

## CHAPTER 8



The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 41 consistently updates its curriculum to keep its workforce prepared for the region's growing investment in sustainable energy technologies.

"We know that wind, solar, and electric cars are a part of the future," IBEW Local 41 Training Director Matt Hilmy says, "so it's important for us to learn how to properly teach our new electricians and keep them up to date."



# Economic and Workforce Development



## GOAL: Foster an equitable and robust green economy

At present, our economic systems and workforce development pipelines are not fit to overcome the challenges from climate change or deliver a healthy balance between social and environmental goals. Instead, our current system promotes overconsumption, degrades natural systems, and breaks down communal bonds. A new vision for economic and workforce development is required to solve these problems in an equitable manner. In fact, there are economic opportunities as the County works to reduce the impact of and bolster its 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.”<sup>89</sup> A green economy

protects, restores, and invests in its 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. This economic transition can serve as an opportunity to implement more inclusive economic development practices that will reduce inequality and support all residents. To do this, Erie County 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.

### 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

# STRATEGY 1: Outreach

The idea that addressing climate change as an investment in our economic future is not new. In fact, more than 70 businesses in Erie County have already joined together as part of the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable that recognize the value of addressing climate change.<sup>90</sup> However, more outreach is needed for all 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 SBR 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 in Erie County. 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.

## ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GOAL: Foster an equitable and robust green economy.

STRATEGY 1: Outreach	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.1.1:</b>	<b>Determine the needs of community members, businesses, and municipalities through annual surveys.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, all local IDAs, Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP), Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, NYSERDA, WNY Regional Economic Development Council (REDC), Erie County Association of Governments Climate Smart Committee, Task Force, Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN), ECEMC
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.1.2:</b>	<b>Develop and regularly update a Climate Action Toolkit to provide a roadmap to success for both large and small business.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, local IDAs, BNP, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, NYSERDA, WNY REDC, Erie County Association of Governments Climate Smart Committee, Task Force, VBN
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.1.3:</b>	<b>Hold an annual inclusive economic development summit focused on identifying needs and highlighting available programs that support businesses to address climate change.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	WNY SBR, local IDAs, Chambers of Commerce, Invest Buffalo Niagara
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.1.4:</b>	<b>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.</b>			
	Medium-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	NYSERDA, NYSDEC, USEPA, United States Department of Energy (USDOE), REDC, United States Economic Development Administration (USEDA), Invest Buffalo Niagara, local IDAs, WNY SBR
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.1.5:</b>	<b>Engage in direct community outreach to assess needs and provide resource assistance.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Climate Ambassadors, local municipalities, community groups, UBRI, WNY SBR



## 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

*To learn more about Transit Oriented Development, check out the Transit Strategy in the Transportation chapter.*

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, such as cli-

mate change impacts, climate resilience, and climate justice. Similarly, investments in infrastructure such as roads, sewer lines, broadband, and brownfield restoration should support smart growth principles.<sup>91</sup> It has been well documented in local planning documents, such as One Region Forward,<sup>92</sup> Framework for Regional Growth,<sup>93</sup> and the Regional Niagara River/Lake Erie Watershed Management Plan,<sup>94</sup> 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<sup>95</sup> to conserve energy.

STRATEGY 2: Policies & Infrastructure	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.1:</b>	<b>Review current local economic development policies for environmental, social, and equity concerns and benchmark against other communities.</b>			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	ECIDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, Chambers of Commerce
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.2:</b>	<b>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.</b>			
	Short-Term	Indirect	DEP	ECIDA, Other IDAs, Invest Buffalo Niagara, WNY SBR, Chambers of Commerce, Equal Employment Office, GBNRTC, NFTA, EC Association of Governments
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.3:</b>	<b>Focus on redeveloping brownfields while aligning with Smart Growth and equity objectives.</b>			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSDEC, USEPA, ECIDA, Invest Buffalo Niagara
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.4:</b>	<b>Identify preferred economic sites within the County that lack renewable electric infrastructure, renewable electric capacity, or both.</b>			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	ECIDA, local municipalities, NYSEERDA, local utilities, Association of Governments, Invest Buffalo Niagara, local developers
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.5:</b>	<b>Expand broadband internet throughout Erie County.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP	ErieNet Local Development Corporation (LDC), PPG
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.6:</b>	<b>Advocate for sustainable supply chain products and services.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP, Purchasing	WNY SBR, private entities
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.7:</b>	<b>Continue to support the WNY SBR.</b>			
	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DEP	WNY SBR
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.2.8:</b>	<b>Assist and guide municipalities in planning and implementing zoning regulations that support green businesses.</b>			
	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Local municipalities, Association of Governments



Training director Matt Hilmy sends the IBEW Local 41 union’s instructors to the National Training Institute each year to learn how to properly teach incoming apprentices.

