



Start where you are, Use what you have, Do what you can.

Arthur Ashe

Achieving the Vision

A year of work by County staff, the community, consultants and elected officials culminates with a vision for Broome County. We inventoried our assets, catalogued our deficiencies, did an extensive survey, held workshops, met with stakeholders and most of all we listened. We asked the community to imagine that they are a resident of the county 10 years from now, the comprehensive plan is done and implemented to great success, and they are writing a letter to a friend or family member who does not live here. In this letter we asked residents to tell us how do you want to be able to describe Broome County? This is what the community said:

The Vision: Our residents make Broome County an inviting place to live, work and play. Our students and young professionals are fully engaged in the community. We take pride in our safe, vibrant, attractive urban and village centers and the scenic beauty that surrounds our rural towns and villages. Because we proactively invested in our legacy sites, new ventures now flourish on former brownfields. Our healthy communities are sustained because municipalities have made a commitment to high standards in community services and building design and renovation.

Broome County communities remain strong and resilient in the wake of natural disasters and other challenges through our capacity for cooperation and by incorporating sound planning in all facets of public decision making.

With our partners in education, Broome County invests in our workforce, entrepreneurship, and innovation to continue our legacy as a leader in high technology development. As the birthplace of IBM and the simulation industry, we know the importance of fostering diverse, newly emerging industries such as renewable and clean energy, green technology, and advanced healthcare.

This vision statement encapsulates the aspirations of the community, and we now lay out vision items and an action plan.



Vision Item 1:

Making Broome County an Inviting Place To Live, Work, and Play

From numerous stakeholder groups, community meetings and survey responses, the message was clear: Make Broome County More Vibrant. At one stakeholder meeting, when asked how people *wanted* to describe their community, in unison the majority of the group enthusiastically said ‘vibrant’. They wanted us to create a buzz.



We have a great base to build upon. We have intact downtowns, and historically and architecturally significant buildings. We need to enhance and enliven these places. One method would be to add public art. The County can look at our facilities and infrastructure as canvases. Even public transit busses can become mobile works of art. For the past 13 years, Valley Metro in Phoenix has had an annual ‘Do the Ride Thing’ contest, where high school students compete to design a transit wrap. Imagine if we had a ‘Wrap the Ride’ contest here and invited Binghamton University and local high school art students to design the bus wrap: We brighten the community and engage our students. We can also add landscaping to new development, something that respondents to our survey thought was important.

We have nodes, such as Washington Avenue and the village green in Windsor, which have the potential to be great, inviting public spaces. We just need to add more people. We can do this by growing existing events like the Windsor “Window on the Arts” and the Johnson City “Carousel Days” and by sponsoring new ones throughout the year. More than one stakeholder we interviewed encouraged the development of a festival to bring more life to the winter months. The arts and events have a tremendous economic impact on the community, and we need leverage this to maximum effect.



Broome County Comprehensive Plan *Building Our Future*

The Village of Johnson City recognizes the need for the arts to be part of their downtown through their recently adopted Health and Cultural District plan. We should partner with the Village to implement their ideas.

Vision Item 2: Engaging Our Students and Young Professionals

Two-thirds of survey respondents believe that residents leaving the area is an obstacle to achieving our vision for Broome County. And this drain is most prevalent among local students going off to college and settling elsewhere. Also students attending class at SUNY Broome or Binghamton University typically do not remain after graduation. Engaging these students and other young professionals is one key to achieving our vision. And the students want to be more engaged.

Graduate students participating in the stakeholder meetings for this plan voiced strong support for more opportunities to volunteer and participate in local civic life. By participating, students become woven into the local fabric and not just outsiders living here temporarily. We also need to provide the amenities and housing opportunities that appeal to students and recent graduates. They want more places to gather, socialize, and network which are not related to the bar scene. The Binghamton University Downtown Center could serve as a nucleus for this, but it is currently not welcoming for students to use after hours. Binghamton University currently holds an annual Internship and Job Fair, but the County can do more to expand and promote this effort. We can also develop other opportunities to engage students from both campuses in civic life. Examples include the having student led bands participate at the Farmer's Market Brown Bag music series, organizing students to design and execute murals and other public art, and encouraging student participation in neighborhood cleanups and other volunteer activities. The annual Riverbank Cleanup carried out by the Environmental Management Council is a model for this type of effort.

Why Attachment Matters

The Knight Foundation has done an extensive study of 'community attachment'. Over the three years, of the *Soul of the Community* study, Knight Foundation researchers found that communities whose residents were more attached saw greater economic growth. And the three greatest drivers of community attachment in this study were: 'Social Offerings', 'Openness' and 'Aesthetics'.

