

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



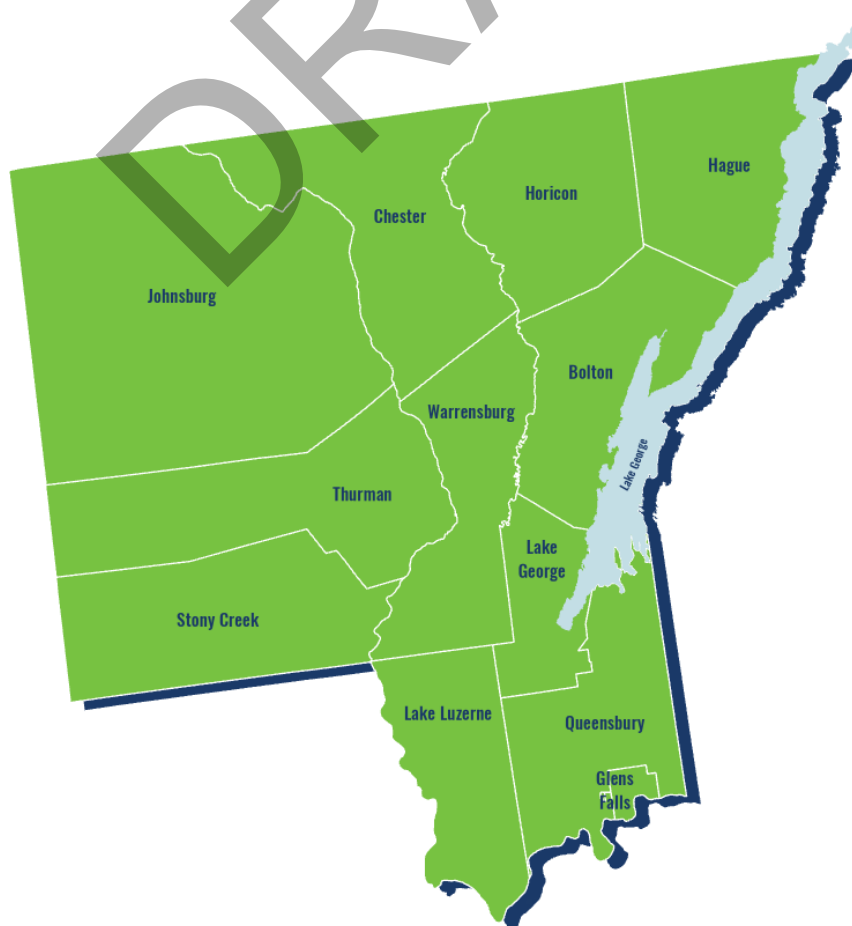
## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan articulates a long-range vision for the future of a community. In order to realize the community's vision, the Comprehensive Plan establishes goals, objectives and strategies through a deliberative and iterative process of data analysis, public engagement, and consensus building. A Comprehensive Plan is not law and therefore unenforceable as regulation; the power and success of a Comprehensive Plan lies in its ability to align and inspire stakeholders around a shared, long-term vision for the future while identifying the work required to achieve that vision. It serves as the foundation upon which future planning and policy decisions are based. At the County level, as opposed to the local level, a Comprehensive Plan has a broader scale and focus.

This Plan, which outlines a vision for the next ten to 20 years, covers essential topics, such as environmental quality, housing, transportation, public services, and economic development. With this long-term outlook, the County can transition towards more proactive decision-making, budgetary and otherwise. A well-considered Comprehensive Plan helps to align near term actions, such as annual budgeting and workplans, with strategic goals that have a far longer horizon.

By integrating long-range priorities into decision-making processes, Warren County can allocate resources more effectively, targeting projects that advance the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. This alignment helps in planning significant capital improvements and operational adjustments that are critical for the County's future, rather than prioritizing them based solely on short-term considerations.

