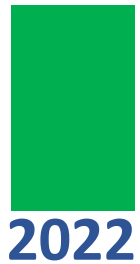




St. Lawrence County
Industrial Development Agency



St. Lawrence County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

St. Lawrence County has a rich history of trade, natural resource development, manufacturing, and agriculture, and it is the cultural and educational center of Northern New York.

While the pandemic presented our rural county with unprecedented challenges, we were better able to rise to meet them because of continued strategic plan updates and exemplary collaborations with leaders from a cross-section of industries that believe economic development success depends on everyone taking part.

Ahead of the pandemic, St. Lawrence County was showing measured, steady progress toward the strategic goals outlined in our previous CEDS and guided by the 2015-2020 McKinsey & Co. study conducted by the New York Power Authority (hereafter the “NYPA Study” or simply the “Study”):

“St. Lawrence County has many assets – particularly its abundant and low-cost power, water, and land; high-caliber universities; and natural beauty – all of which can serve as a base on which to build economic success in the years ahead.”

Cutting-edge research continues to be done at the County’s five institutions of higher learning; world-class aluminum, glass and other manufactured products are fabricated in the County’s factories; and some of the best and most wholesome food and dairy products are grown and processed on the County’s farms and in the County’s cheese and yogurt plants. As the NYPA Study also encouraged:

“Despite recent challenges... St. Lawrence County has a unique opportunity to reshape its economic future.”

Refining the Roadmap. The strategic areas outlined in the McKinsey report and 2017 CEDS identified initiatives tailored to the County’s assets with opportunities intended to evolve to tackle obstacles and maximize opportunities. The Plan is reviewed at least annually, with initiatives amended or supplemented when the group identifies the need for a focused, collaborative effort – workforce challenges related to COVID-19, for example.



New York Power Authority

DATA SOURCES/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (“CEDS”) leverages insights and data gleaned from steps taken to implement initiatives documented in the 2015-2020 St. Lawrence County Economic Development Study, the County’s 2017 CEDS, along with findings from other recent analyses to define the ideal path forward to maximize the County’s unique characteristics in ways that will lead to robust economic activity, diversity, and growth.

In preparing the Study’s strategic initiatives, McKinsey supplemented its general statistical data collection and analysis strengths with interviews of dozens of stakeholders in the County, and input from a high-level advisory board. That advisory board remains active and engaged in advancing the mutually supportive strategies outlined in the Study:

- Accelerating Agriculture and Agri-Business
- Renewing Manufacturing
- Expanding Rural Small Business
- Revitalizing Communities, Tourism and Mindset

Comprised of 23 leaders from a diverse cross-section of industries, the St. Lawrence County Economic Development (SLC ED) Advisory Board meets monthly with strong, ongoing engagement (90% participation rate); and 50 representatives actively participating in working groups empaneled to advance initiatives.

The collective sentiment of the Advisory Board and working group members is to continue meeting regularly to collaboratively advance strategic opportunities, as outlined in the Study and as may arise from opportunities or challenges in the County.

“The St. Lawrence County economic study by McKinsey reinforced the value of a cohesive front to advance focused strategic growth objectives, including to improve and grow the small business sector. The Small Business Working Group is a cross section of economic developers, university staff, bankers and small business owners who have together helped launch strategic initiatives from that study.

“Perhaps most importantly, we have grown as an effective work group to better advance and diversify those initiatives into the future. I believe that our adaptations and implementations from the study will continue to benefit businesses and the economy in St. Lawrence County for years to come.

“To that end, the monthly Advisory Board meetings continue to serve a valuable purpose for two-way conversation between our small business team and the leaders in St. Lawrence County. I always leave the Advisory Board meetings with good ideas generated from the sharing of updates and exchange of ideas from such a diverse group of partners.”

Marijean Remington, CEO - Atlantic Testing Laboratories
SLC ED Advisory Board Member & Small Business Working Group Chair

In addition to the SLC ED Advisory Board’s annual review of strategic objectives, monthly discussions and ongoing Working Group activities, the County has gathered insights from a number of additional sources, including:

- The North Country Regional Economic Development Council’s 2021 Annual Report and strategic update, outlining how the impacts of the pandemic presented the region with new opportunity to drive investment in the region and more fully realize our strategic goals.
- The North Country Regional Economic Development Council’s 2019 Progress Report and its implementation agenda.
- The Downtown Revitalization Strategic Plan for the Village of Potsdam – awarded \$10M in the 2019 funding round by New York’s Empire State Development; along with strategies submitted for DRI funding consideration by core County communities like Canton, Massena, and Ogdensburg.
- Brownfield Redevelopment studies and development strategies for the Town & Village of Canton, Newton Falls, City of Ogdensburg, and former General Motors facility in Massena.
- In partnership with NYPA, SBDC, St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, and other local partners, the SLCIDA has participated in monthly virtual and outdoor networking events with area business leaders to identify and address hurdles created by the pandemic, including workforce issues and opportunities.
- Arconic Business Park Feasibility Study to create a comprehensive, cohesive strategy for developing ~2,500 acres as a mixed-use industrial, technology, commercial, clean energy, agri-business park. The study will provide the information and data needed to develop the sites for future growth and expansion.
- The Common Ground Alliance of the Adirondacks Blueprint for the Blue Line.
- The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Development Plan adopted by the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators on December 5, 2016.
- Data developed by Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow U of MN Extension, Center for Community Vitality and presented at the May 27, 2021 “Resident Recruitment in Rural America” and June 17, 2021 “Moving In, Moving Out, and Moving Over: The Future of Rural Housing” conferences by the North Country Symposium of St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York.

The County supplemented and cross-checked data and recommendations from all these sources with the standard information sources made available by the US Bureau of the Census, the US and NY Departments of Labor, the US Department of Commerce, and other local, State, and federal agencies.

NOTE ON METHOD

Preparation of the CEDS

As part of its service contract dated January 1, 2020 with the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency (IDA), the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators assigned the preparation of the County's CEDS to the IDA. IDA staff worked with the staff of the St. Lawrence County IDA Local Development Corporation (together the "Agency") to provide the personnel who collaborated to research and prepare the CEDS drafts at every stage. Agency staff participated in meetings of the SLC ED Advisory Board, Small Business Working Group, Workforce Sub-Committee, the NCREDC reports, the Agricultural Plan, BOAs, the St. Lawrence County Economic Developers Network, and the Symposium.

Draft CEDS

The Agency first incorporated the data and findings from the strategies mentioned above into a preliminary draft CEDS. In addition to the wealth of data – and recommended strategies and tactics – gleaned from these sources, the Agency staff relied on three other major inputs in preparing the draft CEDS:

1. Agency staff followed the US Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Content Guidelines in structuring the CEDS.
2. Staff reviewed "best practice" recommendations referenced in the EDA's Content Guidelines, together with exemplary CEDS developed by other New York counties.
3. Finally, Agency staff used the previous St. Lawrence County CEDS (2017) and its updates as a starting point for the County to recast its development strategies.

Upon completion of the draft CEDS the Agency submitted it to two separate groups for review and comment. The first of these was the SLC ED Advisory Board and Working Group members.

The second group to provide feedback on the draft CEDS was the Developers Panel. The County IDA has for years hosted meetings of the local professional developers to provide a forum for the sharing of ideas and the coordination of activities among the IDA staff and the local and regional developers in the area.

While the two groups share some of the same members, the draft CEDS was reviewed with each group independently to provide specific action items to help determine final strategies, responsibilities, and expected outcomes.

In doing their reviews the SLC ED Study Advisory Board and the Developers Panel both attempted to analyze and catalogue the assets and strengths of the County as well its obstacles and challenges. In combination, the committees have put together a vision and an action plan for moving St. Lawrence County toward a healthier, more diverse, and resilient economic condition.

SLC ED Study Advisory Board and Working Group Members

Advisory Board Member	Affiliation
Tim Ahlfeld	Village of Massena
Tom Burns	St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES
Jon Cardinal	U.S. Senator Charles Schumer
Tony Collins	Clarkson University
Ben Dixon	SLC Chamber of Commerce
Andy Gilbert	NYFarmNet
Alex Hammond	Town of Waddington
Stephen Hunt	Empire State Development
Patrick Kelly	SLCIDA
Kevin Kitzman	Arconic Corporation
Barb Lashua	Workforce Development Board
James Lazore	St. Regis Mohawk Tribe - OED
Larry Legault	Town of Louisville
Laurie Marr	Development Authority of the NC
Susan Merrill	U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Jim Murphy	Massena BDC
Steve O'Shaughnessy	Town of Massena
Marijean Remington	Atlantic Testing Laboratories
Caitlin Rooney	U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Brooke Rouse	STLC Chamber – Tourism
William Sheridan	St. Lawrence County Legislature
Zvi Szafran	SUNY Canton
Karen White	NYPA - Community Relations
John Wicke	SUNY Potsdam
Mary Wills	SLC Peoples Project
Patricia Wilson	NYPA – Ec Dev / North Country

Working Group Member	Affiliation
Ron Bacon	Community Bank NA
Elisabeth Cain	Clarkson – CAMP
Dave Evans	BOCES/CTE
Larry Fetcie	SLC One Stop
Greg Hart	WDI
Melinda Little	Point Positive Inc.
Steve Lockwood	CITEC
Patrick Massaro	SUNY Canton – CREST
Mike Newtown	SUNY Canton
Laura Pearson	SLC Chamber of Commerce
John Pinkerton	SLCIDA
Dale Rice	NYS SBDC
Leigh Rodriguez	Canton Economic Development
Gail Schneider	Town of Louisville
Lori Sibley	SLCIDA
Ed Smoke	St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, OED
Jennifer Stevenson	Blue Heron Realty
Ashley Sweeney	Clarkson University, Shipley Center
Lenore VanderZee	SUNY Canton

Developers Panel

Name	Affiliation
Heidi Ames	SLC Planning Office
Andrea Smith	City of Ogdensburg - Planning & Development
Anthony Hayden	NYS Dept. of Labor
Barbara Lashua	Workforce Development Board
Ben Dixon	St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
Bob Ahlfeld	SLC IDA
Brian Norton	SLC IDA
Brooke Rouse	St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
Dale Rice	SUNY Canton SBDC
Fred Hanss	Village of Potsdam Planning & Development
Greg Hart	Workforce Development Institute
James Murphy	Bus. Dev. Corp. for a Greater Massena
Jamey Hoose	Shipley Center for Innovation
Jason Pfothauer	SLC Planning Office
Jeni Reed	Canton Community Economic Development
John Wicke	SUNY Potsdam
Larry Fetcie	SLC One Stop Career Center
Leigh Rodriguez	Canton Community Economic Development
Lenore VanderZee	SUNY Canton
Matt Draper	Clarkson University
Michelle Capone	Development Auth. of the North Country
Patrick Kelly	SLC IDA
Patrick Ames	Cornell Cooperative Extension
Rich Williams	SLC IDA
Stephen Hunt	Empire State Development
Steve Garneau	Adirondack Economic Development Corp.
Steve Lawrence	Ogdensburg Bridge & Port Authority
Steve Lockwood	CITEC
Patricia Wilson	New York Power Authority
Victoria Zinser Duley	Adirondack Economic Development Corp.

Agency staff revised the draft CEDS in view of recommendations made by members of the two panels previously described. The Agency distributed the updated draft CEDS to the County's 15 elected legislators, County administrative officials, the SLCIDA Board of Directors and to the County's Workforce Development Board (WDB) members for review.

St. Lawrence County IDA Board of Directors

Name	Affiliation
Brian Staples	Brian W Staples CPA
Ernest LaBaff	Aluminum Brick & Glass Workers International
Lynn Blevins	Blevins Brothers Inc
Mark Hall	Town of Fine & Adirondack Park Agency Member
Andrew McMahon	Massena Electric Department
James Reagen	SLC Board of Legislators
Steven Morrill	Gebarten Acres

The WDB, whose primary role is to oversee the County’s workforce strategies, includes by design a diverse group of individuals from business, labor, education, government, workforce preparation, and economic development. It is also geographically diverse, an important consideration in a jurisdiction that covers over 2,800 square miles. The following chart shows the Committee’s membership and affiliations:

St. Lawrence County Workforce Development Board

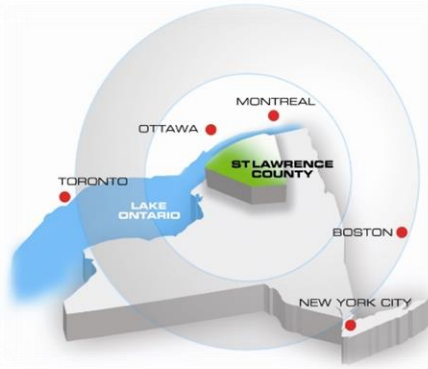
Name (alpha order)	Affiliation
Private Sector	
Jack Backus	Automobile dealer
Lynn Blevins	Automobile dealer
Sue Caswell	Retired hardware store owner
David Ferris	Hospital director
Peggy Fockler	Machine shop owner
Don Hooper	Retired accountant
LouAnne King	Dairy farm owner
Lynn Pietroski	Private not-for-profit (NYSARC) director
Peter Reiter	Construction materials manufacturer
Ryan Schermerhorn	Zinc mine operations manager
Ellie Sullivan-Stripp	Livestock feed manufacturer
Dallas Sutton	Commercial lender (bank)
Leo Villeneuve	Electrical contractor
Public Sector	
Rich Daddario	Labor union executive
Felicia Dumas	SLC Community Development Program
David Evans	BOCES
Ruth Doyle	County Administrator
Ron McDougall	Labor union executive, Elected official
Dale Rice	Small Business Development Center
Zvi Szafran	SUNY Canton (President)

Final CEDS

After Agency staff revised the draft CEDS to incorporate suggestions by members of the SLCIDA Board, the WDB and the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators, the resulting Final CEDS was then distributed to the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators for final review and approval. The CEDS was formally adopted by the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators on February 7th, 2022 and then submitted to the Economic Development Administration.

A. SUMMARY BACKGROUND

St. Lawrence County's northern border parallels the St. Lawrence River, adjacent to Canada, in New York State's far North. It is therefore located on the peripheries of both the New York State and United States' economies. Approximately 30% of the County is located in the six-million-acre Adirondack Park.



The County's distance from the State and nation's markets and population centers is compounded by the inadequate surface transportation system currently serving the County. While the County comprises approximately 5% of the land mass of the State, it is one of the few areas in New York not directly served by a US four-lane interstate highway. It is served by two bridge crossings to Canada (Massena and Ogdensburg) and by two airports with commercially scheduled flights (again in Massena and Ogdensburg), as well as a general aviation airport in Potsdam.

As the largest county in New York State (with an area of 2,822 square miles), St. Lawrence County's acreage is larger than two states, Rhode Island, and Delaware, yet its largest population "center" has fewer than 15,000 people. In fact, all five population centers of the County (the City of Ogdensburg and the villages of Canton, Gouverneur, Massena and Potsdam) had a combined population that totaled only about 36% of the County's total in 2020 (108,505 in the 2020 census). These five population centers are scattered from along a south to north axis that parallels the St. Lawrence River so that about 55 miles separate Gouverneur in the South from Massena in the North (with Canton and Potsdam about mid-way). About 35 miles separate Ogdensburg in the West from Potsdam in the East. In summary, the County lacks what geographers call a central place.

