

PART TWO

# Regional Strategic Plan Update and Participation



# Regional Strategic Plan Update

## REGIONAL ASSETS

The North Country's greatest assets are things that have been around for a very long time and are likely to be around for a long time to come. Proximity to Canada, the proud history of Fort Drum, the beauty of the natural resources, historic downtowns, access to water and land, and a hard-working workforce that has navigated changing economies, emerging industries, and difficult times.

The assets of the North County can be grouped into several categories, including location, institutions, resources, industry, and community.

### Location

- **Proximity to Canada:** Access to Canadian markets and close connections with Quebec and Ontario are positive for foreign direct investment and industry trading opportunities, as well as expansion of the tourism market.
- **Transportation Infrastructure:** The North Country has a wide variety of transportation access including deep-water shipping, major highways, international airports, and railways.
- **Access to Major Markets:** The North Country is within a day's drive of over 50% of the United States' population, including major markets along the east coast and mid-west.

### Institutions

- **Higher Education Institutions:** The North Country is home to institutions of higher learning including vocational schools, community colleges, and public and private colleges and universities. These institutions are major partners for economic, workforce, and community development throughout the region.
- **Collaboration:** Within the North Country many different partners work together for the benefit of the North Country's economy and to support regional businesses and research and development. This includes many chambers of

commerce, economic development organizations, health centers, regional planning organizations, and more. All working collectively to benefit the residents and businesses in the region.

- **Fort Drum US Army Military Post:** Fort Drum has been a part of the North Country's economy since the early 1980's and continues to play a major role. On- and off-base activity drives the Jefferson County economy and creates opportunities for the full region in terms of market size, workforce, and entrepreneurship.

### Natural Resources

- **Clean Water:** The North Country still has access to plenty of fresh, clean water that can be used for drinking, industrial processes, and as inputs. Climate change continues to impact water sources in other parts of the country and world, driving people to places where this important resource is more abundant.
- **Available Land:** There remains substantial land throughout the North Country that is available and affordable for development by expanding businesses. Some of the land is regulated by the Adirondack Park, but compared to other parts of the northeast, the North Country has affordable and available land.
- **Outdoor Recreation Opportunities:** The North Country is full of year-round outdoor recreation opportunities, including biking, hunting, birding, hiking, rock climbing, skiing, white water rafting, camping, and so much more. Lake Ontario and Champlain, the 1000 Islands, Adirondack Park, Tug Hill Plateau, Hudson River, and so many more offer endless potential for residents, seasonal visitors, and tourists. Enjoying and protecting the natural environment is core to the values of the people in the North Country.

### Industry

- **Diversified Economy:** The North Country has a wide variety of industry strengths and emerging

opportunities. Many different sectors are represented in the economy, including aerospace, agriculture, biotech, defense, energy, transit equipment, and tourism.

- **Industrial Parks:** Throughout the North Country there are existing industrial and business parks that have been designed to manage new, existing, and expanding businesses. These parks provide businesses with the necessary space, land use policies, infrastructure, and support that is needed to be successful.
- **Affordable Sites and Space:** For businesses looking to locate or expand in the North Country, there are available and affordable sites and space.

## Community

- **Downtown Districts:** In each of the counties that make up the North Country there are varying sizes of downtown districts, from micropolitan

cities like Watertown and Plattsburgh to small village centers like Tupper Lake. These downtown areas provide much-needed retail access, cultural opportunities, community connection, historic preservation, and business support that is needed by all in the region. These downtowns act as nodes throughout the region for tourists and residents alike.

- **The People:** The people that make up the North Country are hard-working, innovative, and committed to the region. This includes both the residents that work throughout the economy as well as the many hard-working professionals that work to provide supportive services to improve the lives of others.
- **Quality of Life:** Residents in the North Country are able to experience a high quality of life that is not easily replicated, with ease of access to outdoor recreation amenities and a low cost of living.

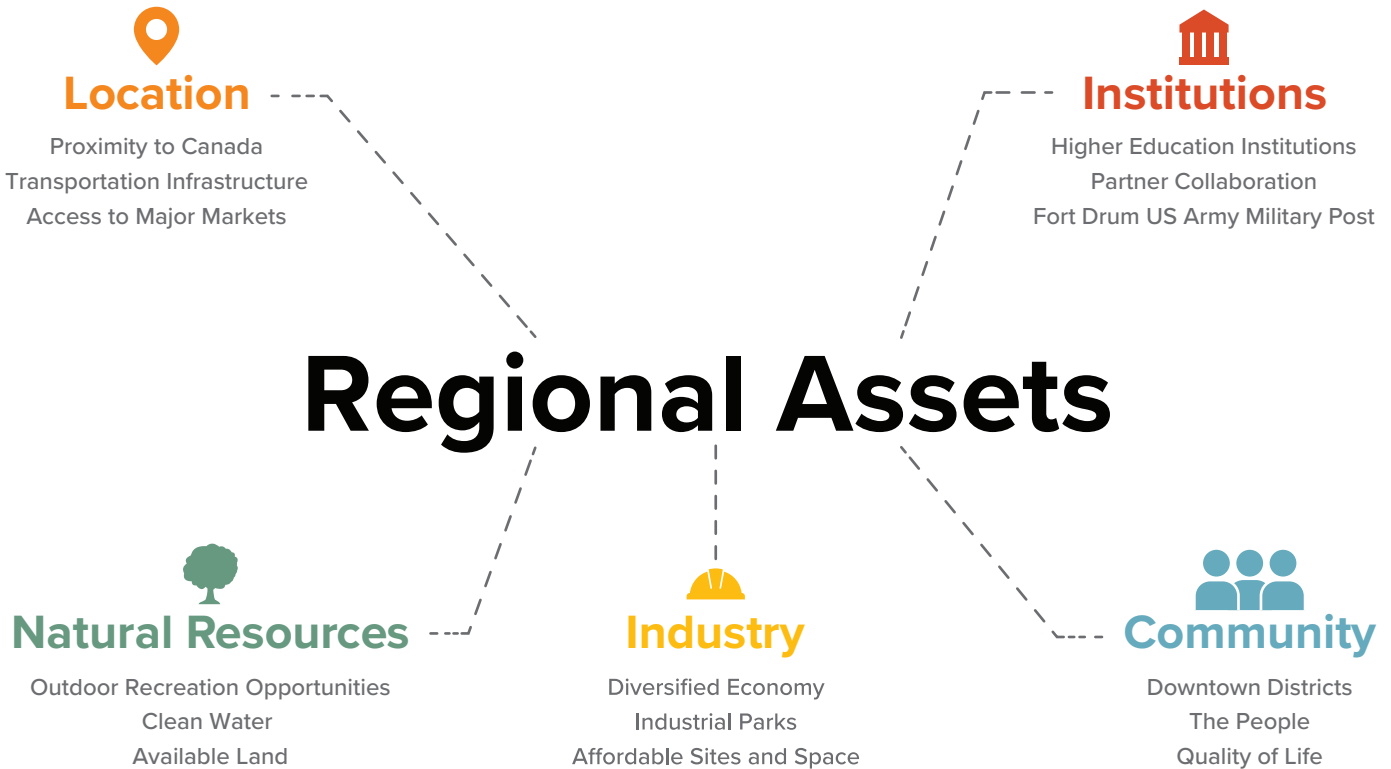


Indian Lake in Hamilton County

## VISION

*The North Country will lead the economic renaissance of New York State's small cities and rural communities, improve the fortunes of the region's residents, cherish the region's vast natural resources, provide access to world class outdoor amenities, and embody a vibrant, resilient spirit.*

Through a series of engagement activities, stakeholders identified common elements of what the North Country is today and what it could be in ten years. Stakeholders focused on Regional Assets that will be leveraged for sustainable development



### What We Heard

“

Diverse location with many opportunities.

“

Beautiful and healthy environment, friendly communities.

“

Protected environment, small and safe communities, endless possibilities.

# STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Based on community engagement, prior research, economic analysis, and best practices, the following strategic roadmap has been developed for the North Country. This roadmap identifies a series of strategies for each of the regional priorities with the overall intent of highlighting critical tasks, programs, and tactics that will have the greatest impact within the North Country on creating positive economic change for the residents and businesses.

