

the economy, housing, and transportation

TOMPKINS COUNTY IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE. MANY OF THE ASPECTS OF LIFE HERE ARE SUPPORTED BY THE INEXTRICABLY LINKED PILLARS OF THE ECONOMY, HOUSING, AND TRANSPORTATION. MAINTAINING ITS VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE JOBS, GOODS AND SERVICES, AND SUPPORT THE MANY AMENITIES CONTRIBUTING TO A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE. ADEQUATE HOUSING AND AN EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM ARE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN A VIBRANT ECONOMY. LIVING HERE IS AFFORDABLE ONLY WHEN JOBS ARE PAYING WAGES THAT MAKE HOUSEHOLD COSTS MANAGEABLE. FOR MOST HOUSEHOLDS, HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION COSTS ARE THE TWO LARGEST FACTORS AFFECTING HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS. AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO JOBS, SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND PUBLIC TRANSIT ALLOWS HOUSEHOLDS TO AVOID THE ADDED COSTS OF LONGER COMMUTES.

the economy

A strong economy is firmly linked with achievement of other community goals, many of which are discussed in this Comprehensive Plan. Many aspects of our quality of life can be traced to a prosperous local economy.

Economic development can strengthen the local economy by leveraging local economic assets, diversifying the makeup of the local economy, and growing the types of jobs and businesses that support a continuation of a high quality of life. Education, workforce development, and job training can provide access to economic opportunities for everyone who considers Tompkins County home and promote broad-based economic prosperity, including the alleviation of local poverty.

PRINCIPLE

Tompkins County should be a place where economic prosperity is accessible to all.

POLICIES

It is the policy of Tompkins County to:

- Support economic development that provides high-quality employment opportunities with living wages and benefits.
- Promote the growth and development of local businesses and encourage the purchase of locally produced goods and services.
- Work with economic development agencies and institutions of higher education to diversify and expand the local economy and enhance community vitality.
- Promote innovation and technology transfer and attract and support people working to start and grow competitive businesses.
- Support quality of life measures that enhance the local business climate and attract employees.
- Promote development of a strong land-based rural economy.
- Provide opportunities to all residents to develop the skills necessary to obtain high-quality employment.
- Ensure the benefits and costs of economic development incentives are distributed equitably and there is an open and transparent process for decision-making.

SNAPSHOT OF THE COUNTY TODAY

Tompkins County is a regional employment center anchored and stabilized by Cornell University and Ithaca College. Cornell University is the county's largest employer and, along with Ithaca College, forms the foundation for a creative economy that has helped the county bounce back from recent recessions. The county has experienced steady population and business growth over the past decade; total economic activity has grown by 15 percent and available jobs jumped 11.5 percent¹ while the population grew by just five percent². This relatively strong job growth compared to population growth has contributed to an increase in the number of in-commuters. Over one-quarter of jobs³ are filled by people living outside the county. The county's economy has out-performed surrounding counties and Upstate New York as a whole.