The geographic dispersion of the County's rural communities makes it difficult to view the County as having uniform, and sufficiently scaled, labor, retail, and tourism markets. This presents challenges in marketing and developing the communities for both outside investment and internal economic expansion. Perhaps as a result of its large size and the previously mentioned demographic dispersion, the economy of the County is characterized by a diverse set of industry types, sizes, and locations. One aluminum smelter is located in Massena, taking advantage of the low-cost electricity sold from the Moses-Saunders Power Dam by the New York Power Authority.

Three paper mills remain from a once-vibrant paper manufacturing industry which located in the County in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries to take advantage of the wood fiber resources of the Adirondacks and the water and power resources of the County. Three mining operations located in Fowler, one of which was closed for nearly ten years but has been back in operations for the past three years are the last vestiges of much larger mining operations in the County which once also included iron, zinc, talc, lead, and wollastonite.

A review of the County's economic condition clearly demonstrates overwhelming circumstances of economic need. According to US Census, Federal Reserve, and New York State Department of Labor data, St. Lawrence County had:

- A 2020 population of 108,505, a decline of 3.1% since 2010 and the lowest population number for the County since the 1950 Census;
- A Labor Force (Employed plus Unemployed workers) that has fallen by 20% over the past twenty years (from over 50,000 individuals to approximately 41,000 individuals);
- An 18.9% poverty level, 45% higher than the New York State average; and
- At \$50,940 a median household income level 19% below the US average and over 25% below the New York State average.



During the past four decades agricultural and manufacturing employment have declined substantially – as has the number of farms and manufacturing establishments. Historically, manufacturing, and dairy farming were the primary drivers of the County's economy. The fact that such declines characterize many other rural economies across the State and (to a lesser extent the nation) does not make their decline in St. Lawrence County any less significant.

The overall number of farms and acres farmed in the County dropped by over 10% and 12% respectively during the last decade, compared with a 5% and a 7% decline Statewide for the same metrics during the same period. However, since the farm economy is overwhelmingly oriented to dairy, it is important to note that the amount of milk produced on the County's dairy farms has increased by 16% over the last decade.

The US Census Bureau reports that in 2019 manufacturing employment accounted for about 6.4% of the County's non-agricultural employment, down from over 20% in the early 1980's.

Retail business accounted for about 12% of the overall non-agricultural employment in the County in 2019. Health care, education, and government employment have grown and together accounted for over 51.4% of the County's non-agricultural employment in the same year – with government alone accounting for 29.2% of the total and accounting by far for the single largest share of the County's non-agricultural employment.

As can be imagined, the economic barriers facing the County have led to high unemployment and poverty rates. Historically, the County's unemployment rate has been, on average, several percentage points higher than the annual State unemployment rate.

Even though it is impossible to change the geography of St. Lawrence County, it is not impossible to reverse the consequences imposed on the County by its isolation. The purpose of this CEDS is to summarize the steps that the County plans to take to deal with the economic consequences that its geography and other socio-demographic realities impose on it.


B. SWOT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is a standard starting point for a strategic planning process. It starts by asking what is positive and negative about the status quo, and what are the competitive advantages and disadvantages of an organization or community. As pointed out by the EDA Content Guidelines the advantages (strengths) and disadvantages (weaknesses) are usually internal in nature. The opportunities – often external in origin – prompt the strategies that an organization or community could pursue that would maximize its chances to capitalize on its strengths and minimize its weaknesses. The threats are the factors – also often external – that could derail efforts to capitalize on the defined opportunities.

Strengths

The relative competitive advantages of St. Lawrence County include:

- *The continuing vitality and adaptability of the County's dairy farms and their supporting infrastructure:* Based on native good soils and a climate conducive to raising cows, St. Lawrence County continues to be one of the major milk producing counties in New York, even though its farm economy has been undergoing substantial structural changes, as farms get larger and as the owners of farm enterprises get older – all the while enduring the cyclical nature that has characterized the production of milk since the coming of railroads in the second half of the 19th century created regional milk markets in the United States.
- 
- *The continued operation of key manufacturing enterprises in the County that capitalize on one or more of the key resources of the County, including:*
 - Water – paper industry
 - Mineral reserves – iron, wollastonite, zinc, marble
 - Low-cost electricity – especially for aluminum reduction, zinc processing, paper production
 - Milk – cheese and yogurt production
 - Wood supply – building products and energy generation
 - Labor force - for all of the above but also for the metal trades that require employees who can solve mechanical problems and operate fabrication equipment.

It is important to note that most of these businesses produce “trade-able” products, i.e., products and services that are exported to customers who are located outside St. Lawrence County. The McKinsey Study highlighted the importance of maximizing such “trade-able” sector products as a key element in the future development of the County.

- *Proximity to Canada:* The County’s border with Ontario stretches for over 70 miles and hosts two bridge crossings. This partially integrates the County’s economy with eastern Ontario’s, resulting in Canadian firms with manufacturing facilities in the County as well as numerous cross-border warehousing operations which service both sides of the border. In the 1980s the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority’s light industrial park was home to a cluster of Canadian high-technology plants that included Mitel, Compas, Filtran, and a half dozen others. In part this was because of the growth of electronics manufacturing in the 1980s in Ottawa and in part because the OBPA and the St. Lawrence County IDA consistently courted such firms. Even now, the County is still home to a number of companies that have Canadian roots and/or have located here because of the border.

- *The County’s five colleges/universities:* Located in Canton, Potsdam, and Wanakena, the County’s five institutions of higher learning enrolled about 12,900 students in 2020 and employed about 3,000 faculty and staff. The



wages and salaries paid by these institutions support a web of retail and commercial establishments that serve the students and staff. In addition, several of the colleges have implemented or are developing entrepreneurship assistance resources for college affiliated and other local start-up enterprises.



As well as being key economic drivers of the County’s economy, the universities add to the diversity of the County’s culture by offering live performances, lectures, and other events for the community. Related art, culture and heritage organizations have developed to complement these offerings, providing cultural opportunities for residents and visitors, which is critical to quality of life and tourism appeal.



- *The beginnings of a knowledge-based enterprise cluster in the County:* Partly attributable to spin-off activities from the colleges, this cluster is clearly attracted by the workforce and culture sustained by the presence of so many colleges in the County. Resources like the Clarkson business incubators in three recently repurposed and renovated buildings (Peyton Hall, Damon Hall, and Old Main), the efforts being mounted by SUNY Potsdam to encourage the development of music businesses, and SUNY Canton’s planned Entrepreneurial Accelerator initiative are cases in point. While it is clearly too early to assert that such efforts have contributed enduringly to the County’s economy, the very fact that the leaders of the local colleges have established them as priorities is a strength for the County.
- *Stable employment opportunities provided by major State facilities in the County:* These include three NYS correctional facilities (though one has been slated for closure by NYS in 2022 – indicating the fragile nature of “stable” employment in the County), the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg, and the New York Power Authority’s facilities in Massena. As with the colleges, these enterprises bring State and other governmental revenues into the County, typically providing above average wages and benefits compared to other industries in the region, and their presence has supported a complementary network of businesses that supply goods and services to them and their employees.

- *Substantial hydropower and wood fuel resources:* These allow employers and residents alike to enjoy reasonable energy rates based on renewable resources and for the County to participate in the State’s renewable energy portfolio goals.



- *Access to natural gas from Canada:* All five population centers and many of the County’s other smaller communities are serviced by Liberty Utilities whose supply originates in Canada. This may not seem to be remarkable, but simple access to natural gas in such a decentralized and sparsely populated rural area is a unique advantage for such an area. Its absence would constitute a major weakness.

- *Health care availability:* The County has five hospitals (in Gouverneur, Massena, Ogdensburg, Potsdam, and Star Lake) to serve its decentralized population plus other health care organizations that provide nursing care and services to the County’s populations with disabilities. Four of the hospitals, together with United Helpers and St. Lawrence NYSARC, are among the top 20 employers in the County. Certainly, several of these institutions are economically challenged as the economics and environment of the health care industry change nationally. Nonetheless, several give evidence of adapting to these changes and are already making additional the capital and personnel investments that respond to their changing circumstances.

As of August 2019, St. Lawrence Health System (SLHS), which had earlier taken over management of the Gouverneur hospital system, and the Town of Massena announced that Massena Memorial Hospital would join SLHS. Therefore, three of the County’s five hospitals – Canton-Potsdam, Gouverneur, and Massena – are under uniform management (through SLHS). Clifton-Fine Hospital in Star Lake is already affiliated with Samaritan Health of Watertown and the expectation is this ongoing consolidation will enable the health care system to reduce overhead costs without detracting from the quantity and quality of care available.

- *Low crime rates:* The high level of perceived (and actual) public safety is a key quality of life measure that helps attract and keep people in the County, especially as other areas of the state and country wrestle with increasing crime and a high level of press attention on elevated crime rates.
- *Strong K-12 educational system:* The report card for the County’s primary schools places the County’s students at or higher than their New York State peers. According to the New York State Education Department Report Card for the 2019-20 school year, 86% of the County’s students graduated with Regents diploma, slightly higher than the NYS average, and 39% were recognized for Advanced Designation (even with the statewide numbers); and, the County’s junior and senior high students eclipse the grades of their peers in English, Algebra, Geometry, History, Living Environment, Earth Science and Physics. Moreover, the local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) system is receptive and able to quickly train the local workforce on skills needed in sectors that range from skilled trades needed by manufacturers to technicians needed for a variety of other industries.

- *Easy access to Canada’s highway system:* The County has easy access to Canada’s Route 401 at the Massena and Ogdensburg bridge crossings. These provide four-lane access east to Quebec and west to Toronto. The “401” not only connects the County with several of Canada’s major metropolitan, manufacturing, and financial centers, but also with the US mid-west (at Detroit) and with US Rt. 81 (in Alexandria Bay). The Ogdensburg crossing gives direct access to Canada’s Route 416 to Ottawa, making the County the closest US location to a foreign capital.
- *Air access:* Potsdam continues to make improvements to its airport facilities and to provide better services for business use and to serve small jets. Since the completion of the 2017 CEDS air access in the County has continued to improve with the addition of new airlines and routes in Ogdensburg and Massena. The Ogdensburg International Airport (OGS) now offers direct flights to Washington DC, and prior to the Covid pandemic had offered flights to Florida, which were popular both with Canadian travelers and residents of the region. Prior to the OGS airport expansion in October 2016, the airport handled fewer than 1,000 passengers per month, up until the pandemic OGS had been handling between 3,000 and 5,000 passengers per month.

The Massena International Airport now offers direct flights to Baltimore and Boston on Boutique Air. In short, through local, state, and federal efforts, air service into and out of the region has been greatly enhanced over the past few years, including by significant investments in runways, lighting and facility expansions.

In addition, the airports in Ottawa and Montreal are within easy driving distance of most of the County's population and provide access to more extensive networks of national and international air travel. It is important to recognize that (for example) people living in Massena and Ogdensburg are about an hour from major international airports. Because of low road traffic densities, travel times from the County to major airports are often less than they would be in over-built metropolitan areas.

- *Port facilities:* A deep water port located in Ogdensburg provides the County easy access to the St. Lawrence Seaway and, via this waterway, to the US mid-west and to Europe. The Ogdensburg Bridge & Port Authority (OBPA) has secured over \$20 million in state and federal assistance to double the capacity of the port.



The Federal Railroad Administration awarded \$800,000 to the OBPA to acquire new bulk handling equipment at the Port for rail and vessel unloading. The expansion project will add an additional berthing spot to the existing dock, allowing two vessels to moor at once, thereby reducing unloading costs. The port facility exported wood pellets from a local manufacturer during the 2019 shipping season. Additional cargoes handled by the port and railroad include road salt, wind turbine generators, large beer vats, agricultural products, etc.

- *Railroad service:* A main line railroad on its North/South axis connects the County to the outside world. That line and several short lines provide freight services to all five major communities in the County, as well as to its remote southeastern quadrant (where a 46-mile short line rail rehabilitation project is in the final stages of completion). One such short line, the New York & Ogdensburg Rail Line (“NYOG”) plays a crucial role in this rural area of New York State by connecting local industry with shipping lanes on the St. Lawrence Seaway. Its linkage to the Port of Ogdensburg is important to the local agricultural sector; renewable energy sector; and other industry sectors who need economic transportation facilities for the exportation of their products to their customers at home and abroad

The 2017 CEDS listed this rail service as one of the County’s strengths. The lynchpin of this strength was the main line service provided directly to four of the County’s five major communities by CSX, whose tracks connected the County with both Canada and the center of the State’s rail complex near Syracuse. In August 2019 CSX announced that it would sell its tracks between Massena and Liverpool to Canadian National Railway Company (after the deal receives regulatory approval). At this time, it is unknown whether Canadian National’s acquisition of the 220 miles of track would affect the quality of rail service to the County either positively or negatively and the proposed acquisition remains in regulatory limbo.

- *Broadband internet access:* The County’s major population centers and much of its more rural population are served by state-of-the-art broadband, in some cases by multiple suppliers. This is attributable partly to the backbone fiber Open Access Network installed by the Development Authority of the North Country over ten years ago and partly to the efforts of a local broadband company (Slic.com) to supply telecom services to many rural residents in the County. There are, however, gaps to fill in the County’s broadband infrastructure. According to BroadBandNow, about 94% of the County’s residents had access to 25-megabyte broadband service in 2021 compared with 98% statewide.
- *Extensive scenic and outdoor recreational resources:* The County’s relatively sparse population (38 people per square mile) has the advantage of affording ample acreages of greenspace and fresh water that not only attract tourists but are also a key component of the quality of life in the County for residents who want to hunt, fish, boat, engage in winter sports, or simply enjoy the great outdoors. The southwestern part of the County is in the Thousand Islands region and about a third of the County lies in the Adirondack Park – in which the County’s Five Ponds wilderness has one of the last stands of virgin timber in the State. Travel to the Thousand Islands’ attractions and to those of the central Adirondacks from anywhere in the County is an easy day trip.
- *Local and regional planning efforts:* There are number of local and regional planning initiatives and associated documents relevant to St. Lawrence County, including strategic, community development, comprehensive, and Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) revitalization plans. These plans reflect the input of stakeholder groups and often include a public outreach component that ratifies recommended actions/activities and priorities. They provide a concentrated source to inform economic and community development efforts and assess infrastructure needs. Aside from the fact that this CEDS has relied on many of the plans’ data, findings, and recommendations, they provide outlines of actions that the County’s decentralized communities and development organizations could take.