Furthermore, this strategic alignment will enhance transparency and accountability in how funds are spent, fostering greater public trust and involvement. Residents will gain a clearer understanding of how financial choices are connected to the County's long-term goals, which can lead to increased community engagement and support. In essence, by adopting a Comprehensive Plan, Warren County commits to a future where decisions are not just about the next fiscal year but about meeting long-term community goals. This strategic approach to aligning annual spending with long-range priorities lays a robust foundation for thoughtful and forward-looking governance.





## A VISION FOR WARREN COUNTY

*Warren County is home to vibrant communities and a high quality of life, achieved through proactive planning and collaboration. The County leverages its natural, cultural, and human resources, fosters economic innovation, and ensures environmental stewardship to create a resilient, sustainable, and inclusive community. With enhanced infrastructure, a thriving economy, a collaborative and considerate civic culture, and strong supportive services, Warren County addresses demographic, economic, and environmental challenges while providing a prosperous future for all residents.*



## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

A series of goals and objectives were identified to address the most pressing issues and opportunities the County faces today. The intent of the goals and objectives is to serve as long-term guideposts for decision-making at the County.

### GOAL 1 **ATTRACT AND RETAIN YOUNGER RESIDENTS WHILE ACCOMMODATING AN AGING POPULATION.**

The demographic shifts that Warren County is facing present unique challenges and opportunities that must be strategically managed to ensure the long-term vitality of the County. An aging population requires enhanced healthcare services, age-friendly infrastructure, and accessible public spaces to support their well-being and independence. Additionally, creating an environment that is attractive to younger families and individuals is essential to maintaining a balanced and dynamic population and addressing workforce needs. By addressing these shifts, Warren County can ensure that its community remains inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable, fostering intergenerational connections and securing economic stability through a diverse and engaged populace.

### GOAL 2 **IMPROVE HOUSING ACCESS & QUALITY**

Addressing the current housing challenges, such as rising costs and a shortage of affordable options, is vital to ensuring that all residents have access to safe, comfortable, and affordable homes. By implementing policies that encourage new construction and promote diverse housing types that provide stepping stones to address housing insecurity for all residents, Warren County can help to alleviate housing pressures and create a more stable market. Enhancing existing housing quality and access will attract new residents, support the local workforce, and contribute to the overall well-being and sustainability of the County.

### GOAL 3 **SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITIES, HAMLETS, & DOWNTOWNS**

Fostering vibrant, economically robust, and socially cohesive communities, hamlets, and downtowns is key to enhancing community well-being and supporting sustainable growth. Strengthening these areas as hubs of commerce, culture, and social interaction involves promoting mixed-use and infill development that integrates residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, creating dynamic and walkable environments. Proactive investment in the maintenance and improvement of community infrastructure and services is essential to support these areas. Resilient transportation networks, such as bike paths, walkable streets, and upgraded culverts, can help communities recover during emergencies by ensuring access to essential services. Also key is preserving and celebrating the unique character and history of each community, while encouraging innovation and fostering new business growth, paving the way for the County's next chapter and improving residents' well-being.

## **GOAL 4** STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT EXISTING AND EMERGING ECONOMIC SECTORS

Warren County's economy is deeply rooted in its natural resources, scenic beauty, and entrepreneurial spirit, which have driven its tourism, manufacturing, and healthcare sectors. The County's strategic location between the Capital Region and the Adirondacks provides access to emerging technology sectors, connections to traditional resource and recreation-oriented businesses, and desirable communities to live, work, and play in. Warren County will continue to invest in healthcare and educational facilities, workforce development, economic development, and tourism to ensure the County has the talent, infrastructure, and resources to support existing industries, while fostering a modern, place-driven economy. Economic resiliency means supporting businesses during disruptions and diversifying industries to reduce risks. Connecting businesses with emergency resources and promoting year-round economic activity are key steps to improve economic resiliency.

## **GOAL 5** MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The County's natural environment is an incredible asset. Lake George, the natural landscape, and a diversity of outdoor offerings are the foundational attributes that make the County a great place. The threat of climate change, introduction of invasive species, and the ability to adapt to unknown threats are of vital importance. While the County and greater region are fortunate to have a broad group of not-for profits and other entities focused on these matters, continued diligence and investment is required. Investment in maintaining environmental quality should consider adaptation and mitigation for changing climate and increasing resiliency against possible natural disasters and impacts. Investments in wetland restoration, floodplain management, and habitat preservation can reduce flood risks and help communities recover more quickly after extreme weather events. Updating FEMA floodplain maps and enhancing stormwater management are critical to mitigating future risks.

