excess of what may be available from one source so combinations of funding sources may be needed to finance a project. Funding mechanisms may include earmarks/appropriations/member items, bonding, direct grants, competitive grants, general fund items, foundation monies, corporate assistance and so forth.

Funding opportunities change as economic conditions change, particularly at State and Federal levels. Currently the nation is experiencing a deep economic downturn. Increased funding opportunities exist at this time through the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This Federal Stimulus Bill is intended to stimulate the economy and employment by providing funding to undertake projects at local levels. In many cases the Federal Stimulus Bill appropriates funding above typical annual Federal spending levels, such as what may be authorized through the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009. Funding will be distributed through existing Federal programs and through new programs or may be passed through existing State programs.

The information provided below identifies Federal Stimulus funding opportunities and projects that have been identified to date at the time of preparing this document. The projects identified below are listed because they relate directly to this chapter and this particular focus area of the Comprehensive Plan. These projects are considered crucial to the health and well being of the communities in Niagara County and for improving the functioning of County government in providing services to the residents and businesses of Niagara County.

The following list of projects will be revised as projects are undertaken and new projects are identified and as local, State and Federal conditions change. Therefore this list of projects should not be considered to be inclusive of all potential projects that may be in need of funding assistance. Also, combined funding assistance for some of these projects may be available from other Federal, State, regional, local and private sector sources.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 includes funding provisions in Infrastructure Improvements and Transportation that include, but not limited to:

- \$7.2 billion for Broadband
- \$2.75 billion for the Department of Homeland Security
- \$4.6 billion for the Corps of Engineers
- \$1.2 billion for VA hospital and medical facility construction and improvements
- \$3.1 billion for repair, restoration and improvement of public facilities
- \$4.2 billion for Facilities Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization
- \$2.33 billion for Department of Defense
- \$2.25 billion through HOME and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program
- \$1 billion for the Community Development Block Grant program
- \$1 billion for the Bureau of Reclamation
  
- \$27.5 billion for highway investments
- \$8.4 billion for public transportation
- \$1.5 for competitive grants to state and local governments for transportation
- \$1.3 billion for air transportation system
- \$9.3 billion for rail transportation, including Amtrak, High Speed and Intercity Rail

Funding for economic development projects is available from a number of sources including Niagara County’s share of casino revenue. Likewise, funding for recreation and tourism based projects is available from Niagara County’s share of Niagara County River Greenway Funding such as through the New York Power Authority Re-licensing Agreement under the Recreation/tourism Fund.

Niagara County Projects include:

Broadband to Give Every Community Access to the Global Economy  
Wireless and Broadband Grants

Town of Lockport Industrial Development Agency

- Town of Lockport IDA Industrial Park Wi-Fi Network \$ 5,000

Niagara County Economic Development

- Broadband Access for Eastern Niagara County \$ 30,000  
[Towns of Newfane, Royalton, and Somerset / Village of Barker]

Niagara County Data Processing

- Wi-Fi Hotspots for Niagara County Municipalities \$ 500,000

Creating Small Business Opportunity Economic Development Assistance

Niagara County Economic Development

- Niagara County IDA Industrial Park Electrical Service \$ 65,000  
[Town of Wheatfield]
- Business Marketing Campaign \$ 300,000  
[Countywide]
- Venture Capital Fund for High-Tech Startup Businesses \$ 1,500,000  
[Countywide]
- Niagara County Agribusiness Fund \$ 1,000,000  
[Countywide]

City of North Tonawanda

- Buffalo Bolt Business Park Infrastructure \$ 1,000,000
- Buffalo Bolt Business Park Spec Building \$ 1,500,000
- Durez/Oxy Site Spec Building \$ 2,000,000
- Gateway Harbor Inn \$ 500,000
- Riviera Theater Expansion \$ 500,000
- Historical Museum \$ 200,000

Town of Lockport Industrial Development Agency

- Town of Lockport IDA Industrial Park Infrastructure \$ 2,125,000
- Town of Lockport IDA Spec Building \$ 2,200,000

Town of Niagara Industrial Development Agency:

- Niagara Industrial Airpark Shovel-Ready Status \$ 20,000
- Town of Niagara Spec Building \$ 2,000,000

Niagara County Economic Development

- Transit North Corridor Infrastructure Improvements \$ 20,065,000  
[City of Lockport / Towns of Lockport and Pendleton]  
Funding request for portion of above project that can be shovel-ready in 90 days \$ 4,175,000



Construction on Public Lands and Parks	
Niagara County Economic Development	
<input type="checkbox"/> Proposed Fish Hatchery at Joseph Davis State Park [Town of Porter]	\$ 13,500,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Fisheries Projects for Niagara River and Lake Ontario [Countywide]	\$ 100,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Prop. Boat Launch & Dock at Fort Niagara State Park [Town of Porter]	\$ 100,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Olcott East Pier Access [Town of Newfane]	\$ 75,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Eighteenmile Creek Public Fishing Rights [Town of Newfane]	\$ 100,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Underground Railroad Interpretive Program [Countywide]	\$ 1,000,000
Water Resources	
Corps of Engineers	
Niagara County Economic Development	
<input type="checkbox"/> Olcott Harbor Breakwater Project [Town of Newfane]	\$ 1,800,000
Bureau of Reclamation	
Watershed Infrastructure	
Niagara County Economic Development	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cayuga Creek Watershed Restoration Plan [City of Niagara Falls; Towns of Niagara, Wheatfield Lewiston, Cambria; Tuscarora Indian Reservation]	\$ 150,000
Closed Military Bases	
Town of Niagara Industrial Development Agency:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reuse of U.S. Army Hangar and Buildings at Niagara Falls Army Reserve Center (Demolition/Rehab/Infrastructure)	\$ 2,500,000
Economic Development Assistance	
Niagara County Economic Development	
<input type="checkbox"/> Former Lockport Air Force Station/NIKE Site Asbestos Abatement and Demolition [Town of Cambria]	\$ 1,400,000
NOAA Habitat Restoration	
Niagara County Economic Development	
<input type="checkbox"/> Youngstown Cold Storage Site Remediation [Village of Youngstown]	\$ 275,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Niagara County Brownfields Program Coalition Environmental Site Assessments (30+ sites) [Countywide]	\$ 1,000,000
Community Development Block Grants	
City of Niagara Falls	
<input type="checkbox"/> Niagara Experience Center Economic Development Assistance	\$ 20,000,000

City of Lockport

<input type="checkbox"/>	Erie Canal “Flight of Five” Locks Restoration Economic Development Assistance	\$ 4,000,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	Municipal Parking Ramp Demolition Economic Development Assistance	\$ 1,000,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ice Hockey Rink Construction Economic Development Assistance	\$ 1,000,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	Palace Theatre Restoration Economic Development Assistance	\$ 500,000

## Reference

United States Congress. 2009. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 - Federal Stimulus Congressional Press Summary. Washington, D.C.