



# TOWARDS A STRONGER FUTURE

REPORT OF THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION  
POST PANDEMIC WORKING GROUP > SEPTEMBER 2020

## Statement of Issue:

COVID-19 poses an unprecedented challenge to the stability of Westchester's regional economy. Our businesses have been shuttered, our healthcare system is strained, our nonprofits and educational institutions are stressed, and our public budgets are stretched thin.

At the same time, the post-pandemic environment will present an opportunity to reevaluate, refocus on, and advance projects and priorities that will position Westchester to prosper and rebuild a stronger and more resilient economy.

## Statement of Purpose:

The Westchester County Association COVID-19 Post Pandemic Working Group is a select committee of business, non-profit, and academic leaders who are working collaboratively to support the recovery and long-term prosperity of our professional institutions in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

The PPWG will establish and advance legislative, regulatory, and developmental solutions for Westchester and the surrounding region. It will be responsive to evolving challenges and opportunities both created and highlighted by the coronavirus crisis.

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A photograph of four business professionals in a high-rise office. Two men in suits are shaking hands in the center, while a woman on the left and another on the right look on. The background is a panoramic view of a city skyline through large glass windows, with a bright sun creating a lens flare effect. The overall tone is professional and optimistic.

## INTRODUCTION

# TOWARDS A STRONGER FUTURE

“ We can take stock of the financial, political, and racial tensions now clearly exposed and we can put the framework in place to work towards a stronger future.

**ON MARCH 3, 2020, NEWS REPORTS CONFIRMED THE FIRST CASE OF COVID-19 IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY. IT WAS ONLY THE SECOND CONFIRMED CASE IN NEW YORK STATE. FOUR DAYS LATER THE GOVERNOR DECLARED A STATEWIDE EMERGENCY. TWO WEEKS AFTER THAT, ON MARCH 20TH WITH THE VIRUS SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE THROUGH THE HUDSON VALLEY, THE GOVERNOR ISSUED “NY PAUSE”, AN EXECUTIVE ORDER SHUTTING DOWN ALL NON-ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS, AND WE HAVE REMAINED IN CRISIS RESPONSE MODE EVER SINCE.**

In broad terms, the immediate needs of our businesses and nonprofits are transparent if not straightforward to accomplish. Attempt to minimize the macroeconomic disruption by aggressively controlling the spread of the virus. Support our robust regional healthcare sector, conduct testing and contact tracing, and encourage people to act responsibly towards one another. At the same time, provide marketplace liquidity and enhanced benefits for displaced workers to give businesses and employees in all sectors an opportunity to maneuver through the worst financial impacts of an economy interrupted.

Longer term, the needs of the professional community are opaque. Nevertheless, we can set a vision for the changes happening around us and we can begin to shape our future. The COVID-19 pandemic is simultaneously a health crisis, an economic crisis, and a social crisis. It has exposed and magnified certain vulnerabilities and strengths in our regional economy, and it has given us the opportunity to reflect on both. It also has highlighted a reckoning with truisms that some might wrongly use to divide us. That would be a false and perfidious choice. Data from the N.Y. State Department of Health confirms unequivocally that the virus has had a disproportional effect on the Black and Hispanic communities which do not enjoy equal access to either quality healthcare or financial resources. That’s not just morally improper, it’s bad for the economy. It is no coincidence, therefore, that primary aspects of this report (healthcare availability,

affordable housing, the digital divide, sustainability) which are designed to improve the regional business environment also strike at this opportunity gap.

The Westchester County Association regularly organizes leaders from business, nonprofit, education, labor, and the government to reach collaborative solutions that improve economic development in our region and support smart growth. This report is the product of the Westchester County Association's Post Pandemic Working Group comprising some of the region's most dedicated professionals. It reflects their active participation as well the collective input of their respective professional networks. It also is guided by the results of the WCA's recent public survey on the business impacts of COVID-19, additional surveys conducted by the Westchester County Office of Economic Development and other professional institutions such as Nonprofit Westchester, and information distilled from numerous broad-scale public reports on the impact of the pandemic published by leading global consulting firms.

