



Warren County 2040

Public Advisory Group Meeting Summary

Project Number: 2231014

Location: Warrensburg Fire House

Date: June 3, 2024

Time: 3:30PM

	Name	Organization/Role
Attendees:	Ethan Gaddy	Warren County Planning
	Sarah Brugger	Warren County Planning
	Sara Frankenfeld	Warren County Planning
	David Nelson	Warren County Planning
	Tammie DeLorenzo	Warren County Administrator's Office
	Craig Leggett	Town of Chester resident
	Ryan Hutton	Town of Chester, theater owner
	Scott Sopczyk	Glens Falls Transit Transportation Director
	Patrick Dowd	City of Glens Falls Community Development Director
	Molly McCarthy	Revolution Rail Co. General Manager
	Brady Stark	Town of Queensbury resident
	Haley Gilligan	City of Glens Falls Ward 2 Supervisor
	Norabelle Greenberger	LaBella Associates
Devin Bulger	LaBella Associates	
Chris Round	LaBella Associates	

One member of the public was also in attendance.

Meeting Summary:

1. Meeting Review

- Norabelle opened the meeting with a review of the planning process and next steps to be covered through the planning process. Meeting six is the last meeting covering issues, opportunities, and trends. Meeting seven and the rest of the planning process will focus on identifying overarching goals, priority strategies, and the overall plan vision.

2. Our Economy

- Norabelle opened by reviewing the County's role and impact on the County's industry. As the memo notes, the County's budget and spending, its taxing levels, and its investments in staff-led economic development and tourism initiatives have a major influence on the business climate and the County economy. The County's budgetary support of externally-led economic development and tourism initiatives are also a source of influence and impact.
- Jim Siplon, of Warren County EDC, shared findings from a forthcoming study EDC is preparing. They are grouping NAICS industries into three categories – those that drive sales and occupancy tax in the County (Retail, Food and Accommodation, Tourism, Transportation), those that are tax exempt (Health Care, Government, Non-profits), and all other industries (Manufacturing, Natural Resources,



Entrepreneurial). Grouped this way, each of these three categories represents about a third of the economy by employment and wages paid. The EDC report looks back to 1990 for employment data; 2000 for wages paid. Manufacturing as a portion of economy declined from 20% to 11% in both metrics by 2023. The decline in manufacturing has been cause for concern because of significant recent closures and the number of jobs that were lost with each of the closures. However, over that same time period, there have been as many open nursing positions in the County, which are higher paying jobs in a growing industry. Jim believes that the County would be better served making investments in infrastructure that support these growing industries and the ability to attract remote workers than infrastructure designed to attract a large manufacturer to a single site in the County. For example, 10% of Global Foundries workforce already lives north of exit 17. With the expansions planned at Global Foundries and the high cost of living in Saratoga County, there are opportunities to attract more Global Foundries employees to Warren County and to cultivate professionals involved in ancillary businesses to chip manufacturing.

- The discussion then moved to Tourism and its role in the County economy. \$3 out \$10 of revenue earned by the County is generated by non-residents through occupancy tax and sales tax. Despite this, Tourism ranked low on the list of priorities in the community engagement survey and many residents dislike the degree to which they rely on tourism. Several issues and opportunities were discussed related to the pros and cons of tourism:
 - The seasonal nature of tourism in Warren County leads to peaks and valleys. This not only creates challenges for operations and staffing, but leads to burnout with operators and the community as they are overwhelmed during the summer season and then struggle to fill their capacity in the winter.
 - Scott inquired as to whether there are any case studies for Counties or regions successfully developing a year-round tourism economy.
 - Attempts to create more year-round tourist attractions have been positive but haven't substantially moved the needle to sustainable winter operations.
 - Tourism jobs are low-paying, and housing for local workers or J1 visa workers is challenging. The industry would not survive without J1 and H1V workers. Employers invest up to \$10,000 per employee to get them to Warren County. Some Lake George businesses have partnered to purchase hotels no longer in operation and converted them to dorm residences for their J1 workers.
 - Expanded high speed internet and the availability of short-term rentals have led to longer stays as people work remotely during their stays. This has benefitted tourism attractions and Warren County communities as these visitors spend more time and money over more days.
 - There could be more diversification of tourism and cross-promotion to spread the wealth and channel tourists from over-crowded and overwhelmed areas of the County to less visited areas of the County.
 - What unique needs do second homeowners have and how do their use patterns compare to the tourist patterns? We can parse the data from the community engagement survey since homeowner status was one of the beginning questions. The North Creek election also created a good contact list of second homeowners, which would provide a sample set for outreach.
 - One of the central tensions with tourism is tourists are competing for the same resources and using the same features that residents enjoy.