Engaging young professionals in decision-making and leadership roles is also important. Respondents to the comprehensive plan survey expressed concern that for decades decisions have been made by a relatively small group of individuals. We should make a concerted effort to include young professionals on boards such as the



Broome County Comprehensive Plan *Building Our Future*

Broome County Industrial Development Agency, Southern Tier Economic Partnership (STEP), Broome County Land Bank, and the Broome County Arena and Forum Board of Directors. This new blood will bring fresh ideas and foster a sense of investment in the community by young professionals.

Vision Item 3: Taking Pride in Our Urban and Village Centers

Broome County is fortunate to have intact and lively urban and village centers. Some villages, like Whitney Point and Johnson City, have been aggressive in winning grants to foster improvements. But all the villages need attention and investment. As shown in the *Housing* chapter, the villages have a very high concentration of substandard and pre-war housing. Grants to improve housing conditions can be leveraged with much needed streetscape, commercial facade improvements, and small business loans and grants to make the village centers attractive, vital nodes of activity and civic life.

These physical improvements when teamed with coordinated marketing efforts for the village centers will foster private interest and investment. Windsor and Deposit have led the way in marketing themselves outside of the region, and we need to extend these efforts to the other village centers. This should include internal marketing as well to help restore community pride and combat negativity. As quality of life improves, and pride grows, the villages will become attractive hubs for visitors and prospective residents.

As we combat blight in our village centers, we also must pay attention to the corridors and entrances identified in the *Land Use* chapter. In these high profile areas we should seek façade grants, work with local officials to target code enforcement, and coordinate development efforts with the newly established Broome County Land Bank. By targeting these highly visible areas, we will greatly leverage our investment of time and resources.

Building Our Future Principles:

- The community must be resilient
- Present needs must be met without compromising our ability to meet future needs
- Limited resources should be conserved and leveraged
- Natural and cultural resources should be preserved and enhanced
- Public health and healthy communities should be promoted through planning tools and strategic public investments
- Collaboration is key



Vision Item 4: Taking Pride in Our Scenic Beauty

Scenic beauty and abundant natural resources are among our biggest strengths. Survey respondents confirmed this: 84% identified “protecting open space” as a major or minor opportunity and 88% identified our “rivers and riverfronts” as a major or minor opportunity. And just as we plan for our traditional, gray infrastructure so should plan for our “green infrastructure” in recognition of their important public health and community service functions.

Green infrastructure provides flood mitigation, alternative transportation corridors, and recreational amenities. It can also link open spaces to major activity centers, such as schools, community centers, and business districts while improving aesthetics and quality of life.

We have done a great deal to protect and preserve our natural beauty. We have an adopted countywide Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan and a Greenway Plan. We have miles of pedestrian and bicycle trails in place and more that have been funded. But there is more that we can and should do. We need to expand and strengthen the linkages between open spaces hubs and urban and village centers in order to create an integrated transportation and recreation network.

And we are missing an economic development opportunity by not heavily promoting all of the recreational resources in the community with a comprehensive outdoor recreation marketing strategy. Broome County is under-represented in outdoor oriented publications and websites. Our marketing strategy could include smart phone apps, GPS enabled hiking trail maps, tying into existing clubs and organizations such as the Triple Cities Hiking Club and social media to promote recreation oriented events. But first, we must assess and fill in the gaps associated with data regarding outdoor recreation opportunities.

We recognize the importance of agriculture both economically and as part of the character of the county. Promotion of agriculture will generate spending and investment by farmers and their suppliers across the economic base of the county, and farmers place very limited demand on infrastructure and municipal services. Agriculture is important for maintaining open space and our rural character. Supporting the agricultural community keeps these farms a productive part of our economy. But our Agricultural Economic Development Plan is now more than 10 years old and needs to be updated.



Vision Item 5: Investing In Our Legacy Sites

Nearly 90% of survey residents want to see infrastructure projects concentrated in the Triple Cities (Binghamton, Endicott and Johnson City) as a means of guiding where development takes place. Survey respondents also wanted to see industrial and commercial development concentrated in the Triple Cities, the smaller village centers and the larger suburban towns. Only one quarter of respondents wanted to see this type of development take place countywide including the rural areas.

Residents recognize that concentrating infrastructure saves tax dollars in the long run by allowing the County to focus on maintaining existing systems. But this approach takes more planning and forethought because there is a lack of developable sites within these areas. The majority of our available industrial building stock is not suited to modern manufacturing. It is older and does not have high bay space, and this is restricting new development opportunities. And some significant sites, like the former BAE Systems site in Johnson City and the former Vestal Nursing Center site in Vestal, need special attention because they are flood prone. BAE will soon be demolished, but the former Vestal Nursing Center may deteriorate as it sits idle. We need to develop reuse plans for these ‘bluefield’ sites which allow for their redevelopment while mitigating flood risk.