The pandemic continues to dominate our personal and professional lives. As the summer of 2020 draws to a close, over 33,000 New Yorkers have died – more than 1,400 in Westchester alone. Unemployment in the Hudson Valley stands at 13.6 percent -- Westchester is at 14.2 percent -- with tens of thousands yet to find work. Businesses of all types and sizes remain under existential threat, and significant budget deficits confront our state and local governments.

These facts are painful to acknowledge. Yet Westchester has enviable resources at its disposal – a broad economic base, a strong and expanding healthcare sector, top-flight schools and institutions of higher learning, immediate proximity to New York City, a mixture of municipalities, towns and villages, vibrant arts and cultural institutions, parks and outdoor space, engaged nonprofits, and an increasingly diverse population. We can take stock of the financial, political, and racial tensions now clearly exposed and we can put the framework in place to work towards a stronger future.

A background image showing a close-up of several people in business attire (suits) gathered around a table, looking at and pointing to documents and charts. The lighting is warm and professional. The image is partially obscured by a white curved shape on the right side.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS *for*

**ECONOMIC  
RECOVERY**

“ A vibrant regional economy is influenced by many factors, including the following: cost of doing business; cost of living; job growth and employment trends; access to sector specific labor; housing stock; educational accessibility; cultural and recreational opportunities; healthy nonprofits; and generational preferences.

**THE WCA POST PANDEMIC WORKING GROUP HEREIN SEEKS TO IDENTIFY AND HELP ADDRESS SOME OF THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES HIGHLIGHTED BY THE PANDEMIC.**

Westchester is the most populous and prosperous county in the State’s most productive region outside of New York City. It has a highly educated workforce with the percentage of residents holding a college degree at 13 percent higher than N.Y. State and 17 percent higher than the national average. The County ranks in the top 10 nationally in per capita income. Westchester is also an ostensibly expensive place to live and work with some of the highest taxes in the country. Existing budget challenges greatly magnified by the pandemic make that unenviable statistic unlikely to change absent a comprehensive reimagining of how education and public services are delivered.

The Westchester County Office of Economic Development recently embarked upon a post-COVID, broad-scale economic strategy and implementation plan. The WCA is actively participating in the County’s efforts in addition to this independent work. There are a great many areas warranting attention and no single organization hoping to accomplish anything can attempt to address everything. Accordingly, the discussion herein is neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Rather, it is instructive. It targets strategically certain areas where the WCA enjoys the policy experience, collaborative heft, and programmatic expertise to maximize impact.

**AS SUCH, THIS REPORT:**

- ▶ Concentrates on those economic segments where the WCA, through its proven expertise and deep professional network, is uniquely positioned to achieve material and tangible impact – i.e. “The Four Foundational Pillars”;
- ▶ Sets a clear and focused advocacy agenda for the professional community; and

► Utilizes strong partnerships and collaborative work to promote a series of finite and targeted initiatives in each economic segment.

**THE WCA WILL ENGAGE IN A MULTI-SECTOR APPROACH TO OUR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING FOUR FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS BY ADVANCING THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES:**

## **FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR I** > Healthcare and Bioscience

**INITIATIVE 1** • Advocate for a Strong and Vibrant Healthcare System

**INITIATIVE 2** • Initiate a Career Path Workforce Talent Project

**INITIATIVE 3** • Showcase and Grow the Healthcare / Bioscience Nexus

## **FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR II** > Real Estate and Housing

**INITIATIVE 1** • Amend WCA's Policy Playbook to Include an Affordable Housing Chapter

**INITIATIVE 2** • Convene an Affordable Housing Summit

**INITIATIVE 3** • Mobilize a Housing Stakeholder Group

**INITIATIVE 4** • Create an Employer Assisted Housing Program

## **FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR III** > Digital Connectivity

**INITIATIVE 1** • Advocate for a Clear Broadband Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity Policy

**INITIATIVE 2** • Mobilize a Digital Technologies Stakeholder Group

**INITIATIVE 3** • Address the Digital Divide Through Strategic Partnerships and Workforce Development

## **FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR IV** > Energy and Sustainability

**INITIATIVE 1** • Advocate for Sustainable Energy Policy

**INITIATIVE 2** • Develop and Disseminate a Clean Energy Information Clearinghouse

**INITIATIVE 3** • Develop and Offer a Formal Curriculum in Sustainability Management





**PILLAR**

# HEALTHCARE & BIOSCIENCE

“ More than just an immense benefit to the people who live in the Westchester region, proximity to world-class health facilities is a key business and talent driver.

