



**ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT:**  
*Economy*

Economic opportunity for all residents is vital to the success and sustainability of the region. Skilled and knowledgeable people tend to locate in places with a high quality of life that offer excellent social, cultural and natural assets.

**Introduction**

Like many other regions in the northeast, Onondaga County is facing population decline, urban sprawl and an economy transitioning from manufacturing and agriculture to more service-oriented and knowledge-based industries. The County’s population has also shifted from the historic urban core to more rural and suburban areas, creating sprawling land development patterns that can result in increased infrastructure costs, the loss of a sense of place, increased traffic congestion, and the deterioration of older communities. All of these factors can negatively affect our region’s economic competitiveness by reducing productivity, limiting the formation of dense economic clusters, and by providing a quality of life that is not attractive to prospective employers and employees.

In terms of economic development and revitalization, efforts to identify, develop and support business clusters and the companies





that comprise these clusters are considered to be sustainable, long-term strategies. As part of these efforts, communities should focus economic development and revitalization towards infill locations, on or around existing development nodes, and in efforts that ensure new development maintains the character of its surroundings.

Each of Onondaga County’s municipalities contributes to the regional economy. By fostering stronger partnerships between local governments, educational institutions and private industry can cooperatively build a strong regional economy that integrates economic, environmental and social components at all levels.

### Element Overview

Nestled in the center of New York State, Onondaga County benefits from nearly two centuries of transportation investments in Central New York – from the establishment of the Erie Canal, to the construction of major railroad corridors, to the development of the Interstate Highway System, to the development of a regional airport. Economic activity historically concentrated in the City of Syracuse and historic settlements, and development along these transportation corridors continues today. Today, the City of Syracuse is within six hours of more than 72 million people in the United States and Canada.

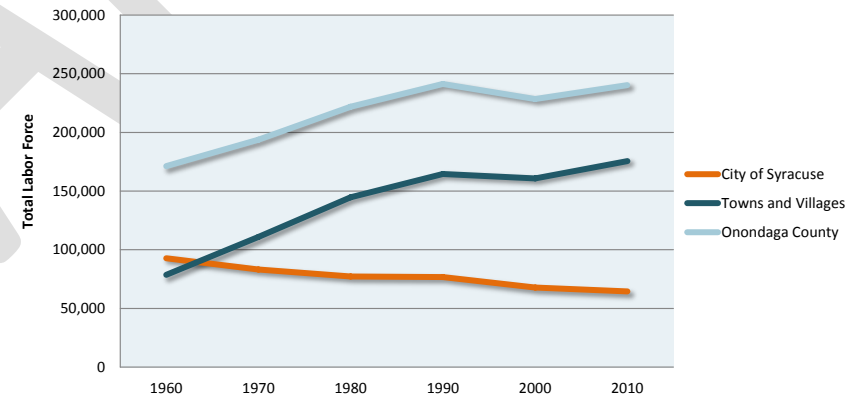
### Labor Force & Employment

With Syracuse at its center, the Central New York (CNY) economic region is generally considered to include five counties – Cayuga,

Cortland, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego Counties. Encompassing more than 3,582 square miles, the CNY region is home to more than 791,939 people, of which almost 60 percent reside in Onondaga County. Based on data provided by the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council’s *Five-Year Strategic Plan: 2012-2016*, the CNY region employs 359,900 people with a gross metropolitan product of \$32.4 billion. Unemployment in the region was approximately 7.8 percent as of April 2012.

**Figure EC-1: Labor Force Distribution in Onondaga County from 1960 to 2010**

Source: US Census



To identify employment trends in Onondaga County, labor force data provided by the U.S. Census were examined. The labor force includes those individuals over the age of 16 who are working or looking for work. While the County experienced a slight dip in the



total labor force during the 1990s, the overall trend shows an increase in the number of individuals working or looking for work over the past 50 years (see Figure EC-1).

Since 1960, however, the City of Syracuse’s labor force has declined by 30 percent, and its overall population decreased by more than 37 percent.