- *Support for development efforts:* There is substantial interest in and support for economic development on the part of educational institutions and government agencies at all levels. A few examples include:
 - The New York Power Authority’s financial support of loan and equity investment funds, operational costs of economic development organizations, and the NYPA Study cited earlier.
 - Clarkson University’s Center for Advanced Materials Processing, Reh Center for Entrepreneurship, and Shipley Center for Innovation, not to mention the three incubator buildings mentioned earlier.
 - St. Lawrence University’s sponsorship of the North Country Symposium, for more than 15 years.
 - The Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority’s efforts to market its two industrial parks and its other facilities, including the expansion of the Ogdensburg International Airport to attract Canadian passengers.
 - Local communities’ financial support for local development agencies and St. Lawrence County’s support for the IDA, the St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Observers, including McKinsey, have contended that the numerous professionally staffed economic development agencies that operate in the County, many of which administer loan funds or other development incentives, “are fragmented, typically have mandated functions, and are difficult for the average County resident to access...” (Study, p. 3). While there may be some accuracy in these observations, given the decentralization of the County’s population centers, an equally cogent case can be made that having localized development functions which work in turn with the County’s primary development organization, the IDA, is one of the County’s strengths because it enlists people who are familiar with local conditions spread across 2,800 square miles in the service of the County’s development. One purpose of this CEDS is to provide these organizations with a plan around which they can structure their activities and modify to suit their own communities.

- *Resources for Economic Development:* In addition to the local support for development efforts just described, the County also benefits from development programs and incentives issuing from the State and federal governments.

The New York Power Authority has funded the Greater Massena Economic Development Fund (originally at \$1 million), the Seaway Private Equity Corporation (initially \$10 million), the River Valley Redevelopment Agency (RVRA – initially \$16 million), and most recently, the Northern New York Economic Development Fund (funded by NNY Power Proceeds).

NYPA has created all of these programs for use in the County in support of business attraction and retention initiatives. And, these are in addition to the low-cost electric power it makes available through RVRA and the Massena Electric Department (20 megawatts) and the Preservation Power Program (over 230 megawatts).



The County IDA has a long-standing relationship with Empire State Development that includes cooperative business attraction, infrastructure financing, project incentive development, and sustained efforts of working together to assist in the retention and expansion of existing firms within St. Lawrence County.



North Country Regional Economic Development Council

In addition to these efforts, St. Lawrence County has participated in the activities of the North Country Regional Economic Development Council (NCREDC), one of the ten such councils created by the Governor in 2010.

In light of this participation, and the integration of St. Lawrence County within the New York State North Country economic development region, the latest Regional Council “2021 North Country Progress Report” was used as an input document for this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

In addition to the fact that the County Board of Legislators’ Chair serves as a member of the Council, staff from the IDA and the County’s Planning Department have served on key committees of the NCREDC. Furthermore, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and governments have received funding from the multiple State agencies through the annual Consolidated Funding Application process that the State implements through the regional councils. Not only was a St. Lawrence County applicant – the IDA – the recipient of the largest award ever made to a North Country applicant (almost \$10 million to reconstruct the Newton Falls Secondary Line) but over the first 10 years of the REDC program the State awarded over \$65 million to County applicants.

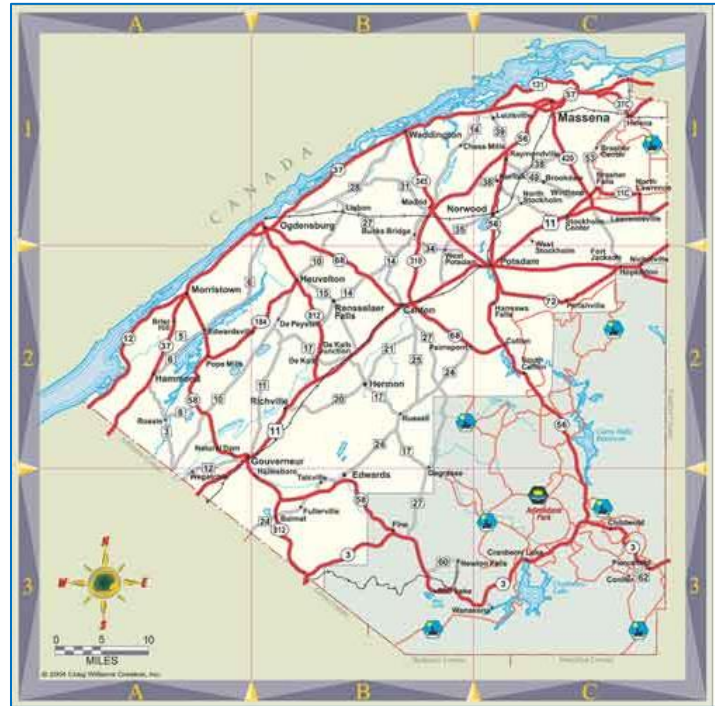
The County is also within the project focus area outlined in the Northern Border Regional Commission for federal funding in support of economic and community development projects.

And, finally, the County businesses can access at least eight other locally-originated loan funds that complement bank and equity investments – three of which are supervised by the County IDA’s Local Development Corporation and Civic Development Corporation. While these funds’ assets are relatively modest, they are especially responsive to small business needs.

Weaknesses

The relative competitive disadvantages of St. Lawrence County include:

- *Employer Isolation:* Small and mid-size employers throughout the County have testified that their ability to solve problems and to capitalize on opportunities is inhibited by the difficulties they have in socializing with and learning from their colleagues. This is partly because they have little time to engage in such activities because they spend their time running their businesses. But, their difficulties in this area are multiplied by the fact that the County's businesses are so decentralized, both because the County's population is so sparse and because it is distributed across many small communities that are located at substantial distances from one another.



For example, a business in Massena is well over an hour distant from one in Gouverneur. Hence, the lack of a central place in the County which would allow business owners and executives to “see” much more of one another fragments the County's business community and inhibits the sharing of information and even doing business with one another. And, while modern telecommunications do help overcome such isolation to some extent, personal contact among employers is limited compared with what may be the case in a county whose economy focuses on a core community (e.g., Watertown, Plattsburgh, and the larger cities across the country).

- *Non-tradeable enterprises:* The NYPA Study highlighted that only 40% of the County's Gross Domestic Product was created by non-trade-able sectors. The key thrust of this observation is that the County as a whole is not selling enough of its products and services to the rest of the world and that not enough income is coming *into* the County from elsewhere.

Key non-trade-able sectors include government, K-12 educational institutions, and health care facilities which, though they may be major employers, and though they may attract transfer payments from the federal and State governments, nonetheless serve primarily local users and do not on balance increase the in-flow of wealth to the County. While this may not be the result of any economic policies or planning, it does result in less-wealth generating activity in the County. Whether it can be reversed by development policy, planning or initiatives remains to be seen.

- *Population decline:* The fact that the County’s population has declined (by nearly 5%) since its 1980 highpoint of 114,000 down to 108,505 is by itself a significant danger sign. Seldom do growing economies and population decline go together, in fact the opposite is nearly always the case, economies struggle significantly with falling pupations. Equally important is the change in the composition of the County’s population. First, as is true elsewhere in the country, the overall average age of the County’s population is increasing – and to a greater degree than in many other parts of the State. Second, a disproportionate number of the County’s youth are electing to leave the County for jobs in other areas, partially masked in the population statistics by the presence of a substantial number of temporary younger residents at the County’s colleges.
- *Ownership transition:* Whether on the farms, in the plants, or in the offices, the owners/founders of many of the County’s long-stable businesses are aging and the County will soon be faced with a rash of sales and (possibly) shut-downs that may deprive the County of key services and employment opportunities. This ties in with the youth out-migration mentioned earlier because many of the aging owners have no family inheritors to whom they can transfer their businesses. The County’s Agricultural Plan (2016) prepared by the County Planning Department has documented that this seems especially to be true in the farm economy.
- *Deteriorating workforce:* The 2017 CEDS (p. 12) listed an adaptable workforce as one of the continuing strengths of the County, in spite of the signs of the deterioration of the workforce described in the report’s “weakness” section (p. 17). As noted in the 2017 CEDS, the County’s employers have reported that it has become increasingly hard to find and retain properly trained employees which has only been exacerbated by the same nationwide workforce issues resulting from the pandemic.

What is going on here – i.e., that properly trained workers are becoming increasingly scarce – is a national, not just a local, phenomenon. But, in addition to the training level of prospective employees, employers are also reporting that it is increasingly difficult for them to find even untrained employees. In other words, they are saying that there are simply not enough workers to fill the available jobs. It is clear that part of the cause of this shortage of workers can be attributed to demographic trends that are described in the new sub-section of the CEDS under “Threats” below.

- *Deteriorating infrastructure:* Of course, as with any mature community, the entire country is faced with the problem of aging water and sewer lines, roads and bridges in need of repair and replacement, and various other community infrastructure elements be either outdated or insufficient, but just saying that infrastructure is deteriorating everywhere does not magically solve the problem of deteriorated roads and bridges, water and sewer systems, public buildings and recreational facilities, and other public venues in St. Lawrence County. Not only will significant investments need to be made to bring these facilities back to standard – requiring increased taxes to do so – but the residents’ quality of life is suffering. Associated with this, as McKinsey noted, the County’s Main streets are in need of improvement to make their communities more attractive.

- *Deteriorating housing stock:* Poverty and poor housing go hand in hand, but the County’s high poverty level is only part of the explanation for the deterioration of the County’s housing stock. Another reason is that, like the population, it is aging rapidly. Much of it was built when the economy was much healthier, both in the population centers and on the farms and in the hamlets that served them. Regardless of the reasons, the deterioration of the housing stock has made it difficult for middle class renters/buyers to find satisfactory housing at affordable prices. In addition, the deteriorated housing stock has contributed to the deterioration of many of the County’s downtowns and Main Streets.
- *Redundant facilities.* The fact that there are three operating airports in the County – two with regularly scheduled passenger service – and five full-service hospitals are explained by history and geography. Of course, these facilities – especially the hospitals – are major employers, but duplicated administrative costs raise questions about such facilities’ longer-term economic viability. It is reasonable to suppose that duplicative administrative services could be reduced if such facilities were consolidated, especially since – with the exception of the recently upgraded Ogdensburg airport – they only draw customers from outside the County to a limited extent.

The County’s health care facilities are at best semi-trade-able enterprises. It is difficult to gauge, especially when considering the County’s decentralized population, whether consolidation of such facilities would result in lower costs *and* better services. It is important to note, that regardless of local opinion, state, and federal policy, as well as national healthcare trends, will likely prompt numerous affiliations and consolidations within the County healthcare industry in the coming years.

- *Dependence on government jobs:* As observed earlier, the NYPA Study highlighted that government employment is a key non-trade-able sector of the County’s economy. There are 44 local governments in the County – plus 17 local school districts – plus numerous State and federal government offices and facilities. It is at the very least arguable that this complex network of organizations could deliver services at the same (or better) levels for less cost if the administrative duplications were reduced. While it is easy to posit this, it is much tougher actually to do it. As with redundant healthcare facilities, it is difficult to gauge whether consolidation of such organizations would necessarily result in lower costs and better services.
- *Limited access to retail choices:* Rural St. Lawrence County is home to one enclosed retail shopping mall (the St. Lawrence Centre, located in Massena) which has struggled to remain relevant over the past decade with the rise in online shopping that was amplified during the pandemic, and further impacted by the closing of the border to Canadian customers. The County’s limited retail choices often leads to residents shopping outside the County – whether at brick & mortar stores in urban-area shopping malls or online retailers – for clothing and other specialty products.
- *Network of resources can be a mystery for businesses.* Although one of the County’s strengths may be the range of business support services and economic development organizations with missions to provide resources to develop businesses in the region, the network of service providers can be confusing to navigate for businesses and entrepreneurs. This linkage failure is exacerbated by the County’s decentralized population centers, which makes it more difficult for entrepreneurs in one community to know how service providers located in another can help them.

- *Financially precarious status of local taxing jurisdictions:* Some of the County's local governments and school districts, led by the County itself, are among the most fiscally vulnerable in the State. These fiscal stresses have taken a long time to accumulate, and they are likely to take an equally long time to remedy. While the economic growth that will result from the implementation of this CEDS will ultimately lead to the generation of additional tax revenues for the various jurisdictions, the present fiscal stresses could restrict their willingness to invest in development projects by providing temporary tax abatements and/or other support for expanding or relocating enterprises. In addition, their financial difficulties have contributed to the deterioration of the public infrastructure that supports existing and future businesses.
- *Access to affordable, quality, childcare:* Childcare is increasingly being recognized as critical to the health of communities across the county. Quality, affordable childcare allows parents to participate in the economy and pursue careers while providing a safe space for children to go to socialize and learn. Without access to childcare, parents are unable to work, and businesses are unable to attract and retain talent. The North Country region has identified childcare as a critical need to promote economic and workforce development in the region.
- *Mindset:* Many long-term County residents are convinced that the County is in a spiral of decline that seems to have no obvious end. This conviction is not simply the general pessimism of a population haunted by the national specter of rural decline, real though such decline may be. There is ample basis for the residents' discouragement – realities like the disappearance of major manufacturing and resource extraction enterprises, the departure of value-added businesses in the forest products and dairy industries, demographic realities of a declining and aging population, the out-migration of young people, deterioration of the housing stock, stagnant per capita and household incomes, and persistent high rates of poverty and unemployment, to name just a few.

It is faint consolation that relative economic decline seems to characterize much of rural America in the early 21st century and that conditions are often worse elsewhere in the State and across the country. Whatever the mindset's causes; it may be a contributing factor to a low level of entrepreneurial ambition in the County. While there are doubtless many exceptions to this assertion, the long-term economic realities cited in the previous paragraph have resulted in newcomers and entrepreneurs reporting that they are frequently asked by long-term residents the following question(s): why would you want to move here/start a business here/expand your business here? The presumption is that the land of opportunity is elsewhere. Such a mindset does not provide a propitious foundation for development initiatives.

Opportunities

- *Continuing Initiatives Outlined in the NYPA Study:* The Study recommended that the County pursue signature and supporting strategic initiatives, some of which continue to represent key opportunities for the County and align with our sectors development, including:
 - ✓ Accelerate agriculture and agri-business by:
 - Building a greenhouse cluster
 - Finding markets for the County’s agricultural products
 - ✓ Re-energize advanced materials manufacturing by:
 - Enhancing efforts to attract materials firms
 - Integrating talent building
 - ✓ Expand small business by:
 - Launching an entrepreneur accelerator
 - Providing small business services
 - ✓ Revitalize communities, tourism, and mindsets by:
 - Making St. Lawrence County the fishing capital of the world
 - Coordinating tourism marketing
- *Advanced materials:* Since the early 19th century St. Lawrence County has produced and frequently processed materials from its mines, forests, fields, and mills. One explanation for the disappearance of many of these enterprises over the last 50 years is that they produced raw and/or partly processed commodities that competed globally with lower-cost producers. McKinsey proposed in the NYPA Study that the County focus on developing and/or attracting firms that produce highly-engineered, advanced materials – whether these involve aluminum, glass, zinc, wood biomass, or other materials whose preparation and processing will add substantial value – and then either sell them at a premium price to global manufacturers of final products or (better still) attract such final producer operations to the County.