**ANY DISCUSSION OF A STRENGTHENED, POST-PANDEMIC REGIONAL ECONOMY MUST BEGIN WITH HEALTHCARE. OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, OUR REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM HAS CONTINUED TO ATTRACT MAJOR HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS AND HOSPITAL GROUPS. THE WCA HAS LONG SERVED TO CONNECT THIS ECONOMIC SECTOR WITH THE REST OF THE PROFESSIONAL AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY. THESE ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS POSITION THE WCA AS A CRITICAL STAKEHOLDER HUB TO ADVOCATE, PROMOTE POLICIES, COMMUNICATE INFORMATION, AND PROVIDE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICES.**

Montefiore Medicine, Northwell Health, NewYork-Presbyterian, WMC Health, Memorial Sloan Kettering, Hospital for Special Surgery, Westmed Medical Group, ENT and Allergy Associates as well as other physicians' groups and nonprofit care facilities all have set down strong roots in Westchester. More than just an immense benefit to the people who live here, proximity to world-class health facilities is a key business and talent driver for the region.

These organizations, along with their ancillary services (doctors' offices, laboratories, etc.) also anchor our real estate industry. Illustratively, over the past two years healthcare has been the largest occupier of new building leases in the county by square feet. Moreover, many of our colleges and universities see growth opportunities in sector specific training for nursing and various technical and clinical disciplines. Existing nursing programs are expanding and at least two colleges have announced plans to open new nursing schools within the past year alone.

Bioscience also stands as an emerging sector where entrepreneurship and innovation intersect with established institutions. Westchester County government has appropriately targeted this segment with the aspiration of creating a regional life sciences hub.

The WCA Post Pandemic Working Group's recent survey on the future of business in the County identified healthcare / life sciences as the single most important industry for Westchester's economic future. With an employment roster of greater than 70,000 in Westchester alone, and with an \$18 billion plus impact on the region, this industry sector cannot be overstated.

### **INITIATIVE 1 :: Advocate for a Strong and Vibrant Healthcare System:**

The WCA's Healthcare Consortium, comprising leaders from world-renowned healthcare systems, physician practices, nursing homes, clinics, and related service providers (real estate, banking, law and accounting), will continue to advocate for legislative and regulatory priorities to protect the foundation of this critical economic driver.

#### **PRIORITIES HIGHLIGHTED BY THE PANDEMIC INCLUDE:**

- Broaden telehealth coverage from both public and private payers;
- Reign-in oversized market influence of healthcare insurance carriers;
  - maintain reasonable insurance premiums and prevent unfair and oversized profits,
  - require "healthcare reinvestment" by insurers as modeled after the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act for the Banking Industry,
  - increase transparency of patients' insurance plans,
  - place fair limits on insurance denials.
- Institute common-sense medical malpractice reforms;
- Identify coverage reimbursement models which are population health based and ensure fair reimbursement;
- Integrate healthcare with nonprofit community service providers.

### **INITIATIVE 2 :: Initiate a Healthcare Career Path Workforce Talent Project:**

A sustainable pipeline of locally educated and trained talent will be more important than ever to the healthcare sector's future success and to Westchester's economic growth. Healthcare providers are actively assessing their current and future workforce needs. Most notably, there is an ongoing need for more nurses, nurse assistants, respiratory therapists, lab techs and other clinical and non-clinical positions. Long-term forecasts suggest that the need will intensify with elevated numbers of retirements anticipated.