Implementation of the strategic roadmap is intended to be jointly pursued by a wide range of organizations and collaboratives, align with the region’s workforce development strategy, and amplify individual community-based economic development plans. The strategies aligned with regional priorities are intended to guide future funding decisions at the North Country Regional Economic Development Council level.



## PRIORITY PILLARS AND GOALS SNAPSHOT

The Regional Economic Development Council developed four work groups to align with the region's vision and strategies in the State of the Region: North Country 2019 Progress Report and created an additional work group for the 2023 Strategic Plan. Each work group aligns with priority areas of the region to focus time, energy, and resources on goal specific strategies. Priority areas of the North Country include Placemaking, Tradeable Sectors, Innovation, Workforce, and Housing. Existing challenges and opportunities are summarized below with new goals that each work group will focus on during the life of the 2023 Strategic Plan.

### Placemaking

**Goal: Create livable, attractive, and connected communities where people want to live, work, visit, and invest.**

The North Country has historic villages, quaint downtowns, and vast natural resources that support residents and draw visitors from all over the world. Due to the geographic size and rural nature of the North Country, there are challenges that present opportunities for economic development. Placemaking challenges include the high cost of infrastructure, existing blighted buildings, scarcity of “boots on the ground” technical assistance programs, lack of local capital, and sprawl from city centers.

However, existing challenges spark new economic development opportunities like leveraging assets to grow outdoor recreation and adventure tourism year-round, expand and market available technical assistance programs and capital resources, and concentrate development on city centers for residents to stay in the area.

### SUCCESS STORY

#### *The Lodge at Schroon Lake*

In June 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul announced the grand opening of the \$25 million Lodge at Schroon Lake in the Town of Schroon, Essex County. The transformation of the Brown Swan Club into the Lodge at Schroon Lake was supported by a \$4.1 million grant through the NCREDC's Upstate Revitalization Initiative and will create 47 full-time equivalent jobs at the site, plus 30 seasonal positions. Additionally, the project aligns with the region's placemaking and workforce strategies by serving as a community anchor, celebrating regional heritage and architecture, and creating accessible employment opportunities for residents.

The vacant property was converted into a premier Adirondack destination, with 116 guest rooms including 44 standard rooms and 25 suites in the Main Lodge, 25 guest rooms in the West Lodge, nine chalets, five cabins, three suites in Longhouse Cabin and five glamping sites. The resort includes a 10,000 sq. ft. world-class restaurant and extensive indoor and outdoor amenities for guests such as miniature golf, multipurpose sports courts and guest waterfront area with swimming, docks, a deck, boats for guest use, and dock slips.



Ribbon cutting ceremony at the Lodge at Schroon Lake

## Tradeable Sectors

**Goal: Support, grow, and diversify the North Country's major industries to serve domestic and global markets.**

Tradeable sectors include Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Renewable Energy. All three tradeable sectors represent approximately 11% of the region's economy. Tradeable sectors are still facing challenges like skilled workforce shortages, varied infrastructure availability across the region, shortage of shovel-ready sites, and limited knowledge in business retention and expansion programs.

Partnering with organizations to build a skilled talent pipeline, investing in shovel-ready sites, prioritizing business attraction, and marketing business expansion and retention programs are opportunities to leverage current assets like education institutions, Fort Drum, existing capital, and available land.

## Innovation

**Goal: Foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that grows and attracts entrepreneurs and companies seeking to market emerging technologies and solutions by creating synergies between research, development, and commercialization.**

Innovation enables sustainable growth, creativity, and diversification in the economy. Innovation in the North Country has the potential to continue building on the existing technology and innovation ecosystem. Introducing more technology and innovative ideas to tradeable sectors can address challenges that are hindering growth. Examples include advanced manufacturing, expanding value-add agriculture products, and technology in life sciences.

## Workforce

**Goal: Develop a resilient and diversified workforce through attraction, training, and retention efforts to meet the needs of our employers, our workers, and their families.**

Job growth in the North Country is projected to increase by 17% over the next ten years. However, with this growth, there will be 48,046 occupations not filled by 2032, based on current labor force participation trends. Existing workforce challenges include an aging population, low wages, high

## SUCCESS STORY

### Agri-Mark

In June 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul announced the completion of Agri-Mark's nearly \$30 million expansion and modernization project at its cheese manufacturing facility in Chateaugay, Franklin County. The expansion, which was a multi-phase project, is retaining more than 100 full-time jobs, supporting more than 500 agricultural jobs in the region, and helping to boost the state's dairy industry in Northern New York.

Agri-Mark's North Country facility produces award-winning Cabot and McCadam cheese products. This project was supported by \$6 million in funding, including \$4 million in Economic Transformation Program funds and \$2 million in ESD capital funds through the NCREDC.



Agri-Mark's new North Country facility in Chateaugay

turnover, lack of skills, and lack of support services for workers (wrap-around services).

Opportunities that leverage the North Country's current assets to build the workforce pipeline include excellent training facilities/education institutions, training programs, and talent attraction programs that market the benefits of living in the North Country.

## Housing

**Goal: Build a regional ecosystem to support owner occupied and rental housing development and rehabilitation for the region's workforce in the 80% - 200% Area Median Income (AMI) range to create healthy, sustainable, and diverse communities to support the region's businesses and employers.**

As a new goal area in the 2023 Strategic Plan, housing strategies are focused on addressing the attainable housing shortage in the North Country

to support overall growth of the region. Attainable housing specifically focuses on the 80% - 200% Area Median Income (AMI) range to address workforce housing challenges and shortages of starter-home and multi-family units. The Housing work group is focused on building technical assistance programs, grant/loan programs, and partnerships for successful implementation of strategies.

### WRAP-AROUND SERVICES NEEDED MOST

Wrap-around services breaks down employment barriers and supports labor force participation, increases residents' quality of life, and grows the economy.



#### Affordable, Quality Child and Elder Care

Across the region, there is limited access to affordable eldercare and childcare services. Due to this, caregivers are not engaged in the workforce or able to build careers. This can lead to residents migrating out of the North Country to find more services, decreasing the population.



#### Attainable Housing

Every pillar work group stated that access to attainable, quality housing hindered economic growth, especially talent attraction efforts to grow tradeable sectors. Businesses find it challenging to hire quality workers because they do not have a place to live in the region.



#### Transportation

There is limited public transportation across the region due to the geography and lack of infrastructure. Increasing public transportation routes, flexible bus schedules for shift workers, and connected localities across the region can support resident success.



Houses on Lake Flower in Saranac Lake

# PLACEMAKING

**GOAL:** Create livable, attractive, and connected communities where people want to live, work, visit, and invest.

Investing in livable, attractive, and connected communities (also known as placemaking) enhances the economic potential of the individual communities that make up the North Country, and therefore the larger region as well. The many historic villages, towns, and city centers that make up the North Country have always been the lifeblood of the region, attracting visitors, supporting residents, and encouraging entrepreneurs to take a chance. Putting resources into these centers will create a ripple effect throughout the North Country by creating stronger connections from the outer areas to central points, increasing greater pull towards the areas of existing infrastructure, and reinforcing the unique aspects of the region.

Placemaking initiatives play an important role in catalyzing economic development by enhancing the appeal and functionality of community centers and neighborhoods. Well-designed public spaces, parks, and vibrant streetscapes attract people, and this influx of foot traffic can translate into increased business activity. Restaurants, cafes, shops, and cultural venues flourish in areas where placemaking efforts have taken root. As a result, local entrepreneurs and small businesses benefit from higher customer traffic, leading to increased sales and revenue. The thriving economic ecosystem nurtured by these efforts not only benefits existing businesses, but also encourages new investments in the area. By creating places that people want to visit and linger in, placemaking has the potential to stimulate job creation and economic growth.

Placemaking enhances the overall desirability of a community, making it an attractive destination for investors, businesses, and a skilled workforce. When community centers are thoughtfully developed to offer a high quality of life, complete with amenities like green spaces, cultural hubs, and recreational opportunities, they become magnets for both capital and talent. Businesses are more inclined to establish themselves in areas where they can tap into a thriving local economy and a well-educated workforce. Additionally, placemaking efforts can serve as a signal to potential investors, indicating that the local government and community are committed to fostering a prosperous and welcoming environment. This, in turn, can lead to increased private sector investments, further boosting economic development.