If the County is to successfully pursue advanced manufacturing opportunities, it must focus on enterprises that put a premium on the types of business advantages that St. Lawrence County offers – not the least of which may be the proximity of raw materials, plentiful fresh water, low-cost energy, and the resources at within the local colleges and universities.

- *Agricultural diversification:* We will continue to explore ways in which the County could diversify its agricultural economy, including development of all-season covered agriculture – selling fresh vegetables, herbs, and flowers to northeastern metro areas whose markets are currently being supplied by growers a continent away. The pandemic highlighted the need to bring the safe production of food closer to the population who will consume it.



- *Build upon existing key sectors within the County economy:* While much is made in this, and previous, CEDS of the challenges presented by the size and dispersion of the County’s population, communities, and facilities, the reality is that there are several very strong sectors within the County economy which have developed over time as a result, in part, of the County’s unique geography and make up. These sectors (Agriculture, Education, Financial Services, Food Processing, Healthcare and Human Services, Manufacturing, Renewable Energy, Technology, and Tourism) are profiled in the Action Plan of this CED. The sectors build upon the County’s natural, human, and educational resources and are in varying stages of development and maturity. By allocating resources and specific attention to these sectors, local and county developers have a strong starting point to build and enhance the local economy.

As an example, there is little doubt that the processed food industry has changed dramatically over the past 40 years, both nationally and locally. There are doubtless competitive forces at play that explain the exit of traditional mainstream processing plants from the County and understanding these forces is essential as St. Lawrence County decides whether it can identify how the County’s raw materials, especially milk, can be processed locally and thereby give the processing companies an advantage over their competition.

- *Capitalize on other local strengths to develop new tradeable sectors:* The 2017 CEDS drew attention to the fact that the County has significant strengths in a variety of sectors that could provide a basis for its expanding economy. Three paper mills continue to operate in the County; the key raw materials for the industry – water, fiber, and power – continue to be major resources. Several machine shop and metals fabrication businesses call the County their homes. The fact that the Crane School of Music is located at SUNY Potsdam could leverage music industry businesses. The location of five colleges in the County could prompt additional college service businesses to locate in the County – to provide services to other colleges as well as the ones nearby.
- *The Tourism economy:* Since 2017, major strides have been made developing the tourism economy of the County, especially by the communities of Massena and Waddington and the SLC Chamber of Commerce, in promoting the St. Lawrence River fishery as a “destination” for bass enthusiasts, appealing to both competitive bass and individual sport fishing aficionados alike. In 2021, St. Lawrence County hosted its third BassMasters Elite tournament in four years. These and other events for both bass and other sports fish – e.g., carp and muskies – have raised the profile of the County as an increasingly attractive venue for international fishing enthusiasts.

“The St. Lawrence is not only healthy right now, but it seems to be showing off.

“There have been years where a spirited internal debate was required to assign the top spot in the rankings. This year was easy after looking at the unbelievable weights being produced at the Upper St. Lawrence River. And on top of that, the scenery is stunning. If you are looking for the best angling experience in the country right now, the St. Lawrence River should be your next destination.”

James Hall, Editor
Bassmaster Magazine

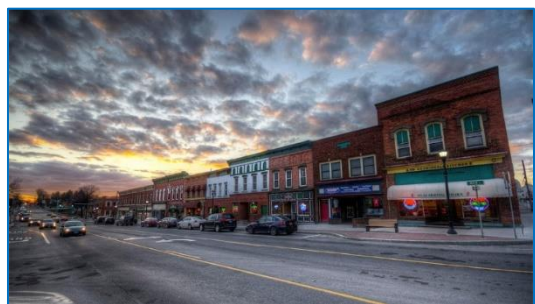
Since 2017 several other notable events have occurred that will help the County's tourism efforts gain traction. In 2018 the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators (BOL) came to an agreement with the St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce (the BOL's Tourism Promotion Agent - TPA) to allocate a percentage of the County's occupancy tax collection to the TPA, with a three-year commitment to a 5% increase. The annual allocation, which was formerly set at a dollar amount, per annual discretion, ensures greater sustainability in tourism investment. The commitment to funding provides a platform to ensure local match for tourism grants, and the professional staff needed to execute a strategic marketing plan and related tourism development initiatives.

These additional resources, together with a Power Proceeds Board Allocation from the New York Power Authority, have also allowed the Chamber to hire a tourism events specialist. The focus of this initiative is to seek and recruit new, large scale tourism events that maximize our recreational and other assets, as well as support existing events that have greater potential for attracting overnight stays. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure a consistent schedule of events, which justifies tourism development in the form of lodging, retail, and restaurants facilities. A marketing complement to this effort is the redesign of the Fishcap.net website, which features events and the ability for tournament organizers to host microsites on the website.

Since the CEDS was completed, the Chamber has also developed a new destination brand for the County. The brand – focused on the tagline 'Life Undiscovered' – has allowed for a professional application on marketing, signage, and apparel, and embraced by organizations and efforts around the County (Grasse River Blueway signage, for example).

- *Come (back) here:* There is no denying that the bright lights – not to mention economic opportunities – of the big cities have for centuries attracted people away from their rural American homes. Countering this age-old pattern will be a challenge, especially in light of 2020 Census information which shows an acceleration in the movement out of rural American to metropolitan locations. What is not clear, however, is how much the Census data captures the flight of residents from metro America during the pandemic. This development was felt throughout the County as former (and new) residents sought rural havens with more living space, and healthier outdoor recreational opportunities.

And, there remains the potential that some of the students who came to the County to go to school at one of its colleges – and then left for the metropolis – may be interested in some day returning to the communities of their alma maters because they have become disillusioned with the stresses of urban life.



Main Street Canton, NY

In addition, it is assumed that a significant number of urban and suburban natives – the great majority of who probably have never heard of St. Lawrence County – are looking for the same kind of less hectic environment to which they can relocate, especially when they start to raise families.

So, the opportunity is here; the challenge is for the County to figure out ways to identify and attract all three kinds of metro renegades to the County, who ideally will bring their businesses and/or their business ideas, skills, capital, and spirit of enterprise to the County with them.

Of course, it's not enough for the County simply to be non-metro; it is only one of many, many rural areas in the country that can offer a less hectic alternative location for living and working. The challenge for developers is to fashion and market a compelling case that St. Lawrence County should be a destination of choice for people who can conduct their businesses profitably in a locale that combines the best of both worlds – small town culture with comfortable proximity to the wider world of Ottawa, Montreal, Burlington, and New York's Thruway cities. This initiative does not need to attract thousands of people to the County to make an impact. A few dozen of the above-mentioned relocatees, with their businesses/business ideas, capital, and energy would provide a significant lift to the County's economy.

If such people are to relocate to the County, it is essential that the County's communities have "downtowns" that are livable and inviting. The deterioration of the County's main streets has already been cited but it is essential for the success of any "come (back) here" initiatives that the County and its communities support projects that develop and redevelop both privately and publicly owned facilities, including cultural and recreational venues. If the County's unique sales proposition is that a metro renegade can live better here than somewhere else in rural America, then the County's communities must pay focused attention to the quality of life that "in-comers" will experience when setting local resource priorities.

Threats

- *Remote Location:* Since it is impossible to change St. Lawrence County's location, the consequences imposed by the County's relative isolation will continue to hamper its development. This is especially true for some of the County's key economic drivers – for example, dairy production and processing, paper and metals manufacturing, and higher education. These are trade-able sectors for whom more difficult access to and from the outside world translates into a competitive disadvantage.

It is important to note that the County's perceived remoteness is not just a result of geography. Improved highway and other communications infrastructure could provide the County and its residents with better opportunities to diversify and grow the economy. Of course such improvements would require massive public investment of the kind that requires State and federal government participation. Whether such investments will be forthcoming during increasingly difficult times is unknown, no matter how much effort local developers put into the cause. Furthermore, if the County's developers prioritize massive infrastructure initiatives, no matter how important in the long run such initiatives might be, it will divert attention and resources away from more immediately productive development initiatives.

- *The Regional Economies in Nearby Canadian Population Centers:* While other border locations, like Buffalo and Plattsburgh, may have seen greater investment from Canadian-based firms, neither Ottawa nor the smaller cities in eastern Ontario located near the St. Lawrence County border are primarily manufacturing centers. For example, as the capitol of Canada, Ottawa is obviously in many ways a "government" town, and many of its larger governmental and related-agency employers are not realistic targets for investing and creating jobs in St. Lawrence County. Comparatively, the Montreal region in Quebec and the southwestern/Toronto region of Ontario are home to many more manufacturing operations, especially in the aerospace, defense, and automotive industries, but have a greater proximity to the other border regions in New York State. Additionally, unlike both Plattsburgh and Buffalo, St. Lawrence County is not situated on one of the highly developed travel corridors connecting Canada to the industrial and population centers of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwestern United States.
- *Population decentralization:* Geography is destiny when it comes to the County's lack of a central place as well. The strategies its developers devise must be compatible with the fact that the County's population – and the places where they work, shop, go to school, get medical care, etc. – will be scattered across 2,800 square miles. This decentralization and lack of larger, well-known central community makes the costs of redundant operational and capital facilities almost inevitable and makes promoting the region to prospective companies, tourists, students, and residents all the more difficult.
- *Continuing vulnerability to international commodity demand/supply fluctuations.* Milk, aluminum, zinc, paper, wood biomass – all are materials produced by companies whose operations are dictated directly by international trends over which the local companies have little or no control. While farms and mining and manufacturing companies continue to be major employers in the County's economy, the same shocks that have (for example) reduced employment in aluminum reduction and fabrication from about 4,000 in the 1970s to 650 today may continue. What makes this especially discouraging is that there seems to be little or nothing that local initiatives can do to impact these global trends.

- *Milk pricing:* The price that County farmers get for the milk they produce is partly affected by the global market for milk, but it is also affected by a complex regulatory system that may protect farmers from the worst effects of a totally free market but also inhibits them from benefiting in times of high demand.



Blake & Carmen Gendebien's Farm, Lisbon
NY

- *Decline of the family farm:* Farm owners in the County are as a group getting older; many are nearing retirement age and few younger farmers can afford the investment required to own a modern farm. Many of the County's older farmers have already sold out to larger farms. Reportedly, few of the younger generation are interested in taking over their family farms, even if they had the capital to do so. Many have already left the farm to work elsewhere in the County or have departed for other areas and other jobs. In short, the County's farm economy is losing both its entrepreneurs and its traditional workforce.

In spite of this, and while the number of the County's farms has declined precipitously, the size of them – when measured by the amount of milk produced – has increased substantially. Furthermore, as the County's 2016 Agricultural Plan says, between 2002 and 2012, "despite fewer dairy farms and a decline in the number of dairy cows, dairy production volume grew over the past decade and dominates as an economic powerhouse to the county's economy." With this said, it remains true that the ever-increasing size of dairy operations will continue to create stresses in the traditional dairy economy that must be addressed.

- *Continuing exposure to international currency fluctuations:* Fluctuations in the value of the US dollar, especially in relation to the Canadian dollar, can create havoc with cross-border trade between Ontario (and the rest of Canada) and the County. Recently the Canadian dollar has been trading at historic lows and, though there has been some increase in its value over the last six months, its low value will continue to create real stresses for many border community retail, service, and tourist enterprises. The point is that this threat is another global condition that local initiatives seem powerless to affect.
- *Reputation of New York as a high-cost state for doing business:* A frequently cited difficulty in attracting and maintaining employers in the County is New York's reputation as a high tax and cost state. To add to the difficulty, the State has a reputation for regulatory complexity that parallels its high tax image. The County can do little or nothing to affect the State's reputation, whether deserved or not.
- *Increasing cost of college education and associated college-related debt, along with rise of online options:* One of the County's success stories is the growth and stability of the economic activity generated by the County's five colleges. Though a fair number of the students attending them come from the County, for the most part the colleges represent a trade-able sector of the County's economy, i.e., they bring revenue into the County from elsewhere, analogously to the way the sale of milk does.

The question is whether the steadily increasing costs of attending college and the increase in student debt will result in the near future in declines in the revenues flowing to local colleges.

This is of course a national question that has received much attention in recent years as some pundits have observed that the whole country is witnessing a “higher education bubble” that is bound to “pop” sooner or later, coupled with the expected decline in the number of students tied to the 2008 recession. One thing is sure: a slowdown in the national consumption of higher educational services could have a seriously negative effect on the County’s economy if it means that fewer students are attracted to the County’s five colleges.



Clarkson University

No one is more aware of the potential reduction in demand for higher educational services than the college themselves. The County’s colleges have stepped up their recruitment efforts and have uniformly tried to develop programs that give them unique competitive advantages in the college market, but most of the nation’s other colleges are doubtless doing the same. Additionally, the increase in acceptance of online education options that occurred during the pandemic presents a challenge to our - and all in-person - educational institutions.

- *Bright lights, big city:* The chances are that, no matter how sensible a development strategy the County adopts, substantial numbers of the young people born and/or raised here will migrate to cities. Migration of the young from rural America to the big cities is nothing new, nor is it confined to St. Lawrence County; rural out-migration has characterized the US economy since at least the late nineteenth century. The County can minimize this drain by doing its best to develop good employment opportunities and quality of life options that can minimize this drain, but it is unlikely that anything it can do will totally stanch the bleeding. As mentioned in the Opportunities section above, what the County might be able to succeed in doing is to bring some of these people back when they have established themselves in business and started to raise families.

Deteriorating workforce: The current workforce situation in St. Lawrence Co. has two major features – the workers’ training levels and the simple availability of enough workers. The 2017 CEDS focused on the training levels of the County’s workforce. Since then, it has become apparent to employers that the pandemic, coupled with the County’s aging workforce and the continuing out-migration of many younger workers to more prosperous locales, especially the larger cities, have made it increasingly difficult for them to recruit even untrained workers.

C. STRATEGIC DIRECTION/ACTION PLAN

Vision Statement

St. Lawrence County will build a healthy, diverse, and growing economy that will create good jobs for us and our children through the implementation of economic and workforce development initiatives that capitalize on our current strengths, assets and attributes while mitigating the factors limiting our development.

Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Identify, retain, and expand employers and startups within the County by prioritizing activities that assist in ensuring viability through more profitable operations.

Objectives:

- a. Support “primary” industries, i.e., enterprises that sell significant percentages of their products and services to customers largely located outside the County. This may include government and not-for-profit enterprises – such as the universities and State correctional institutions – whose revenues largely come from out-of-County sources.
- b. Utilize the County’s skilled workers to convert its natural resource materials into value-added products for sale, in addition to exporting the raw materials elsewhere for processing.
- c. Place value on local ownership or control. This includes enterprises whose owners may be reaching retirement age and assisting them may involve helping them find and finance new local owners to whom they can transfer their enterprises.
- d. Strengthen operations that provide products or services that support primary (tradable sector) enterprises located in the County (e.g., the local machine shops).
- e. Support companies in the key sectors already in the County, as their success builds upon our strengths and connects to an existing local or regional cluster.
- f. Encourage and work with entrepreneurs and businesses that can supply products and services which give County residents a locally produced or delivered choice.

Goal #2: Elevate and grow the workforce through improved employer/job seeker matching systems, locally customized training initiatives, and better connections with the education sector.