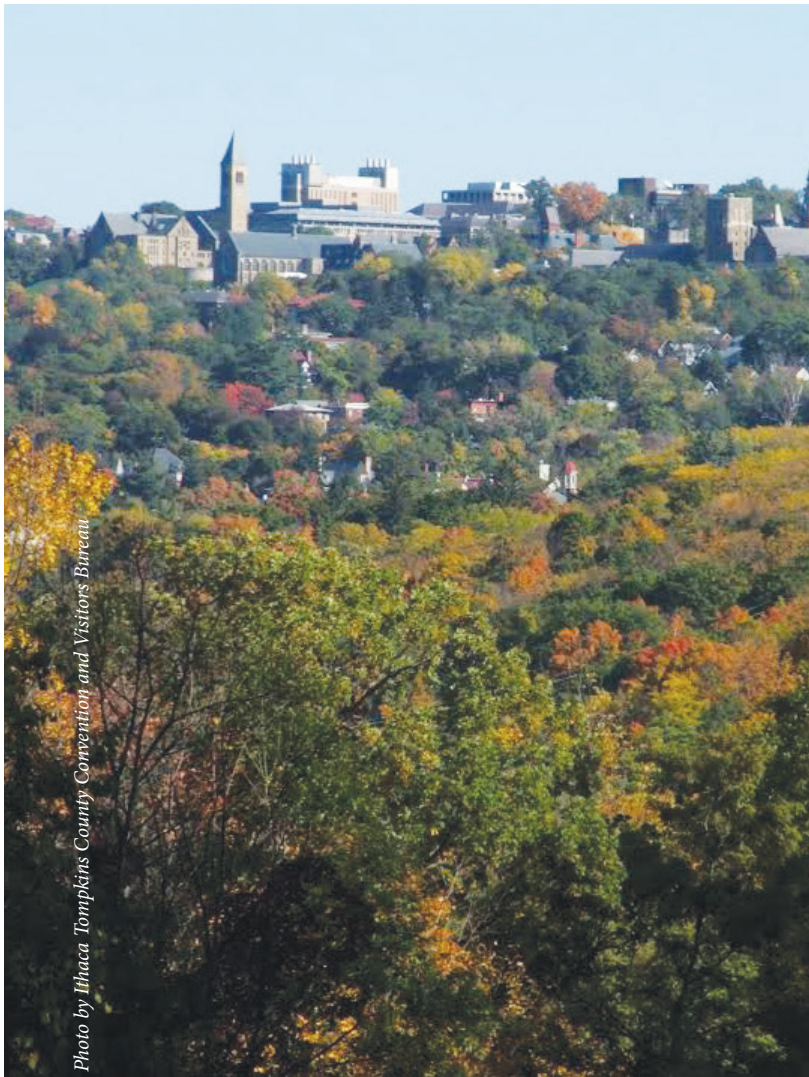


Photo by Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau

Cornell University

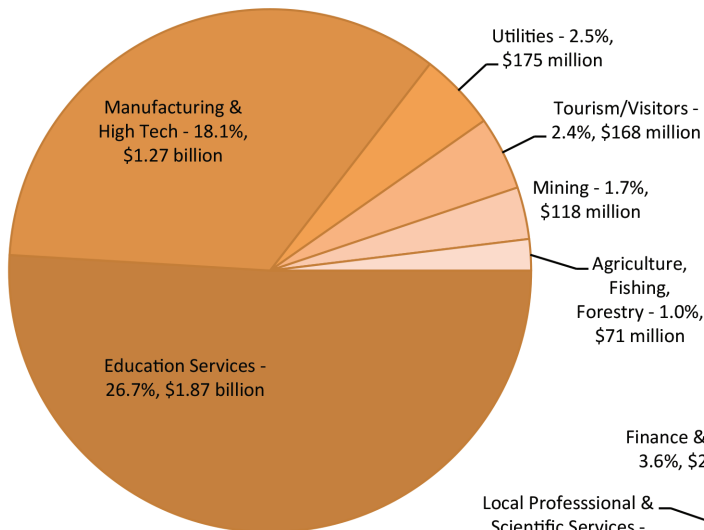
Economic Sectors

Total economic activity in Tompkins County was around \$7 billion in 2009⁴, with about half in sectors of the economy that sell goods or services to consumers outside of the county, or “traded” sectors, and half in sectors that serve consumers inside the county, or “local” sectors. In addition to education, the traded sectors include manufactured goods; high-tech services which includes portions of the information sector and the professional, scientific and technical services sector; and tourism. Education is the county's largest sector, generating 27 percent of economic activity and 32 percent of employment. But it is not expected to be the fastest growing sector and actually experienced a 12 percent reduction in local jobs between 2006 and 2011. Still, it creates the largest number of job openings due to its large size. Health care is expected to be the fastest growing sector of the economy.