One of the remarkable features of placemaking is its ability to contribute to long-term economic resilience. By fostering a strong sense of community and pride in the local environment, placemaking can help insulate communities against economic downturns. People are more likely to invest in and support their neighborhoods when they have a deep emotional connection to the area. As a result, residents are motivated to take an active role in preserving and improving their community, which can lead to sustainable economic growth over time. Placemaking also promotes environmental sustainability by encouraging the use of public transportation, walking, or biking, reducing reliance on cars and associated expenses. In this way, it contributes to both the economic well-being and environmental health of a region, ensuring a more robust and resilient local economy.

The rural character of the North Country can make placemaking more challenging, but also makes it that much more important. Giving residents a positive place where they can connect, have their needs met, and see opportunities for themselves and their families is critical to enhancing economic prosperity, from the small villages to the larger cities.

## DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY MODEL

This model illustrates foundational placemaking components to support strategies for a connected, diverse, and vibrant downtown.

- Economic development framework
- Entrepreneur ecosystem
- Financing
- Place
- Built environment
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Economic diversity
- Innovation and entrepreneurship
- Business environment
- Real estate market
- Human diversity
- Marketing, communications, and engagement
- Arts and culture
- Regulatory/government role

## STRATEGIES

1

Revitalize and energize our main streets and downtowns to create connected, vibrant, livable centers of commerce, seeding replicable approaches to placemaking for application regionwide.

The North Country is surrounded by natural beauty with charming main streets and quaint downtowns. Main streets and downtowns are important social and economic centers that provide entrepreneurship opportunities, activities for residents and visitors, and create a sense of belonging. Connected, vibrant main streets and downtowns boost the economy and enhance the quality of life for all. Continued

investment in infrastructure, transportation, mixed-use development, and community programming is essential for enhancing the North Country's main streets and downtowns. As improvements are made in localities, creating a replicable blueprint of successful projects is a comprehensive approach that provides a toolbox for communities to use across the region.

2

Increase the appeal of community gateways and travel corridors to strengthen community pride and effectively welcome the region's visitors.

Visitors' first impressions of the region are travel corridors and points of entry into a community. Gateways and corridors can be leveraged to create a positive story that represents the community's identity, values, and unique qualities. Increasing the appeal of gateways and corridors can include investments in

landscaping, public art installations, better signage, elimination of blight, and structural enhancements. A strong first impression encourages increased tourism, lingering stays, and repeat visits that positively stimulate the region's economy.

3

Enhance the region as an "adventure destination" to diversify the economy for the benefit of all residents and visitors, including investments in active and outdoor tourism infrastructure.

The North Country's vast landscapes provide an outdoor playground for everyone with over six million acres in the Adirondack Park and access to Tug Hill and the 1000 Islands. Enhancing the region as an adventure destination can drive economic development year-round based on the North Country's assets, such as leveraging the region's Olympic heritage and traditional winter sports. Adventure tourism attracts visitors and

residents to different experiences like hiking, rock climbing, camping, winter sports, snowmobiling, etc. To capitalize on increased adventure tourism, examples of necessary investments include outdoor recreation business capacity, trail/site maintenance, facilities (including access to utilities and transportation routes), and lodging.

4

Create a sense of welcoming and belonging in our region's places, through investments in social, cultural, and artistic resources and infrastructure.

Creating a sense of welcoming and belonging supports talent attraction efforts, business retention, and promotes social connections among people from diverse backgrounds. Social resources and investments focus on gathering spaces, programming,

and creating accessibility for people with differing abilities. Similarly, cultural and artistic resources enhance the vibrancy of the region, encourage residents to be creators, and instill a sense of pride in the community.

5

Preserve and reimagine viable historic, underutilized, and vacant buildings, especially residential and mixed-use buildings, to enhance the character, livability, and sense of place in our communities.

Identifying and investing in existing buildings that are vacant or underutilized is a sustainable method to breathe new life into communities across the North Country. Redevelopment is an opportunity to address blight, a lack of housing stock, and stimulate

the economy with new businesses while preserving the character of an area. Engaging residents in the reimagining process can create a sense of place and community buy-in for municipal code enforcement and future projects.

6

Concentrate development in community centers to help create vibrant, walkable places with adequate infrastructure, while preserving the region's unique natural resources.

The North Country is primarily rural with access to stunning natural resources with quaint downtowns and main streets. It is beneficial to concentrate development in North Country's community centers to improve accessibility, reduce urban sprawl, and focus resources on improving infrastructure for people to live, work, and play in the same area. This Smart Growth approach promotes a sense of community, decreases long commutes, and ensures the region's unique natural resources are conserved and protected.

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**Smart Growth makes our communities more attractive, economically strong, socially diverse, and resilient to climate change.**

UNITED STATES EPA

7

Support the long-term stability of small, independent, and locally owned businesses that form the backbone of thriving year-round communities.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the heart of local economies. Supporting small businesses contributes to economic resilience, job creation, and innovation. Small businesses provide a wide range of services and products, unique experiences

for residents and visitors, and contributes to the authenticity of the community. Supporting entrepreneurs through technical assistance programs and funding opportunities encourages collaboration, creativity, and succession planning.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

### Infrastructure

- Increased Investment in blighted buildings
- Upgraded infrastructure to support development
- Improved availability of contractors

### Entrepreneurial/Business Start-Up Assistance/Succession Planning

- Expanded availability of local capital
- Enhanced “boots on the ground” technical assistance
- Businesses supported beyond the start-up phase to ensure they become sustainable
- Greater number of business owners receiving succession planning assistance

### Community Environment

- Reduced reliance and investment in personal automobiles and higher investment in pedestrians and public transportation
- Reduction in historic sprawl away from community centers

- Expanded and diversified entertainment, recreation, and amusement activities for tourists and residents
- A more welcoming atmosphere for newcomers

### Regulatory Environment

- Increased political will to create and/or enforce building codes and regulations
- New and creative ways to support placemaking efforts in the context of existing regulations (like Adirondack Park Agency)
- More focused attention on infrastructure and transportation concerns over beautification and connection to community

### Wrap Around Services (e.g., childcare, housing, workforce, healthcare, etc.)

- Continued efforts to address affordable housing
- Increased access to healthcare and education facilities
- Increased access to broadband and cell phone service

# TRADEABLE SECTORS

**GOAL:** Support, grow, and diversify the North Country’s major industries to serve domestic and global markets.

Tradeable sectors play a pivotal role in a region’s economy, serving as the bedrock of economic development and prosperity. These sectors encompass industries that produce goods and services that can be traded across regional, national, and international borders, creating opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and increased standard of living. The ability to participate in this type of trade not only stimulates economic diversification and competitiveness, but also allows a region to tap into a

broader consumer base, leading to increased revenues and private investment. In essence, tradeable sectors are the engines of economic expansion, forging connections to the global marketplace and advancing resilience in the face of economic challenges.

The North Country has identified three key tradeable sectors, including Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Renewable Energy. All play an important role in the North Country’s economy.

## Manufacturing

The Manufacturing cluster includes occupations involved with making products from raw materials by the use of manual labor or machinery. It includes the previously identified target subsector of Transportation Equipment Manufacturing, which accounts for 11% of Manufacturing jobs and 6% of its business establishments.

### Why Manufacturing?

The Manufacturing cluster is a critical element of the North Country’s economy.

#### Significant Employment

**7,951**

jobs, 4.6% of the region’s employment

#### Notable Businesses

**231**

establishments, share of 2.3%

#### Specialized

**11.90**

average LQ, highest subsector LQ of 80.6

## Agribusiness

The Agribusiness cluster includes businesses serving the agricultural production and processing industry, including food, beverage, chemical, and agricultural machinery manufacturing. It also includes wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing, and professional, scientific, and technical services related to agriculture.

### Why Agribusiness?

The Agribusiness cluster is a critical element of the North Country’s economy.

