

Columbia Economic Development Corporation

2019 Three-Year Strategic Plan



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Introduction

In 2016, Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) published its three-year Strategic Plan following a planning process facilitated by O’Loughlin Consulting. At the end of 2018, Columbia Economic Development Corporation’s (CEDC) President and CEO, F. Michael Tucker, re-engaged O’Loughlin Consulting to facilitate a review of the 2016 plan, assess the current business environment, and identify the economic development priorities for the next three years.

The review and planning process was initiated in December 2018 and completed in May 2019.

General

Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) was organized by local business leaders in 1964 under the New York State not-for-profit laws and is the lead economic development organization in Columbia County, New York. The organization’s mission is to strengthen the area’s tax base through economic development and job creation, to assist business to locate and expand within the County, and to promote Columbia County as a premier spot for both business investment and personal opportunity.

Columbia County, New York, located along the Hudson River, is home to rolling hills, historic towns and sites, and a rich quality of life. Situated amongst a vibrant, regional high-tech ecosystem, you will find thriving businesses and one of the lowest unemployment rates in New York State. We know most business leaders are happy to be located in Columbia County and optimism is correlated with expectations for greater revenues, profits, fixed asset acquisitions and hiring.

In general, the economic environment in Columbia County is good. More than 30,000 people are working with most in the Healthcare & Social Assistance, Educational Services, Retail trade, Public Administration, Construction, Professional Services, Manufacturing, Agriculture, Creative, and Tourism and Recreation sectors. As of the beginning of January 2019, Columbia County’s unemployment rate was the lowest in New York State at 3.7%.

The current low unemployment environment, coupled with an anticipated decline in population through 2040, presents a unique challenge for businesses across the county – the need to identify a new skilled and professional labor pool from which to hire. CEDC will need to partner closely with county stakeholders in business, government, education and the not-for-profit sectors to stimulate workforce growth.

Strategic Planning

Process

Strategic planning is a systematic process used to identify, focus and monitor the organization’s priorities to achieve specific objectives. Over the next three years, CEDC will use the 2019 Three-Year Strategic Plan as a roadmap to build upon the successes of the last three years by continuing to foster and build a vibrant, strong business community.

Between December 2018 and March 2019, key stakeholders were engaged to affirm CEDC’s mission statement and strategic areas of focus, and assess and adjust goals (outcome) and objectives (drive outcome) set by the 2016 Strategic Plan. Stakeholders included all staff and board of directors’ members as well as business owners and general public.

The process began with input from stakeholders and was then followed by data collection by the consultant. The information was synthesized and presented to stakeholders via group and individual meetings. Additional feedback was gathered and a strategic plan was drafted. The draft plan was distributed to stakeholders individually, presented at a board meeting and communicated at a public meeting. Again, feedback was collected and subsequently integrated into the final 2019 Strategic Plan.

Sessions

Sessions held with staff and board members were a primary method of information sharing and collection. Sharing information throughout the process is considered to be a high priority to support shared ownership and understanding of the final strategic plan. Additionally, collecting information from those doing the work is equally important.

Staff Sessions

A staff planning session was held on December 11, 2018. All staff was in attendance. At this meeting, the mission statement was reviewed and discussed, goal progress and viability was assessed, new opportunities and challenges were discussed, and information was gathered for a SWOT analysis.

In addition to the group session in December, the consultant met with each staff member one-on-one to collect additional information about opportunities and challenges. Further, all employees attended regular board meetings where findings were presented and discussed.

Board Sessions

Sessions facilitated with board members during special board meetings were held on December 18, 2018, and February 26 and March 26, 2019. During these meetings, the board affirmed CEDC’s mission statement, validated the strategic pillars, assessed goal progress and viability, discussed additional opportunities, and completed a SWOT analysis.

In addition to the board meetings, the consultant met one-on-one with executive committee members to review plan progress and collect additional information about opportunities and challenges.

Public Session

A public session was held at the Hudson Area Library Community Room on March 22, 2019. Approximately 20 business and community members attended. Board members were also in attendance.

At this meeting, the strategic planning process and progress, CEDC’s mission statement, and community priorities were discussed. Community discussion items included:

- Both small businesses with physical locations and those without need assistance (e.g. gig economy, creatives, etc.)