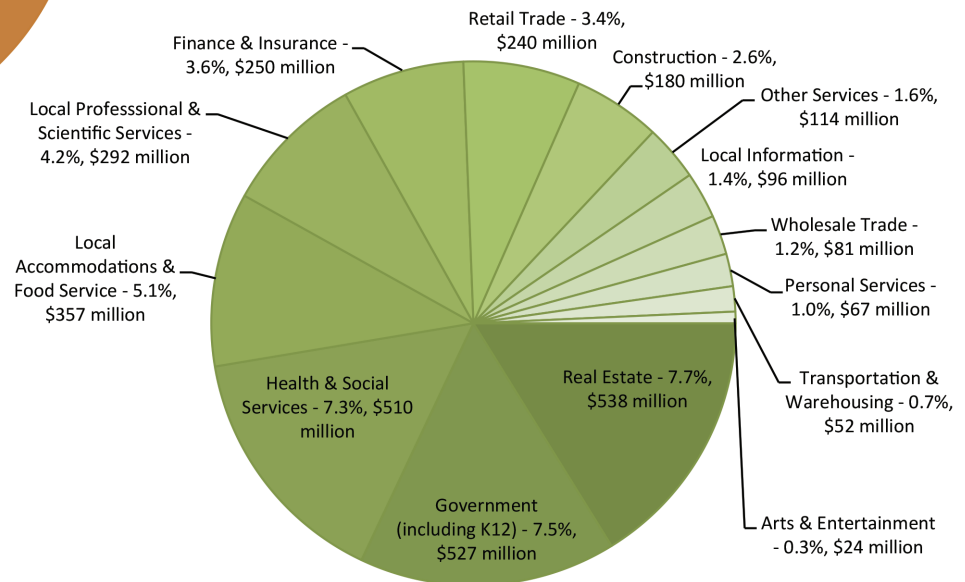
Manufacturing and high-tech together form the second largest sector, accounting for 18 percent of local economic activity and seven percent of employment. Locally manufactured goods include automotive and machine parts, electronics, food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, software, and innovative materials such as high-performance polymers, specialty metals, and plasma micromachining. The high-tech services sector includes scientific and technical research, software design, and analysis and testing of materials for industry. In the midst of a serious loss of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. as a whole in the early 2000s, Tompkins County's loss was much less dramatic. Local manufacturing employment dropped by seven percent between 1999 and 2003, when nationally the drop was 19 percent. Manufacturing then rebounded between 2006 and 2011 in Tompkins County, when it increased by 17 percent, compared to ten percent national growth in manufacturing over the same period. Manufacturing is a key employer and wealth generator and Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD) considers it a sector with moderate job creation potential. Technical and scientific services also experienced notable job growth.

The three local economic sectors of government (including public schools), real estate, and health and social services each make up about eight percent of economic activity. Although agriculture and tourism contribute only one percent and two percent of activity respectively, they contribute in other important ways to quality of life. Local agriculture maintains the distinct Finger Lakes landscape and supports a growing local foods movement, while also contributing over \$67 million in sales annually⁵. Tourism helps to support

Tompkins County 2009 Production by Traded Sectors



Tompkins County 2009 Production by Local Sectors



Source: Tompkins County Area Development, 2009 IMPLAN data set

local arts, culture and entertainment venues and contributes over \$174 million in annual sales⁶. Visitor spending and local tourism investments help attract and retain businesses and employees since quality of life amenities that attract visitors are also enjoyed by residents. Between 2006 and 2011, health care and accommodations and food services experienced solid job growth.

Jobs and Wages

Unemployment rates in Tompkins County have experienced the same cyclical ups and downs as New York State and the U.S., but have consistently been lower than statewide. Still, unemployment is considered a problem by local residents, especially rural residents, with nearly 60 percent of rural residents calling it “critical” in the 2009 *Compass II-2.0* community needs assessment survey conducted by the United Way and Human Services Coalition of Tomkins County.