Objectives:

- a. Differentiate St. Lawrence County from other potential business destinations by providing direct, on-the-ground linkages between business enterprises, job seekers, and workforce support systems.
- b. Develop and administer locally managed funds to assist with the training of new and existing employees and talent building programs.
- c. Build upon the SUNY Canton CREST Center CDL-A training model to create other specialized training programs and initiatives to fill local industry gaps.
- d. Work with local school districts to provide contacts and transition assistance services to graduates who are seeking to enter the workforce with employers in the County.
- e. Build effective working relationship with Fort Drum’s Transition Services office to matching transitioning soldiers and/or spouses with job or educational opportunities in the County.
- f. Outreach new residents, including the trailing spouses from major employers such as the colleges and hospitals, to add these individuals to the pool of potential and new workers in the County workforce.

Goal #3: Promote outside investment and bring new firms to the County by focusing resources on markets that can be reached effectively.

Objectives:

- a. Continue to promote the County as a destination to Canadian firms seeking a US location.
- b. Seek out new firms in primary industries, i.e., their products and services will be primarily sold to customers largely located outside the County, or those which will provide products or services that support primary (tradable sector) enterprises located in the County.
- c. Leveraging the County's assets, pursue firms which will add to or complement the key sectors of the County economy.
- d. Attract firms which add value to the County's existing physical resources and/or capitalize on the existing workforce in the County.
- e. Attract firms providing products and services that give County residents a locally produced or delivered option.

Goal #4: Initiate a systemic economic development research program that will develop, on an ongoing basis, new ideas to be converted into future development initiatives and actions.

Objectives:

- a. Research new industries, companies, or development resources to support the key sectors of the County economy.
- b. Explore the natural resource potential of the County as a means for expanded economic activity and future growth, as well as proper protections to sustain those resources.
- c. Work with development and industry partners to capitalize on low-cost and renewable energy assets of the County.
- d. Explore creation of new development incentives and programs to assist existing, expanding, and evolving industries.
- e. Partner with local universities to maximize both their potential as economic development engines and the research and development capabilities they offer to business entities in the County.

Goal #5: Maintain and enhance the County's physical infrastructure and make the communities of the County attractive and vibrant places for current and potential residents.

Objectives:

- a. Find resources to upgrade and improve the existing municipal infrastructure in the County.
- b. Redevelop unused or underutilized commercial and manufacturing properties and assist existing manufacturers and related businesses to modernize and expand.
- c. Position the County for future development success by developing new industrial parks, sites, and buildings and the supporting and surrounding infrastructure required to make these sites ready for investment activity.
- d. Assist in the development of more vibrant and attractive downtown and gateway locations within the communities of the County.
- e. Improve the housing stock within the communities of the County for individuals and families across a range of affordability options.
- f. Capitalize on the unique waterfront and natural landscape advantages of the County to attract a range of new development activities, including housing, tourism, arts and cultural venues, retail, and commercial projects.

Key Sectors of the St. Lawrence County Economy

The preservation and growth of job opportunities and business investment are supported when there is a concentration of enterprises within a business sector operating within close proximity to one another. Typically, there is a natural advantage within a geography (transportation, workforce, natural resources, etc.) that has encouraged the growth of a sector. This is certainly the case in St. Lawrence County, examples of which include water and land resources supporting the development of renewable hydroelectric and solar projects, agricultural, and manufacturing facilities. The sectors of the County economy are in many cases connected to larger regional and New York State clusters of businesses and industries.

The Action Plan of this CEDS will be implemented with a focus on the sectors of the County which have the greatest potential for reaching the above listed goals – job retention and expansion through assisting profitable operations, fostering locally-originated startups, promoting outside investment, researching future development initiatives and actions, and maintaining and enhancing the County’s infrastructure to make the communities of the County attractive and vibrant places.

These sectors include:

- Agriculture and Forest Products
- Education
- Financial Services
- Food Processing
- Healthcare and Human Services
- Manufacturing
- Renewable Energy
- Technology
- Tourism

Agriculture

St. Lawrence County’s agricultural and agri-business sectors are “growing” – thanks to good soils, low-cost renewable energy, and a cow-friendly climate. Some of the world’s safest, most wholesome, and delicious food and dairy products are grown, processed, and packed fresh on the County’s farms, greenhouses, and in our cheese and yogurt plants. There are also a number of forest product operations that manage, harvest, and utilize regional wood fiber resources for export and to supply local and regional processing operations. The county is home to 1,253 farms on 342,595 acres of land, according to the 2017 Agriculture Census. While the majority of these farms and resulting sales revenues are related to dairy and field crops, there is an increasing number of small, direct-to-consumer producers that includes 462 livestock and specialty crop producers, 59 vegetable farms, 33 fruit and nut producers, and 32 greenhouse operators.

St. Lawrence County boasts an abundance of affordable land that is subject to limited development pressures. Additionally, the agricultural community is supported by an active group of local organizations, including the Cornell Cooperative Extension, St. Lawrence County Farm Bureau, Soil and Water Conservation District, St. Lawrence County Maple Producers Association, GardenShare, the Local Living Venture, and the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency.

Education

St. Lawrence County is home to five highly regarded colleges and universities, 18 local school districts and many vocational tech programs, offering outstanding education options from K-12 and beyond. Our colleges and universities offer degrees in a wide variety of concentrations and, in addition to their own importance in the local economy, offer a wide variety of collaboration opportunities with local and potential business partners.

Clarkson University is a nationally ranked research university offering more than 50 comprehensive programs in business, engineering, science, liberal arts, health sciences, and environmental studies. Clarkson has an international reputation in the field of Advanced Materials Science, Biotechnology, Environment & Energy, Entrepreneurship, and Global Supply Chain Management, and was recently named one of the top ten colleges for producing engineers.

St. Lawrence University, a private university, is a collaborative community of learners. This Liberal Arts university is highly regarded for the flexibility of education tailored to each student. The University's multi-field major program allows students to design their own course of study.

SUNY Canton has grown to become a leader in technology education. It's home to the county's Small Business Development Center and CREST: Career Ready Education and Success Training, offering customized workforce development training.

SUNY Potsdam was founded in 1816, making it one of America's first 50 colleges, and the oldest in the SUNY system. SUNY Potsdam is divided into three schools with more than 40 majors offered: Arts and Sciences, Music, and Teacher Education and is home to the Crane School of Music, a world-renowned leader in music and music education.

Located in the heart of the six million-acre Adirondack Park, the SUNY ESF Ranger School in Wanakena offers a unique educational experience in a spectacular natural setting. The 2,800-acre campus supports the field-based education that is a hallmark of the ranger school, educating students for careers in environmental conservation, forestry, and surveying.

Collectively, the education sector is a large employer and a prime generator of economic impact in the County. By attracting students, improving the local communities, building the workforce, and reaching into other industries, this sector offers tremendous potential for continued growth in St. Lawrence County.



Financial Services

Numerous local financial institutions with multiple branches and locations are headquartered in St. Lawrence County, including Massena Savings and Loan, North Country Savings Bank, SeaComm Federal Credit Union, and St. Lawrence Federal Credit Union. Additionally, Community Bank has a large deposit operations back-office facility in Canton in addition to a branch network that includes banks in most of the larger communities in the County.

In addition to Community Bank, Key Bank and NBT Bank operate numerous branch locations and have active commercial, governmental, and investment operations serving the County.

According to the US Census Bureau American Community Survey, over 1,100 individuals are employed in St. Lawrence County in the Business and Financial Services sector. The prevalence of low-cost power, available facilities, and the ability of the County's education systems to provide a future workforce presents an opportunity for the further development of the financial services sector in St. Lawrence County.

Food Processing

Within a day's drive or less, food processing operations can reach the markets of the largest cities in the northeast U.S. and eastern Canada from St. Lawrence County, including New York City, Boston, Chicago, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. This puts these operations, which often have product expiration date logistical considerations, within easy reach millions of both U.S. and Canadian consumers.

Additionally, in a regional agriculture market that generates over \$200 million in annual sales, area farmers are great supply chain partners – providing food processors with an abundant local supply of locally-produced dairy and agricultural products. As a result, food processing companies have long utilized the advantages in St. Lawrence County, including our lower-cost power solutions, sprawling farmland, and developed municipal water and wastewater treatment infrastructure, to produce a variety of food products.

As communities and industries work to adapt to changing climate conditions, including longer drought periods hitting the central and western U.S., it is expected that the continued viability of transporting products that are predominantly water will come under increasing pressure. The abundance of water, including clean surface and water table reserves, in St. Lawrence County gives food processing companies a significant advantage to process food products here and supply the 100-million people that live close by.

Crop, dairy, egg, poultry, and other meat products are all parts of a growing food processing sector in St. Lawrence County.

Healthcare and Human Services

St. Lawrence County has a range of healthcare and human service providers in both the public and private sectors. Three primary healthcare organizations, Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center in Ogdensburg, St. Lawrence Health System (an affiliate of Rochester Regional Health) in Gouverneur, Massena, and Potsdam, and Clifton-Fine Hospital in Star Lake (an affiliate of Samaritan Health of Watertown) operate five hospitals in the County. Each organization also operates numerous healthcare clinics and satellite facilities in the smaller communities throughout the County.

The Claxton-Hepburn facility houses a 28-bed mental health center for adults and will be opening a 12-bed children's mental health unit in 2022. Senior care nursing home facilities are located in Canton, Massena, and Ogdensburg.

Additionally, the New York State Office of Mental Health operates the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center ("SLPC") in Ogdensburg, which offers on-site comprehensive residential services, including Children/Youth Service, Adult Services, and a Sex Offender Treatment facility.

Outpatient residential programs are also operated by the psychiatric center through the on-grounds Community Residence (Northwood Manor) and the Family Care Program, a network of certified private homes located in St. Lawrence, Jefferson, and Clinton counties. In addition to the SLPC, the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports operates a Certified Alcohol/Substance Abuse facility on the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center grounds. A mix of in and outpatient addiction treatment facilities are also located in communities throughout the County.

A number of non-profit healthcare and human service providers are also either based in the County or have significant operations in the County, providing a range of healthcare, substance abuse, behavioral health, and personal assistance programs. In addition to providing services, these organizations represent significant employment and provide significant positive economic impact in the County through their operations.

KPH Healthcare Services, Inc., a national provider of pharmaceutical and health care services has significant operations in the County as the employee-owned company traces its roots back to Kinney Drugs in Gouverneur. In addition to the Kinney Drugs regional retail footprint, the company provides institutional, mail order, and specialty pharmacy services to customers throughout the country.

Other private businesses also offer services in the healthcare and human services field, ranging from smaller scale manufacturing of healthcare related products to individual and family health and counseling services.

Manufacturing

From large multi-national corporations to midsize companies and start-ups, a diverse portfolio of manufacturing firms is located in St. Lawrence County. Some of been here for decades because of our high quality, low-cost assets like low-cost hydro power, others have built state of the art facilities to utilize engineering talent, training resources, and research and development capabilities of our local colleges and universities. Others have located here to take advantage of the County's close proximity to Canada, allowing manufacturers to produce in local factories and easily supply both US and Canadian customer bases.

In addition to benefitting from location on an international border, manufacturers can transport of raw materials and finished goods by truck, train, and ship, giving St. Lawrence County truly global access to suppliers and customers.

As a result of the County's natural resources, location, history, and workforce, there are a number of subsectors in the local manufacturing economy. For example, in addition to the aluminum manufacturing in Massena and cross-border Canadian companies, there are a number of mining operations, paper companies, and food product producers. Spinoff manufacturing operations from the local colleges and universities offer growth potential and the continued investment of long-time firms such as Corning, DeFelsko, and Structural Wood Corporation as well as many smaller operations continues to contribute to the ongoing vitality and diversity of manufacturing in St. Lawrence County.

Renewable Energy

St. Lawrence County is well-known for its substantial hydropower capabilities, best represented by the St. Lawrence-Franklin D. Roosevelt Power Project in Massena, one of the New York Power Authority's major hydroelectric dams. Brookfield Renewable Energy and other hydroelectric plant owners operate dozens of smaller hydro facilities along the rivers in the County. As a result, the County produces some of the lowest cost, most reliable, green electricity in North America.

The development of solar projects is expanding throughout New York in part due to NYS policy to encourage renewable development. New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act goals include:

- Increasing the Renewable Energy Standard to 70% by 2030
- Doubling the target for distributed solar power to 6 gigawatts by 2025
- Installing 3 gigawatts of statewide energy storage capacity by 2030
- 100% Zero-emission Electricity by 2040
- 85% Reduction in GHG Emissions by 2050

As the largest county land wise in New York State, St. Lawrence County has naturally seen its share of interest and activity from solar project developers. Dozens of projects, representing hundreds of megawatts of generating capacity are either proposed or already underway in the County. Additional renewable growth may come from the harnessing and transport of renewable gas from methane digesters being constructed at some of the larger local farms. Abundant water, land, and timber resources make the County a leader, and a high growth player, in renewable energy production and utilization.

Technology

Business operations, whether in an office or on the factory floor, and technology are increasingly linked as global competition drives the need for efficiency and innovation. Numerous technology resources serve and drive the various other sectors of the St. Lawrence County. For example, the Shipley Center for Innovation at Clarkson University fosters innovation in engineering and science and works with investors and various funding agencies to develop start-up companies to commercialize breakthrough technologies developed in Clarkson laboratories and bring them to market globally. Drawing on the expertise of faculty researchers internationally recognized in their fields, the Center's focus is on technology transfer related to advanced materials, bio- and nanotechnologies, the environment, and sustainable energy.

The Center for Advanced Materials Processing at Clarkson (CAMP) is dedicated to developing Clarkson's research and educational programs in high-technology materials processing and is focused on meeting industrial needs. CAMP's mandate is to develop innovations in advanced materials processing and to transfer this technology to business and industry. SUNY Canton's Canino School of Engineering Technology offers cutting edge technology instruction and flexible, customized industry training solutions for local industries.

The continued integration of technology, especially with the support of our local educational and research resources, offers tremendous opportunities for existing firms, startups, and college spinoffs, as well as for attraction of new firms and industries.

Tourism

St. Lawrence County's unique location takes advantage of both the Thousand Islands and the Adirondack regions. The Massena-Cornwall International Bridge and the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge each afford a spectacular view of the St. Lawrence River and provide easy passage between the United States and Canada. Eighteen museums and art galleries, including the world-renown Frederick Remington Art Museum, an excellent library system, an established crafts community, and professionally and locally produced theater are just some of the reasons why St. Lawrence County has earned its reputation as an important cultural and tourism center.

From the St. Lawrence River to the Adirondack wilderness, the diverse geography of St. Lawrence County provides recreation enthusiasts a paradise of year-round adventure. Lake Placid, site of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, and the metropolitan areas of Ottawa and Montreal are within a two-hour drive. The streams, rivers and lakes in the county make it a haven for all types of fishermen in any season. In fact, in 2019 Bassmaster Magazine named the St. Lawrence River the "best bass fishery" in the nation.