- Inclusion interventions are not apparent (i.e. demographic mix)
- Zoning limitations are a significant roadblock to small businesses
- Broadband to rural is important for all residents – many businesses are in home settings
- CEDC’s value is not apparent to all

Information Gathering and Analysis

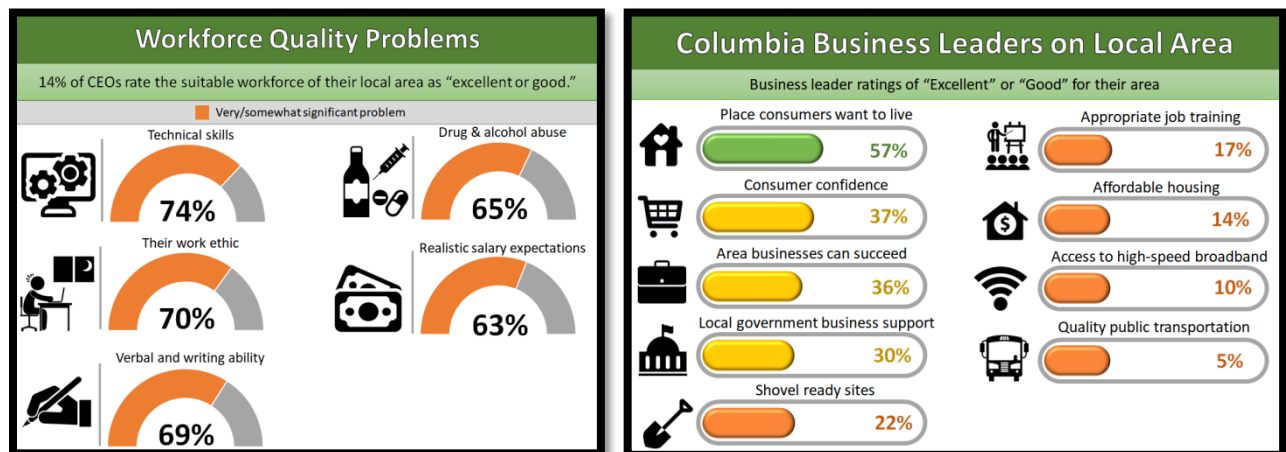
Gathering information as part of strategic planning is crucial to understand the present situation and ability to meet the company’s mission and goals. The data allows management to identify trends and needs of the community, become aware of population changes that may have occurred, and reveal areas of opportunity and risk. A good assessment will examine internal and external factors. It is common to overlook external data even though external forces are often key factors in driving change within an organization.

Survey

Dr. Don Levy, Sienna College, conducted a survey of Columbia County Business Leaders in early 2018. The information gathered provides insight and a baseline specific to the business community’s (CEDC’s primary customer) needs and perceptions.

Key findings:

1. Generally optimistic and committed
2. Workforce concerns
3. Infrastructure concerns



Business leaders affirm the county is a location consumers want to live. Only 14% of those surveyed rate the suitable workforce of their local area as “excellent or good” while 17% believe the job training provided is appropriate. The highest needs for workforce are reported to be *in technical skills, work ethic and communication skills*.

Shovel-ready sites, affordable housing, access to high-speed broadband and quality public transportation are all significant infrastructure concerns for business leaders.

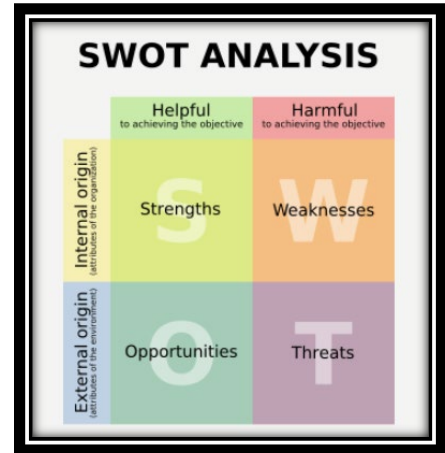
The survey is repeatable and thus can be used as an ongoing measurement tool.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

One commonly used tool for planning, identifying and analyzing the internal and external factors that can have an impact on the viability of a project, product, place or person is a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis can verify observations, provide insight, and reveal realities.

Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to the organization and as such can be influenced. Opportunities and Threats are external to the organization and beyond its influence.

The SWOT format was used with staff and board members to quickly solicit information from those closest to the work and issues. The information was then used to guide additional information gathering. The SWOT information collected from each group is listed in the attachments.