The high number of students, about 30 percent of the local population, noticeably shapes the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the county. In 2012, Tompkins County had about 38,500 households of which about 20,000 were families with two or more related individuals, and about 18,500 were non-family households. Dormitories and other types of group housing are counted separately, but student households still accounted for 20 percent, with around 7,800 student households. In addition, the county has a relatively high rate of non-student, non-family households of around 31 percent. In general, Tompkins County’s family income levels are not as concentrated in the higher or lower ranges as are found in New York State and the US as a whole. Family income is highly concentrated in the \$50,000 to \$150,000 range and the percentage of local families earning below \$35,000 is lower than state and national averages.

Selected Income and Employment Characteristics for Tompkins County and Surrounding Counties

Characteristic	Tompkins	Surrounding Counties	NYS	USA
Labor force participation rate	61.0%	61.2%	63.8%	64.7%
Unemployment rate	5.9%	7.5%	8.7%	9.3%
Population with bachelor's degree or higher	49.9%	21.3%*	32.8%	28.5%
Population with health insurance coverage	93.7%	90.2%	88.7%	85.1%
Population in poverty	20.0%	12.2%*	14.9%	14.9%
Families in poverty with children under 18	14.1%	13.8%*	17.5%	17.2%
Families in poverty with children under 5	18.9%	21.5%*	17.1%	18.2%
Median Household income	\$50,539	\$50,015*	\$57,683	\$53,046
Median Family income	\$76,053	\$60,810*	\$69,968	\$64,585
<i>*Unweighted average</i>				

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2008-2012

Individual poverty rates here are quite high, around 20 percent in 2011. While this can be partially explained by the fact that about 30 percent of the local population consists of students, a significant portion of non-student households and families experience poverty. The poverty rate for families with children under 18 is around 14 percent compared to state and national rates of around 19 percent. It is clear that not everyone in the community shares in the region's economic prosperity.

Underemployment is a problem that can be hidden by employment statistics. Nearly 40 percent of *Compass II-2.0* survey respondents indicated a problem finding a job equal to their level of education and experience and nearly 30 percent indicated that they are currently underemployed. According to a 2008 local labor market study, nearly 25 percent of the local workforce is underemployed, compared to about 18 to 19 percent nationally. Residents experience this phenomenon across all levels of education, but medium- and high-skilled workers especially report underemployment. This also impacts those who possess the fewest qualifications and lowest-level work skills, as many of the jobs

for which these workers would be qualified are occupied by people who are over-qualified.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Key Sectors

Planning for an economy that can maintain prosperity over the long term requires identifying industries and sectors that are likely to thrive in the future and planning for how best to tap local assets to strengthen and expand local economic sectors. The County's *Economic Development Strategy* identifies specific targeted sectors and economic development approaches and activities to achieve this.

An overarching goal is to support sustainable economic growth opportunities rather than short term boom--bust cycles. A second major goal is to promote economic diversity in the makeup of the overall local economy as a means

A major goal is to promote economic diversity in the makeup of the overall local economy as a means to achieve stability.

to achieve stability. A more diverse economy helps insulate the community from negative repercussions should any significant segment of the economy experience a serious downturn.

Specifically, the draft update to the *Economic Development Strategy* calls for targeting economic development incentives and programs to key traded sectors that hold the strongest potential for growth and wealth-creation. Education, along with manufacturing and high-tech, together employ 40 percent of the county's workforce and are priority sectors. Other key traded industries targeted for growth are technology start-ups, food processing and distribution, agriculture, tourism, and energy. It is also critical

Tompkins County can attract new tech start-ups by leveraging local strengths in knowledge-based industries and innovation.

to ensure that local sectors have access to good quality infrastructure, workforce, and business services to operate economically-sustainable companies that provide the goods and services needed by local businesses and consumers.

