

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

March 18, 2022

Members Present: D. Root, G. Barnes, P. Curran, A. Cyr, G. Hanchett, D. Healy, J. Ricci, P. Stockin, (Absent: J. Ricketts-Swales)

Others Present: A. Carrow, K. Demick, K. Dirlam, B. Harris, S. Havey, K. Hooker, C. Knapp, T. Linn, R. Lynch, B. Riehle, T. Ross, J. Rumfelt

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Planning & Economic Development Committee Chair Debra Root.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Legislator Hanchett, seconded by Legislator Curran, and carried to approve the February 16, 2022, Planning & Economic Development Committee minutes.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

Employment and Training Director Reita Lynch attended the meeting and submitted her monthly report to the committee for review.

Unemployment

Ms. Lynch stated that the Allegany County unemployment rate for January was at 4.6 percent and that most of the people applying for benefits were seasonal workers, with 17 new unemployment insurance benefit applicants in January 2022. Ms. Lynch stated that the unemployment rate was 5.3 percent for New York State, and 4.4 percent across the United States.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Ms. Lynch stated that they are gearing up for their summer programs with a focus on the youth work experience program.

“The Great Resignation”

Ms. Lynch stated that they talk a lot about “the Great Resignation,” and shared an article she read from WalletHub, <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-highest-job-resignation-rates/101077>. Ms. Lynch gave some statistics from the article regarding resignation rates as follows:

- Alaska’s resignation rate was at 3.5 percent last month, and 3.9 percent over the last 12 months
- New York’s resignation rate was 1.8 percent last month, and 1.87 percent over the last 12 months

Ms. Lynch concluded that New Yorker’s ranked 51st in the United States, and that people are less likely to leave their jobs in New York State. Committee Chair Debra Root asked if that meant New Yorker’s were satisfied with their jobs, or don’t have the means to move. Ms. Lynch stated that she thinks it is a combination of both, and that people who are highly satisfied with their jobs are more likely to stay, and the lower the satisfaction, the easier it is to leave. Legislator Curran asked if there were statistics with how many people have left New York State in the past two years. Ms. Lynch stated that she has a lot of data from 2019, but it is difficult to narrow it down to just data for Allegany County or Western New York. Ms. Lynch stated that she would create a one-page summary to present at next month’s Committee meeting. Legislator Healy stated that he recently had a short discussion with one of our State elected officials about helping to bring a new manufacturer or large employer into our area. Legislator Healy stated that the gentleman remarked that he was not sure we could get the employees to fill those jobs.