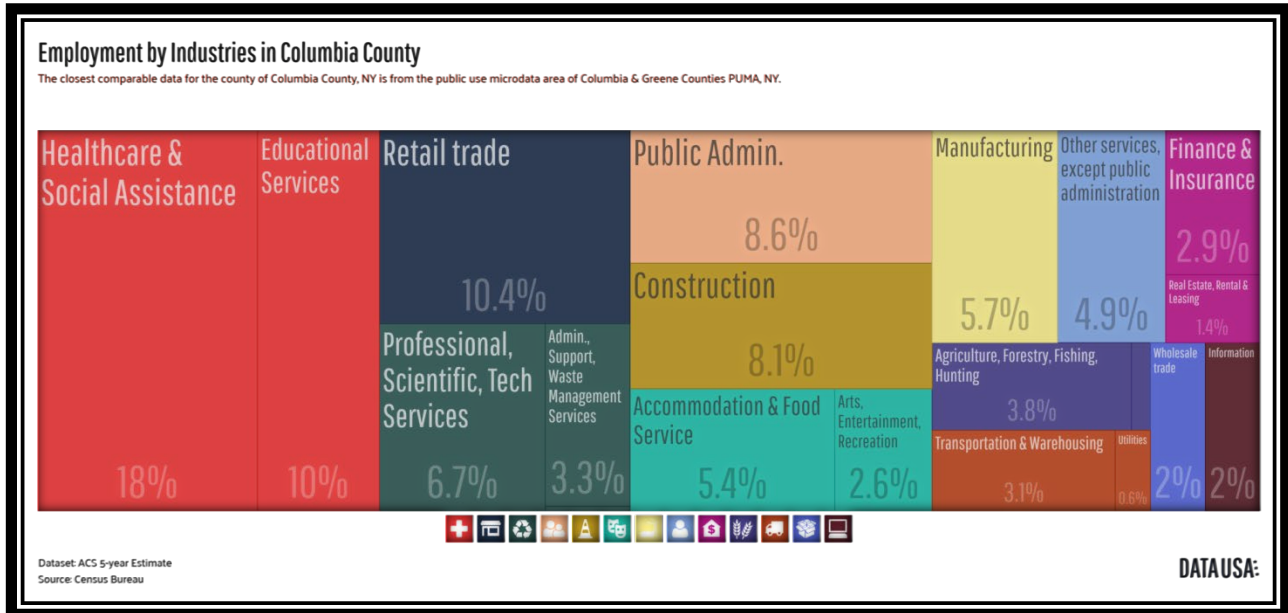


Employment

Generally speaking, unemployment in Columbia County and New York State are low:

- As of December 2018, unemployment in Columbia County equals 2.9% (down 1.1% from December 2017 and 4% from 2010).
- As of December 2018 unemployment in New York State equals 3.8% (down .5% from December 2017 and 4.4% from 2010).

Employment by Industry



- Columbia County, NY employs 30,184 people and is specialized in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting; Public Admin.; and Construction, which employ respectively 2.85; 1.81; and 1.3 times more people than would be expected in location of this size
- Largest industries are Healthcare & Social Assistance (5,426), Retail trade (3,146), and Educational Services (3,006), and the highest paying industries are Utilities (\$93,000), Professional, Scientific, Tech Services (\$54,203), and Transportation & Warehousing (\$48,750).

Employment Industry Projections 2014-2024

Strong employment growth for Columbia County is expected in these sectors:

Industry	% Change
Healthcare and Social Assistance	+22.2
Educational Services	+7.5
Retail Trade	+7.7
Agriculture	+7.5
Manufacturing	+8.3
Wood Product	+16.8
Fabricated Metal	+14.1
Construction	+28.6

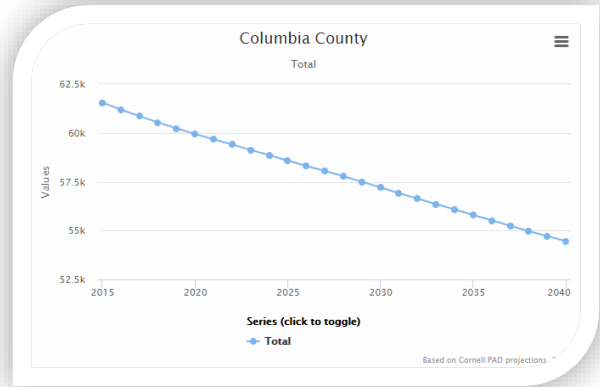
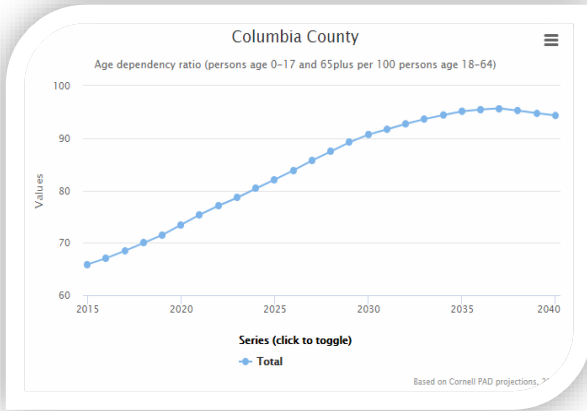
The Employment Industry Projections for 2014-2024 indicate meaningful opportunity for growth for the business community and the overall economic vitality of Columbia County. However, CEDC also recognizes from national economic data that an increased risk of a recession is present in the next three years, which underscores the importance of strengthening workforce development the economic environment.