The county's historic prosperity owes much to the strong higher education sector and the campuses are likely to remain leaders in attracting students, staff, and research investments. However, while the campus experience is likely to

continue to be important into the future, the increasing role of online education, decreasing college-aged population, and decreasing Federal research funding suggest caution about predicting large growth in the local higher education industry. These trends also underline the need to diversify the economy to be less reliant on higher education for prosperity. Even if they don't remain the direct sources of growth in the future, the campuses remain key place-based anchors and will be assets around which other significant economic development activity can be based. For example, the recent resurgence in manufacturing and high-tech locally is bolstered by technology transfer between institutions of higher education and businesses. Tompkins County can encourage new tech start-ups and expansions by leveraging local strengths in knowledge-based industries and innovation.

The community can also develop programs to support entrepreneurs and start-ups; improve linkages among start-ups and entrepreneurs, the colleges, government, and non-governmental organizations; proactively identify local assets for business growth; and collectively market these assets both internally and externally. Businesses should also be supported through all states of development: start-up, research and development, and expansion. Economic development investments should work to keep businesses here as they grow.

State Role in Economic Development

New York State has recently supported two economic development initiatives, in partnership with local institutions of higher education, whose goals are to promote technology transfer, commercialization, and entrepreneurship. START-UP NY (SUNY Tax-free Areas to Revitalize and Transform Upstate NY) provides tax-free status for ten years for businesses locating in pre-designated university zones, including one at Cornell that could be an important means



Photo by TCAD

High-tech business in Tompkins County

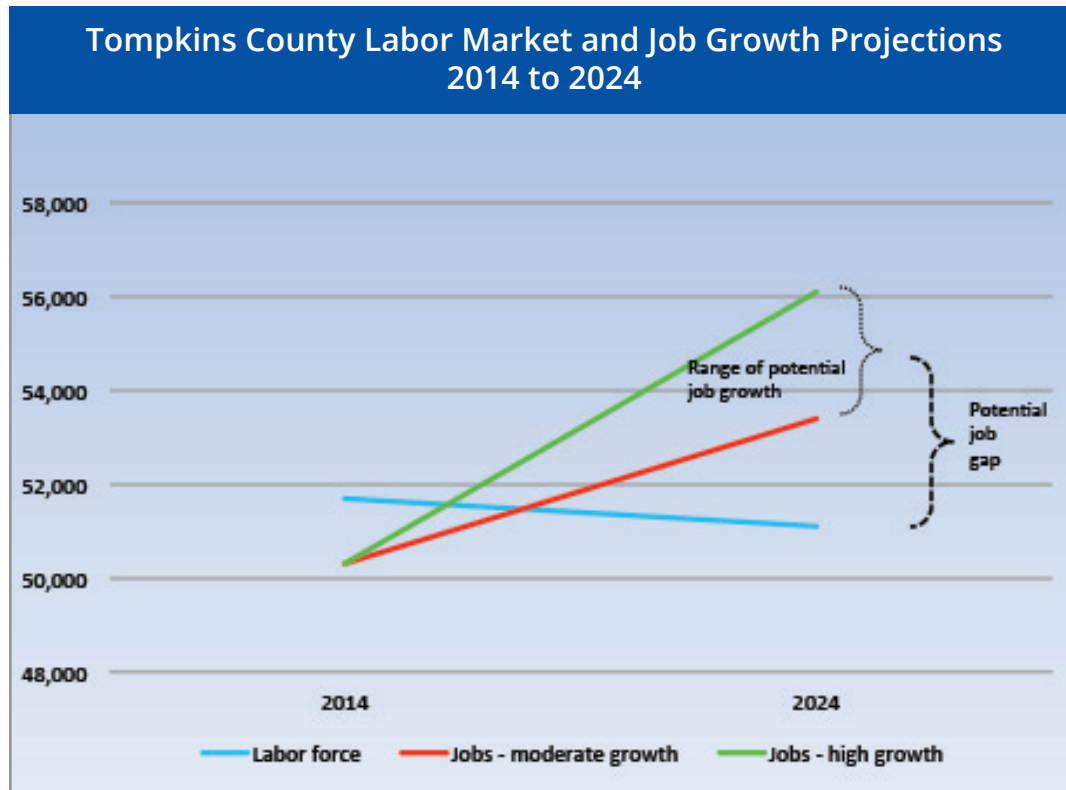
of new technology business growth in Tompkins County. Incodema 3D, located in the Town of Dryden, is the first local business to take advantage of this opportunity. The other initiative is the Southern Tier Innovation Hot Spot, which will catalyze startup formation by helping start-ups grow, raise capital, and succeed. A Hot Spot node is located in downtown Ithaca and is a partnership of Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3).