#### Significant Employment

**8,110**

jobs, 4.6% of the region’s employment

#### Notable Businesses

**403**

establishments, share of 4%

#### High Growth

**650**

jobs added in 2017-2021

#### Specialized

**3.78**

average LQ, highest subsector LQ of 10.7

## Renewable Energy

The Renewable Energy cluster includes businesses involved in the R&D, generation, storage, and transmission of energy derived from renewable, zero-emission sources (biomass, geothermal, hydropower, solar, and wind). It also includes businesses that manufacture and install the parts and components required for capturing and transforming energy.

### Why Renewable Energy?

The Renewable Energy cluster is a critical element of the North Country's economy.

#### Significant Employment

**2,790**

jobs, 1.6% of the region's employment

#### Notable Businesses

**217**

establishments, share of 2.2%

#### Stable

**13**

jobs added in 2017-2021

#### Specialized

**2.67**

average LQ, highest subsector LQ of 17.96

## STRATEGIES

- 1 Energize our communities through growth in manufacturing sectors including aerospace, transit equipment, defense, biotech, clean energy, forestry, agriculture, and minerals processing.

To maintain North Country's alignment with its values, strengths, and available opportunities within both historical and emerging sectors, it is important to support ongoing growth for the region. This entails ensuring that infrastructure not only meets, but

surpasses the needs of various industries, developing and implementing targeted workforce programs, and continuing investments in constructing and retaining the essential supply chain necessary to serve the region.

- 2 Leverage our gateway to Canada, the nation's largest trading partner, to reinvigorate cross-border commerce and increase Foreign Direct Investment in the region.

The North Country's proximity to and existing relationship with Canada as a trading partner is a significant advantage. Putting more attention, research, and resources towards finding new opportunities and

strengthening international networks will create more chances for local businesses to expand their trading capabilities and increase their import/export potential.

- 3 Maintain, establish, and expand storage, processing, and distribution systems in the region to promote the sale of value-added agricultural products that are sold locally, regionally, and globally.

Value-added agricultural products build off the historic strengths of the North Country and capitalize on a growing sector. Finding ways to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and expansion for agricultural product producers will help the North Country expand the reach and recognition of the wide variety of goods

crafted in the region. Encouraging both existing and new value-added agricultural producers to explore ways to include retail, tourism, and regional brand development will support multiple crucial sectors in the North Country.

- 4 Harness the region's renewable energy resources to increase generation, distribution, storage capacity, and clean energy jobs and reduce community and business costs through energy efficiency improvements.

The North Country's access to available land and its long history of valuing environmental protection align with the opportunities linked to the renewable energy industry. Communities and businesses in the region have been making progress in growing renewable energy generation and infrastructure. Continuing

this transition will require ongoing investment in distribution, storage, and industry conversion processes. The impact of this sector on the population is significant, with job opportunities in renewable energy ranging from entry-level to highly skilled and experienced positions.

5

Focus on business retention and expansion for existing mid-size and large manufacturers to ensure their long-term viability.

A strength of the North Country is the long history of mid-size and large manufacturers that have built a legacy in the region. These companies have deep roots in the area, but they should not be taken for granted when thinking about business retention and expansion support efforts. Engaging with these industry leaders

and major employers will help ensure that any issues or concerns are addressed. Conversations with these key leaders can identify what is working and help with business attraction efforts that focus on the region's strengths, including limited impacts of climate change, reliable infrastructure, and core business resources.

6

Create the needed infrastructure and sites aligned with future economic growth opportunities for existing businesses and to attract new businesses.

Ensuring that the physical requirements of current and future businesses are available is vital for supporting business retention and attraction efforts. It is important to maintain a list of critical infrastructure upgrades, capital projects, and site improvement plans that can

be carried out as funds become available. These investments should be promoted widely and shared with important officials from both the state and the region to make sure that the North Country's progress is acknowledged and considered for future projects.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

### Infrastructure

- Expanded transportation, including rail, ports, and airports
- Robust infrastructure across region
- Enhanced grid infrastructure and capacity in target areas
- Improved business-to-business cooperation for supply chain development
- Increased number of shovel-ready sites

### Business Climate

- Improved connections between businesses within the region
- Expanded knowledge around available state incentives
- Enhanced access to capital, especially for new and small businesses

### Continued Onshoring

- Created perception that region is open for business and produces things of value
- Increased number of products produced in region that are cost or quality competitive
- More investment in business retention and expansion opportunities

- Robust diversification efforts to help businesses, especially manufacturers, build resilience

### Community Environment

- Successful approaches to overcoming isolated geographic location
- Overcome challenges of rural communities

### Workforce

- Increased alignment of workforce with changing industry needs
- New support for employers to train employees or get employees with right skill set
- Enhanced availability of skilled workforce

### Wrap-Around Services (childcare, housing, healthcare, etc.)

- Greater investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare to attract new residents and business
- Improved availability of affordable day care (child and elderly)
- Increased public transportation options
- More accessible and affordable housing

# INNOVATION

**GOAL:** Foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that grows and attracts entrepreneurs and companies seeking to market emerging technologies and solutions by creating synergies between research, development, and commercialization.

Innovation plays a crucial role in driving economic development in rural areas, and the North Country is no different. Traditionally, rural regions have relied on agriculture and natural resource-based industries for their economic sustenance. However, with innovation and new technology, rural regions have been able to diversify their economies and reduce their dependency on these traditional sectors. Innovations in agriculture, such as precision farming and the use of drones for crop monitoring, have not only increased productivity but also reduced the environmental impact of farming. This, in turn, has led to higher incomes and better economic prospects for rural communities.

Moreover, innovation has also enabled the establishment of remote work opportunities, allowing rural areas to tap into the digital economy. High-speed internet connectivity and the rise of telecommuting have made it possible for rural residents to work in industries like technology, customer service, and e-commerce. This trend not only retains local talent but also attracts individuals from urban areas seeking a better quality of life. The result is increased economic

activity, the development of local businesses, and a more diverse and sustainable rural economy.

Furthermore, innovation has fostered entrepreneurship in rural areas. With access to various funding sources and support networks, rural entrepreneurs are developing innovative solutions to local challenges. These startups are creating jobs, boosting the local economy, and often leading to the creation of innovation hubs in these regions. By nurturing a culture of innovation, rural areas can position themselves as centers of excellence in various industries, ultimately driving long-term economic growth and development.

The North Country has the benefit of access to incredible natural resources, great public and private institutions of higher learning, and a workforce with the experience and know-how to solve problems for the greater good. The remote and rural nature of the North Country means that there has always been a need to look to the community to solve problems and that has helped to build entrepreneurial spirit and innovation.

## STRATEGIES

- 1 Maintain and grow the region's innovation economy by retaining and leveraging businesses built around technology and innovation.

Retaining businesses in the North Country starts with connecting with current businesses built around technology and innovation to better understand industry challenges. Industry challenges can be addressed by future projects, and it shows the business community that the North Country encourages innovation and creative thinking. Connecting with businesses directly, building the innovation ecosystem through collaboration, and investing in infrastructure supports business growth.

**Up to 80% of new jobs and capital investment comes from existing businesses.**

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

2

Market and attract new innovative companies to the North Country by leveraging and promoting the region's strengths and resources.

Business attraction campaigns market and promote the region's brand and showcase assets that will entice a business to locate to the North Country. The region can leverage current assets like academic institutions, a strong talent pipeline, and infrastructure investments (ex. broadband). It is beneficial that the North Country currently has technology and innovation companies

in the region as a foundation to continue building the ecosystem by targeting different components of the supply chain that current businesses use. As new businesses move into the region, it will be important to provide access to research and development resources, mentorships, and networking opportunities to create a sense of community.

3

Support entrepreneurship within the region by actively engaging with the business community and assisting in the commercialization of new products and ideas.

Through technical assistance programs, networking, and providing resources to businesses, the region can capitalize on and help entrepreneurs that are ready to expand innovative concepts or products into market-ready goods or services. Commercialization

is a process that needs partners, funding, access to resources, and prioritization of active engagement with the business community and allows the North Country to play a vital role in understanding industry needs and supporting new endeavors.

4

Attract and retain teleworkers in innovation-related fields.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted how employers operate businesses and how job seekers look for new opportunities. During the pandemic, the North Country attracted teleworkers from larger cities due to the region's assets like a higher quality of life, lower cost of living, education institutions, and outdoor recreation. Dedicating talent attraction resources to market the

region's current assets is essential in reaching talent in innovation-related fields. To retain talent, making investments in utilities, infrastructure (transportation, broadband, etc.), housing, and coworking spaces is important to create a sense of belonging and connection to the community.