In response to the pandemic, the WCA has initiated a Healthcare Workforce Talent Project, tasked with identifying the greatest hiring needs of the regional healthcare sector. At its outset, an active working committee made up of the region's largest healthcare providers and seventeen colleges, BOCES and career centers held weekly meetings focused on helping fill immediate workforce needs identified by the providers.

To amplify those efforts, the WCA held virtual career chats with providers to let job seekers know about open positions.

The WCA will continue to convene the working committee to connect employers, job trainers, and job seekers and improve pathways to careers in the healthcare sector. In addition, the WCA will bring together high-level stakeholders such as hospital and nursing administrators and college presidents.

#### **FOREMOST FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS ARE:**

- (1) aligning curriculums and course offerings with talent needs;
- (2) coordinating and increasing availability of clinical training for nursing students and nurse assistants;
- (3) supporting a residency/fellowship program for nursing and potentially other high demand positions;
- (4) promoting workforce diversity and inclusion; and
- (5) developing new funding streams for training and early career support.

#### **INITIATIVE 3 :: Showcase and Grow the Healthcare / Bioscience Nexus:**

Westchester and the surrounding region will need continued opportunities to showcase its considerable assets while also addressing existing challenges in fulfilling its bioscience aspirations. Access to early stage investment and college level engineering programs are top-level focuses. The WCA, through its existing Healthcare Consortium, will engage with County government, our healthcare systems, the real estate industry, and other stakeholders to advance this agenda.



PILLAR

2

# REAL ESTATE & HOUSING

“ The creation of new housing increases the population, expands the labor force, improves wages, enhances GDP and should be accretive to the tax rolls.

**AS THE ECONOMY REOPENS, WESTCHESTER IS POISED TO BECOME AN ATTRACTIVE DESTINATION FOR BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS WISHING TO REMAIN CLOSE TO NEW YORK CITY BUT WITH A LESS DENSE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.** Changes may take place in occupancy and use trends in the office, retail, hospitality, research and development, and industrial sectors. We should continue to encourage suburban clusters (comprising attractive office space close to retail and lifestyle amenities) through proper development incentives and zoning modifications as the pandemic reshapes the commercial landscape.

Numerous real estate stakeholders have circulated helpful guides on anticipated needs for a changing work environment. These include; recommendations on physical reconfiguration, risk management and continuity planning, talent management and worker psychology, transportation and communication protocols, and essential needs for a hybrid work environment. The WCA has made these resources available via virtual programming, website access, and social media.

While many of these concepts also apply to residential real estate, unique structural issues remain in that subsector and none is more important than affordable housing. In 2019, Westchester County government conducted an Affordable Housing Needs Assessment to establish a data driven foundation for the creation and preservation of affordable housing in the county. The assessment concluded that Westchester needs approximately 11,700 units of affordable housing and it set forth a series of recommendations. The county cannot attract and retain businesses without accessible and affordable housing and our essential workforce currently is underserved.

Furthermore, in and of itself, the creation of new housing is a well-documented economic stimulant. It increases the population, expands the labor force, improves wages, enhances GDP and should be accretive to the tax rolls. Housing development is a major economic engine in the region.

## **INITIATIVE 1 :: Amend WCA’s Policy Playbook to Include Affordable Housing Chapter:**

The WCA’s standing Real Estate Task Force is an experienced group of developers, brokers, land-use attorneys, planning consultants, architects, and government officials. As Westchester’s leading advocate for smart real estate development, the Real Estate Task Force supports projects, educates municipal officials and institutes policy initiatives to ensure that Westchester and the surrounding region remains attractive for businesses and workers. One of the WCA Real Estate Task Force’s tangible deliverables is the WCA Policy Playbook -- a resource to design, validate and deploy land use policies and strategies to improve the planning, zoning, and approval process across the county.

To help tackle the issue of affordable housing, the WCA has partnered with Pace University’s Land Use Law Center to create a brand-new chapter for the Policy Playbook. The Policy Playbook will now directly address this vital challenge with specific policy recommendations, “how-to” guides, model zoning ordinances, municipality specific best practices, and training and funding resources.