During the winter months, residents enjoy ice-skating at one of the local arenas or lakes, downhill and cross-country skiing at nearby resorts or snowmobiling on marked trails throughout the county. The summer months find people swimming, picnicking or simply enjoying the warm summer days. Campgrounds, hiking trails, biking paths and boating facilities abound.

Research Program and Development Tools

The County realizes that this CEDS – since it IS the owners’ manual for the revival of the County’s economy – must be based on a firm commitment to do regular updates based on both experience and changing expectations. This is not primarily because EDA expects annual updates, but more because any strategic plan begins to become irrelevant the moment it is completed. Only by making a firm commitment to a regular and rigorous process of revision can the CEDS truly be the owners’ manual that the County wants it to be.

This CEDS continues to include “research” questions to be investigated and pursued as part of its immediate action plan – with the promise of more to come in the future. In a very real sense this Research Agenda constitutes the kind of R&D that is the lifeblood of an expanding entity – the kind of “entity” that the County plans to be. The whole point of doing research into such topics is to determine which ones to convert into new actions in future revisions to the action plan, together with plans for implementation.

Along the same lines as an ongoing development research agenda, it makes sense to look at the development “tools” that the development “technicians” have to work with, i.e., the infrastructure of economic development services in the County, in order to determine where additional programs/policies are required if the County is to achieve the development objectives summarized in this document. Therefore, this section of this CEDS also proposes actions that the County’s development community will take to develop new and better tools so they can be more effective in implementing the actions described elsewhere in this plan – all of which are targeted to expanding existing enterprises and growing new ones. This step is particularly timely as new resources have been, and will continue to be, created at the state and federal level to address the ongoing economic and social challenges resulting from the Covid pandemic.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure encompasses more than the physical assets – e.g., roads, water, and sewer – usually owned by government or quasi-government agencies. Privately owned services – like rail, telecom, natural gas, and electric power – are infrastructure as well. This CEDS also extends the



term to include buildings and other facilities, including industrial and business parks, where enterprises that employ people can locate to produce their products and provide their services. Additional consideration is given to the main streets, housing, and community development challenges and requirements that contribute to the appearance, vibrancy, and livability within the various communities of the County.

It is essential that the County maintain and improve its infrastructure to enable all of the enterprises targeted by the CEDS – farms, manufacturers, universities, hotels, etc. – to be profitable and to employ people. Employers’ ability to compete effectively is limited by neglected and out-of-date infrastructure, not to mention neglected downtowns. Neglected infrastructure places severe limits on growth, so its improvement must go hand-in-hand with the focus on the enterprises whose creation and growth will reverse the County’s comparative deterioration.

Actions

How to Read This Section:

Five Matrices: The actions that follow are grouped into five matrices which mirror the five goals of the CEDS: (1) Enterprise retention and expansion; (2) Elevation and growth of the local workforce; (3) Promotion of outside investment; (4) Research Agenda; and (5) Infrastructure.

Timeline: The CEDS development team is committed to review this plan annually to determine what has and has not been accomplished and what amendments may need to be made in order to adapt it to changing circumstances. The plan is to review the Action Plan classification every year when the County's CEDS committee and the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency conduct the annual review.

Leadership Entities: What follows is a glossary of the development organizations who have been tasked with either primary or supporting roles in executing the actions described below.

Organization	Acronym
Adirondack North Country Association	ANCA
Colleges and Universities in St. Lawrence County	Colleges
Cornell Cooperative Extension	CCE
Council for International Trade, Technology, Education, and Communication	CITEC
Development Authority of the North Country	DANC
Local development organizations from the various St. Lawrence County communities	Local Developers
New York Power Authority	NYPA
Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority	OBPA
RACER Trust (owner of the GM property)	RACER
St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce	Chamber
St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency and affiliated local development corporations (IDA-LDC, IDA-CDC, SLCPDC)	IDA
St. Lawrence County One-Stop Career Center	One Stop
St. Lawrence County Planning Department	SLC Planning
St. Lawrence County Workforce Development Board	WDB
SUNY Canton Small Business Development Center	SBDC
Workforce Development Institute	WDI
Others, including specific communities or institutions	Listed by name

Action Plan

Goal #1: Retention and expansion of profitable enterprises

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Continue ongoing networking events developed to assist in overcoming employer isolation and promote mutual learning and problem solving.	IDA Chamber	Local Developers	Colleges, Workforce Providers, local communities	
Identify locally owned companies whose top management/ownership is reaching retirement age and help them to plan for and execute transitions that will enable their companies to maintain/expand operations in the County, make referrals to SBDC, CITEC, and ANCA's Center for Business in Transition.	Chamber	IDA ANCA SBDC CITEC Local Developers	Local Accountants Attorneys Banks Realtors	
Continue Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership program in the County to encourage established, locally owned businesses to connect, learn, and grow.	SUNY Canton	NYPA IDA	Local Developers	
Collaborate closely with local existing economic development organizations and trusted intermediaries (e.g., accountants and bankers) to focus on assisting startups.	IDA	SBDC Local Developers		
Build an Entrepreneurial Accelerator with integrated programs that deliver the networks, coaching, training, and other intensive supports to aid high-potential growth entrepreneurs in the County in scaling-up their businesses.	SUNY Canton SBDC	Colleges		
Create flow chart or map of service providers for potential entrepreneurs (e.g., SUNY Canton's Small Business Development Center, Clarkson's Reh Center for Entrepreneurship and Shipley Center for Innovation, the Adirondack Economic Development Corporation, the Seaway Private Equity Corporation, North Country Alliance, and Point Positive).	SBDC	Colleges	Local Developers	

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Partner with Clarkson University and the Shipley Center to retain manufacturing and clean tech firms graduating from its small business incubator in St. Lawrence County by providing manufacturing or commercial space and competitive financing.	IDA Clarkson	Local Developers		
Leverage the current investment in trail development and marketing to spur business growth. Seek training and certification programs to support this lodging, restaurants, guide services and equipment rentals, which create opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and provide job and business opportunities. Contact existing businesses in key locations to add additional rentals. Investigate insurance and other barriers to this type of business development.	Chamber	Local Developers Workforce Providers		
Install and utilize a modern Customer Relationship Management system to assist in expanding the IDA's formal business calling program.	IDA			

Goal #2: Elevate and grow the local workforce

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Establish workforce coordinator role within IDA to manage collaboration among the County’s training providers (colleges, BOCES, etc.), workforce providers, and local businesses and industry. Develop and consistently manage job opening and labor connection service between local employers, the provider groups above, and job seekers inside and outside the County.	IDA	Chamber	BOCES Colleges Workforce Providers	
Seek sources outside WIOA system to provide flexible, enhanced funding for talent building programs.	IDA			
Build effective working relationship with Fort Drum’s Transition Services office to matching transitioning soldiers and/or spouses with job or educational opportunities in the County.	IDA Workforce Providers			
Establish continuing means of collaboration with the career services offices of the County’s colleges to identify ways to assist in increasing local placements of their students for internships and post collegiate jobs.	IDA	Chamber Colleges	Workforce providers	
Develop relationships with high schools, guidance offices, and the BOCES to connect students entering the workforce with local employers, job openings, and training services through a formalized, sustained outreach program.	IDA	BOCES Workforce Providers		
Evaluate childcare gaps and support creation of childcare options & facilities that address gaps to assist parents needing to work, employers to attract/retain talent, and to make the region more appealing for businesses.	Workforce Providers	SBDC SUNY Canton IDA		
Build on CDL-A training model to develop career pathways for individuals with labor market barriers through range of specialized training partnerships between local BOCES, the colleges, and local employers.	IDA	Colleges BOCES	Workforce providers	

Goal #3: Promotion of outside investment and attraction of new firms to the County

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Continue to solicit Canadian companies - primarily located in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor - to establish operations in the County.	IDA	Local Developers OBPA		
Reach out to realtors in the County to formalize sharing of information about new residents moving to the County. Provide relocation guide for information on quality of life, job opportunities, and business development programs.	IDA Chamber	Local Developers		
Expand on previous experimental come-back-here initiatives by planning, funding, and implementing focused and rigorous marketing campaign to identify and attract previous County residents who will relocate to the County to bring their businesses, capital and/or skills back to the County in order to start businesses or join the workforce here. Expand initiative to Drum Country region with neighboring counties.	IDA Chamber	Colleges Local Developers		
Collaborate with SUNY Potsdam to conduct music industry marketing effort to take advantage of the world-renowned Crane School of Music by demonstrating to music businesses the advantages of locating operations in the "Crane-shadow".	IDA	SUNY Potsdam	Local Developers	
Analyze and focus resources to attract and assist firms in our identified target industry sectors to locate in the County.	IDA			
Highlight, and actively market the research and development, collaborative, and intellectual resources available through our five colleges and universities.	IDA	Colleges		
Market SLC's plentiful, low-cost, renewable, dependable energy to companies who value sustainable energy as part of their corporate missions and market targeting.	NYPA	IDA		

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Create a sustained effort to catalogue, promote, and coordinate the various attractions, events, and initiatives by cultivating a working relationship with all County municipalities (for example, by making St. Lawrence County the fishing capital of the world or other similar destination activities).	Chamber	Local Developers		
Partnering with DANC, National Grid, and economic development partners to promote the County and region to attract workers and businesses using social media and other platforms to market assets. Investigate and utilize consultants and site selection firms if suitable.	IDA	NYPA Local Developers		
Engage the services of a travel and tourism consultant to explore ways to better market and capitalize on the County’s natural and cultural resources including natural resources and traditional outdoor activities, extreme sports (mountain biking, whitewater kayaking), heritage tourism, arts/cultural, agricultural and energy venues).	Chamber	Local Developers		
Embrace fishing tournaments as signature opportunities to keep St. Lawrence County on the map as a premier fishery. In order for the fishery to be a fishing destination, the destination needs to be developed and marketed with supporting assets such as lodging, retail, services. Community benefit and visitor benefit should be considered along with the concept of leveraging the events to attract consistent visitation and demand.	Chamber	Local Developers		
Continue annual preparation of a comprehensive industrial and tourism marketing plans for the County.	IDA Chamber			

Goal #4: Research Program and development tools

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
<p>Research the following to assess potential future development opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quantities and destinations of wood raw materials harvested in the County exported elsewhere and the value-added products they are turned into. 2. Domestic and international markets for reverse osmosis and/or UHT milk and what prevents such products from being produced in the County. 3. Enterprises that require low-cost electricity and large quantities of fresh water and the business case for such enterprises to locate in the County. 4. Survey mining wastes in the County to determine what recoverable minerals are in the mine wastes at places like Star Lake and Fowler and the potential value-added uses for such minerals. 5. Feasibility/need of a fully serviced large-scale 'super industrial park' within the County. 6. Determine whether County's location presents an opportunity of attracting distribution operations serving Canada. 7. Programs that incentivize companies whose operations are based on knowledge management and whose fixed assets offer little collateral to secure conventional loans. 8. Update Doing Business in New York State Guide to best inform prospects on doing business in the County. 9. Categorize the assets and attributes of each of the colleges and determine plans for utilizing the reach, resources, and connections of these institutions within the County's economic development efforts. 	IDA	Colleges		

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Identify, research, and adopt an economic modeling and/or reporting program that the County can use to measure the performance of its economy in order to help gauge whether this plan's actions are yielding results.	IDA			
Create an inventory of the renewable energy resources in St. Lawrence County and determine how these resources could provide a platform for additional development in the County.	NYPA	IDA	Colleges Local Developers NYSERDA SLC Planning	
Identify opportunities to track economic impact of various tourism events and attractions on the destination. Streamline existing data for analysis and availability for future business development. Expand and consolidate research.	Chamber	IDA		
Communities and/or Destinations (based on an asset) benefit from having a destination plan (ex. REDC Destination Plan) to identify gaps and opportunities to supporting a tourism economy. This would include infrastructure (sidewalks, water, sewer, access), marketing (signage, marketing budget, brand, and professional resource), businesses (lodging, restaurants, attractions, breweries/wineries, shops, services, etc...).	Chamber	IDA		
Working with DEC and Fishery manager, identify ways to gauge overuse and identify opportunities to host events that are more sustainable.	Chamber	IDA		
Conduct a market study for new lodging and accommodations (hotels, B & Bs, Air B &Bs), recreational vehicle parks and campgrounds.	Chamber	SBDC Local Developers		
Clearly identify resources needed to continue to host fishing events: permanent infrastructure, human resource, rental availability, etc.	Chamber			

Goal #5: Infrastructure and community development

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
<p>Develop/redevelop specific sites suited for economic development purposes in the County, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excess Arconic property for a multi-user industrial park • The J&L site at Benson Mines and the Newton Falls Secondary Railroad serving the J&L and Newton Falls industrial sites • The brownfield sites in the City of Ogdensburg’s waterfront BOA • The former Newton Falls Fine Paper mill property • The RACER Trust site in the Town of Massena • Clarkson University Peyton and Damon Hall incubators • The St. Lawrence Centre Mall in Massena and other large former retail facilities • Other underutilized industrial, commercial, and retail sites which may be suitable for development activities 	IDA	Local Developers DANC	SLC Planning	
Work with the County’s real estate brokers and community development officials, to create and keep up to date an inventory of available industrial and commercial properties for development.	IDA	Local Developers		
Continue efforts to improve water and sewer infrastructure to the Maple Hill subdivision and Sullivan/Riverside Drive areas in the Village of Canton; construct a new sewer lift station and transmission line on northeastern side of Village; and construct a new water main from Waterman Hill to the Village limits.	Village of Canton			
Support efforts to redevelop the former Jubilee Plaza in Canton.	Village of Canton			

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Restore and modernize the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge.	OBPA			
Support efforts to eliminate traffic blockages along the US Route 11 corridor.	Local Developers			
Complete dredging and expanding of the Port of Ogdensburg and other infrastructure projects which enhance the Port's productivity and cargo handling capabilities.	OBPA			
Assist in finding resources to repair the trestle serving Dunn Paper and restore rail service to the mill.	IDA			
Determine on case-by-case basis appropriate means for assisting renewable energy projects throughout the County.	IDA	Local Developers		
Extend gas line along Route 11 in the Town of Gouverneur.	Town of Gouverneur	IDA		
Install white water parks in Canton and Potsdam (Grasse and Raquette rivers).	Local Developers	IDA Chamber		
Replace water line in East Massena and provide water/sewer infrastructure to RACER and Alcoa East sites.	Town of Massena	Massena BDC		
Replace water piping and water lines and paint/maintain water tank in the Village of Massena.	Village of Massena			
Extend water and sewer in OBPA Commerce Park, Heavy Industrial Park and Wagner Road development sites.	OBPA			
Develop outreach plan for informing communities about existing economic development efforts, programs, and services.	IDA Local Developers			
Redevelop and better utilize the numerous waterfront sites in the County including former industrial sites and underutilized downtown properties.	Local Communities	Local Developers		
Improve outdoor recreational facilities like trailheads, including wayfinding.	Chamber			

