

WARREN COUNTY 2040: ARTS AND INSTITUTIONS

The "Arts and Institutions" topic area encompasses a diverse array of critical community assets, including arts and cultural institutions, educational facilities, healthcare services, emergency services, and social services. This multifaceted sector plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike by fostering creativity, education, well-being, and safety. Arts and cultural institutions enrich the community with vibrant programs and events, stimulating economic growth and cultural vitality. Educational facilities provide essential learning opportunities and resources, preparing individuals for future success. Healthcare and emergency services ensure the physical and mental well-being of the community, offering crucial support and intervention in times of need. Social services address a wide range of needs, promoting inclusivity and support for all demographics. Together, these institutions create a robust foundation that supports a thriving, resilient, and dynamic Warren County. The issues and opportunities identified in this memorandum were developed with input from stakeholders that participated in a series of focus groups on the topic in May 2024.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Warren County has a thriving arts and culture scene including music, theater, dance, the visual arts, and historical and cultural museums. Glens Falls is a hub of thriving arts community from museums to theaters, and galleries to concert halls, helping to enrich the culture and lives of residents and visitors alike. Within a single square mile, 14 arts and cultural organizations brighten the Glens Falls City scene. Outside of Glens Falls, organizations like the Lake George Arts Project bring arts and music to the waterfront, including one of the oldest-running jazz festivals in the County. Further north, the Adirondack Folk School provides unique programming for all ages, highlighting the history of the County. These are just some of many arts and cultural institutions that bring vibrancy to the County and enhance quality of life.

THE COUNTY'S ROLE

Warren County's role within arts and culture centers largely around the Tourism Department and the work of the County historian. The Tourism Department works to promote and support the tourism industry, especially in the Lake George area, through marketing, collaboration, and communication with regional tourism partners and visitors. Their goal is to use year-round brand awareness and thematic campaigns to generate demand, interest, and visitations in the region. The department typically does events management and marketing campaigns through advertisements and digital media. Much of their work centers on drawing visitors to the Lake George area as an iconic vacation destination. Currently, the department is successful in marketing to visitors the many great outdoor recreational assets available in the County.

Additionally, the Historian's Office works to preserve, interpret, and promote the history of Warren County and serve as the connection between the local municipal town and village historian offices throughout the County. Currently, the Historian's Office is working closely with local historical societies to open a new Joseph Warren Center for History and

Leadership. Much of the Historian's work is in preservation, as well as education and research. The County plays an important role in maintaining a collective memory of the history of Warren County and what makes the community what it is today.

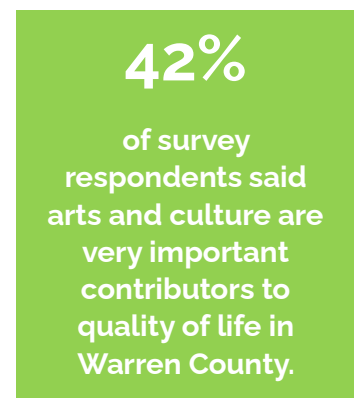
Lastly, the County through its Occupancy Tax, provides grant funding for special event and activities. As outlined in the County's Occupancy Tax Local Law, the tax revenue is allocated "to enhance the general economy of the County of Warren, and its city, towns and villages through the promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other directly-related and supported activities." Awards from 2024 included several music festivals and the LARAC Annual June Arts Festival,

STAKEHOLDER/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Warren County includes multiple art museums, gallery spaces, music and theater organizations, historical museums and educational centers, and a children's museum, all of whom are stakeholders. During outreach we spoke to a variety of arts/cultural organizations. There is no one umbrella organization coordinating or speaking on behalf of the diverse offerings. We spoke with representatives of local museums (including, but not limited to the Hyde Museum and World Awareness Children's Museum), arts/entertainment (Glens Falls Symphony, Lake George Arts Project) and historical and education centers (Warren County Historical Society and Adirondack Folk School).

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

Warren County has a thriving arts scene that should be showcased to residents and visitors alike. The Glens Falls Arts District leads the County's art culture with 14 different arts and cultural organizations, including music, galleries, museums, and more. This organization, which is currently undertaking a Strategic Plan looking ahead at the next 5-10 years, is focused on the City of Glens Falls; there is no County-wide promotion or hub for information on arts and cultural institutions. Currently, the County is successful at promoting tourism related to outdoor recreation, drawing people to the Lake George region, but has the opportunity to better highlight the thriving arts centered in the County, as well.



