POLICY OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES

Based on feedback from the public and the PAG, a series of policy objectives and priorities related to the County's built environment were identified. The intent of the policy objectives is to serve as long-term guideposts for decision-making at the County, while the priorities are near-term strategies that the County should actively seek to advance. These are not intended to encompass all potential strategies that could be implemented at the County level, but high priority recommendations that should be implemented in the coming years.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

- **Address the compounding hardships of lack of access to infrastructure (i.e., cost of living, equity, mobility):** While portions of the County have adequate access to infrastructure and multi-modal transportation options, other areas – generally in the County's more rural communities – are facing the compounding impacts of lack of public water and sewer, broadband gaps, and reliance on private automobile as the sole source of transportation. These rural communities are also often the areas of the County that are having the greatest housing pressures. Acknowledging these compounding impacts and prioritizing innovative opportunities to build up these communities is of utmost importance.
- **Think holistically when making decisions related to housing, infrastructure, and transportation:** Too often decisions related to these critical needs are made in isolation. Increased communication between the County and housing, infrastructure, and transportation stakeholders to better communicate projects under consideration and being advanced is key to ensuring that Smart Growth principles are being considered in decision-making. Thinking of these topic areas holistically also has environmental and economic benefits, reducing greenfield development and construction costs.
- **Foster projects at the local level, tailored to each community's unique identity and needs:** In addition to the basic fact that NYS is a Home Rule State, it is also critical to understand that each community has unique identities and visions for the future. Acknowledging this and developing context-sensitive approaches in collaboration with local stakeholders rather than a one-size-fits-all approach is critical to the success of any action taken at the County level.
- **Proactively plan for a more resilient future:** Looking ahead, faced with the impacts of climate change, the County should be proactive in anticipating and mitigating potential risks and challenges to the built environment before they arise. This approach involves identifying vulnerabilities in systems, infrastructure, and communities, and implementing measures to strengthen them against future shocks. Proactive planning for resilience not only enhances preparedness but also fosters long-term sustainability and prosperity, ensuring a safer and more secure future for generations to come.
- **Collaborate with existing organizations to leverage local capacity and intellect:** The goal with any decision should not be to reinvent the wheel or duplicate efforts. The County is served by many partner organizations that bring expertise, local knowledge, and capacity. The County should continue to engage with its partner organizations and identify opportunities to fill gaps and support these organizations.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING[2]

- **Assist in identifying community-supported locations and vision for infill housing development:** The County Planning Department can provide valuable technical assistance and community support to set the stage for future housing development. At the earliest stage, this could begin with continuing to assist in conducting build-out analyses that identify potential opportunity sites for housing, in consideration of infrastructure or transportation access. The County can facilitate community discussions - using this analysis and the recently completed Housing Needs Assessment as a conversation starter - to gather feedback on where and what type of housing they would like to see in their communities. Once feedback from this technical analysis and community conversation is compiled, County Planning could provide further technical assistance in the form of zoning updates and advancing pre-development tasks. This approach would result in projects that are rooted in the community, more shovel-ready, and enticing to housing developers.
- **Explore expanding the use of Occupancy Tax funds to support housing needs:** Warren County currently collects a four percent occupancy tax on all overnight tourism accommodations in the County. This tax is levied on customers of hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, inns, housekeeping cottages with four or more units and tourism facilities (i.e. campgrounds with onsite RV rentals), as well as STRs. The purpose of this tax, as outlined by Occupancy Tax law, is to promote and increase tourism in Warren County and its municipalities "through the promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other directly related and supporting activities." Other counties, including Ulster County, have expanded the use of their occupancy tax revenue to fund housing initiatives, understanding the impacts the interconnection between increased tourism, rising home prices, and the availability of workforce housing.
- **Develop a library of model STR regulations and provide technical assistance to communities:** STRs are a significant topic of conversation across the County, with many municipalities evaluating potential solutions to minimize impacts on the larger housing market. The County can serve as a resource to assist municipalities by providing model STR regulations and licensing or registration systems that have been implemented successfully in other communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Continue to support municipalities with infrastructure mapping needs:** The County's GIS department should continue to support municipalities in the region with their infrastructure mapping, including system mapping, project identification, and lead service line inventory management. This information is critical for system management, to identify priorities, and to support grant applications, especially as many local municipalities do not have the capacity in-house for these services. With the forthcoming requirement to upgrade Lead Service Lines (LSLs), having an online database to track progress will be important to the replacement program's success.

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[2] The County Planning Department recently started developing a Housing Implementation Strategy. Progress on that plan will advance through the spring and summer and will be incorporated into the Warren County 2040 plan.

- **Continue to build and maintain an inventory of capital project needs for local municipalities.** The County could act as a resource to smaller communities in infrastructure planning. Essex County, as an example, maintains an inventory of infrastructure needs and assists communities in securing funding, developing project plans, and procuring consultants for water and sewer projects.
- **Identify, track, and share information on infrastructure climate change vulnerabilities with local municipalities.** With the County's recent completion of the Hazard Mitigation Plan and digitized, mapped infrastructure data, the County can play a crucial role in sharing concerns around climate vulnerabilities with local municipalities, many of whom are unaware of the risks their infrastructure face.

TRANSPORTATION

- **Prioritize Complete Streets improvements along County roads in the hamlets:** Public survey respondents prioritized the importance of walkable communities to quality of life. To support this public interest, the County can implement changes in an area that they have control over: County roads. Improvements should focus on enhancing pedestrian safety through the installation of well-marked crosswalks, sidewalks, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Additionally, opportunities to improve accessibility for cyclists along these roadways should be explored by incorporating dedicated bike lanes, shared-use paths, and secure bike parking facilities. By prioritizing these enhancements, we can create more vibrant, inclusive, and livable communities while promoting active transportation options and reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. Implementation of this priority should begin with the adoption of a Complete Streets Implementation Plan and Policy. This approach has been taken in other counties in Upstate NY, including Franklin and Lewis Counties. To complement the Plan and Policy, the County should also collaborate with the A/GFTC on Complete Streets outreach and education at the local level.
- **Serve as a partner with local municipalities to secure and administer transportation funding:** To address the significant competition for funding from other, more populous communities and counties in NYSDOT Region 1, the County should partner with local communities to help securing the funding. To potential approaches would be providing technical assistance or funding to advance concept level plans to design stage, bringing them to the coveted "shovel ready" status that is more competitive for construction funding projects. The County's involvement as a noted partner on grant applications can also help address concerns about local capacity for implementation.
- **Work with the CDTA to explore micro-transit and on-demand models for the County's rural communities:** While bus transit is not viable in all areas of the County, to address the transportation access equity gap, alternative solutions have been proposed by local partners, including the A/GFTC and LCLGRPB. The County should work with these partner organizations and the CDTA, and support their efforts to implement micro-transit and/or on-demand pilot programs to serve the County's more rural communities.
- **Conduct a County-wide greenhouse gas emissions inventory:** Transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse (GHG) emissions, nationwide. In 2013, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) completed the Capital District 2010 Regional GHG Inventory, which showed that 32% of GHG emissions in the County are

generated by transportation. With much of the County's population reliant on private automobiles, quantifying updated contributions to greenhouse gas emissions County-wide is a critical next step to understand opportunities to reduce GHG emissions and begin benchmarking.