3. Arts & Institutions

- LaBella and the County held focus groups with three Arts & Institutions stakeholder groups: Education, Health Care, Art and Theater. The focus groups were well attended, with representation throughout the County. Key takeaways from the Arts and Theater conversation included:
 - Many feel they are left out of County occupancy tax funding because of the “heads in beds” scoring, but create other positive economic activity. Craig quipped, “people don’t come here for the pillows” to emphasize that the events and experiences arts and theater organization’s offer are the enriching experiences that tourists come for in the first place.
 - There isn’t a central leader for the County’s arts and theater organizations. This undermines their collective strength – there is no central community calendar, no shared distribution lists for event promotion, not as much cross promotion of events as there could be.
 - All organizations are at capacity with staffing, volunteers, and resources. Volunteers for Board positions are aging out and not being replaced by younger people.
 - Sara Frankenfeld mentioned the opportunity for better volunteer coordination with high schools. Many students require volunteer hours, but end up scrambling to fill hours with less meaningful activities. Liza and the Workforce Development Board have also instituted a soft skill development program for 14 – 21-year-olds that volunteer opportunities would dovetail nicely with.
 - In the same way that United Way 2-1-1 provides a clearinghouse of social services, a volunteer opportunity directory would be a helpful resource.
 - The group acknowledged that volunteer scheduling and management can be a challenge and smaller organizations that could use the support might not have the capacity. Volunteer recruitment, scheduling, and management could be another opportunity for shared services.
- Key takeaways from the health care and social services conversation included:
 - Staffing is the biggest need in the industry. HHHN has gone so far as to build housing for its staff, but still cannot fill its positions in the communities where they have built housing.
 - Internally, there is good awareness of wrap-around services available in the community and they operate on a “no wrong door” policy, meaning providers will make an appropriate referral before a community member leaves.
 - AHI has played an important connector and clearinghouse role within this sector.
 - DSS estimates they provide services to 60% of the population either because of income or age status.
 - Tammie reviewed challenges facing local EMT forces. The State has consolidated EMT staffing to two levels, which has created a need for additional training. Local municipalities have been creating tax districts to generate resources for their EMS needs. Because of the lack of health care industry workers, municipalities are increasing pay and benefits to recruit EMS staff.
- Educational institutions
 - Small, rural schools are encountering the same workforce challenges – it is hard to attract and retain faculty and staff.
 - Many expressed a challenge with not having good projections to rely on to right size staffing, facility, and operational investments. This is potentially an area that the County could support.



- Many schools have already started to combine athletics and use BOCES for vocational learning. There is a recognition that more shared services will be necessary in the future, potentially even a regional school for up-County communities.
- General notes on memo
 - Need to edit the word "robust" from the paragraph on childcare.
 - The County's zero waste team should be included in a section of the report. They have been handling solid waste issues at the County level, including contracts, supplying dumpsters, and organic waste management, among other responsibilities.
- 4. Vision Statement
 - The group reviewed the draft vision statement. It was emphasized that this was just a starting point. It focuses on the County government's future vision (as opposed to a statement encompassing the vision for the County as a geography).
 - The group generally felt like it covered the important themes of the Plan within the statement. Several people liked the use of the word adaptive since that type of approach will be necessary for responding to the changing needs and opportunities facing the County through the Plan's implementation.
 - Jim identified the need to add an element addressing the County's vision for getting younger.
- 5. Goals
 - Goal: Transparency regarding where resources go
 - Goal: To not take anything for granted. We have to work to protect and sustain the things we love about the County – they are not a guarantee.
 - Sara offered that she thinks of the County issues as a triangle with the aging population at the top of the pyramid because that factor is permeating every other factor in the County. This isn't an issue that is unique to Warren County – every developed nation is confronting the issue – but it will dictate services and sustainability in many Warren County communities.
 - Ryan posed a general question: is the goal to turn the ship or be responsive to the conditions as they are? Is the plan charting a course for growth or managing decline?
 - Despite the economic headwinds and the statewide population decline, Saratoga County is the fastest growing County in the State. What lessons and opportunities does that present Warren County?
 - Jim posed a question – If 50,000 – 100,000 new people show up to Warren County, where would we want them and what will they be doing?
 - It was noted that we could look at data for State and County migration to understand where we are losing people and how we might bring them back. The County has that data and could map that.

The preceding minutes represent the author's understanding of the matters discussed and decisions reached. If there are any corrections, clarifications, or additions to be made to these minutes, please contact the sender at dbulger@labellapc.com within five business days of issuance.

Respectfully submitted,
LABELLA ASSOCIATES, D.P.C.

Devin Bulger

Cc: All Attendees