Job creation and economic development have recently been elevated in importance for a wide variety of state programs. State financial support through many agencies is now vetted against five-year strategic plans adopted by Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs). This process has also increased the importance of demonstrating regional, not just local, economic significance. Tompkins County is in the Southern Tier REDC region. Several major regional goals have translated into support for projects here. Examples are redevelopment of the Ithaca Commons and TC3's Coltivare Farm-to-Bistro project. Alignment with regional economic development strategies will continue to be important to advance local priority projects and initiatives.

Matching Jobs and Workforce

Half of county residents over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher and there is often a problem of job skills not matching the available jobs. An additional problem is that even with slight population growth, the size of the labor force is expected to remain fairly flat or even drop slightly due to retiring baby boomers making up a larger portion of county residents. Meanwhile, available jobs are expected to increase. These factors point to major future challenges in finding people with the right skills to fill all the expected jobs.

The County's *Workforce Strategy*, updated in 2010 by Tompkins Workforce NY and TCAD and approved by the County's Workforce Investment Board, provides direction for workforce development activities, and calls for a coordinated response to rapid economic globalization, integration of technology into all occupations, and dramatic demographic changes. A system where both jobs and workforce programs support the individual's skill and career development, including for people with disabilities, requires a collaborative approach among schools, employers, training entities, and Tompkins Workforce NY.



Source: TCAD analysis of Woods and Poole demographic projections, Cornell PAD labor market participation, Jobs EQ employment projections

Quality of Life and Growth

With vibrant arts, cultural, educational, and culinary offerings; beautiful parks, natural areas, and working rural landscapes; abundant recreational opportunities; good schools; low crime rates; and a strong sense of community engagement, residents in Tompkins County enjoy a very high quality of life. The community regularly makes “top ten” lists for great places to live. This high quality of life plays an important role in attracting and retaining employees and businesses in knowledge industries, while benefiting from those same jobs to supply wealth in the community.

The relationship between quality of life and economic development is at once mutually supportive and divergent, and should be considered carefully and nurtured. Too much development, too quickly, in industries that detract from the community’s vision for itself can threaten the quality of life upon which long-term prosperity depends. Growth that supports the community’s vision enhances local quality of life. The challenge is to focus on development that enhances and does not degrade the natural landscape, sense of place, and community character, but that does provide competitive job opportunities across a variety of educational and skill levels and brings more living wage jobs to local residents. In certain cases, enhanced incentives might be offered for projects that support key community objectives such as paying a living wage or reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Strong Working Lands*

Agriculture is a relatively small local sector of the economy, but makes up about 30 percent of the local land base and contributes in important ways to quality of life. Maintaining economically productive rural lands is vital to the rural economy and important to limiting sprawl and maintaining the highly-valued rural character of the community. The agricultural sector is also a source of innovation and new investment, demonstrated in part by the many smaller operations developing new value-added, high-quality agricultural products, and opening up new markets. To support this economic sector, the community can employ a variety of economic development and farmland conservation tools to maintain the vitality of working rural lands. The County’s *Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan* (draft 2014) identifies strategies for

Maintaining economically productive rural lands is vital to the rural economy and important to limiting sprawl.