Columbia County also is home to an impressive array of arts, culture and tourism workers and businesses. In a regional study, the county was ranked 3rd on a per capita basis for creative economy workers behind Brooklyn and Taos NM.

Note: Employment data was sourced from The American Community Survey (ACS) (premier source for detailed population and housing information) and the U.S. Census Bureau. Industry sectors identified are as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Population Trend

According to the 2018 County and Economic Development Regions Population Estimates, an analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau performed at Cornell University, Program on Applied Demographics, Columbia County's general



population is projected to trend steadily down through the year 2040 while dependent population is projected to increase during the same time period. Alternatively, New York State general population will steadily increase.

A review of regional population data from the same source reveals trending growth in and

around urban centers and trending decline in rural areas:

- Albany – up
- Saratoga – up
- Rensselaer – up then down
- Schenectady – up then down
- Warren, Washington, Greene and **Columbia** – all down

County Demographics

Columbia County has an aging population with a declining overall population. In spite of this, employment grew.

General Demographics					
Compare Columbia County to NYS – 2015 to 2016					
Columbia County			New York		
population	median age	median household income	population	median age	median household income
61,860	47	\$ 59,916	19.7M	38.4	\$ 62,909
.54% decline		1.37% growth	.26% decline		3.37% growth
poverty rate	number of employees	median property value	poverty rate	number of employees	median property value
12.7%	30,184	\$ 222,300	14.7%	9M	\$ 302,400
	.74% growth	.09% growth	.09% growth		3.03% growth
Note: County employment grew although population declined.					

Findings/Considerations/Recommendations

Key considerations are drawn from CEDC’s mission, the business community’s needs and perceptions, regional and local population trending, and employment levels versus workforce demands.

The Board of Directors affirmed the organization’s mission:

- to strengthen the area’s tax base through economic development and job creation
- to assist business to locate and expand within the County, and
- to promote Columbia County as a premier spot for both business investment and personal opportunity

Information/data gathered from:

- group and one-on-one meetings/interviews
- internal metrics
- Siena survey
- The American Community Survey (ACS)
- U.S. Census Bureau

Findings	Considerations	Recommendations
Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Quality of Life and Sustainability, Infrastructure, and Workforce and Education are all broad areas of concern for the business community.	Information gathered synthesized with the mission together reflect these broad areas of focus, thus the 2016 Strategic Plan pillars remain relevant in 2019.	The plan’s four core pillars remain the same.
There is an opportunity and need to grow CEDC membership. Additionally, SBA Microloan and CEDC loan fund programs are not at full capacity.	<p>CEDC’s value is not broadly understood.</p> <p>CEDC membership, funding resources and business support for small businesses have a direct positive impact on entrepreneurship success.</p>	<p>Initiate and maintain a robust expansion and retention program.</p> <p>Simplify marketing messages and language to “connect businesses to...” The more direct and simple, the easier it is to understand.</p> <p>Internal membership and funding metrics can be used to track progress.</p>
<i>Shovel-ready sites, affordable housing, access to high-speed broadband and quality public transportation</i> are all significant infrastructure concerns for business leaders.	<p>CEDC is positioned to (and has responsibility to) positively impact the availability of <i>shovel- ready sites</i>.</p> <p><i>Affordable housing, access to high-speed broadband and quality public transportation</i></p>	<p>Increasing shovel-ready sites remain as an objective. Its priority is accentuated by reordering the objective to the top of the list within the Infrastructure Pillar.</p> <p>CEDC must leverage its partnerships to support and facilitate improvements in</p>