The full impact of the County's arts and cultural institutions is not fully understood. At the State level, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector contributed \$126.7 billion to NY's economy in 2020, representing 7.3% of the State's GDP, 435,693 jobs, and total compensation of \$53.4 billion.¹ Further research is needed to quantify the direct and indirect impact of arts and cultural institutions on the County's economy.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis & National Assembly of State Art Agencies, 2022.

Having a more concrete understanding of the local impact could help with decision making and spending at the County level.

There are opportunities to improve cross-promotion between the County's arts and cultural institutions. Each of the County's arts and cultural institutions maintain respective mailing lists and regularly communicate with their audience on upcoming events of interest at their respective locations. However, there is no cross-promotion of respective organizations' events and happenings at a County-wide level. There is an interest and opportunity amongst arts and cultural institutions to increase cross-promotion and also better connect with other events, such as conferences, to connect attendees with the County's many arts and cultural offerings. This collaborative approach can lead to increased attendance, greater community engagement, and enhanced funding opportunities, ultimately contributing to the sustainability and growth of the arts as a whole.

CASE STUDY: MONROE COUNTY

In each of its annual budgets, Monroe County sets aside funds to support arts and cultural organizations. In the 2023 budget, Monroe County budgeted \$1.2 million to support in community festival funding and mid-size arts funding. Approximately \$300,000 of that is being used to support community festivals, and the remaining \$900,000 is allocated to support mid-sized arts and cultural organizations.

Organizations seeking to apply for FY 2023 mid-sized arts support must meet the following eligibility guidelines:

- Have a significant presence in Monroe County, conducting at least 50% of its operations in Monroe County and maintaining a physical location in Monroe County.
- Be legally recognized for at least one year with a tax filing as a 501(c)3 organization or LLC.
- Have a primary mission directly related to arts and culture.
- Have an annual operating budget (operating expenses) between \$50,000 and \$4,000,000.

You can learn more about the program [here](#).

The current framework for evaluating projects for Occupancy Tax funding is constructed to recognize the broad value the the County's arts and cultural institutions provide to make the region attractive to visitors and residents alike. In evaluating projects and events to fund through the County's occupancy tax, an emphasis is placed on how many "beds" the event will generate. While this framing does contribute to continued occupancy tax generation (through additional hotel stays), it unfortunately leaves out the County arts and cultural institutions, whose visitors are more likely day-visitors. Other metrics – or expanded evaluation criteria – could help to address this funding access gap. This has been a

reoccurring theme during stakeholder outreach; how to best leverage this revenue stream to maintain and improve features that contribute to the elements that make the region attractive to visitors, as well as maintain the quality of life for residents

HEALTHCARE. SOCIAL SERVICES, EMERGENCY SERVICES

A driving factor behind quality of life, priority needs for an aging population, and an important factor in people's decision on where to live or relocate to, is access to quality health care. In the recently completed Adirondack Relocation Assessment Survey, respondents were asked to select the top five most important factors when selecting a community or neighborhood to live in: availability of health care services was third most important of fifteen factors with 54% of respondents choosing it as one of their top five factors.

THE COUNTY'S ROLE

Health Services: The County provides both mandated and voluntary programs to the residents of the County. The Public Health programs in the department include immunization programs and clinics, preschool and early intervention programs for children with growth and developmental concerns, lead poisoning prevention, disease control programs, health education, rabies (for both animals and humans) and emergency preparedness. Health Services' Homecare Services is also one of the largest homecare agencies in the County.

Community Services (Mental Health): The Office of Community Services for Warren and Washington Counties is a shared administrative office between the two counties responsible for planning, oversight, and coordination of a wide range of services for individuals and families impacted by mental illness, intellectual/developmental, and addiction issues. The office provides no direct care but instead works with a variety of partner agencies to ensure services are available to residents. The Office is governed by a Community Services Board with nine members, and it oversees local planning for services through community service boards.

The Office of Community Services is responsible for administering the local Single Point of Access (SPOA) process for referrals for mental health residential and care management services. They also coordinate the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program for Warren and Washington Counties. The County contracts with 12 to 14 local nonprofits for services. All of the services that are provided are mandated by State law. Most of the services are funded through State aid or patient insurance.