* For more information see the *Natural Resources Chapter*, “Agricultural Resources” section.



Bensvue Farm and Cayuga Lake

supporting agriculture in five areas: economic development, policies, agricultural awareness, the environment, and local foods.

Compared to most other counties in the region, Tompkins County has historically experienced relative stability in the number of farms and the amount of farmland, and growth in the diversity of farm types. Small farms, up to 100 acres in size, account for most of the growth in farms, farmland, and diversity of farm types. On the other end of the spectrum, the number of very large farms (over 1,000 acres) has

started to decline in the last five years after increasing dramatically in the prior decade. Some of the small farm growth can be attributed to innovative farm marketing and operations, including filling niche markets, creating value-added foods, such as craft cheese and vinegar, and producing food geared toward seasonal local consumption through sales at farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture shares.

The limited size and potential income stream from small farms makes it difficult for these farms to support the farmer as his or her sole livelihood. Regardless of size, only 24 percent of farms are primary-occupation farms and only 48 percent of principal operators report their primary occupation as farming. It is clear that a majority of farmers pursue additional activities to sustain themselves, offering different opportunities and constraints than those of full-time farmers.

Another issue facing the agricultural sector is that Tompkins County farmers are aging. This raises serious questions about how the local farmland base will remain active and successful into the future. The *Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan* identifies specific strategies for transitioning farms and farmland from one generation to the next and expanding the pool of young farmers ready to take on the challenge.

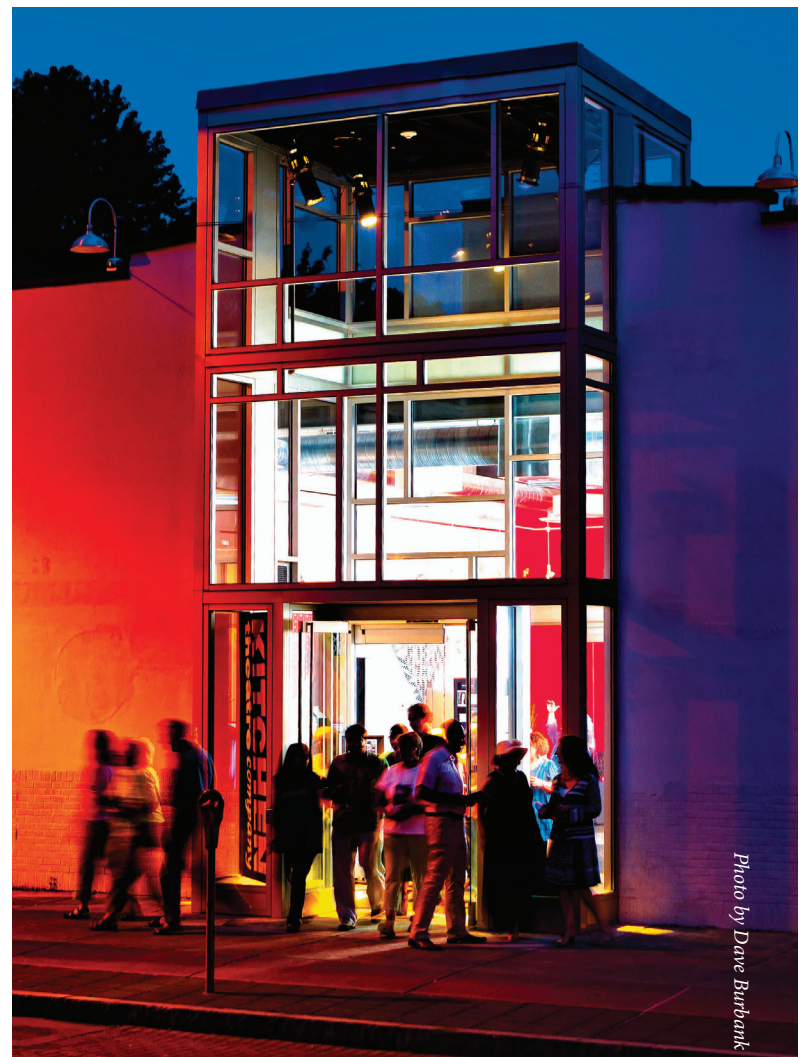
Working rural lands can also contribute to increased economic vitality from producing forest products and renewable energy. Currently over 18,000 acres of State Forests and 10,000 acres of privately managed forest land support the region's forest products industry. Still, many privately owned forest lands are not actively managed and sustainable forest management for hardwood production and biomass are areas of opportunity. Local programs like Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County's Local Building Materials Initiative promote the use of local lumber and other building materials, along with locally manufactured and sustainably produced materials, to add value and efficiency to local projects. Another project, to promote use of wood pellets for thermal energy, especially in rural areas, offers the potential to stimulate this market. Further, farmers can choose to locate solar and wind energy production facilities on farms that have ample room to site the systems.