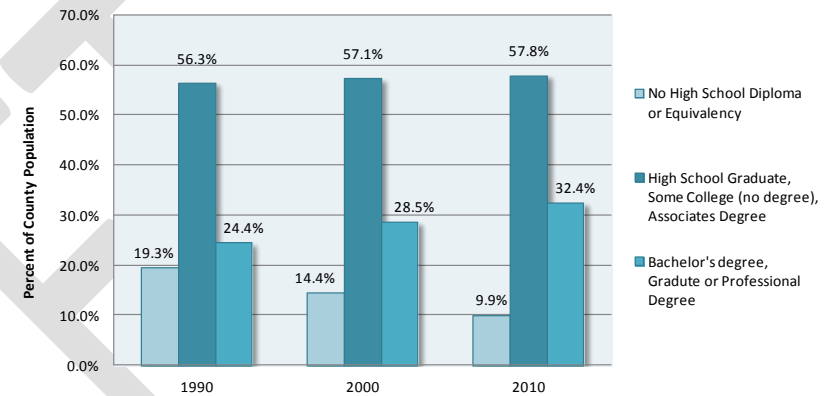
### *Educational Attainment*

The level of educational attainment Onondaga County residents have achieved is another important characteristic to consider when planning for the future of the County. In addition to being a predictor of overall well-being and economic success, individuals with a higher level of educational attainment are less likely to experience unemployment during periods of economic stagnation. Many businesses looking to locate a new facility often use statistics on educational attainment to determine whether the workforce in a given location possesses a specific set of skills. With a global shift to a knowledge-based economy, ensuring that County residents achieve high levels of educational attainment is critical to ensuring the future economic success of the region.

Between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of County residents with no high school diploma (or equivalency) was cut in half. This decline in under-educated residents was met by a 10 percent increase in the proportion of residents with a high school diploma or greater education. Again, City educational achievement levels lag behind countywide statistics.

**Figure EC-2: Educational Attainment in Onondaga County from 1990 to 2010**

SOURCE: U.S. Census



From an economic development perspective, the overall increase in education is a positive trend as a more highly educated populace makes the region more attractive to firms looking to locate new facilities. In addition to the economic benefits, regions with higher levels of educational attainment are also characterized by lower crime rates and greater and more informed civic participation. Individuals with greater levels of educational attainment are less likely to require state support for long periods of time and will generally contribute more in tax revenues to their communities.

Several education and job training initiatives are taking place throughout Syracuse and the CNY region to ensure that the region’s workforce is prepared for the knowledge- and service-based economy. Of note is the innovative *Say Yes to Education* program,

which works to address issues associated with poverty and educational achievement, as well as trade and workforce training programs through CNY Works and Onondaga Community College. The CNY region also boasts a high concentration of colleges and universities, with more than 100,000 high school graduates from within 100 miles of Syracuse enrolling each year.

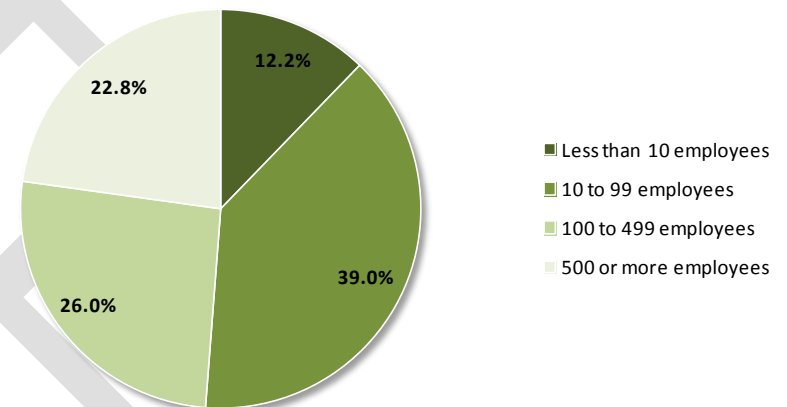
### Job Sectors

Like many other regions in the northeast, Onondaga County has been transitioning from an economy focused mainly on manufacturing and agriculture to more service-oriented and knowledge-based industries. “Eds and Meds,” or the education and healthcare sectors within the labor market, have emerged in recent decades as today’s primary economic sectors in Onondaga County. Twelve of the fifteen fastest growing occupations projected through 2018 by the New York State Department of Labor are in the healthcare field.

While Onondaga County remains home to several large employers, the numbers of employees working for large companies has been declining, as the region has seen significant job losses with the closing of longstanding manufacturing mainstays such as Syracuse China and portions of Carrier Corporation. Small firms now make up a growing segment of the regional economy, a trend being found throughout the northeast.