## **GOAL 6** DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A LONG-TERM PLAN FOR COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE/ASSETS

Warren County owns and maintains a range of properties and infrastructure critical to its operations and community services. However, the County currently lacks a comprehensive long-term plan to guide future decision-making regarding the long-term viability and potential alternate uses of these assets. Developing and maintaining such a plan is essential to ensure that the County's infrastructure and property investments are managed effectively and sustainably. By establishing a clear vision and systematic process for managing its assets, Warren County can enhance the functionality, efficiency, and resilience of its infrastructure, support sustainable growth, and better serve the needs of its residents over the long term. Critical infrastructure assessments can identify risks and guide investments, such as retrofitting or relocating facilities to ensure they remain operational during emergencies. For example, the Warren County Hazard Mitigation Plan recommends relocating at-risk County DPW facilities and upgrading undersized culverts and bridges to reduce flooding impacts.

## **GOAL 7** IMPROVE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

The County's rural nature, the growing number of seasonal residents, the ever-changing landscape of government mandates, and a rapidly evolving information landscape have made it more challenging for residents to stay informed and engaged with County operations. Addressing this issue is essential to ensuring that Warren County residents can effectively participate in governance, understand how decisions are made, and improve efficiency in accessing community resources.



# THE PLANNING PROCESS

## FORMING THE PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP

The planning process was led by a Project Advisory Group (PAG) included 12 representatives of County leadership, staff, and community members from across the County that were selected through an open solicitation process in spring and summer 2023. The PAG met on a regular basis throughout the planning process to establish priorities, review interim documents, and brainstorm ideas. During the first PAG meeting, members provided input on their goals for the planning process and their vision for the future of the County. Subsequent PAG meetings delved into each of the Plan topic areas, identifying and reviewing issues, opportunities, and trends, and establishing objectives and priorities for the future. All PAG meetings were in-person, noticed, open to the public, and concluded with a public comment period.

In addition to the PAG meetings, a Working Group was established, consisting of County staff and the consultants that met on a more frequent/regular basis to review draft documents and oversee the overall planning process.