## **INITIATIVE 2 :: Convene an Affordable Housing Summit:**

The WCA annually convenes a stakeholder summit that draws many hundreds of participants who discuss the most pressing issues in real estate. This year’s summit will be dedicated to the housing crisis in Westchester. Experts will speak about many of the topics within the Policy Playbook and present recommendations from the newly minted affordable housing chapter.

## **INITIATIVE 3 :: Mobilize a Housing Stakeholder Group:**

In addition to the members of the WCA Real Estate and Housing Task Force, the WCA works closely with other key leadership groups from the public and private sectors to coordinate efforts of the various housing programs and initiatives. This coalition will mobilize a master outreach plan, including co-sponsored webinars, events, and training to leverage collective resources and technical assistance.

### **DEDICATED PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE:**

- > Pace University’s Land Use Law Center
- > Westchester County Office of Economic Development
- > Westchester County Office of Planning
- > Westchester Municipal Planning Federation
- > Builders & Realty Institute
- > Construction Industry Council
- > Urban Land Institute
- > Housing Action Council

#### **INITIATIVE 4 ::** Create an Employer Assisted Housing Program (EAHP):

The WCA has collaborated with the Housing Action Council and Pace University's Land Use Law Center to originate an Employer-Assisted Housing Program (EAHP). This program is a benefit that employers can offer their employees to help secure housing. A menu of options chosen by the employer facilitates the housing transaction by providing employees access to services, grants and other financial benefits. Employees have access to financial education and counseling; housing costs assistance programs; and other housing resources available in the region. EAH programs can help businesses reduce turn-over and training costs, boost employee morale, and increase employee motivation and productivity.





**PILLAR**

3

DIGITAL  
CONNECTIVITY

“ The resiliency and flexibility of modern communications and broadband networks have proved to be an essential form of infrastructure with services that are intertwined with nearly all aspects of modern human life.

**DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, BROADBAND COMMUNICATIONS BECAME THE MEANS BY WHICH WE STAYED CONNECTED TO OUR WORKPLACES, SCHOOLS, HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT, AND EACH OTHER.**

Wireless, cable, enterprise fiber and local telephone companies all ensured that people had reliable access to communications services in the midst of major shifts in their locations and typical usage patterns. Real time video platforms suddenly became the norm in work from home, remote learning and telemedicine environments during stay at home orders. Ultimately, the resiliency and flexibility of modern communications and broadband networks proved to be an essential and critical form of infrastructure with services that are intertwined with nearly all aspects of modern human life.

Unfortunately, the pandemic also has exacerbated the effects of a digital divide. During the pandemic, reports of children sitting on benches at public Wi-Fi hotspots to do homework and an inability to join remote online classes due to the lack of home computers and effective devices became all too common. Federal programs and subsidies such as Lifeline and E-Rate have proven inadequate to serve those in need of affordable broadband service at a time of unprecedented economic disruption and record joblessness. It is no surprise that underserved and unserved broadband populations and geographies have been an area of renewed attention.

In the Hudson Valley region, as elsewhere in the United States, the provision of broadband services is largely a private sector endeavor with multiple players and market forces that drive quality, price and new offerings. The COVID-19 pandemic has come at a time of heightened competition and the convergence among numerous digital technologies and various modalities of service by various commercial broadband providers. Cloud services, next generation 5G wireless networks, edge computing, gigabit speeds and many other technical developments in broadband come to mind.

Additionally, policy discussions at the federal and State level of government are largely rooted in the need to subsidize remote and rural broadband when it comes to stimulating private sector infrastructure deployments in places like the Catskills and Adirondacks. These subsidies are largely unavailable to Westchester and the lower Hudson Valley. Moreover, the lack of economic viability associated with broad scale municipal owned networks in New York makes it an illusory option for a discussion in downstate New York. These realities coupled with local tax caps, municipal bond ratings and the looming erosion in state and local tax revenue make municipal efforts to address the digital divide a challenge. The WCA seeks a unified approach supporting broadband policies and programs which facilitate broadband infrastructure deployments and which push against unproductive tax and regulatory headwinds in New York.