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Support communities that receive DRI funding to prioritize projects that have the best prospect of improving economic growth in that community.	Village of Potsdam Village of Massena	Local Developers	IDA	
Assist communities to develop plans and goals for infrastructure maintenance and expansion projects that support economic development. Assist with applying for funding for such projects from local, State, and federal economic development programs, e.g., the EDA, the RVRDA Community Development program, and the North Country REDC CFA process.	Local Developers	IDA	SLC Planning	
Support communities in efforts to remediate, reuse and redevelop brownfield sites in the County.	Local Communities	Local Developers	IDA SLC Planning	
Assist communities in development of adequate and improved housing options for local families and potential new residents.	SLC Planning	Local Developers	IDA	
Increase access to high-speed, affordable broadband/cellular service in rural areas of the County to support business development and telecommuting. Partner with DANC, federal & state funding sources.	SLC Planning IDA	DANC		
Install new water and sanitary sewer lines from Elm Street to the Potsdam Damon Field Airport and LaValley Transportation's aircraft hangar.	Village of Potsdam			
Replace the Village of Potsdam's 12-inch water main between Sandstoner Drive and May Road.	Village of Potsdam			
Replace the underwater sanitary sewer mains between Pine Street and the main line on the east side of the Raquette River as well as the main line between Fall Island and Garner Parks.	Village of Potsdam			

Action Items	Responsible Organizations			Status
	Primary	Secondary	Suggested Others	
Construct 2 nd shell building in Potsdam Commerce Park	IDA	Village of Potsdam		
Address the Village of Potsdam’s sanitary sewer infiltration and inflow issues; and, undertake renovation of the Village’s Cross-Town Canal System, the community’s main stormwater management infrastructure.	Village of Potsdam			
Lengthen the runway and parallel taxiway at the Potsdam Damon Field Airport.	Village of Potsdam			
Install 200,000-gallon water tower in the Town of Gouverneur to connect the Village of Gouverneur water system to create a water system infrastructure loop to support economic development, fire protection, and public health.	Village/Town of Gouverneur			
Develop the Town of Gouverneur site on Owl Road for business and attraction or expansion.	Town of Gouverneur	IDA		
Identify gaps in the emergency response services, both for first responders and firefighters, and support funding and training programs working with local educational entities to improve participation rates in emergency response in the County.	SLC Emergency Services	Workforce Providers	Local Developers	
Support and develop events & attractions that highlight County's unique people, places, traditions, and talents as the arts, culture, and heritage within the County have the ability to attract people and improve local quality of life.	Chamber	IDA		

D. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The Key Performance Indicators associated with the various actions included in the Action Plan above are mostly “input” numbers and activities, i.e., measures of the efforts expended, not the impacts that will result. While diligent implementation of these actions may set the stage for economic progress, the actions themselves are not the results that evidence a “healthy, diverse and growing economy that will create good jobs for ourselves and our children.” This Evaluation Framework of the CEDS, therefore, attempts to translate the actions listed in Action Plan into outputs that can be measured and that will demonstrate that actions described in the CEDS are having positive impacts.

Doing this is not as straightforward a process as one would like it to be. Establishing cause and effect, even in an economy with as (relatively) few “moving parts” as St. Lawrence County’s, is difficult in the best of circumstances. And, the circumstances are NOT the best, if only because the data available to gauge progress are either unavailable or not current or not fine-grained enough to be meaningful.

The McKinsey analysts examined the County by comparing the County with “peer” counties elsewhere in the country based on a variety of metrics. The following two key statistical measures were published in the final report:

- GDP per capita growth
- Employment growth

Though McKinsey’s analysis never explained statistically how it chose the peer counties, McKinsey was satisfied that its data broadly demonstrated that the County has consistently fallen short on at least key economic benchmarks compared with similarly situated counties during the reference period (roughly the last five years of available data, generally 2009-2014). McKinsey’s data ratified with general statistics what residents of the County already pretty much knew to be true from experience and anecdote, i.e., that the County has fallen further behind in recent decades.

So, while the County expects that – all other things being equal – most of the actions described in sections 1-3 of the Action Plan above will help improve metrics like the County’s GDP and employment, not to mention other high-level economic indicators, this Evaluation Framework will outline other, intermediary output targets that are more immediately measurable, and which are likely to be “proxies” for the macro-metrics cited by McKinsey. In other words, these same intermediate indicators arguably should affect high-level indicators but their influence on such indicators cannot be mapped in a simple cause and effect relationship because multiple confounding variables intervene.

Finally, the issue of data availability must be confronted, i.e., how the County developers can access/collect contemporary data to measure success in meeting the intermediary metrics described below.

The best and most consistent locally available data sets – even though they don’t measure some key variables that should be measured, e.g., startups – are associated with the reports that local authorities like the IDA and its associated corporations submit annually to the New York State Comptroller and the Authority Budget Office (ABO). While the formats of these reports are not meant to capture all development activities and are not filed by many development public-sector organizations that are not classified as “public authorities” by State law or by banks and private developers, they do provide some “**internal**” (or not otherwise tracked) information on the impact of the county-level economic development activities. Nonetheless, the IDA, the IDA-LDC, and the IDA-CDC do submit these reports and the data these organizations collect to develop these reports provide a near-contemporary record of actions that can be compared over time.

It is critical to understand the limits of the Comptroller/ABO data. First, the data required for reports of the three organizations summarized in this CEDS as the “IDA” are, as already mentioned, not uniform across the three organizations. Second, the only data that can be reported are those that result from “projects” as these are defined by State law and regulation – which by no means includes everything that developers do to help companies stay in business and/or become more profitable. One of the things that cannot be captured by such data is the advice and assistance that developers provide to companies and individuals but that do not result in projects as they are defined by the State oversight entities.

With these last reservations in mind, the project information that many of the local development organizations send to the Comptroller/ABO is prepared annually, is consistent in format over time, and does cover all the projects to which these organizations have provided assistance related to key development incentives. Therefore, while not all-inclusive and requiring some computations to create uniformity, the annual Comptroller/ABO reports are a source of output data available. Some of these data points in these reports includes:

- Retained Jobs
- New Jobs
- Increases in Assessed Value
- Total Project Amount

As has been noted above, the information from the Comptroller/ABO reports is helpful, but not comprehensive enough to be used solely. For example, none of the measures are particularly suited to capture one of the key outcomes of the developers’ activities, i.e., maintaining businesses. It is impossible to measure directly how many businesses DO NOT go out of business or reduce the scale of their operations – but would have done so had it not been for assistance from the surrounding development community.

As an example, over the last 18 months, the IDA has specifically targeted those businesses in need of assistance with COVID-19 related issues. IDA staff worked with the Small Business Development Center at SUNY Canton to identify and assist County businesses in need of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loans, Economic Injury Disaster (EIDL) Loans and Shuttered Venue Operator Grants. The overwhelming majority of the businesses assisted through this outreach will not show up on the reports submitted to New York State as that reporting process is only for those projects which receive very specific and direct forms of assistance through the IDA or one of its affiliated local development corporations.

As a result, the impacts that can be quantified from the data that the IDA and its associated corporations collect to report on projects as these are defined by the Comptroller/ABO's reports, while real and important, ignore other impacts not directly stemming from IDA-associated projects or from activities by many of the other development organizations operating in the County.

For this reason, more available, and traditional, externally available impact measures must be included despite the previously mentioned limitations of data availability and precise fit to the County. This list of “**external**” indicators would include:

- Total Employment in the County
- Total Size of the County Workforce
- Unemployment Rate vs. New York State
- Median Household Income
- Poverty Levels
- Population Growth
- GDP

As is indicated in the CEDS, economic growth and population growth go hand in hand. There are a number of sources of available information for the above listed indicators, including the New York State Department of Labor, the US Census Bureau, and the Federal Reserve Economic Data provided by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

These internal and external indicators are included, with targets and goals, in the following Evaluation Matrix.

SLC ECONOMIC PROGRESS EVALUATION MATRIX - Internal Indicators

IDA Project Reporting

Source: OSC/ABO PARIS Reporting	2020	2025 Target	2030 Target
Active Projects	25	50	75
Total Project Investment	\$77,690,686	\$155,000,000	\$232,500,000
Jobs Prior to Projects	641	1,250	1,875
Jobs Currently at Projects	910	1,800	2,700
Jobs Added at Projects	269	500	750
Jobs Goals for Projects	248	500	700
Jobs Added vs. Jobs Goals	+19	-	-
New Square Footage added to Tax Roll	366,867 sf	750,000 sf	1,125,000 sf
Assessment Value Currently Added to Tax Roll	\$8,932,275	\$17,500,000	\$26,250,000
Assessment Value Added at end of PILOT	\$28,400,998	\$55,000,000	\$82,500,000
PILOT Payments Made	\$364,062	\$725,000	\$1,087,500

The information in the matrix above for the year 2020 was taken from the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency’s project activity reporting to the NYS Office of the Comptroller and Authorities Budget Office through the Public Authorities Reporting Information System.

Figures for the 2025 and 2030 years were arrived at by analyzing existing per project figures for job retention, creation, and tax base/assessment/PILOT payments and applying them in the aspirational target years five and ten years out.

In addition to the information in the matrix above, summarized project activity and related data to be tracked internally (IDA and affiliated development corporations) and analyzed for future growth targets throughout the period of this CEDS will include:

- Total project value undertaken
- Job retention and Job creation
- Building space constructed or rehabilitated in St. Lawrence County
- Direct IDA investment or loan funds provided to projects
- Additional financing and investment leveraged by IDA activity
- Grant funds administered by the IDA and its related organizations for projects inside the County or secured/administered by the IDA for St. Lawrence County projects
- Increase in assessed property values
- Increase in annual sales tax collected by firms supported by IDA projects
- Renewable Energy Generation capacity added

These internally tracked indicators can be measured in near “real” time and will be supplemented by the following externally tracked, but less frequently accessible, data indicators.

SLC ECONOMIC PROGRESS EVALUATION MATRIX - External Indicators

Source	Year	1990	2000	2010	2020	2025 Target	2030 Target
Census	SLC Population	111,974	111,931	111,944	108,505	109,000	110,000
	NYS Population	17,990,778	18,489,997	19,378,102	20,201,249		
	USA Population	248,709,873	281,421,906	308,745,538	331,449,281		
	SLC Population Growth Rate	-2.03%	-0.04%	0.01%	-3.07%	0.46%	0.92%
	NYS Population Growth Rate	2.46%	2.77%	4.80%	4.25%		
	USA Population Growth Rate	9.78%	13.15%	9.71%	7.35%		
NYS DOL	SLC Total Employed	45,600	46,100	44,800	39,400	42,500	47,500
	NYS Total Employed	8,361,900	8,727,500	8,790,600	8,361,000		
NYS DOL	SLC Total Labor Force	49,500	48,800	50,000	42,900	45,000	50,000
	NYS Total Labor Force	8,831,400	9,140,500	9,630,300	9,507,100		
Census, DP3	SLC Labor Force Participation	--	51%	49.5%	--	51%	55%
	NYS Labor Force Participation	--	56.6%	57.1%	--		
	USA Labor Force Participation	--	59.7%	--	--		
Census, DP3	SLC Unemployment Rate	7.9%	4.7%	10.3%	8.2%	5.5%	5.0%
	NYS Unemployment Rate	5.3%	4.3%	8.7%	10.0%		
	USA Unemployment Rate	5.6%	3.7%	9.3%	8.1%		
Census, DP3	SLC Per Capita Income	\$10,346	\$15,728	\$29,879	\$43,034	\$50,000	\$60,000
	NYS Per Capita Income	--	\$23,389	\$48,818	\$74,472		
	USA Per Capita Income	--	\$ 21,587		\$59,450		
FRED	SLC Median Household Inc.	\$25,000	\$33,323	\$40,008	\$51,526	\$68,000	\$80,000
	NYS Median Household Inc.	\$60,851	\$61,414	\$59,228	\$68,304		
	USA Median Household Inc.	\$29,943	\$41,990	\$49,276	\$67,521		
Census, DP3, S1701, S1702	SLC Poverty Rate-Individuals	--	16.9%	17.4%	19.9%	19%	18%
	NYS Poverty Rate-Individuals	--	14.6%	14.9%	13.0%		
	USA Poverty Rate-individuals	--	12.4%	15.3%	12.3%		
	SLC Poverty Rate-families	12.8%	12.3%	12.2%	12.6%	12%	11%
	NYS Poverty Rate-families	13.0%	11.5%	10.8%	10.4%		
	USA Poverty Rate-families	--	9.2%	10.1%	9.5%		
US DOC, BEA	SLC GDP (in thousands)	--	--	--	\$4,293,868	\$4,800,000	\$5,200,000
	NYS GDP (in millions)	--	--	--	\$1,777,389		

E. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Introduction

The County's economic prosperity depends upon its ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., "shocks") to its economy. Economic resilience includes the ability to prevent or minimize such shocks, to endure them, and to recover quickly from them. The EDA Guidebook suggests that there are in essence three categories of shocks that a community, whether big or small, should address when attempting to analyze its susceptibility to out-of-the-ordinary natural and economic events and how to ameliorate the impacts of such events. They are:

- Specific external shocks (a natural or human-made disaster, closure of a military base, exit of a major employer, the impacts of climate change, etc.).
- Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending; and/or
- Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity.

Before addressing these three general categories of shocks something must be said about the general situation of the County. To put it most simply, the County appears to be situated both geographically and economically so as to make it less exposed to some of these shocks than many other communities. As will be seen below, the County's exposure to dangerous climatic and geologic hazards is almost minimal. But, with the onset of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic and ensuing and lockdowns that started in March of 2020, the County did and continues to feel both the health and economic effects. At the time of this CEDS, workforce, US-Canadian border, and global supply chain are among the many issues that have not yet been resolved and will continue to be challenges for the foreseeable future.

External Shocks: Natural Disasters

Mention natural disasters to longer-term residents of St. Lawrence County and the almost universal candidate for the County's greatest risk is winter weather related. Of course, it is cold and snowy in St. Lawrence County for extended periods of time every year. Therefore, "simple" cold and snow are part of daily life in the County for up to six months of every year, not a cause for emergency action except in very localized instances. In short, the bitter winters do not equate to shocks to the system, because the County and its residents expect serious cold and snow every year homes, businesses, and governmental facilities have no choice but to be prepared as a matter of course for just about anything even an atypically severe winter can throw at them.

The exception to this winter rule being ice storms. To wit, the most recent example, prior to the ongoing global pandemic, of a natural disaster that virtually closed some parts of the County for over two weeks was the ice storm of 1998. The fact that the storm impacted parts of neighboring Ontario and Quebec more severely than St. Lawrence County, did not provide much solace to the thousands of County residents who were unable to travel (because of icy roads and states of emergency) and whose electric power was cut because of downed power feeder and distribution lines.

The County's Office of Emergency Services, whose pedigree dates to the 1970s, certainly had the 1998 ice storm in mind when it prepared its Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan in 2014 (<https://www.stlawco.org/Departments/EmergencyServices/>). The County has since updated the Plan several times, most recently in the summer of 2021. The Plan recognizes that the 1998 storm was not the first, nor will it be the last, such storm and the Plan lays out a systematic approach to dealing with such events.