## WARREN COUNTY 2040 PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP

Dan Barusch, Town of Lake George

Anna Bowers, Town of Johnsbury

Paul Cummings, Town of Queensbury

Tammie DeLorenzo, Town of Bolton

Patrick Dowd, City of Glens Falls

Nathan Etu, Town of Queensbury

Haley Gilligan, City of Glens Falls

Ryan Hutton, Town of Chester

Craig Leggett, Town of Chester

Molly McCarthy, Town of Johnsbury

Brady Stark, Town of Queensbury

Scott Sopczyk, City of Glens Falls

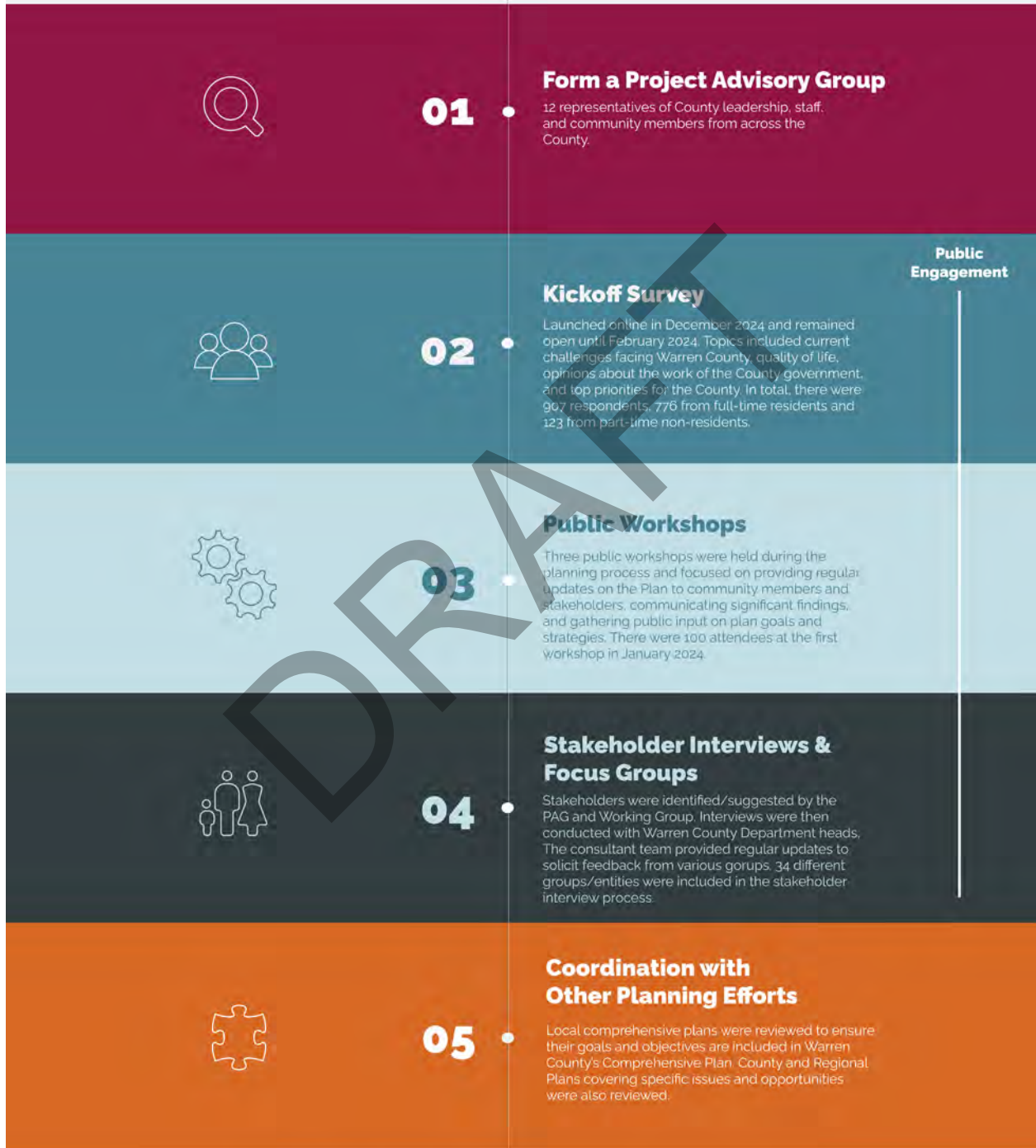
## PAST PAG MEMBERS

Connie Bosse, City of Glens Falls

Josh Westfall, Town of Bolton



# The Planning Process



## Listening to Community Voices

A multifaceted approach to community engagement was developed with the PAG, which included public workshops, surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. In total, more than 1,000 residents were engaged in the two-year planning process.

## LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES

Community feedback, when combined with insights into county operations, demographic trends, and regional influences, helps pinpoint where and how adjustments in county practices can better align with residents' needs. Diverse, representative feedback is critical to the planning process. A multifaceted approach to community engagement was developed with the PAG, which included public workshops, surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. Over 1,000 residents and stakeholders were engaged in the two-year planning process.

### WHAT WE HEARD

#### *Residents are generally happy with life in Warren County*

In conversations, meetings, and survey responses, what is clear is that residents are happy with quality of life in Warren County. Notably, over 80 percent of the almost 1,000 survey respondents consider the quality of life in the County to be good or very good. Significant contributing factors to overall quality of life in the County were identified as safety, environmental quality, and emergency services.

The County offers the best of both worlds, with a small-town charm, while still being close to all necessary amenities and services. The environment, natural resources, outdoor recreation, quality of life, safety, affordability, the community, and the natural beauty of Warren County's scenery, open space, and nature all provide value to Warren County residents.