Social Services: The Department of Social Services (DSS) works to provide the assistance and services necessary to sustain dependent and disabled persons, protect children and adults from abuse and neglect, and to assist applicants and recipients in achieving the greatest degree of independence possible. Broadly, the department has five primary units: Fiscal, Legal, Countryside Home (discussed elsewhere), Eligibility, and Human Services. The

department estimates that it provides some sort of service to about 60% of the population in the County.

Ageing Health Services: The Office for the Aging (OFA) serves the Warren County population ages 60 and over, assisting them in accessing services to address their needs. This includes services that help them remain independent, prevent premature institutionalization, relieve isolation and loneliness, and improve their quality of life and health. The OFA has served both Warren and Hamilton Counties since 1974.

The WHCOFA (Warren-Hamilton Counties OFA) provides a wide range of services to the seniors of both counties, and all the services are mandated to some degree. Nutrition is the largest program in every aspect. It includes both congregate meal sites and home delivery to residences. The OFA also provides Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP), Expanded In Home Services for the Elderly, transportation to medical appointments, and access to legal services. The costs between counties are shared based on a formula and the operations are managed by Warren County. All the employees are Warren County employees although some work exclusively in Hamilton County and are funded by Hamilton County.

Emergency Services/Fire/EMS: The role of fire coordinator and EMS coordinator are mandated by the State. There are also State and federal mandates related to emergency preparedness planning. The Department supports the County's hazardous materials response team and coordinates efforts to respond to weapons of mass destruction. The Department coordinates applications for grants for emergency preparedness and response funds. In the event of an emergency, the OES serves as the response coordinator and coordinates the Emergency Operations Center. The OES also works with the local municipalities as they develop their response plans and conduct drills. The Department also had a substantial role in coordinating the County and localities' response to COVID-19. The Department relies heavily on volunteers and deputy coordinators during events and to help support the local EMS and fire agencies.

STAKEHOLDER/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Health care, social services, and emergency services stakeholders in the County are numerous, and include Glens Falls Hospital, Hudson Headwaters Health Network, and the numerous small medical offices in the County; nursing homes and senior living and support facilities; supportive housing and shelters; food pantries; volunteer and staffed fire departments; and EMS agencies.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

Warren County is facing healthcare workforce shortage and access challenges. In Warren County, many of the current healthcare staff, especially the nurses, are nearing retirement age and attracting medical professionals to the region is a challenge. Based on current data from the Health Resources and Service Administration, Warren County is considered a Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) for both primary care providers and mental health providers. This shortage has led to closures, consolidations, and the loss of critical specialized medical services, such as emergency pediatric care. This is not an issue unique

to Warren County; attracting medical professionals has been an issue for much of rural America. Based on NPR reporting, "only 1% of doctors in their final year of medical school [...] want to live in communities under 10,000; only 2% want to live in towns of 25,000 or fewer."

Health care, social, and emergency services providers are looking at innovative approaches to address some of the hurdles of recruitment. This includes constructing or purchasing staff housing, as Hudson Headwaters Health Network did in Glens Falls, and EMS providers considering installing staff trailers. Private homeowners in the County are also stepping up to the plate, renting out rooms to traveling and contract nurses.

While the County provides a diverse range of services, accessing these services can be a challenge. From where to begin and who to call, to accessing facilities due to lack of transportation or lack of accessibility, additional work is needed to ensure that residents in the County can access these lifeline facilities.

The Board of Supervisors has been very supportive of the needs for mental health services. Recognizing the increased prevalence of mental health, domestic violence, and addiction exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Warren County Board of Supervisors has been directing funds from ARPA and also new State addiction services funds. While there is generally enough funding for these services, finding qualified staff continues to be a problem, particularly as the issue grows.

With the aging population trends, medical and supportive service needs for seniors continue to increase. To address this increased demand, Hudson Headwaters is set to open in Glens Falls the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), a community-based program that will provide coordinated medical and social services to eligible older adults who want to continue living in their own home despite chronic care needs. PACE will service portions of Warren, Washington, and Saratoga Counties. Southern Adirondack Independent Living is also advocating and supporting seniors who want to age in place. Despite these strong advocates and advances, challenges remain and are expected to be more acute as the County population continues to age. As one example, the Elderwood Skilled Nursing Facility in Johnsbury was recently denied a lifeline funding request of \$2.5 million to the NYS Department of Health through their Vital Access Provider (VAP) program.