Legislator Healy stated that it has been his estimation that the policies put in place by the State over the last sixty years has decimated the Southern Tier, and especially Allegany County. Legislator Healy stated that the situation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because people can't stay if they can't find a job, and then you don't have those people to fill positions if a large employer did come into the area. Legislator Healy asked if Ms. Lynch thought that we could encourage people to move back to the area if we did find a large employer. Ms. Lynch stated that she thinks people would move here if we had a large employer, that housing is an important factor to consider because there isn't a lot of available housing right now. Ms. Lynch stated that there are definitely challenges, but that she would be up to that challenge. Committee Chair Root followed up by stating that local businesses have been unable to find people to fill job openings, and businesses are hiring everywhere. Committee Chair Root asked if local businesses and restaurants are struggling to find people willing to fill these jobs, how will a larger employer be able to fill their positions? Ms. Lynch stated that it will be a difficult challenge, that we should not make false promises to a potential employer, but she feels we should try. Committee Chair Root stated that housing is a problem and that the Planning Department is doing a study right now looking at existing housing, and they are aware that people coming in to work for the University of Rochester are struggling to find housing. Committee Chair Root asked if we need to be focusing on housing in order to increase the labor pool. Ms. Lynch stated, "yes, it is a reality." Legislator Hanchett stated that one thing that economic development has always looked at is working with local colleges to develop an employee pool, and asked if that option is still viable to fill larger employers and manufacturers. Ms. Lynch stated that she would like to refer that to Allegany County Development and Industrial Development Agency Executive Director Craig Clark. Legislator Hanchett stated that was part of what she had worked on for the past several years to help foster a large employee pool. Ms. Lynch stated that we have a lot to offer in other areas because people are concerned with their life-work balance, and some employers are looking at shortening their work week from a 37.5-hour work week to a 35-hour work week. Ms. Lynch stated that she thinks employers are trying very hard to be competitive at recruiting and retaining employees. Legislator Hanchett stated that one of the workshops she attended in Albany that week focused on the great resignation, and that employers need to market job descriptions the right way, and realize that people can work from anywhere and not necessarily need to live near their employer. Legislator Hanchett stated that she thinks it is important that we study those suggestions as we try to foster economic growth, and how we fill those positions. Committee Chair Root asked if there is another potential factor in Allegany County where the labor pool has aged out, and that the largest demographic age in Allegany County is retirement age. Ms. Lynch stated that the first wave was from Siemens in Wellsville because many of those employees were age 50 and older. Legislator Healy stated that in his opinion it seems like many people choose not to work because public assistance is a better deal than to go to work. Ms. Lynch stated that if you are an employable adult without dependent children receiving cash assistance, you are required to do a job search, and it is not easy to get cash assistance. Legislator Healy asked if the same is true for disability. Ms. Lynch stated that it is also a lot of work to get Social Security Disability, but a lot of our residents are unemployable due to a lot of severe medical issues, and many are due to mental health issues.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Planning Director Kier Dirlam attended the meeting and submitted his monthly report to the committee for review and highlighted several items:

- Amity/Belmont Comprehensive Plan - nearing completion, with final edits
- Town of Almond Zoning Code - completed an updated draft
- Town of Angelica – assisted with plans surrounding the creation of a new water district
- EV Charging Stations – working with Ardent Solutions to find locations and installers of electrical vehicle charging stations
- Town of Willing Comprehensive Plan – met to begin the process
- Hazard Mitigation – new funding available and notified towns

Tourism Guide

Mr. Dirlam provided the Committee members with a copy of the new tourism guide and pointed out several of the new features of the guide. Mr. Dirlam referenced the pullout map updates and stated that it is more graphically pleasing to the eye. Mr. Dirlam stated that they did place Allegany County on the front of the guide along with a nice map on the back of the guide. Mr. Dirlam stated that they are still pushing the WNY Wilds brand and have included QR codes throughout the guide. Mr. Dirlam stated that the QR codes should aid them in tracking how effective this guide will be and if people are using them. Mr. Dirlam stated that the guides are being sent to several areas such as: Buffalo, Rochester, Interstate 81 outside of Syracuse, Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, North Western Pennsylvania, all along the National Forest, Chautauqua-Allegany region, NYS Capital, Colleges and direct requests. Legislator Barnes stated that he found Allegany County at the very bottom of the front page of the guide, but would have liked to see it a bit more pronounced. Mr. Dirlam stated that it is subtle but that Allegany County is displayed throughout the guide as well as the back page. Committee Chair Root asked how the search was going for their open positions. Mr. Dirlam stated that the Planner position has been open for about five weeks with just one or two applicants.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Allegany County Development and Industrial Development Agency Executive Director Craig Clark was not able to attend the meeting but previously submitted his monthly report to the committee for review. Legislator Healy asked for details regarding the contract with Alfred State for economic development. County Attorney Allison Carrow stated that she would look up the details of that contract for him. Legislator Healy stated that he read a February 24, 2022, article in the *Olean Times Herald* that the Cattaraugus County Legislature approved an economic development strategic plan, and wondered if Allegany County had anything coming from Alfred State. Legislator Healy stated that Alfred State needs to step up their game or we should look for an alternative for economic development. Committee Chair Root stated that she believed there is a strategic plan that has been worked on for economic development in 2012 that should be refreshed and brought back to Committee.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:32 p.m. following a motion by Legislator Hanchett, seconded by Legislator Curran, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Tiffany Linn, Confidential Secretary
Allegany County Board of Legislators