#### *The County's water and land resources are second to none*

The County's natural assets are world class and major contributors to not only quality of life but the environment and economy. The overall quality and quantity of resources and the ease of access to those resources are what really differentiate the County, even among other counties in the Adirondacks. Whether mountain biking, kayaking, boating, Warren County offers something for everyone and has invested in infrastructure and amenities to make those resources accessible.

Residents, however, are concerned about the effects of climate change on the County's natural resources, including potential threats to air quality, increased risk of forest fires, flooding, and the spread of invasive species—all of which could harm wildlife, outdoor recreation, and the local economy.

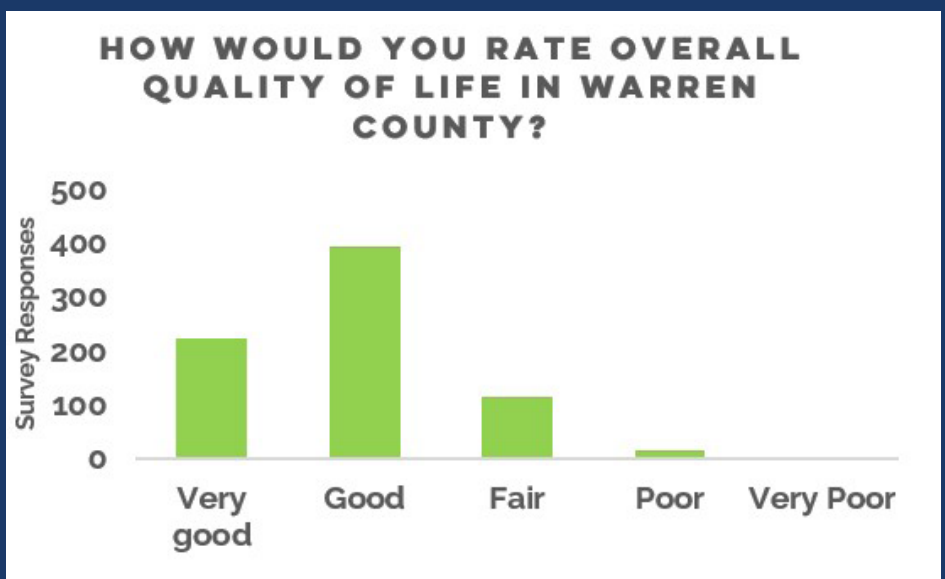
#### *The County has a wealth of skilled organizations*

The County's varied assets are supported by a capable, diverse, and impressive range of institutions and their skilled leaders and staff. There are opportunities to improve collaboration and better leverage these existing organizations to make the County a stronger, better place to live.

#### *The County's demographics trends are clear and concerning*

The most cited – raised in perhaps every Project Advisory Group meeting, public workshop, stakeholder meeting, and many survey responses – is the fact that the County is old and getting older. This has impacts on all assets of the County from its workforce to housing, social services, and schools. While this issue extends beyond Warren County and is driven by many factors that the County cannot impact directly, residents and stakeholders are interested in thinking about ways to prepare and adapt to this new reality and look into opportunities to attract and retain younger populations.

"Community, safety, and the mountains—living here offers a unique blend of small-town feel with access to incredible natural landscapes and a secure, tight-knit community atmosphere."  
- Survey Respondent





**The housing crisis is impacting Warren County residents**

Also notable is the housing crisis, which 61 percent of survey respondents cited as the biggest challenge facing the County today. Of note however, the 18 to 24 age group and 25 to 34 age groups ranked housing as the County's biggest challenge 85 percent of the time and 77 percent of the time, respectively, showing that the housing crisis is more concerning for younger people – the exact group that the County needs to attract to address its aging population and its worker shortage.

**We need to strike a balance between tourism and local needs**

Tourism is a significant and highly visible contributor to the County's economy. However, its negative impacts, such as increased traffic and a reliance on seasonal jobs, were frequently highlighted. Striking a balance between expanding the tourism economy and preserving local quality of life will be essential to sustaining residents' support for being a tourism destination.