“We’ve been working on training our electricians on solar and wind for years, Hilmy says, “and now we’ve added things like electric vehicle charging and battery storage to our curriculum.”

## 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.

*To learn more about nature-based jobs, check out the Skilled Labor Jobs Strategy in the Nature-based Solutions chapter.*

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. The Invest Buffalo Niagara Labor Market Assessment, which specifically looks at “green” jobs and identifies needs, was released in late 2022.<sup>96</sup> It is important to align the outcomes of this needs assessment with existing entities and partners to create interest, training opportunities, and placement in green jobs, such as Tonawanda Tomorrow.<sup>97</sup>

### STRATEGY 3: Workforce Development

	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.3.1:</b>	<b>Advocate for solutions to remove barriers to employment, including access and affordability to transportation<sup>98</sup> and childcare.</b>			
	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP, DSS	Workforce Investment Board, Childcare Coalition, Live Well Erie
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.3.2:</b>	<b>Identify and promote WNY educational institutions that have training programs to attract labor force and industries that are pivoting to green technologies.</b>			
	Short-Term/Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Workforce Investment Board, local educational institutes, Northland Training Center, NYS Labor Board, NYSERDA, Buffalo Niagara Builders Association, BOCES, Erie Community College (ECC)
<b>ACTION ITEM 8.3.3:</b>	<b>Use local market data to convene a summit with workforce development organizations to identify needs and ways to leverage and fund programs.</b>			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	Invest Buffalo Niagara, community colleges, universities, local municipalities, labor unions, BOCES, Northland Training Center, NYS Labor Board, Workforce Investment Board, NYSERDA, USEPA

Figure 26 Green Jobs



## Further Reading

### Outreach Strategy

#### Climate Action Toolkit for Businesses –

This Toolkit provides practical and cost-effective actions that every business can take to reduce GHG emissions and build resilience.

<https://businessclimateactiontoolkit.ca/>

### Policies & Infrastructure Strategy

**ErieNet** – Creating a foundation to address the broadband needs of unserved areas, improve services in underserved areas of the community, and enable world-class broadband investment and deployment countywide.

[www.erienet.com](http://www.erienet.com)

### Workforce Development Strategy

**Invest Buffalo Niagara Labor Market Assessment** – An overview of Buffalo-Niagara’s economy, labor force, and target industries.

[https://regional-institute.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2020/11/LOWSingles\\_LMA17\\_WhosOurEconomy.pdf](https://regional-institute.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2020/11/LOWSingles_LMA17_WhosOurEconomy.pdf)

#### FOOTNOTES: Economic and Workforce Development

89 United Nations, “Green Economy,” United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1446>.

90 To see the list of WNY SBR Members, go to the WNY SBR’s website at <https://www.wnysustainablebusiness.org/our-members>

91 See the Smart Growth Strategy in the Housing and Neighborhood Resiliency chapter.

92 To access the One Region Forward by UBRI document, go to [http://bap-home.net/solarize/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2017/05/1RF\\_A-New-Way-To-Plan-For-Buffalo-Niagara\\_FinalPlan\\_reduced.pdf](http://bap-home.net/solarize/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2017/05/1RF_A-New-Way-To-Plan-For-Buffalo-Niagara_FinalPlan_reduced.pdf)

93 To access the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth, go to Erie County’s website at <https://www4.erie.gov/regionalframework/framework-regional-growth-final-plan>

94 To access Erie County’s Regional Niagara River/Lake Erie Watershed Management Plan, go to Erie County’s website at <https://www3.erie.gov/environment/watershed-management-plan>

95 To learn more about smart technology, go to the Williams College website at <https://oit.williams.edu/itech-posts/what-is-smart-technology/>

96 The Invest Buffalo Niagara’s Labor Market Assessment can be found on Invest Buffalo Niagara’s website at <https://info.buffaloniagara.org/2022lma>

97 To learn more about Tonawanda Tomorrow, go to UBRI’s website at <http://regional-institute.buffalo.edu/work/tonawanda-tomorrow/>

98 Check out the Transportation chapter to learn about the connection between transportation infrastructure and equitable workforce development.