5

Implement critical communications infrastructure to improve broadband and cell service connectivity.

Implementing critical communications infrastructure to improve broadband and cell-service connectivity to enhance digital access, promote economic development, and foster innovation within the region. Investing and implementing critical communications

infrastructures plays a significant role in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that the benefits of the internet are accessible to all businesses, residents, and visitors.

6

Leverage the North Country's graduates and higher education cluster by designing and implementing incentives for collaborative research and entrepreneurial activity among and between them.

The North Country has over 12 higher education institutions and approximately an average of 6,700 graduates annually. The overall goal of this strategy is to tap into the intellectual and innovative potential present in the North Country's graduates and higher education institutions. While most start-ups are started by mid-career entrepreneurs with some experience, sparking graduates' creativity and providing them opportunities to learn and grow can keep them in

the region. This will also foster their entrepreneurial spirit by creating a supportive environment through incentives. Keeping younger professionals in the region, increasing research and development collaboration with higher education institutions, and spurring new entrepreneurial activity can contribute to economic growth, job creation, and the development of a knowledge-based economy in the region.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Greater number of entrepreneurs with scalable businesses and the ability to network
- Small market for products/services
- Distance to market for physical product
- More access to angel, venture, and other funding sources
- Greater executive-level workforce in the region (or out of the region)
- Improved broadband and cell service infrastructure
- More connected business network to facilitate the commercialization of ideas
- Limited access to grant support



Boldt Castle in Jefferson County

# WORKFORCE

**GOAL:** Develop a resilient and diversified workforce through attraction, training, and retention efforts to meet the needs of our employers, our workers, and their families.

Workforce development is a key component of economic growth and sustainability in rural areas. The North Country has recognized that industries are facing serious constraints when it comes to attracting and retaining workers and has been working hard to invest in programs that upskill, reskill, and retrain workers to meet the needs of the industries. Investing in workforce development programs not only equips individuals with the skills needed to secure better job opportunities, but also provides rural communities with the means to attract new businesses and industries.

Building off the work completed by the North Country Regional Economic Development Council in Summer/Fall 2022, the Workforce Development Strategy identified the primary workforce related issues across the region including **lack of available workforce, lack of career-ready skills, limited wrap around services,** and opportunity to **expand the connection with Fort Drum.** All of these remain important as part of this economic development strategy and key regional priorities from the 2022 Workforce Development Strategy.

## STRATEGIES

- 1 Create and promote pathways for military families by actively marketing the North Country's training resources, education systems, and career opportunities.

Fort Drum is a major asset for the region as an economic driver, both from the activity on base and also as a way to attract new families to the region. Working intentionally to make it attractive for military families to build long-lasting connections within the region will support economic growth for the North Country. Continuing to enhance the resources that are available will make it possible for military families to stay in the North Country after their time in the service is over, which will help to address workforce challenges.

*The 2023 Regional Challenge addresses this strategy. See the proposal in Part Three of this report.*

- 2 Reduce employment barriers to enable the region to train, retain, and recruit its needed workforce by expanding access to affordable wrap-around services including housing and transportation.

Throughout the North Country, employers are struggling to find workers and workers are struggling to access work due to significant barriers, such as lack of reliable access to transportation, unaffordable housing in the areas they want to live, and more. To make sure more people have a chance to get good jobs, it is important to implement a coordinated

effort that includes multiple partners. The wrap around services available should start early, including providing assistance with accessing job applications and conducting interviews and continuing throughout the person's career to provide stability and ongoing support.

3

Expand quality, affordable childcare and elder care services to reduce employment barriers and meet the demands of the workforce.

An issue being faced across the country is the lack of affordable and accessible child and elder care services. The inability of working parents to find reliable care services has made it difficult to return to work or remain consistently employed. The high cost of care along

with misaligned hours can make it seem impossible for caregivers to return to work, which further exacerbates the workforce shortage. Addressing the care issue will require partnerships and ongoing investment from the public and private sector across the North Country.

4

Refine and enhance programs that integrate workforce development in our K-12 systems to clearly communicate career pathways, including trades and entrepreneurship, in the North Country.

To strengthen the pipeline of workers to meet the needs of industry throughout the North Country, it will be necessary to start communication early to build awareness and representation of opportunities. This will require coordination with the New York

State Department of Education to permit more flexible curriculums that incorporate varied exploration opportunities for all students, with additional focus for individuals most interested in pursuing certain pathways.

5

Market agriculture career pathways by promoting the potential growth in sustainable and high technology operations.

Connecting young people with careers in agriculture will encourage long-term viability of industry in the North Country. By showing them how farming makes a positive impact on the environment, how technology is making farming better, and the money they can earn

in this field, more young people will be interested. The advanced age of those currently in the agriculture industry is a concern, so building in succession planning and replacement workers will be important to continue the long tradition for the North Country.

6

Activate underserved populations and support young professionals entering the workforce by investing in on-ramp employment services and programs.

Providing young people and underserved populations with the training, resources, and guidance to access work opportunities will help to address issues associated with the lack of workforce participation and help bring people out of poverty. Partner organizations

within the North Country can work together to identify opportunities to share resources, coordinate services, and facilitate ongoing support as people work to onboard into a long-term job.

7

Develop and strengthen existing training and education networks to reskill and upskill incumbent workers to ensure quality, in-demand jobs are available to the region's workforce.

Within the North Country, there are organizations, institutions, and employers working to address the issues associated with training workers. Coordinating these efforts and bringing together education and industry professionals on a regular and intentional basis will help to align emerging skill needs with

curriculum and training opportunities. The skills needed to compete are ever-changing, so employees and employers that are pursuing ongoing training and lifelong learning will be best positioned to adjust and transition successfully.

## 8

Engage and retain college educated students by boosting partnerships with higher education institutions and existing employers in the North Country.

The many education institutions in the North Country are a real strength, and finding ways to retain or bring back those with connections to the region will address challenges being faced by employers. Working with higher education institutions and employers will help create ongoing connections that will allow the students

to create stronger roots in the area. Finding ways to incentivize staying in the North Country following graduation through tuition forgiveness, career pathway connections, home buying down payment, or higher wages will help combat some of the reasons why college-educated individuals are leaving the area.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

### Wraparound Services

- More quality housing at all price points
- A wider variety of childcare options affordable and accessible
- Enhanced public transportation options

### Infrastructure

- Improved broadband across the region
- Widespread Wi-Fi access throughout the region to support remote learning/work
- Cell service

### Community Environment

- Improved ability to attract a diverse workforce
- Reduction in the loss of skills due to attrition, retirements, no succession planning, etc.
- Sufficient population to meet employer needs and growth in working age population
- Greater support services in rural areas

### Industry Environment

- Increased number of higher wage jobs
- Reduce turnover in lower wage positions

- Greater rates of attracting highly-credentialed talent

### Upskilling/Training Programs

- New in-class opportunities for students to experience work and develop soft skills
- Expanded engagement of youth and their adults to understand varied career pathways at a younger age
- Greater resources to help high school graduates transition into the workforce
- Improved STEM readiness of high school students with skills relevant to modern manufacturing
- Adequate training available in trades
- New opportunities for youth to gain practical experiences
- Improved clarity around who is responsible for providing workforce training
- New investment from employers in training initiatives



Blue Mountain Lake in Hamilton County

# HOUSING

**GOAL:** Build a regional ecosystem to support owner occupied and rental housing development and rehabilitation for the region’s workforce in the 80%-200% Area Median Income (AMI) range to create healthy, sustainable, and diverse communities to support the region’s businesses and employers.

The North Country region has the largest geographic area and is the least populated of the 10 Economic Development Regions of New York State. The North Country boasts a globally significant natural environment, including six million acres of Adirondack Park, access to the 1000 Islands, and Tug Hill. North Country’s outdoor recreation amenities attract visitors from around the world, with the largest percentage coming from the northeast United States and southeast Canada.

Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, the North Country’s natural environment, open spaces, and outdoor recreation have driven record breaking seasonal second home investment, remote workers, and short-term rental investors. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a shrinking supply of middle-income housing options due to a rise in visitors seeking outdoor activities while social distancing. The pandemic boosted visitor expenditures in 2022 in the 1000 Island and Adirondack region, over 100% relative to 2019. The result is a significant decline in quality, middle-income housing for the North Country’s workforce. New York State has empowered the REDC’s to develop strategies and actions for economic growth specific to their region. Housing was identified as a primary goal area and is now part of the NCREDC’s Economic Development Strategy.

With a rise in projected job growth, seasonal second home investment, an aging workforce, and income levels misaligned with housing costs, the North Country’s residents and labor force have limited access to quality, attainable housing. To address housing challenges, the NCREDC formed a Housing work group in 2023 with a concentration on current residents, new residents, and workforce with an AMI between 80% and 200%.

The Housing work group diligently collaborated with each of NCREDC’s pillar work groups including Placemaking, Innovation, Tradeable Sectors, and Workforce to better understand the North Country’s housing needs and opportunities. Through this collaboration, the Housing work group discovered that each work group identified affordable, quality housing



**Employers cannot hire qualified applicants for new job opportunities due to the lack of housing in the North Country.**

WORK GROUP WORKSHOP

shortages as an inhibitor to the North Country’s growth and prosperity in every pillar.

For example, for the Strategic Plan Regional Challenge, the NCREDC selected workforce development as the challenge topic that identified a solution focused on recruiting over 3,000 soldiers and their spouses transitioning from Fort Drum Army Post. One of the biggest concerns of talent attraction and retention of transitioning soldiers and their families is the availability of an affordable housing stock.

## CHALLENGES

- Many public private housing programs are geared for large developments in more densely populated areas
- There are limited programs that reach the 200% Area Median Income (AMI)
- Outdated zoning and comprehensive plans/ master plans that do not address current needs for resident/workforce housing
- A high swing in resident income levels combined with a smaller number of users makes the success of water and wastewater grants difficult
- Lack of available land adjacent to utilities
- Higher than state average investment in short term rentals combined with increased market demand for seasonal homes
- Lack of capacity for municipal planning offices to implement existing housing programs

- Limited number of contractors due to high demand for upscale houses
- Unique regional differences in regulatory oversight and jurisdiction that complicates the availability of buildable land and development densities within the Blue Line of the Adirondack Park. These differences fragment the larger North Country and cause additional challenges in creating universal affordable housing solutions across the region.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide technical assistance to become Pro-Housing Communities
- Position small communities to take advantage of HCR programs over 80% AMI
- Provide planning and technical assistance for smaller communities to apply for the very successful DRI and NY Forward programs
- Provide technical assistance and direct planning for local government to address housing needs and what local incentives they can provide
- Update comprehensive/master plans and outdated zoning to increase housing density
- Increase the competitiveness of smaller communities on infrastructure grant programs
- Provide local contractors with streamlined programs to address the local resident/workforce housing needs
- Provide dedicated matching funds for municipalities for pre-development and infrastructure costs and secure low interest loans for private and not-for-profit investment in housing

## STRATEGIES

### 1 Explore and expand new programs for North Country housing.

- a. Identify partners and pursue a regional housing fund
- b. Build awareness of existing programs
- c. Provide additional capacity for small municipalities to engage
- d. Increase resources for existing programs

### 2

### Pro-Housing Communities for rentals and owner occupied.

- a. Create a task force to provide outreach to seven counties
- b. Additional technical and financial support for rezoning
- c. Create resident housing zones to increase density
- d. Develop a formula to make small towns competitive for water & wastewater funding
- e. Identify pre-development assistance for profitability
- f. Develop capacity and support for Neighborhood and Rural Preservation Commissions, Housing Trusts, and Land Banks
- g. Include senior and accessible housing as part of the regional plan

### 3

### Provide tool kit for local governments and local contractors.

- a. Develop simple state and local incentives and pilots
- b. Drive public infrastructure and private investment for new and rehab housing
- c. Target 80%-200% of AMI use Progressive Housing Income
- d. Restrict STRs and non-full-time residents

### 4

### Allow all towns in Adirondack park to be eligible for NCREDC housing programs.

### 5

### Prioritize small local contractors for resident housing.

- a. Provide training to engage new local contractors
- b. Develop methods to lower construction costs
- c. Provide simplified incentives and technical assistance
- d. Work with local governments to assist

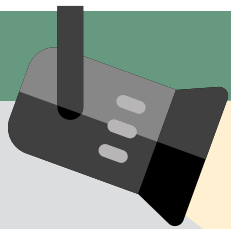
## IMPLEMENTATION

Housing will drive economic development and population growth in the North Country by implementing programs that are specific to the region. Two organizations with experience in all counties in the North Country have been identified and agreed to manage housing specific programs for the NCREDC.

- The Lake Champlain Lake George Regional Planning Board would manage the **Municipal Planning, Zoning, and Outreach Technical Assistance Program**.

- The Development Authority of the North Country would manage the **North Country Housing Grant/Loan Fund**.

Advocate that all NCREDC housing programs will be available in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton, Essex and Hamilton counties and all towns wholly or partially within the Adirondack Park Blue Line.



### NORTH COUNTRY REDC HOUSING WORK GROUP PROPOSED PROGRAM

## Municipal Planning, Zoning, and Outreach Technical Assistance Program

The Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board, working with DANC and the Fort Drum Compatibility Committee, will provide technical assistance to municipalities across Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties to implement the Municipal Planning, Zoning, and Outreach Technical Assistance Program.

### 1. NYS Pro-Housing Communities Program Outreach

- Develop North Country-specific NYS Pro-Housing Communities Program outreach materials and provide in-person and virtual program outreach.
- Provide technical assistance to communities in calculating and compiling permitting information for certification.
- Work with interested communities to adopt a resolution for certification.

### 2. Build Awareness of HCR Programs over 80% AMI

- Work with NPCs/RPCs and HCR to host in-person and virtual outreach events within communities to increase awareness of existing programs.
- Provide additional resources to NPCs/RPCs to assist communities in accessing HCR programs.
- Provide training to local contractors on HCR program requirements to increase familiarity and comfort with using state grant programs.

### 3. Provide Technical Assistance to Communities for Planning and Zoning

- Create and utilize a model housing zoning guide and toolkit with best practices for municipalities.
- Evaluate existing zoning and land use policies throughout the region to identify hurdles to workforce housing development.
- Develop an incentive system to encourage municipalities to adopt/update model zoning ordinances.

- Explore opportunities to support the use of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and ensure local zoning regulations are in alignment to support ADUs.
- Work with communities to apply for NYSDOS Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Grant Program to update comprehensive plans and zoning.