EMS and Fire Departments across the County struggle to find volunteers and paid staff. To address reduced volunteerism, most EMS agencies in the County are using paid staff, and there have been discussion and support for the County to begin operating an EMS transport service or paramedic first response to provide a back up to the volunteers. Even with the shift to paid positions, however, staffing remains an issue, as the EMS services in the County cannot compete with the salaries offered in down-State counties. This EMS staffing issue is exacerbated by State-level changes in provider levels; with the removal of mid-level providers, additional costs and training are needed for these providers to advance. While the County can step in and help cover these training costs, few have taken advantage. The staffing concerns among volunteer firefighters are not yet at a crisis, but recruitment and retention efforts are an area where the County could be involved in the future.

Food insecurity is an issue in the County, fueled by rising food prices and lack of access to fresh food. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, food prices in

CASE STUDY: FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA

Fairfax County, VA began providing paid staff to support volunteer fire departments in the 1970s. The County fire department has been invited by volunteer fire departments to provide additional services over time. There are some cities in the County that maintain their own separate departments. The County department now staffs 42 paid fire apparatus (including paramedic ambulances), while the volunteers staff 12 County-owned apparatus. Some of the 30 stations are owned by separate volunteer departments, while others are owned by the County. The volunteers maintain their "branding" on many stations, uniforms, and apparatus. However, all turn out gear is owned by the County and has consistent markings; all members (paid or volunteer) need to meet consistent training standards; and all operate under a single unified command structure. All essential functions are funded through County funds and patient billings, while the volunteer departments have separate fundraisers to support their activities. The County department provides both fire and EMS transport services.

In sum, this model is the result of "regionalization by evolution" as volunteer departments have slowly turned to the County for support over many decades to the point where the majority of services are provided by paid staff, but volunteers still play an important role.

You can learn more about the program [here](#).

Warren County have seen significant increases over the past few years, mirroring trends observed nationwide. From 2020 to 2024, the overall cost of food and beverages rose by about 22%; this rate is higher than the overall inflation rate, indicating that food prices have been particularly impacted by economic conditions. In addition to rising prices, many County residents have limited access to supermarkets. The USDA developed a Food Access Research Atlas to identify areas across the Country that have limited supermarket access due to distance and vehicle ownership. Based on this 2019 data, with the County, the Town of Warrensburg and portions of Glens Falls face the most dire need, as measured by a high percentage of households that do not have vehicles and are located more than a half-mile from a supermarket.² Local food banks have observed these trends and are working to support communities by providing essential services and distributing food to those in need; however, pantries are often stretched thin, given the growing demand.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Medicaid Reform: Between 2014 and 2019, New York State finalized terms with the Federal government for a waiver that allowed the State to reinvest \$8 billion in Federal savings generated by the Medicaid Redesign Team reforms. The goal was to redesign Medicaid payment incentives by shifting the health care industry towards a value-based payment

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

system versus the current fee-for service payment system. While progress was made towards establishing interventions that could demonstrate cost savings, not to the extent needed to shift the paradigm or to realize significant savings.

In August 2021, NYS Department of Health request a new 1115 Medicaid Waiver for \$17 billion over five years. The goals of this round of Medicaid reform include building more resilient, flexible and integrated delivery system that reduces racial disparities, promotes health equity and supports the delivery of social care, developing supportive housing and alternatives to institutions for long-term care populations, redesigning and strengthening health and behavioral health system to response to future pandemics and natural disasters and creating statewide digital and telehealth infrastructure.³ As of June 2023, the waiver request is still pending. If approved, Warren County Public Health will want to closely monitor and coordinate with planning and governing agencies that are set-up to coordinate services and manage fund flows.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Warren County offers a range of educational resources catering to various needs. The County's public school system includes nine districts that provide comprehensive education from elementary through high school levels, ensuring accessible education for residents across the County. The Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex (WSWHE) BOCES provides vocational education for the 32 school districts in the larger five-County region.

For higher education, SUNY Adirondack serves as the primary community college, located in Queensbury. It offers a wide array of associate degree programs and vocational training, supporting around 2,994 students annually. Additionally, SUNY Plattsburgh operates a satellite campus in Queensbury, extending opportunities for undergraduate and graduate studies within the County.