**The County should help fill gaps and upgrade infrastructure**

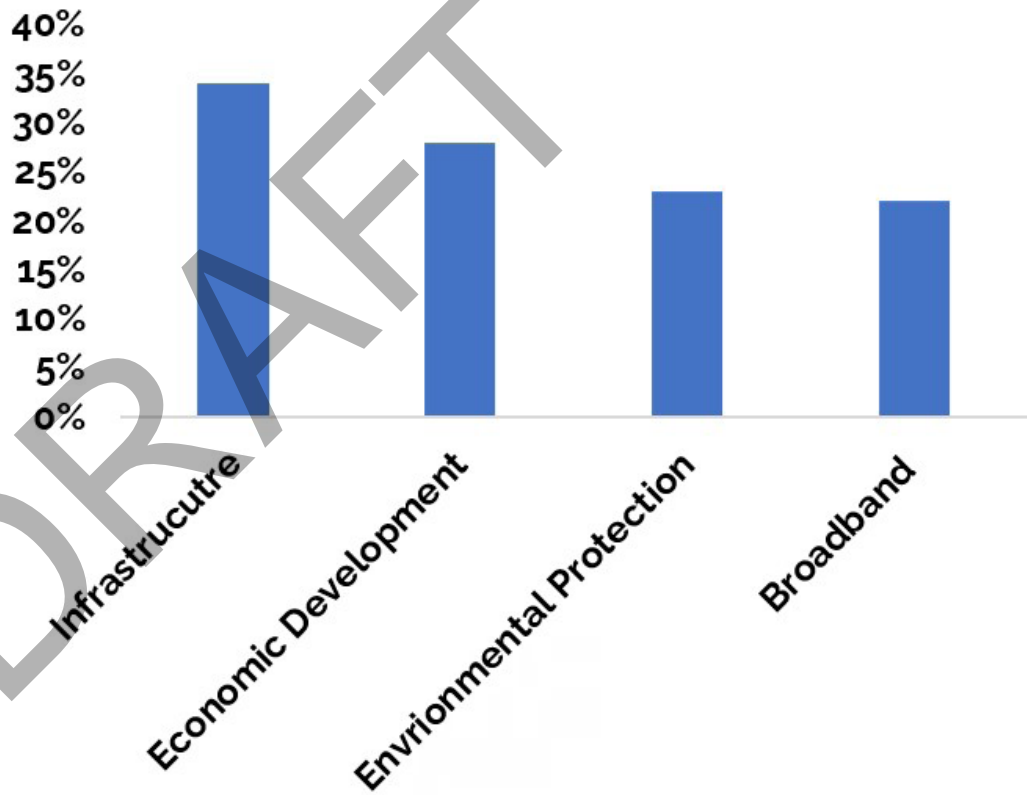
Citizens emphasized the County's critical role in maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, including roads, culverts, and bridges. Concerns were also raised about local capacity to take full advantage of historically high levels of State and Federal funding support for infrastructure projects, highlighting a potentially larger role for the County in these areas.

Cellular and high-speed internet infrastructure remains a pressing issue for many residents and stakeholders. This concern is especially significant for up-County residents, who identified it as a top priority 34 percent of the time, compared to 22 percent countywide.

"The mix of culture and nature, from vibrant community events to quiet moments by the lake, gives everyone something to cherish about Warren County."

- Survey Respondent

**WHAT SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITIES OF WARREN COUNTY'S GOVERNMENT?**



**Nuanced approaches should be considered to meet local contexts and specific demographics**

Feedback from residents and stakeholders emphasized avoiding a "one size fits all" strategy, as needs vary significantly between rural, urban, and tourism-driven areas. Similarly, the needs of different demographics, such as residents looking to retire in Warren County versus those looking to start their careers in the County, must be considered. By considering these distinctions, the County can create equitable and effective policies that serve its diverse communities.

## EXISTING PLAN REVIEW & ANALYSIS

Developing Warren County 2040 included a review of plans prepared in recent years by the County, local municipalities, planning agencies, and State agencies.