**Figure EC-3: Percent of Central New York Employees by Firm Size for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2010**

SOURCE: State of New York and the U. S. Bureau of Labor



As provided in Figure EC-3, during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2010, 12 percent of all firms in the CNY region employed less than 10 people. Together, these small businesses employ just over one-half of all employed individuals in the region.

### Location of Jobs

Onondaga County’s employers and residents play a major role as the core of the economic region. In fact, many of Onondaga County’s largest employers are also the largest regional employers, as well. As a testament to this, a significant number of residents from neighboring counties travel to work in Onondaga County and



the City of Syracuse each day. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 38,000 workers commuted to Onondaga County from the four surrounding counties.

The shifting location of jobs from traditional urban employment centers into new communities and greenfield sites at the edges of the urbanized area has been occurring throughout Onondaga County (i.e., job sprawl). In addition to following the population shifts occurring in the County, there are a number of additional reasons that employers are moving away from the urban core, including affordable land and construction costs, easily developable land, accessibility of new infrastructure, and the ease of assembling large sites.

Another factor in job siting is the desire of communities to recruit commercial and industrial development in order to increase their individual municipal tax base to support government services and provide jobs and services to residents. While these recruitment efforts may provide some short-term and localized benefits, the long-term impacts of intra-county competition are sprawling land development patterns and impacts to a number of community variables, including:

- Commute times, travel patterns, and transportation costs;
- Infrastructure and government service needs for new business locations and neighborhoods;
- Relocation of housing and retail;

- Job access for low-income, elderly and special need populations;
- The viability of transit; and
- Availability and proximity of daycare services to job sites.

Thanks largely, however, to the geographic stability and clustering of the education and medical sectors in the University Hill and nearby districts in the region's urban core, the Central New York region has fared better than other metropolitan areas in terms of 'job sprawl,' or the dispersal of jobs away from the urban core. In fact, the major employers and institutions that make up the University Hill district - Syracuse University, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Upstate Medical Center, Crouse Hospital, and the Veterans Administration Hospital - have teamed together to identify ways in which they can retain and grow their campuses in a sustainable way that maximizes the limited land area and maintains their presence on the Hill and into Downtown, while also managing the potential impacts of build-out. This multi-faceted district-wide

**Onondaga County's largest employers** are SUNY Health Science Center, Syracuse University, Wegman's Food Markets, Inc., St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center, Crouse Hospital, Lockheed Martin, National Grid, and Loretto.



approach to land planning will maximize the benefits of clustering and density.

To measure the relative amount of job sprawl occurring in the United States, the Brookings Institution conducted an analysis of the spatial location of private-sector jobs in 98 of the largest metropolitan areas, including the Syracuse MSA. As provided in the summary report *Job Sprawl Revisited: The Changing Geography of Metropolitan Employment*, the Syracuse MSA was classified as one of the most centralized (i.e., less sprawling) MSAs in the country, but it is currently undergoing relatively rapid decentralization.

### *Regional Economic Priorities*

The recently created Central New York Regional Economic Development Council, comprised of over 80 representatives from across the region, has developed a *Five Year Strategic Plan: 2012-2016*, which outlines a variety of economic development and investment priorities for Central New York and will serve largely as the basis for State spending on economic development. Highlights of the Plan include three Priority Goal areas:

- **Strengthen Industry Concentrations that Leverage Unique Assets**, in traditional and new areas including clean energy and environmental systems, financial services, agribusiness and food processing and tourism.
- **Improve Competitiveness In and Connections to the Regional, National and Global Economy**, using the region's

highly educated workforce for new ventures and product development, building a 21st century infrastructure, and maximizing human capital in areas such as advanced manufacturing and healthcare.

- **Revitalize our Region's Urban Cores, Main Streets and Neighborhoods**, "acknowledging that strong regions are built around strong municipal cores and neighborhoods that develop, attract, and retain the human and social capital required for industry to grow and remain competitive: the convergence of ideas and people."
  - Rethink – Reinvigorate the region's neighborhoods and main streets through partnerships between businesses and anchor institutions, and invest resources to leverage the movement of anchor institutions to restore neighborhoods, train new workers, retain young talent and create small business and social enterprises.
  - Repurpose – use existing physical assets through reuse, develop transit-oriented strategies, use green technology to improve existing assets, promote density in development, and encourage quality communities.
  - Retrain – Improve Pre-K to 20 educational attainment, with greater access to education, retraining for new careers, support for minority, women and veteran businesses, and create quality



employment opportunities that allow families to prosper.