### **INITIATIVE 1 :: Advocate for a Clear, Consistent Broadband Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity Policy:**

Westchester's connectivity future is at an important crossroads. The current policy climate reflects a disjointed approach to taxation and the regulation of broadband infrastructure. For example, a statewide fiber broadband tax imposed by NYS DOT in 2019 and the lack of a predictable or level regulatory playing field at municipal levels of government has in many cases slowed investment and impacted the deployment of modern and next generation broadband networks by the private sector. Historic adherence to municipal home rule has also made state legislation in this area a challenge despite clear economic and social benefits.

#### **POLICY PRIORITIES INCLUDE:**

- Develop and promote a municipal list of do's and don'ts in cable franchising, fiber and small cell use of public rights of way, and permit streamlining of municipal codes appropriate for the Region. For example, allow WiFi and 5G small cells on a streamlined administrative permit basis with simplified right-of-way access terms and conditions when locating in municipal rights-of-way.
- Advocate for federal and state legislation and programs that provide predictable and standardized municipal approaches to the deployment of 5G and broadband infrastructure and that also maintain the current light touch approach to federal and state regulation of broadband and wireless services.
- Support proposed federal recovery and infrastructure legislation that includes funding for non-rural areas and which encompasses the Hudson Valley.
- Partner with national trade associations like WIA (Wireless Infrastructure Association), CTIA (Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association), and state associations and groups like NYSWA (New York State Wireless Association) and NYers for 5G. Amplify efforts to build support for local 5G and broadband infrastructure projects.

## **INITIATIVE 2 :: Mobilize a Digital Technologies Stakeholder Group:**

Specialized broadband solutions are becoming more and more critical for many business enterprises and particularly in healthcare and telemedicine. The need for data protection and cybersecurity technologies has stimulated a major economic sector with several global companies in the space based here in the Hudson Valley Region. Many universities are moving quickly to provide technology based educational curriculums for their students in collaboration with businesses. In real estate, the pandemic illustrates the need for accelerated broadband investments in office buildings for workforce connectivity to meet the demands of tenants. The transportation and municipal sectors also are focused on automation (e.g. self-driving vehicles) and smart city solutions (e.g. lighting and traffic management).

These ongoing disruptions and technical innovations across various economic sectors are a broad topic and critical to the overall business community in the region. Certainly, organizations will pursue solutions and innovation as part of their own market interests. What's needed is a forum to educate, share best practices, network to create real opportunities and curate a mass of specialized information.

The WCA will continue to act as the premier venue and clearinghouse for high level education and networking in this area. The WCA will organize content and collaborate new connections unique to each specific sector – i.e. colleges and universities, healthcare, real estate and commercial offices, transportation and smart city applications -- where digital connectivity and innovation are a major post-pandemic focus.

## **INITIATIVE 3 :: Address the Digital Divide Through Strategic Partnership and Workforce Development:**

Even before the pandemic, digital disruption was a growing topic of discussion and its effects on both displacement and a growing skills gaps in our workforce. The pandemic's economic impact is likely to accelerate this problem and threaten the speed and inclusiveness of the recovery. Additionally, the inability of many at or below the poverty line to engage in recovery through access to affordable broadband is already of concern for 100,000 residents in Westchester and many more in the greater Hudson Valley region. For example, a recent survey by the Westchester Children's Association during the pandemic revealed that nearly 30% of Mount Vernon homes lacked internet access whereas that number fell to less than 3% in nearby Scarsdale.

In addition to its telecom and technology business members, the WCA has built a substantial network of community contacts and other digital stakeholders. These included the Federal Reserve, numerous nonprofits, and the Westchester Library System just to name a few. The WCA is partnering with these and other organizations such as the STEM Alliance which recently launched its "DIGITAL EQUITY NOW - A

Westchester County Initiative”, desirous of addressing the digital divide.

