

Chapter 8: Economic and Workforce Development

GOAL: Foster an equitable and robust green economy.

In the coming decades, humanity faces a number of serious, interconnected challenges including climate change, biodiversity loss, and the continued growth of social inequality. At present, our economic systems and workforce development pipelines are not fit to overcome these challenges or deliver a healthy balance between social and environmental goals. Instead, our current economy promotes overconsumption, degrades natural systems, and breaks down communal bonds. A new economic vision is required to solve these problems in an equitable manner. In fact, there are economic opportunities as we work to reduce the impact of and bolster Erie County's resilience in the face of climate change.

According to the United Nations, a green economy is an economy that "results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive." A green economy enables all people to create and enjoy prosperity while remaining within the ecological limits of the planet. It protects, restores, and invests in our natural systems while supporting responsible production and consumption of resources.

In order to foster a just transition from our current economic system to a regenerative green economy, Erie County government, businesses, organizations, and residents must strive to move all sectors away from carbon-intensive practices and steer the region toward a low-carbon future. To do this, the Erie County government will focus on developing the County's workforce, promoting a regenerative green economy through policies and infrastructure, and working with businesses County-wide so that they can realize the benefits of sustainable operations. This economic transition can serve as an opportunity to implement more inclusive economic development practices that will reduce inequality and support all residents.

DEFINITIONS FOR ACTIONS SPECIFICATIONS
Short-term: By or before 2030
Medium-term: By 2040
Long-term: By 2050
Direct: County government can directly control the action - relating to County government operations and infrastructure
Indirect: Regional agencies and municipalities have control and/or County government can support/influence
Support: State or Federal policies and programs

STRATEGY 1: Outreach

The idea that addressing climate change as an investment in our economic future is not a new idea. In fact, recognizing the value of addressing climate change, more than seventy businesses in Erie County have already joined together as part of the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable. However, more outreach is needed for all of the County’s local businesses to see the opportunity to innovate, conserve energy, improve quality of life, and attract employees. The County government should work with the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable and other economic development and workforce organizations to educate, motivate, and reward businesses that take such actions.

Before developing any outreach materials or holding meetings, it is important to understand the baseline knowledge, concerns, and needs surrounding the intersection of climate change and business. A survey tool should be developed and distributed with partners, including the County’s Community Climate Ambassadors, and be used to inform outreach materials and economic development summits. The knowledge garnered from surveys and meetings should be used to inform programs and foster actions that support this equity-focused Plan.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
1.1: Determine the needs of community members, businesses, and municipalities through annual surveys.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Support	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, All Local IDAs, BNP, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, NYSEDA, WNY REDC, Blue Green Alliance, Erie County

				Association of Governments Climate Smart Committee, Task Force, VBN, ECEMC
1.2: Develop and regularly update a Climate Action Toolkit to provide a roadmap for success for both large and small business.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Support	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, Local IDAs, BNP, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, NYSERDA, WNY REDC, Blue Green Alliance, Erie County Association of Governments Climate Smart Committee, Task Force, VBN
1.3: Hold an annual inclusive economic development summit focused on identifying needs and highlighting available programs that support businesses to address climate change.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Support	DEP	WNY SBR, Local IDAs, Chambers of Commerce, Invest Buffalo Niagara
1.4: Work with government agencies to create new and leverage existing programs that are responsive to the needs identified through the summits to educate, motivate, attract, and reward businesses to invest in climate action.	Medium-Term/ Ongoing	Support/ Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, NYSDEC, USEPA, USDOE, REDC, US EDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara, Local IDAs
1.5 Engage in direct community outreach to assess needs and provide resources assistance.	Short-term - on-going	Support	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, Local municipalities, Community Groups, UBRI

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Climate Action toolkit for businesses

STRATEGY 2: Policies & Infrastructure

It is vital that both economic development policies and infrastructure investments are aligned with the goals of this equity-focused Plan. To ensure widespread implementation and success,

policies should be in the form of incentives. For example, financial incentives to attract new businesses or support existing enterprises should include sustainability criteria. Similarly, investments in infrastructure such as roads, sewer lines, or broadband should support smart growth principles. It has been well documented in local planning documents, such as One Region Forward, that continual sprawl has negative impacts on the environment and our region’s economic stability. For example, sprawl results in more infrastructure for municipalities to maintain, which requires increased funding through taxes plus additional GHG emissions from increased vehicle miles traveled. Through “ErieNet,” the County is currently working to ensure that all areas of the County can access the internet, which has become a required utility for doing business and can assist in reducing GHG emissions in a variety of ways, such as decreasing the need to travel through virtual meetings and incorporating “smart” technology to conserve energy.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
2.1: Review current local economic development policies for environmental, social, and equity concerns and benchmark against other communities.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	ECIDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, Chambers of Commerce
2.2 Work with stakeholders to develop policies that encourage business efforts to reduce GHG emissions and become more resilient to a changing climate, including equitable transportation-oriented development, energy conservation, renewable energy, and job creation.	Short-term	Indirect	DEP	ECIDA, Other IDAs, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, Chambers of Commerce, Equal Employment Office, GBNRTC, NFTA, EC Association of Governments
2.3: Focus on redeveloping brownfields while aligning with Smart Growth objectives.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	NYSDEC, USEPA, ECIDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara
2.4: Identify preferred economic sites within the County that lack renewable electric infrastructure, renewable electric capacity, or both.	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	ECIDA, local municipalities, NYSERDA, local utilities, Association of Governments, Invest Buffalo

				Niagara, local developers
2.5: Expand broadband internet throughout Erie County.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP	ErieNet LDC
2.6: Advocate for climate action goals and sustainable supply chain products and services.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP/ Purchasing	SBR, private entities
2.7: Continue to support the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP/ Purchasing	SBR, private entities
2.8: Assist and guide municipalities in planning and implementing zoning regulations that support green businesses.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Local municipalities, Association of Governments

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Urban sprawl
- ErieNet
- Tie into transit-oriented development & Transportation WG

STRATEGY 3: Workforce Development

Addressing climate change impacts while building community resilience to those impacts will result in changes to the region’s workforce. As we plan for a Just Transition to jobs that address climate change impacts and build resilience, it is important to consider both the existing jobs that are affected and how to create opportunities for workers who live in disadvantaged communities.

Many of the solutions to climate change require labor related to renewable energy, energy conservation, tree planting, green infrastructure, building new homes while renovating existing ones, and upgrades to utilities. These are all “green” jobs. Invest Buffalo Niagara’s Labor Market Assessment, which specifically looks at “green” jobs and identifies needs, is expected to be released in late 2022. This needs assessment should be aligned with existing entities and partners to create interest, training opportunities, and placement in green jobs.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
3.1: Advocate for solutions to remove barriers to employment, including access and affordability to transportation and childcare.	Ongoing	Indirect/Support	DEP/DSS	Workforce Investment Board, Childcare Coalition, LiveWell Erie
3.2: Identify and promote WNY educational institutions that have training programs to attract labor force and industries that are pivoting to green technologies.	Short-Term/Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Workforce Investment Board, Local educational institutes, Northland Training Center, NYS Labor Board, NYSERDA, Buffalo Niagara Builders Association, BOCES, ECC
3.3: Use local market data to convene a summit with workforce development organizations to identify needs and ways to leverage and fund programs.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	Invest Buffalo Niagara, community colleges, universities, local governments, labor unions, Erie1 BOCES, Northland Training Center, NYS Labor Board, Workforce Investment Board, NYSERDA, USEPA

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Invest Buffalo Niagara Labor Market Assessment