### LOCAL PLANS

Ten of the County's 12 municipalities have prepared and adopted local Comprehensive Plans. Warren County 2040 is the first effort by the County to establish a Comprehensive Plan, but these existing municipal Comprehensive Plans offer excellent insights into the issues and priorities of individual communities.

Common themes emerge from a review of existing and ongoing planning efforts, including concern over aging population, lack of attainable housing, loss of young population, the need for cellular and internet service, and environmental quality. The shared nature of community issues across municipalities reinforces the value of establishing shared County-wide goals.

Several local municipalities have also prepared focused plans that were reviewed and referenced, including the 2023 Town & Village of Lake George Workforce Housing Market Study and 2019 Queensbury Affordable Housing Strategy.

### COUNTY PLANS

Warren County has actively explored key areas like housing, outdoor recreation, hazard mitigation, health, and waterbody protection. These studies inform the County's Comprehensive Plan, which consolidates previous documents to guide future decisions. Key plans include:

- **Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan (ongoing):** Defines the County's role in supporting outdoor recreation and its economy.
- **Hazard Mitigation Plan Update (adopted January 2024):** The Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), updated in 2023, identifies risks to Warren County's infrastructure, environment, and communities.

It provides detailed assessments of vulnerabilities and outlines strategies to reduce risks, increase resiliency, prepare for emergencies, and recover quickly. Incorporating the HMP into this plan ensures alignment of priorities and resources to enhance community resiliency.

- **Housing Needs Study & Market Demand Analysis (2023):** Highlights a strong demand for housing across all types, indicating a shortage in Warren County.
- **Community Health Assessment (2022-2024):** Analyzes resident health needs to inform the County's Health Improvement Plan.
- **First Wilderness Plan (1998-2014):** Aims for the coordinated revitalization of communities along the Upper Hudson River through tourism, heritage preservation, and recreational opportunities.







## REGIONAL PLANS

The issues and opportunities that Warren County faces do not end at the County's borders and must be framed within and informed by other regional plans that have been undertaken by County partners. A key example of this is local watershed planning; Warren County has partnered with other State, regional, and local entities to prepare a series of studies and plans focused on preserving and protecting the quality of Lake George, Lake Champlain, and the Hudson River. This has included the 2023 Lake George Watershed Action Plan, the 2022 Lake George Harmful Algal Bloom Action Plan, the Upper Hudson Watershed Revitalization Plan, and the 2018 Lake Champlain Non-Point Source Pollution Subwatershed Assessment and Management Plan, among others.

Similarly, the economy extends past the County's borders, with Warren County residents working and spending outside of the County and vice-versa. These economic plans by regional entities are key to understanding the influencing economic development factors and strategies being undertaken by the County's partners.

The LCLGRP's 2021 **Forward Together: Economic Resiliency Plan** notably identifies six economic imperatives that remain relevant to Warren County:

- Connecting Our People: ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors have adequate infrastructure
- Child Care Access: supporting and growing this critical need
- Housing Access & Stability: ensuring that this basic human right is accessible for the region's residents, workers, and new/prospective residents
- Main Street & Community Centers as Economic Engines: increasing downtown economic development capacity
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building: supporting and growing the region's entrepreneurial spirit
- Career Building & Skills Training: adapting regional workforce training

The Capital Region REDC's **2024-2028 Strategic Plan** includes three regional priorities:

- Economic Growth
- Social and Economic Integration
- Community Vibrancy and Sustainability

Also of note is the Adirondack Gateway Council's 2015 "Pathways to Progress" whose common themes were the need for stable jobs, quality of life matters, striking a balance between jobs and housing, and how focused investment in existing communities pays off. This was a multi-County effort (encompassing Warren and Washington Counties and parts of Saratoga County), and many of the findings and recommendations of the report are still relevant today

For other topics – such as transportation – past plans prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving the region, the A/GFTC, were reviewed and considered. This includes their 2021 Regional Bike Plan, 2023 Rural Workforce Transportation Plan, and 2023 Long Range Transportation Plan.