The WCA also will augment its existing workforce development programs to include skills gap training to help bridge the digital divide. Digital fluency and skills are critical for new workforce needs and job opportunities let alone potential displacement. These efforts will provide enhanced value and a pipeline for employers in numerous and growing sectors in the region.

PILLAR

4

# ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY

“ New York State now has one of the strongest climate change laws in the world and in order to meet these ambitious clean energy goals, stakeholders in businesses, real estate developers, asset managers, community organizations, and local municipalities will need to be proactive.

**SINCE THE OUTSET OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, OUR UTILITIES AND OTHER ENERGY PROVIDERS WORKED TO ENSURE THAT BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS HAVE CONTINUED ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY, NATURAL GAS, AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS TO HEAT AND COOL OUR HOMES AND BUILDINGS, POWER OUR CARS AND EQUIPMENT, AND KEEP OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM OPERATING. BUT NEW YORK STATE’S ENERGY COMPLEX IS EVOLVING, AND OUR ENERGY FUTURE IS IN FLUX.**

In 2019, New York State passed groundbreaking legislation to place us on the path to a cleaner and more sustainable energy future. The ambitious Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) codified aggressive targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the next several decades – with aspirational goals of 100 percent zero-emission electricity by 2040 and 85 percent reductions of greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2040. The Climate Act is not very specific about how we reach these bold statewide goals.

The New York State Climate Action Council, formed under the Climate Act, is tasked with creating a scoping plan over the next eighteen months. This plan thereafter will be implemented primarily by the State Department of Environmental Conservation and by the Public Service Commission in the power sector. Currently in development, the scoping plan will involve some combination of: (a) rapidly expanding existing

renewable energy production; (b) developing new systems for enhanced renewables and negative emissions technologies; (c) conservation measures and smart grid technology; and (d) physical climate resiliency initiatives.

Like each economic region in the State, the Hudson Valley faces a unique set of energy challenges. As Indian Point prepares to decommission, over 2,000 megawatts of power generating capacity is permanently coming off-line. Moreover, due to increased demand and tightening capacity constraints, stress on the natural gas delivery system has led to Con Edison's temporary moratorium on new firm gas accounts for most of Westchester County. In the midst of these delivery constraints, Con Edison continues to invest in renewable energy, battery storage, and modernizing the distribution grid. Similarly, petroleum operators are delivering cleaner burning products as they continue to build out supply chains for renewable diesel and advanced biofuels.

The regional economic issues created by climate change and the regulatory response thereto predate the pandemic. They are, however, linked in numerous ways. For example, many climate change impacts (deforestation, loss of biodiversity) can create new pathogen pathways and increase the likelihood of novel infections. Moreover, as a respiratory infection, COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on places where air quality is poor.

Regardless of cause and effect, New York State now has one of the strongest climate change laws in the world. In order to meet these ambitious clean energy goals and become a leader in the fight against climate change, stakeholders in businesses and professional institutions, real estate developers, asset managers, community organizations, and local municipalities will need to be proactive. And they will need the proper incentives, information, and training to make it happen.

### **INITIATIVE 1** :: Advocate for Sustainable Energy Policy:

Our business and professional community can embrace the evolution to a clean energy future consistent with the goals of the Climate Act. But they deserve greater clarity about how to bridge the gap between traditional energy sources and a carbon free economy. Moreover, they will need transitional assistance through incentive-based mechanisms.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Economic development agencies such as county-wide and local IDAs and LDCs should reward clean energy building projects and retrofits as well as other sustainable business practices.
- Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council (MHREDC) should actively solicit projects that move us towards a clean energy future.
- Model county-wide green building codes should be adopted.
- State and local government should view investment in both public transit and EV charging stations as essential economic infrastructure.
- As an alternative to Article 10, new siting mechanisms for large scale renewable projects should be developed and run out of the NYS Department of Economic Development.
- New York State should expand existing financing mechanisms available for businesses such as the Clean Energy Fund and the NY Green Bank.
- New York State should encourage the orderly and responsible decommissioning of Indian Point consistent with plans already put in place.
- New York State should expand its electric vehicle rebate program to encourage fleet purchases of electric vehicles.
- The federal government should pass legislation adopting a technologically neutral and non-sector specific carbon tax.