Child care services in Warren County are robust, facilitated by the Southern Adirondack Child Care Network. This organization provides support and resources for licensed day care centers, school-age programs, and family day care homes, ensuring that working families have access to reliable and affordable child care options.

The ten libraries in Warren County are well-distributed and resource-rich, with the Crandall Public Library being a notable hub. It offers a variety of services including book lending, digital resources, and community programs for all ages. The library system's branches provide additional access points for residents to engage in educational activities.

³ https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/2021/2021-08_1115_waiver_concept_paper.htm

THE COUNTY'S ROLE

The primary role of the County in education is providing funding to education providers in the County, including child care, SUNY Adirondack, and the Southern Adirondack Library System.

STAKEHOLDER/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Stakeholder educational institutions in the County include the nine public school districts and ten public libraries in the County, SUNY Adirondack, BOCES, Head Start, and private educational institutions.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES, & TRENDS

The County's nine public schools are a point of pride and an attraction to the region.

Many families are attracted to smaller schools over larger schools due to benefits of smaller student-teacher ratios, the sense of community they provide, and safe, close-knit nature. The schools across the County offer a range of diverse, unique curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Queensbury Central School and on-site BOCES vocational and apprenticeship programs at Warrensburg Central School.

While the small size of the County's schools is a point of pride, class size continues to decline across the County, which comes with additional challenges. Based on data from the Empire Center⁴, school enrollment across Warren County decreased by 15.5% between 2012 and 2022, exceeding the statewide enrollment decline of 8% over that same period. The three school districts that saw the largest decline were Lake George (-30.5%), Bolton (-26.2%), and Hadley Luzern (-25%). The decline in enrollment at the public schools is having spillover impacts at the community college (SUNY Adirondack). While the schools are feeling the impacts of the decline, they are unclear on what the future holds. There are opportunities to better collaborate and share information on projected population change in the County with the school districts.

There is an acknowledgement and interest in shared services amongst school districts in the County. With declining enrollment, several schools have already begun combining athletics, but, absent a significant shift in population trends, additional shared services, such as Special Education and other academics, will need to be considered if the districts want to continue to provide the range of offerings that families and students desire. This is a trend that is being seen across NYS's rural school districts, as outlined in the Rural Schools Association of New York State's 2023 Policy Brief.⁵ The State Education Department is currently exploring legislation to authorize greater flexibility in choosing shared and regional educational programs and services.

There is not enough child care to meet the needs of County residents. Consistent with regional, State, and national trends, in recent years many child care facilities have been

⁴ <https://www.empirecenter.org/publications/ny-school-enrollment-change/>

⁵ <https://rsany.org/>

closing, as providers age out and centers find it difficult to attract and retain staff, given the profession's limited income potential. The Southern Adirondack Child Care Network found that between 2019 and 2023, the number of licensed child care facilities in the County decreased from 50 to 30. As a result of this decline, 44% of parents surveyed in Warren County following child care searches, reported not finding care.⁶ The child care shortage not only has long-term developmental impact on children but also further depletes the workforce, with parents unable to return to the workforce due to lack of child care.

OTHER FACTORS

Foundation Aid Formula and Hold Harmless Provision: In this year's budget, the Governor originally proposed significant changes to the Foundation Aid Formula, which is the main way that school money gets allocated. Under the formula that the Governor proposed, many districts around the state would receive less money than they anticipated. The Governor also proposed eliminating a provision known as "hold harmless," which has traditionally ensured that schools receive at least as much funding as the year before, regardless of any enrollment loss. While both the state Senate and the Assembly rejected the Governor's Foundation Aid formula changes and the elimination of "hold harmless," the State is advancing a study of how to change the Foundation Aid Formula, which would impact funding for school districts across the County.

Electric Buses: New York's 2022-23 budget set a mandate requiring all new buses sold in the State to be zero-emission by 2027 and all buses on the road be zero-emission by 2035. Questions abound regarding how to build, acquire, and pay for the change. For rural schools, the logistical challenges are more severe, due to concerns about travel distances, hilly terrain, and costs – both of the buses themselves and the need to retrofit garages.

⁶ <https://www.saccn.org/public-policy/>