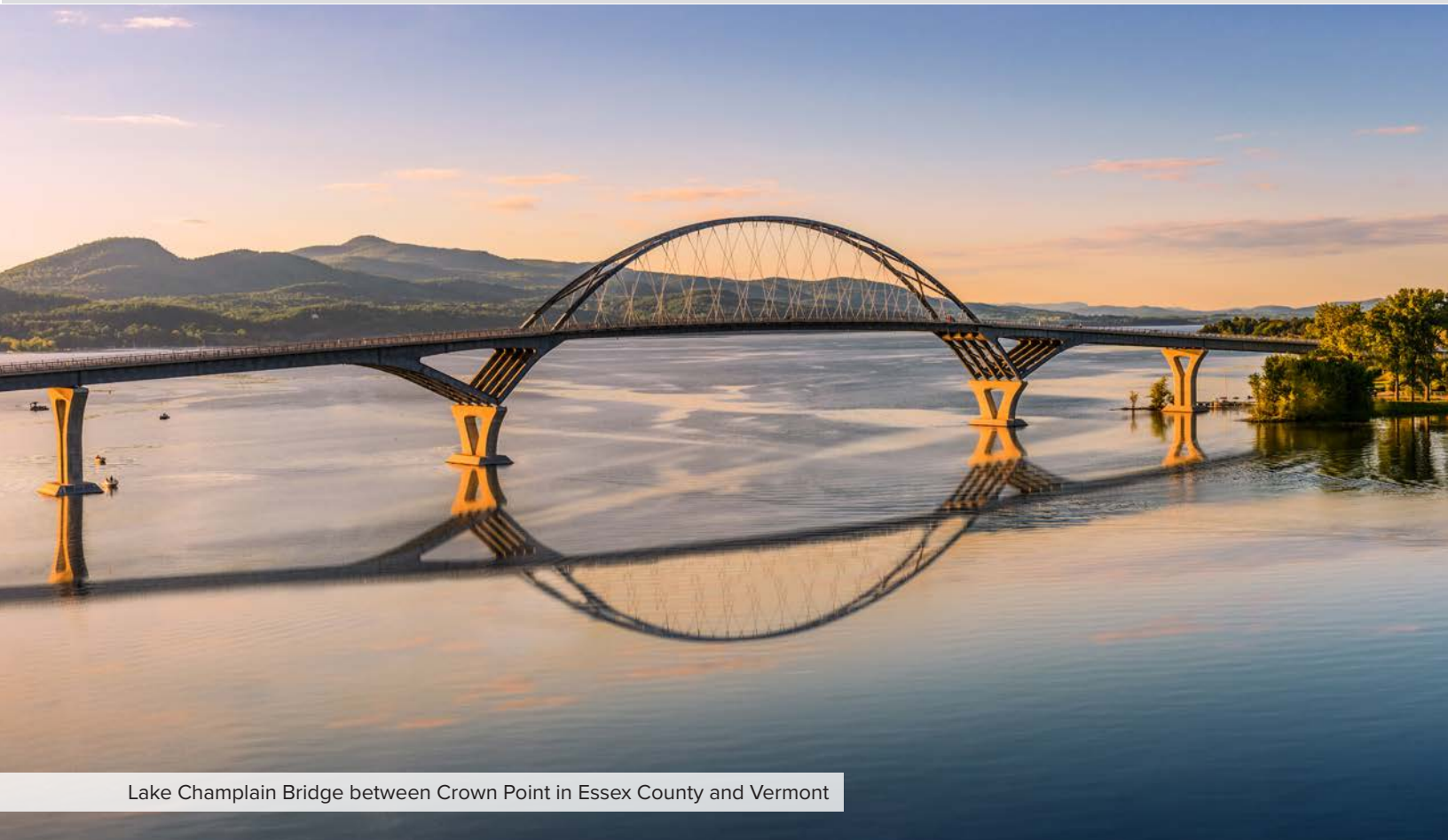
#### 4. Work to Lower Local Construction Costs and Outreach to Local Contractors

- Create marketing and outreach program for North Country Region Housing Grant/Loan Program.
- Convene focus groups of local contractors to identify and understand challenges for small, local contractors.
- Convene NCA members to develop innovative ways to lower construction costs in the North Country. Work with the NCREDC's Innovation Work Group.
- Work with state funding agencies (HCR, DEC, EFC) to increase competitiveness of North Country community infrastructure projects.

Recognizing that development within the Adirondack Park has additional regulations under the Adirondack Park Agency, the LCLGRP will work throughout the entire Adirondack Park on supporting workforce housing.

#### 5. Work with Adirondack Park Agency and Adirondack Communities to Support Workforce Housing Development

- Identify areas where APA density bonuses for workforce housing are appropriate and assist with planning and application development.
- Educate communities and developers within the Park on existing APA regulations and approval processes to curtail process issues.



Lake Champlain Bridge between Crown Point in Essex County and Vermont



# NORTH COUNTRY REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

## Visioning Session | August 31, 2023

The NCREDC leadership discussed challenges facing the North Country region including lack of workforce diversity, local amenities, broadband service, housing options, as well as emerging opportunities such as renewable energy (geothermal), climate resilience, and downtown revitalization. Feedback was gathered via a survey on the Council's current vision and goals to help guide an update to the strategic plan. The discussion focused on ways to improve the region's vision and goals to address current challenges and leverage future opportunities.

NCREDC members see the following as challenges facing the North Country Region:

- Employment opportunities
- Quality housing
- Aging populations
- Population decline

## Survey | August 2023

An online survey was distributed to NCREDC members in August 2023 to evaluate and refine the vision, goals, and strategies outlined in the 2011 NCREDC Strategic Plan through a series of targeted questions. This survey was distributed ahead of the August 31, 2023, Strategic Council Meeting. Survey results were used in facilitation of further conversations to confirm the Plan's vision, goals, and strategies.

According to NCREDC members, North Country's greatest assets are nature, beauty, natural resources, and strong environmental protection regulations.

## NCREDC Meeting | September 29, 2023

The NCREDC convened to review the preliminary Vision and Goal statements, provide a Solutions Work

# TIMELINE

## MARCH 2023

Members of the North Country REDC met with the Fort Drum Transition Services Program

## APRIL 2023

Public meeting of the North Country REDC

## MAY 2023

Working meeting of the North Country REDC and Regional Challenge Initiative Workshop

## JULY 2023

Public meeting of the North Country REDC and Tour of Fort Drum Army Base

NCREDC co-chairs public forums in all seven counties to present Round XIII information and gather feedback on the Council's Challenge Initiative

## AUGUST 2023

Project kick off and Council meeting

## SEPTEMBER 2023

Council and workgroup sessions (September 11)

## OCTOBER 2023

Virtual public forum (October 10)

## NOVEMBER 2023

Finalized Strategic Plan submitted to New York State

Group update, and provide an opportunity for the work groups to report on strategy development for each of the five key topics. Topics addressed include challenges and opportunities related to innovation, housing, placemaking, tradeable sectors, and workforce development.

### **NCREDC Meeting | November 8, 2023**

The Strategic Plan was presented at the Council's November meeting. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the Strategic Plan.

## **STAKEHOLDER WORK GROUP ENGAGEMENT**

Work groups consist of representatives from government, healthcare, industry, tourism, and education sectors to bring diverse perspectives together and participate in the development of the Strategic Plan update. Each work group engaged in facilitated workshops throughout the month of September 2023, in addition to council meetings and public meetings. The work groups worked with NCREDC to:

1. Refine and finalize the NCREDC's vision, goals, and strategies and identify regional priorities
2. Develop the NCREDC challenge competition proposal
3. Review the draft Strategic Plan update

Work group membership is provided at the end of this section. Key activities and meetings of the work groups included:

### **Solutions Work Group**

The Solutions Work Group was created to work collaboratively to help develop the Challenge proposal for the Strategic Plan.

#### **Solutions Work Group Workshop | September 11, 2023**

On September 11, the Solutions Work Group met at an in-person workshop to discuss strategies for retaining Fort Drum soldiers in the North Country region after they transition out of the military as the focus area for the Challenge proposal. The group identified potential solutions like early outreach programs, workforce training, and providing attractive benefits like subsidized housing and improved public transit systems. The group emphasized the importance of creating a centralized organization to coordinate services, to serve as a one-stop-shop for transitioning

soldiers to help connect them with jobs, services, training, and community resources.

#### **Virtual Meetings**

The Solutions Work Group also met several times virtually between September and November 2023 to further discuss and refine the Challenge proposal.

#### **"Fort Drum Day" and Transitioning Soldiers Focus Group | September 27, 2023**

Members of the Solutions Work Group and the Project Team conducted in-person meetings in the Fort Drum area with key local stakeholders and potential partners, including officials from Fort Drum. As part of this outreach, a focus group was facilitated with Transitioning Soldiers to gain insights into the specific needs and opportunities to build a better pipeline to North Country employers.



Transitioning Soldiers Focus Group meeting at Jefferson County Economic Development

### **Pillar Work Group Workshops**

Work groups for each goal area met several times through the process to update, refine, and create strategies for the Strategic Plan.

#### **Virtual Workshops**

The Project Team facilitated virtual workshops with each work group to identify regional assets, opportunities, challenges, and strategies related to each specific goal area.

#### **Work Group Session Strategic Plan Council Meeting | September 29, 2023**

Work groups participated in a workshop along with North Country REDC members in-person in Lake Placid. The workshop included a presentation from each work group team member on a draft goal statement and strategies. Small groups were convened to discuss and provide input for each goal area. The results of the workshop were used to finalize the Strategic Plan's goals and strategies.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On July 17, 18, and 19, the NCREDC Co-Chairs hosted town-hall style public forums on the ground in all seven North Country counties to present information about this year's Strategic Plan update and share the council's proposed solution for the "challenges" initiative. Dozens of stakeholders and members of the public came to learn more and share their perspectives.