We need to continue to aggressively assess, remediate, assemble and prepare our legacy sites for redevelopment. And we should use all the mechanisms available, such as New York’s Shovel Ready program and the recently established Broome County Land Bank, to market and redevelop sites.

Vision Item 6: Making a Commitment to High Standards in Services

We need to make a commitment to providing high quality services which take advantage of the latest innovations in social entrepreneurship and technology. We can begin by launching a 21st century website which is welcoming to new residents and business owners. This site would encourage tourism and be tied to successful local social media efforts such as BingSpot. We are the ‘Home to Innovation’ and we should look like it. Millennials expect a government website which accepts payments online, allows residents to reserve parks pavilions, and routes questions and concerns to appropriate departments. This fresh, vibrant portal would also enable county administration to track complaints that have been filed to ensure that there is appropriate follow up. If thoughtfully implemented, an advanced website would keep costs down by streamlining government services.



Broome County Comprehensive Plan *Building Our Future*

Our commitment to high quality services must extend to our growing aging population. As the population grows grayer, there are many services that must be sustained and enhanced to ensure that our residents maintain their quality of life as they attempt to age in place. Some, like health care, are obvious, but others may not be so apparent. For example we need to improve our public transportation system to assist the growing pool of retired residents in the rural and suburban towns as they become unable to drive themselves. Transportation related issues are consistently in the top reasons older adults call Broome County's Senior Resource Line. An improved public transportation system will also help job seekers find and maintain employment, a point made to us by the high school students involved in Citizens U.

Vision Item 7: Making a Commitment to High Standards in Building Design and Renovation

We can have the community we want if we expect excellence. When projects are proposed, we should require them to be carried out to the highest standards in architectural design. The higher we set the bar, the more investment we will attract. We can work with local officials to develop design standards for critical areas such as village centers and high profile transportation corridors.

The county can achieve this goal by strategically investing in premier sites that add value to the community. We have a once in a generation opportunity to carry out a project at a high level of architectural excellence. The Broome County Industrial Development Agency has taken ownership of one of the landmark buildings in Binghamton's downtown: the former Carnegie Library on Exchange Street. This gem is on the State and National Register of Historic Places, but it has sat vacant for over a decade after a developer bought it and failed to follow through on his promises to renovate the property for upscale development. With the library back in public control, we should pursue grant funds to bring the shine back to this jewel.

Another means of creating a quality community is by adopting a 'Complete Streets' policy where we consider all modes of transportation: bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicle when reviewing and designing projects. The number one request from the comprehensive plan survey to consider when conducting site plan reviews was including pedestrian and bicycle amenities such as convenient sidewalks, benches and bike racks, showing that the community supports this approach.



Vision Item 8: Becoming More Resilient

As a community, we have become experts in responding to the aftermath of major floods, but now our focus must turn to actions that protect our residents, businesses and institutions from future events. Our towns, villages and public institutions have done much to mitigate against future disasters through selective buyouts of residential properties, improving our infrastructure, and constructing floodwalls to protect critical facilities such as Lourdes Hospital and the Union-Endicott High School. Projected increases in the amount of precipitation and the frequency of significant storms requires us to adapt to changing conditions. We can become a more resilient community by further incorporating hazard mitigation planning concepts into decision making, instituting policies that protect property and public safety, and encouraging natural, non-structural solutions to reducing flood damages.



**BROOME COUNTY
FLOOD TASK FORCE**

As we make land use and capital investment decisions, we should review projects with hazard mitigation in mind. This can include making it Planning Department policy to provide comments as part of the 239 review process that require proposed developments become more disaster resistant. In addition, we should integrate flood mitigation and stormwater management projects and policies into the County's annual Capital Improvement Plan.

All communities in Broome County participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, but only Johnson City and the Town of Union are part of FEMA's Community Rating System. Through the Community Rating System program, residents and business owners receive reduced flood insurance rates because their communities take a comprehensive approach to floodplain management and work to reduce flood damage to insurable properties. Related to this, all communities in Broome County have floodplain development ordinances, but none have adopted the more stringent No Adverse Impact standards that would be more protective of property. These programs are complex and difficult to initiate, and require a great deal of technical assistance, education, and advocacy. The Broome County Flood Task Force is one venue for initiating these programmatic and policy changes. But we should continue to reach out to the business community through the Chamber of Commerce, the local chapter of the Bar Association, the Board of Realtors and other appropriate venues to educate businesses, attorneys, realtors, and others about



Broome County Comprehensive Plan *Building Our Future*

concepts such as flood insurance, individual property hazard mitigation, and contingency planning during a flood to keep businesses running.