	are not the direct responsibility of CEDC, however infrastructure has a direct impact on the economic health and growth of the county.	the county's housing, broadband access and public transportation. These findings were quantified by the survey. Because the survey is repeatable, it can be used as an ongoing measurement tool.
Business leaders positively identify Columbia County as a place consumers want to live.	Quality of life is crucial to the economic and business vitality of the county.	Leverage funding opportunities to contribute to sustainability and expansion of current standards. Design and use a quality of life measurement tool. Synthesize and strengthen quality of life messaging with county messengers.
County population will continue to decline. Unemployment levels are very low. Skilled workforce is a significant concern for business leaders.	The combination of declining population, low unemployment and existing lack of skilled workers requires a focused, collaborative approach to identify initiatives to meet the business community's needs and encourage continued growth. The BOD has already added a dedicated WFD committee.	Restructure the Workforce and Education Pillar to allow for and require ongoing community collaboration. Broaden and strengthen partnerships in surrounding counties specifically targeting the skills businesses need.

2019 Strategic Plan

The 2019 Strategic Plan is structured in the same manner its predecessor was:

- Pillars refer to broad areas of focus
- Objectives are the outcomes
- Initiatives can be thought of as the “list of things to do” to achieve the objective (outcome)

PILLAR ONE – Entrepreneurship & Innovation

CEDC will create and foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes establishment, growth and long-term success of businesses.

Objective: Connect businesses to information resources.

- Create and launch long-term business retention and expansion strategy to promote inclusive economic development strategies to foster prosperity for all residents.
- Enhance and promote CEDC's online information resources.
- Promote and operate micro-business and allied technical assistance programs.

Objective: Connect businesses to funding resources.

- Promote SBA Microloan and CEDC loan fund programs.
- Engage new businesses and entrepreneurial ideas to identify funding opportunities that leverage county sector strengths (e.g. creative, agribusiness, tourism, manufacturing, etc.) and individual business needs.
- Educate and connect businesses to loan, grant and investment capital.

Objective: Advance county business and expansion projects.

PILLAR TWO – Infrastructure

CEDC will champion rural and main street infrastructure expansion by leveraging private and public partnerships.

Objective: Increase shovel-ready development sites.

- Maintain comprehensive inventory of available sites.
- Assess inventory for market and development.
- Investigate and partner to secure investment to development available sites.

Objective: Increase investment in infrastructure to support and attract businesses.

- Partner with county stakeholders to identify options to mitigate housing needs.
- Partner with county stakeholders to define transportation needs and improvement opportunities.
- Develop and strengthen policies designed to encourage increased infrastructure investment.

Objective: Monitor countywide activities to expand broadband access.

- Assess implementation of countywide broadband infrastructure expansion.
- Identify broadband funding gaps.
- Seek additional financial resources for full execution of plan.

PILLAR THREE – Quality of Life and Sustainability

CEDC will partner with public and private organizations to identify and support improvement and expansion efforts designed to improve quality of life.

Objective: Strengthen Columbia County's economic health and competitive advantage.

- Leverage opportunities to secure funding for county and local enhancements.
- Connect creative economy individuals and businesses with regional and local resources.
- Collaborate with agribusiness and tourism enterprises to identify opportunities for new and expansion projects.

Objective: Enhance local government economic efforts and opportunities.

- Convene "Main Street" (small business storefront) roundtable exchanges to identify issues of common concern.
- Develop a zoning and permitting database to be used as a resource tool.
- Develop and provide templates and protocols to support local economic planning activities.

Objective: Integrate smart economic development into county and local activities.

- Develop a Quality of Life dashboard to measure and market the County's assets and its growth through economic development efforts.
- Align CEDC marketing and promotions efforts with Quality of Life strengths.
- Foster local-level understanding of Quality of Life metrics to support integration into local-level promotional initiatives.

PILLAR FOUR – Workforce & Education

CEDC will facilitate networking and collaboration among the County's educational, business and government institutions to stimulate purposeful alignment of educational offerings and business needs.

Objective: Leverage Columbia County's education to workplace pipeline.

- Catalog and support existing programs to link employers with the workforce.
- Identify existing challenges and strengths of current education to workforce pipeline.
- Identify and support needs of targeted businesses, cultural, and non-profit communities.

Objective: Increase skilled workforce.

- Partner with stakeholders to define skill gaps in local industry sectors.
- Collaborate with Columbia-Greene Community College, Questar III, and public school districts to define mutual educational challenges and opportunities.
- Facilitate identification and development of business training solutions.

Objective: Increase funding for and investment in skills training.

- Partner with stakeholders to define funding gaps.
- Partner to identify funding opportunities.
- Partner to secure funding.