## INITIATIVE 2 :: Develop an Information Clearinghouse:

There are numerous programs and resources (financial and otherwise) currently available to developers, building owners, and businesses wishing to transition to a lower carbon footprint.

## A SAMPLE OF THESE PROGRAMS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

### ➤ Con Edison

- Energy savings programs and tariff-based incentives such as electricity Time of Use Rates
- Equipment efficiency financial incentives for businesses
- Demand management programs for large commercial customers

### ➤ NYPA

- Energy Project Financing
- NYPA Energy Solutions
- NYPA Blended Power Product

### ➤ NYSERDA

- NY Clean Energy Fund (Green Bank / Loan Loss Reserve Fund / Market Development / Innovation and Research / NY Sun)
- Flexible Technical Assistance Program
- Retail Energy Storage Incentive Program
- Bulk Energy Storage Incentive Program
- Commercial Tenant Assistance Program
- Clean Energy Action Plan

### ➤ NY and Federal Law

- Property tax exemptions for energy conservation improvements
- Business Energy Investment Tax Credit

These resources lack an easily digestible information clearinghouse, readily available to businesses and nonprofits. Organizations need a dynamic guide to resources to assist them. Accordingly, the WCA is partnering with Pace University's Energy and Climate Center to curate and maintain an annotated, dynamic sustainable energy resource guide which will be made publicly available.

### **INITIATIVE 3 ::** Develop and Offer a Formal Curriculum in Sustainability Management:

Together with experts from NYSERDA, NYPA, Con Edison, and other local organizations, the WCA will stage events focused on the State's energy future and available professional resources. However, preparing our businesses and nonprofits to adapt to a more sustainable energy future will require more than informational seminars. It will require agents of change who are educated in sustainability management concepts and who are armed with the resources to actively apply those concepts to make a demonstrative difference within their respective organizations.

Sustainability in business is not just about climate change. It's about corporate social responsibility and institutionalized fairness. It's about utilizing available resources with maximum efficiency and minimal waste. Most importantly, it's about developing a long-term strategic business model for innovation, profitability and enduring success. Organizations must be willing to commit to customized guiding principles, based upon empirical information, measured against qualitative norms, and supported (or at least understood) by an array of stakeholders. Sustainability and social responsibility feed the success of any enterprise, whether for profit or otherwise. It is a superior, long-term financial business model.

Accordingly, the Westchester County Association is partnering with Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business to develop a curriculum in organizational sustainability to train thought leaders with the necessary analytical tools to originate, market, and lead sustainability initiatives in a variety of professional contexts. This will be a single, stand-alone, semester long course, taught locally and sensitive to the time constraints of working professionals.

More ambitious than a series of informational sessions, the goal is to arm dedicated professionals with the practical skills necessary to develop and implement an enduring sustainability program within their organizations. Those who undertake and complete the coursework and assignments will be prepared to recognize and apply the pre-eminent tools used today in sustainability management, stakeholder engagement, and communications.

# The Westchester County Association Post Pandemic Working Group

## CO-CHAIRS:

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## About the Westchester County Association

The Westchester County Association is the most influential group of businesses and nonprofit organizations in the lower Hudson Valley. For greater than 70 years, the WCA has served as the collective voice of a broad range of industries including real estate, healthcare and bioscience, law, energy, finance & banking, hospitality, technology, education and nonprofit organizations, and local municipalities. The leading advocacy and economic development organization in the region, we foster strong personal connections, advocate for issues, and administer programs that cultivate a robust economic environment for our members and the community at large.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES CALL US AT (914) 948-6444 OR EMAIL CHRISTINA BARRY, MANAGER OF MEMBERSHIP AND EVENTS, AT [CBARRY@WESTCHESTER.ORG](mailto:CBARRY@WESTCHESTER.ORG). VISIT [WWW.WESTCHESTER.ORG](http://WWW.WESTCHESTER.ORG) FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR CURRENT INITIATIVES AND UPCOMING EVENTS.



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