Vision Item 9: Investing In Our Workforce, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation

It is hard to imagine today's society without the technological advances that came out of Broome County businesses. These include a century of innovation at IBM, the virtual reality and simulation industries which were borne out of Link Aviation and its daughter companies, and significant contributions to the space program and defense industries by local technology firms that maintain a strong presence here. What are we doing to cultivate the next crop of entrepreneurs?

Like any greenhouse, we must tend to the infrastructure of innovation in order to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Community groups, private industry, and the public sector have done quite a bit to sow the seeds for the next generation of innovators. For nearly 30 years, the Southern Tier Imaginink Celebration of Invention and Art has hosted art shows and invention conventions at many local venues. Over 20,000 students have invented solutions to their problems since the program

Boston Innovation District: Core Principles & Strategies

Work: Create Clusters of Innovative People

People in clusters innovate at a quicker rate, sharing technologies and knowledge easier. **Ideas need a tight ecosystem** to foster creative growth – distance equals death. These Innovation District clusters become the new economic engines for the region, retaining homegrown talent from the surrounding city and intellectual institutions.

Live: Build Flexible Housing Options to Work for Flexible Lifestyles

The entrepreneur who is never at home because she's at the lab all night or developing a new program with her co-founders, needs an apartment that meets her lifestyle demands and budget and is near her office. The City of Boston works closely with design professionals and developers to produce a palette of new housing options to fit the range of lifestyles and needs of the innovation workforce.

Play: Provide Public Space and Programming To Foster An Innovation Ecosystem

An **abundance of collaborative venues and open space** is critical to fostering the creative process. The Innovation District will offer unparalleled opportunities to organically grow projects and networks among entrepreneurs.



Broome County Comprehensive Plan *Building Our Future*

began. A creative team of local individuals has started the Center for Technology & Innovation to celebrate and memorialize the technological advances that we have made here. Broome County supports business start ups by managing a small incubator on Court Street. The County has partnered with Binghamton University and the Broome County Industrial Development Agency to build a top-tier incubator in downtown Binghamton. The City of Binghamton has an annual business plan competition and a 'Start Up Weekend'. The Town of Union's 'Emerging Enterprise Emerging Market Entrepreneurial Program' (E³) encourages research and

"People always say, 'How long does our stuff last?'" said Chuck Hinton, a McIntosh employee. "We don't know how long they last. We've only been making them for 63 years."
-from a CBS News report

development in emerging fields and improve upon existing technologies. New York State recently announced the 'Start Up New York' program to "foster entrepreneurialism and job creation on a large scale by transforming public higher education through tax-free communities across the state, particularly upstate."

We can go further. We can organize a 'Maker's Faire' or similar event here to foster experimentation and inventing for all ages to raise the awareness of the importance of local entrepreneurs and innovators to our economy. We should also investigate establishing a venture fund for start up companies being created at SUNY Broome and Binghamton University.



But our biggest idea is to join the elite cities of the world like Barcelona and Boston and create 'Innovation Districts' to establish a creativity eco-system. Each iDistrict would work to: Create Clusters of Innovative People; Build Flexible Housing Options that Work for Flexible Lifestyles, and Provide Public Space and Programming To



Broome County Comprehensive Plan

Building Our Future

Foster An Innovation Ecosystem. We will work with the State and Local development entities to offer a targeted suite of incentives to innovators and entrepreneurs in each iDistrict.

One Innovation District (iDistrict) would be centered on the high-technology incubator proposed for Hawley Street in downtown Binghamton. This iDistrict would focus on technology transfer from Binghamton University into the commercial sphere. A second iDistrict would be centered on the Wilson Hospital campus in Johnson City and would be focused on innovations in health care, senior living, and the Johnson City Health and Culture District. A third iDistrict would be centered on the Huron Campus and the Endicott Municipal Light District, and would use the combination of ample low cost manufacturing space and discounted electricity to support electronics manufacturing firms.

These ambitious ideas and many more are included in the Action Plan Matrix. The Action Plan Matrix establishes what we will do, who is responsible, where it will take place, when they will start, and how we will pay for it. These actions will only be successful through a serious commitment to their implementation by the county in close collaboration with our public and private sector partners. Only with diligent follow through will we be able to *Build Our Future*.