Of course, the Plan's primary concern is with the dangers to life and limb that such weather events create, not the economic dislocations that are also created. Though no one quantified the economic losses attributable to the 1998 storm for the County on a stand-alone basis, they were certainly substantial because large numbers of retail, commercial, and manufacturing businesses had to close for days, and in some cases stay closed for several weeks. These businesses lost revenue and their employees lost pay.

In the end, the 1998 ice storm had no discernable impact on the County's 1998 economic statistics. Among the reasons for this are:

- Micro-climate variations in the storm's effects meant that it buffeted some regions of the County less than others and consequently the impact and recovery from it were not as economically stressful because nearby residences, farms, and businesses who were less affected were able to help their neighbors cope with lack of power in their hours of need;
- Almost all of the County's major public institutions (hospitals, the colleges, etc.) and many of its larger private employers had back-up power supplies in-place (generators) and were able to continue to function, even if at reduced levels of efficiency; the County probably had (and still has) more facilities with such back-up capacity than might be expected because smaller ice storms and wet, heavy snow storm events are common in the County and such preparations are a cost of doing business;
- Public safety and utility personnel – e.g., the County's Office of Emergency Preparedness and National Grid and Massena Electric Department, the County's two primary electrical power providers – were (and continue to be) well trained in how to deal with such emergencies; and
- The County is a net producer and exporter of electricity, primarily from the New York Power Authority's Moses-Saunders hydroelectric facility in Massena, but also from the many small-river hydro dams scattered throughout the County on the streams that feed into the St. Lawrence River; hence, even where major distribution lines were "down", the decentralized power production grid ensured that power continued to flow in many parts of the County.

It is also important to point out that significant investments and improvements have been in the local and regional electrical infrastructure since the 1998 ice storm.

Other than winter weather-related events, two other possible sources of natural disasters must be mentioned, i.e., seismic events and wildfires. As for the first, in historic times the 1944 Cornwall–Massena earthquake was the largest such event on record across the whole State of New York, registering 5.8 on the moment magnitude scale. Geologists report that the part of the County in the Saint Lawrence River Valley is underlain by a seismically active zone known as the

Saint Lawrence rift system. In the end the 1944 event created very little significant damage and the County's emergency management team is aware of and prepared for similar events in the future.

The second major natural threat that the County must be – and IS – aware of are wildfires. Such fires were a major threat to the local populations in times past, especially the 1860-1940 period when the County's forests were being harvested for both lumber and the fiber for paper mills. The unregulated slash from such operations together with drought conditions created major fire events. The incidence of such major events has declined to nil, largely because of improved harvesting regulations and practices, together with decreased demand for the County's forest resources.

It is worth observing that the upside effects of several of the County's continuing economic threats discussed above in the SWOT analysis – i.e., population decentralization and the decline in the paper industry – actually have had the effect of making the County less susceptible to natural disasters.

The same may be at least partly true as well for another category of potential disasters. Whether wars are natural or human-made disasters, the County relative remoteness from metro-America affords less protection than might be assumed by just looking at a map. A major US army base – Fort Drum – borders the County's southern line and the Moses-Saunders Power Dam and the St. Lawrence Seaway locks are on the County's northern border. Both could be major targets in the event of war – as could be the capitol of Canada in Ottawa. It is impossible to calculate the impacts of the use of either tactical or strategic nuclear weapons on any of the three targets mentioned but one thing is sure: no matter how much wide-open space there is in St. Lawrence County, both its people and their livelihoods will be dramatically affected.

In light of the events of the past year and a half, global pandemics and other biological or human health related threats are essential in any resiliency analysis. A section end of this section focuses on the County's response, and future preparedness, for such circumstances.

Other External Shocks:

The NYPA Study pointed out that one of the weaknesses of the County's economy is its dependence on governmental jobs. As described in the SWOT analysis, substantial employment in the County is also rooted in the health care and education sectors. In fact, according to recent NYS Department of Labor data (July 2021), nearly 52% of the County's non-agricultural workforce – including at least nine of the County's top ten employers – are in government, health, and education.

This needs to be mentioned because the countervailing advantage of these sectors is that the danger of County government, a large hospital, or one of the colleges going out of business "overnight", so to speak, is less than might be the case for large private employers who are more subject to short-term swings in the world economy and whose continued operation in the County is dictated by decisions made elsewhere in the companies' corporate hierarchies. Well-attested anecdotes suggest that many of the branches of local manufacturing plants that have gone out of business over the last 30-40 years have been closed, not because they were unprofitable, but because they were not profitable enough to suit their corporate parents or because of larger corporate shocks that did not originate in St. Lawrence County.

National and International Economic Events

It is best to admit at the outset that a small, rural, impoverished jurisdiction like St. Lawrence County has essentially zero options available to it to affect the course of global or national, or even State, macro-economic events. The best the County can do is to be prepared to react quickly and intelligently to what happens in the larger world outside its borders.

The previous sections highlighted how in some cases the County's decentralization and economic decline has actually served to partially insulate the County from natural and man-made economic shocks. The County's economy has lost much of its old extractive and large manufacturing industry base. The decline and/or closure of the aluminum, lead, talc, and zinc extractive and refining operations, many paper mills and sawmills, and much of the value-added milk processing industry has lessened, although not eliminated, the County's relative exposure to national and international commodity price fluctuations – at the expense, of course, of drastically reducing the number of the traditional higher paying jobs. But, making the best out of a bad situation, the decline of traditional large manufacturing has indeed lessened the County's exposure to the troughs of global commodity fluctuations, whether created by secular trends or by dislocations attributable to natural or man-made calamities (e.g. floods or wars).

While the action plan proposed by this CEDS includes several initiatives that will further insulate the County's economy from national and international shocks, -- for example by further diversifying the County's economy -- it also proposes to take actions that will increase the County's exposure to such events. In particular, the plan proposes to revive manufacturing, seek out Canadian business branch locations, and revive the utilization of the County's natural resources for the fabrication of value-added products. Inevitably success in such efforts will indeed increase the County's exposure to international and national shocks. In essence, increasing such exposure is the price that has to be paid to increase the relative profile of trade-able sectors in the County's economy.

Nonetheless, the County has "built into" the CEDS's action program at least two approaches that to a significant extent will minimize the effects of this increased exposure. First, the CEDS focuses on value-added industries, not just commodity production, as was so often the case in the past.

Second, the CEDS's incremental development strategy – the strategy of hitting singles and doubles, and not swinging for the fences at every at-bat – implicitly assumes that the chances are remote of attracting a large international company to the County. Hence, the success of CEDS will populate the County with a myriad of mid-sized manufacturing operations, none of which will dominate the local economy to the extent that was true in the past.

Still, it bears mentioning that the substantial cross-border commerce in the retail, service, and tourism sectors is very important on both banks of the St. Lawrence River. Of course, it's not as if this is a new consideration. Both countries' border communities' economic interdependence goes back to the early 19th century. And, the communities on both sides have been "living with" the instabilities created by their border statuses for two centuries. That won't change. What has changed and what will need to be monitored closely is how the closure of the US-Canada border by each of the respective federal governments of the United States and Canada will affect businesses that rely on border traffic.

Further, how will it affect the IDA's ability to attract Canadian businesses to the United States if it is increasingly difficult to go between the two countries? The COVID-19 Pandemic has forced business to pivot, and perhaps pivot away from traditional trade practices to compete and survive. The US has long been the largest market for the products and services of Canadian business and the County's geographic location presents both risks and opportunities as both countries recover from the pandemic.



The energy sector, and particularly the hydrocarbon portion of it, is another such example of risk and reward. Of course, energy is more than gas and oil. Mention has already been made of the County's hydro capacity and its biomass resources. Despite this, the County is still peculiarly sensitive to fossil fuels for transportation. This CEDS has drawn attention again and again to the challenges – and sometimes the advantages – presented by the County's large size and decentralized population. These factors, when coupled with the absence of any rail passenger capacity and little public transportation, make the incomes of County residents and businesses very sensitive to increases in the cost of gasoline. By the same token, the cold winters make upward fluctuations in the prices of natural gas and heating oil a key item in family and business budgets.

[Downturns in Particular Industries](#)

The County's primary employers are:

- Dairy farms and their service and supply providers, together with milk processing manufacturers;
- A diverse array of mostly small manufacturers, scattered across a variety of industrial sectors;
- A host of small hospitality and tourism establishments, many of which derive much of their business from serving the colleges and universities in the Canton-Potsdam communities;
- The five colleges and universities and the businesses that service them and their students;
- The five hospitals and other health care facilities; and
- Governmental agencies – from the County, Town, etc. governments to the public-school systems to the State agencies located in the County (e.g., prisons, NYPA, the Ogdensburg Psychiatric Center, etc.) to federal agencies (e.g., the Seaway Development Corporation, Homeland Security, etc.)

Alcoa, Arconic, and Corning are the three remaining global companies who have operations in the County. Among them they employ about 1,000 people. Alcoa's Massena operation is one of the four remaining aluminum reduction plants operating in the US. It wasn't the long ago where there was a global in aluminum that threatened to force Alcoa to shut or further curtail operations in Massena.

It is potentially positive for the County that Alcoa divided its Massena operations between itself and Arconic. Arconic is still in the aluminum business, and therefore is not free and clear of the global glut, but at least it is adding value to the raw aluminum and that might insulate its Massena operation somewhat from the raw products where there is almost nothing to distinguish one plant's production from that of another.

It should be noted that the County already has had significant recent experience in dealing with contractions in employment at Alcoa. In 2014-15 Alcoa shut down its Alcoa East plant which had employed almost 400 people. Aside from the short-term responses mounted by the County to ameliorate the impacts of this Eastern plant's closure – e.g., the IDA's effort to help local Alcoa suppliers diversify into additional markets for their products and services – the prospect of further reductions in employment at Alcoa (and other larger private employers) is one of the threats motivating the County to build the CEDS around a series of actions that will lead to further diversification of the County's economy.

A sector of primary concern to the County is the future of the higher education business. Increasing costs of higher education; huge increases in student debt; and the recent national and local decline in the rate of growth in student registrations – all of these give pause to those who realize that the County's major expansionist economic driver for at least the last three decades has been the health of its higher education sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the higher education industry, and not just the five colleges that are in the County. Complete changes in how education is delivered are in the foreseeable future, including the decline of in-person instruction.

Nationally, colleges and universities will be re-examining how to instruct students even after the pandemic is over. Given that St. Lawrence University, Clarkson, SUNY Canton, and SUNY Potsdam, along with local businesses that serve each institution, rely heavily on the presence of students on campus during the school year, any significant change to how students are instructed could have a major deleterious effect on the County. Further, taxes, housing, infrastructure, and the local economy of the County could be in serious trouble if professors and researchers are no longer instructing in classrooms and labs that are located in St. Lawrence County.



Finally, while it is unlikely that any of the colleges is a "flight risk" in the same way as is a global corporation, the preparation of this CEDS has focused the County on the importance of its five colleges and helped it to realize that its developers must take the lead in preparing a contingency plan for and with its higher education sector.

The role of the colleges as employers, spenders, attractors of new residents, as research partners and development resources is extraordinary in a county of our size. Hence, the IDA will work closely with the Associated Colleges –to determine how the colleges' perceptions of their future trajectories can benefit from this and future versions of the County's CEDS.

Resilience and Response: Coordination, Communication, and Assistance during the Pandemic

The Covid pandemic has provided all levels of government and society with the opportunity to develop, enact, and endure emergency response plans. This is as true in St. Lawrence County as any place else.

The pandemic response has included numerous aspects— public health, education, economic development, information management and public awareness, to name a few. In St. Lawrence County the pandemic response was managed and coordinated through the County Public Health Department and County Government. These entities interacted with their counterparts both regionally and at the State level.

The County also formed a task force with the goal of reopening the County safely and providing businesses and residents with the best information and guidance possible as the local economy recovered. This Task Force began meeting in May of 2020 to help coordinate the economic and public health responses to the pandemic. The CEO of the County IDA chairs the Task Force and serves along with the County Legislative Chairman and County Administrator, County Legislators, the Director of the County Public Health Department, the Chief Medical Officer for the County, the Executive Director of the County Chamber, the Executive Director of the Small Business Development Center, the Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension, and IDA staff.

In light of the vast amount of information being passed around and covered on various news outlets, newsletters, web resources, social media, etc., the Task Force and IDA implemented an outbound calling effort to reach businesses in March of 2020. This was part of an organized strategy to connect with businesses and provide as much personal, direct contact as possible. The effort resulted in contact with over 500 businesses and remains active and ongoing.

Technical assistance and/or referrals to other service providers was provided through a coordinated effort with the service and resource provider members of the Task Force and the local economic and community development communities. Initially this included assisting companies to qualify as “essential” businesses in order to remain open during the “NY ON PAUSE” period. Many of the manufacturing facilities in the County were able to remain open during the early stages of the pandemic due to this designation.

In effort to make certain no businesses were being overlooked, a local advertising campaign highlighting the services available through the IDA and its local partners was undertaken. Ads were placed on the various radio stations operated within the County, in print and on-line.

The ads continue and the message is continuously changing in response to the evolving challenges and needs during the crisis. Over 600 yard and window signs were distributed throughout the County to reinforce the concept of staying safe to keep businesses open in St. Lawrence County. Face shields, supplied by the County and required by executive order for reopening, were delivered to several salons around the County to help meet the needs for reopening.

Technical assistance was provided to employers not only understanding and applying for CARES Act SBA programs (and other local programs) but are also tracking awards and the provision of funds to local applicants. This enabled the sharing of information related to the funding process and timing with other companies that were in the application process.

A year and a half into the pandemic, the Reopening Task Force local development partners continue to work together to coordinate the response effort with the latest focus being on the vaccination effort. This includes helping with site selection and layout plans for vaccination sites, contacting and scheduling volunteers to help process registrants for vaccination site locations, and reaching out to companies to solicit employees to utilize vaccination clinics.

Multiple potential medical providers were certified through the Public Health Department to do vaccinations, leading to proper staffing levels at the clinics and preventing volunteer burnout. Vaccination clinics were held at company sites, including Arconic, ALCOA, Corning, and the multiple businesses at the OBPA industrial park through a clinic held in the park.

Business assistance and response efforts have been coordinated not only in St. Lawrence County, but also regionally and with our New York State partners. In addition to working with Jefferson and Lewis Counties and the Development Authority of the North Country, efforts were coordinated across the North Country Region through our board and executive committee member status on the North Country Alliance and with our New York State partners in our role on the New York State Economic Development Council executive board.

Periodic meetings led by the IDA are also ongoing with our local Small Business Development Center, the County Chamber, community development partners, workforce development agencies, financial institutions, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the regional and State development agencies and organizations with whom we always work. This has contributed to an efficient and coordinated information flow amongst service providers, government, businesses, the health and education systems, and the public.

Any disaster, economic downturn, or catastrophic impact to a key industry of the County's will be unique and will require specialized and specific response. That said, the experiences, lessons learned, and connections built during the pandemic have better positioned the County to be resilient and responsive to these events in the future.