On October 10, the NCREDC hosted a virtual public forum. The forum introduced the Regional Economic Development Councils to the public, highlighted regional economic success stories, and outlined the total economic impact of past ESD-funded projects.

An overview of the strategic planning purpose and process was provided to attendees. The forum also offered interactive opportunities to engage attendees, by administering interactive polling questions such as asking attendees to identify regional strengths and weaknesses. The Forum concluded with a discussion of the preliminary Vision and Goals.

Public forum attendees said the North Country's greatest assets were:

- Open spaces
- Abundant water
- Proximity to major markets
- Geography

## WORK GROUPS

The following work groups were formed to identify and advance major goals, tasks, and strategies at a regional level.

### Executive Committee

#### Committee Members

Dr. Kathryn Morris (Co-Chair)  
St. Lawrence University

James McKenna (Co-Chair)  
Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism

Cali Brooks  
Adirondack Foundation

Victoria Zinser Duley  
Adirondack Economic Development Corp (AEDC)

Erika Flint

Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

Steven Lawrence

Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority

James Lazore

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Department of  
Economic Development

Michele Ledoux

Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension

Brenda Valentine

Indian Lake Community Development Corporation

## Solutions Work Group

This group was charged with collaborating with the project team on the "Challenge Proposal". The NCREDC Challenge Proposal consists of developing a plan and identifying potential projects that tackle workforce issues in the region, taking advantage of the unique opportunity presented by the 3,000+ soldiers and spouses transitioning from active service at Fort Drum to civilian life each year.

#### Members

David Champagne, Work Group Captain  
The Development Corporation

Elizabeth Cooper

Adirondack North Country Association

Carl Farone

Development Authority of the North Country

Erika Flint

Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

Danielle King

Business and Workforce Development (TDC)

Cheryl Mayforth

Jefferson-Lewis Workforce Development Board



Co-chair James McKenna presents Round XIII information and gathers feedback on the NCREDC's Challenge Initiative



NCREDC council members meet with US Army officials at Fort Drum

Ryan Piche  
Lewis County Manager

Zvi Szafran  
SUNY Canton

Dave Zembiec  
Jefferson County Economic Development

James McKenna, Ex-Officio  
Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism

Dr. Kathryn Morris, Ex-Officio  
St. Lawrence University

## Placemaking Work Group

The focus is on improving our built environments, stressing the need for accessible job centers, sustainable infrastructure, and livable communities to draw skilled workers. Overall goal: Create livable, attractive, and connected communities where people want to live, work, visit, and invest.

### Members

Elizabeth Cooper, Work Group Captain  
Adirondack North Country Association

Zach Hobbs, Writing Captain  
Adirondack North Country Association

Brittany Davis  
Naturally Lewis

Ben Dixon  
St. Lawrence Chamber of Commerce

Jeremy Evans  
Franklin County Economic Development

Corey Fram  
1000 Islands Tourism Council

Melissa McManus  
Melissa McManus, LLC

Andrea Smith  
City of Ogdensburg

Geoff Urda  
City of Watertown

Brenda Valentine  
Indian Lake Community Development Corporation

## Workforce Work Group

The focus is on targeting job training and education opportunities to ensure the availability of quality, in-demand jobs for the region's workforce, while removing barriers to employment. Overall goal: Develop a resilient and diversified workforce through attraction, training, and retention efforts to meet the needs of our employers, our workers, and their families.

### Members

Victoria Duley, Work Group Captain  
Adirondack Economic Development Corp (AEDC)

Cheryl Mayforth, Writing Captain  
Jefferson-Lewis Workforce Development Board

Cali Brooks  
Adirondack Foundation

Kelly Chezum  
Clarkson University

Erika Flint  
Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

Danielle King  
Business and Workforce Development (TDC)

James Lazore  
Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Department of Economic Development

Pam Lewis  
St. Lawrence Workforce Development Board

John Marraffa  
Kinney Drugs

Susan Matton  
North Country Chamber of Commerce

Sylvie Nelson  
North Country Workforce Development Board

Mary Margaret Small  
Clarkson University

Meghan Stadler  
SUNY Jefferson

## Tradeable Sectors Work Group

The focus is on growing export-based jobs and attracting foreign direct investment to the region.

Special emphasis will be placed on industry sectors that are part of the global market, such as manufacturing, agricultural products, and energy. Overall goal: Support, grow, and diversify the North Country's major industries to serve domestic and global markets.

### **Members**

David Champagne, Work Group Captain  
The Development Corporation

Dani King, Writing Captain  
Business and Workforce Development (TDC)

Manna Doyle  
Empire APEX Accelerator

Eowyn Hewey  
Arconic

Steve Lawrence  
Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority

Michele Ledoux  
Cornell Cooperative Extension

Donna Wadsworth  
Sylvamo

Dan Wilt  
Wilt Industries

Tricia Wilson  
New York Power Authority

Joel Wood  
North Country Chamber of Commerce

Dave Zembiec  
Jefferson County Economic Development

## **Innovation Work Group**

The focus is on building connections among research, development, and commercialization to propel economic growth. Overall goal: Foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that grows and attracts entrepreneurs and companies seeking to market emerging technologies and solutions by creating synergies between research, development, and commercialization.

### **Members**

Stephanie Ratcliffe, Work Group Captain  
The Wild Center

Dan Kelleher, Writing Captain  
Adirondack Park Agency

Jamey Hoose  
Clarkson University

Melinda Little  
Point Positive

Victor Podd  
Northstar LLC

Lenore VanderZee  
SUNY Canton

## **Housing Work Group**

The focus is on identifying public and private sector solutions to increasing the supply of owner and renter occupied housing for all income levels. Overall goal: Create a regional ecosystem to support owner occupied and rental housing development and rehabilitation for the region's workforce.

### **Members**

James McKenna, Work Group Captain  
Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism

Rocci Aguirre  
Adirondack Council

Lori Bellingham  
Adirondack Foundation

Michelle Capone  
Development Authority of the North Country

Brittany Davis  
Naturally Lewis

William Farber  
Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages

Corey Fram  
1000 Islands Tourism Council

Beth Gilles  
Lake George-Lake Champlain Regional  
Planning Board

Andrea Gout  
Uihlein Foundation

Leslie Karasin  
Northern Forest Center

Dan Kelleher  
Adirondack Park Agency

Mary Jane Lawrence  
Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism

Nicole Martinez  
Wild Light Solutions

Megan Murphy  
Housing Assistance Program of Essex County

Christopher Rosenquest  
City of Plattsburgh

Reginald Schweitzer  
Neighbors of Watertown

Andrea Smith  
City of Ogdensburg

## **Downtown Revitalization Initiative/ NY Forward Work Group**

### **Members**

Mark Tryniski, Work Group Captain  
Community Bank System, Inc

David Champagne  
The Development Corporation

Elizabeth Cooper  
Adirondack North Country Association

Donna Wadsworth  
Sylvamo

Dr. Kathryn Morris, Ex-Officio  
St. Lawrence University

James McKenna, Ex-Officio  
Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism

## **Upstate Revitalization Initiative Work Group**

### **Members**

Mark Tryniski, Work Group Captain  
Community Bank System, Inc

Cali Brooks  
Adirondack Foundation

Erika Flint  
Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

John Kowal  
Clinton Community College

Michele Ledoux  
Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension

Zvi Szafran  
SUNY Canton

Brenda Valentine  
Indian Lake Community Development Corporation

Donna Wadsworth  
Sylvamo

## **Scoring Work Group**

### **Members**

Cali Brooks, Work Group Captain  
Adirondack Foundation

Damon Draught  
DNJ Management LLC

Victoria Duley  
Adirondack Economic Development Corp (AEDC)

Michele Ledoux  
Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension

Stephanie Ratcliffe  
The Wild Center

Zvi Szafran  
SUNY Canton

Brenda Valentine  
Indian Lake Community Development  
Corporation



NCREDC Co-Chair Dr. Kathryn Morris presents Round XIII information and gathers feedback about the Challenge Initiative in Saranac Lake