The Council, in partnership with the Brookings Institution identified the connection of jobs, people and housing, as well as maximization of the built environment as an integral and transformative component of a successful economic development strategy.

### *Place-Based Assets*

Onondaga County and the Central New York region are home to a wealth of important place-based, environmental and cultural assets that play a role in economic development and community quality. Protection and enhancements of these and other assets will be critical to the region's sustainability and prosperity:

- Transportation networks and access
- Variety of colleges, universities and research institutions
- Diverse and plentiful energy supply
- Traditional neighborhoods and Main Streets
- Abundant drinking water and access to waterfronts
- Accessible parks, natural areas and scenic assets
- Low housing costs and overall cost of living
- Diverse seasonal recreation opportunities
- Historic architecture and interesting cultural heritage

- Venues and growing support for arts and culture
- College, professional and semi-professional sports programs
- Concentration and diversity of high-quality medical institutions

### **Findings**

- The appeal of the Syracuse metropolitan region as a destination for new jobs, residents and visitors depends on the attractiveness and function of its neighborhoods, civic spaces, urban centers and the countryside alike. The region's unique place-based assets must be protected through reinvestment in our existing urban core, villages, main streets and traditional neighborhoods and safeguarding our natural environments.
- The increasing trends toward decentralization of jobs can have negative economic and social impacts. The region today is lacking collective reinvestment in urbanized areas and proper management of suburban expansion, which is required to elevate the tax base, strengthen densities needed to support localized business and services, maximize efficiency of existing infrastructure, and maintain the scenic qualities of rural areas.
- Urban flight has left older communities with significant racial, educational and wealth imbalances. Concentrated



poverty, found especially within the City of Syracuse, is associated with low education levels, perceptions of safety, property value instability, increased public spending on social services, and is used as a community indicator for business attraction and retention. Neighborhood revitalization must contain comprehensive and aggressive strategies to elevate human capital and increase basic and advanced education and job skills within struggling neighborhoods.

- Investing in arts, culture and recreation, and creating quality environments in our urban places and neighborhoods can help attract and retain businesses and employees. Skills and knowledge are keys to economic progress, and individuals with these abilities tend to locate in places that have a high quality of life and offer excellent social, cultural and natural assets.
- First impressions often leave a lasting impact on visitors. Visitor amenities such as placemaking, gateways, and signage and community cleanup and beautification efforts have a measurable impact on the visitor experience while increasing community pride.
- The Central New York region has made great progress in recent years in, and must continue to work toward, aligning the region's collective and sometimes competing goals, making strategic use of limited resources towards focused priorities, and considering the role and responsibility of all

its parts to promote high quality and sustainable economic growth.

- The Central New York Regional Economic Development Council, Centerstate CEO and others in the region are performing necessary research and benchmarking to identify the region's strengths and shared opportunities for job creation and economic growth. Implementation of these strategies will rely on careful and strategic planning and investments, as well as incentives and disincentives within the public and private sector.
- An unintended result of local government structure in New York State, individual municipalities compete for new development and property tax base, resulting in inefficient allocation of jobs and housing that creates a system of 'winners and losers' and a larger overall financial burden on the region as a whole.
- The ease of greenfield development, combined with the complexity, cost and perceived limited returns on investment inherent to redeveloping vacant or underutilized commercial properties in urbanized areas has resulted in development shifting to the fringe of the County's population centers. While underutilized properties are plentiful inside existing urban service areas, redevelopment can be challenging, and will require new skill sets within the building community.





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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN



- The actual and perceived costs of doing business in New York State act as a barrier to economic development. New efforts are targeting strategies to reduce government costs through land and infrastructure planning, minimizing duplicative layers of government, consolidating services across municipalities, streamlining regulation and review processes, easing utility costs, and minimizing other pressures on local budgets, such as rapidly rising pension, insurance and Medicaid costs.
- Central New York is one region – the success of individual communities and the region are interdependent. Redistribution of the County’s population has weakened the urban core and traditional village centers, which acts to weaken the entire region. Municipalities must consider local land regulation, infrastructure provision, and investment area allocation with regional need in mind. Regional governments and stakeholders must help to elevate struggling communities in meeting expectations.
- Education must play a critical role in urban revitalization, regional planning and economic development discussions.