Viable economic options for rural landowners are critical not only to supporting the rural economy, but also to providing alternatives to subdivision of rural land for development. To reverse the pattern of sprawl across the rural landscape, attractive options for land management are necessary that provide income to rural landowners and cover the costs of rural land ownership. A vibrant working landscape of farms and forests supplying an increasingly diverse range of products is an essential element of both rural development and smart growth.

Tourism

Tourism plays a small, but important and growing role in the local economy. The County plays a special role in tourism development because of local hotel room occupancy tax funds, which are collected by the County and reinvested in a variety of tourism marketing and product development programs and initiatives. Between 2004 and 2013, room tax revenues grew from \$1.24 million to \$2.15 million, or 73 percent. The county invests 60 percent of room tax funds in tourism marketing and 40 percent in tourism product development, supporting dozens of local non-profit organizations.

The County's *Strategic Tourism Plan* lays out 15 goals for protecting and continuing to grow existing tourism types, tapping into the community's unique assets to grow new tourism types, and continuing to build a strong tourism foundation. Existing tourism types include agricultural and



Patrons exit the Kitchen Theatre Company, downtown Ithaca's "off-Broadway" theater.

Photo by Dave Burbank

culinary tourism; arts, culture, and heritage tourism; tourism in downtown Ithaca; educational tourism; and outdoor recreation. New tourism types are sports tourism, sustainability tourism, and under-tapped niche markets which are highly focused demographic and interest-based visitor markets for which Tompkins County holds a strategic advantage.

Perhaps even more important than its direct economic impact – four percent of local jobs and \$174 million in visitor spending in 2012 – tourism supports a variety of local institutions that contribute greatly to quality of life. By reinvesting room tax dollars in the community to support new and expanding tourism attractions and build on local cultural, historic, natural, and economic assets, it is possible to grow the tourism economy while also enhancing the variety of experiences that make this a great place to live, work, go to school, retire, and grow a business. A successful tourism industry also supports the goal of diversifying the overall Tompkins County economy.

Localization and Wealth Retention

Tompkins County enjoys a strong movement to develop locally-rooted businesses. This localization effort focuses on building internal linkages in the local economy to promote local wealth creation and re-circulate capital in the local economy. Local businesses contribute to the health and vitality of the local economy by purchasing from or providing goods and services to other local businesses, investing in the growth of their business, spending profits within the local economy, and contributing to local organizations.

While it is important to build local businesses, it is also important to promote consumption of locally produced goods and services. Although currently a small part of the economy, recent growth in the production of local food and value-added food products for both local consumption and export are inspiring examples of the benefits of localization.

Methods of promoting local wealth creation and retention include re-directing personal and institutional financial investment resources to local businesses and organizations, encouraging shared-ownership business models, identifying opportunities for investing in communities that have been historically disadvantaged, and encouraging investment in local philanthropy.

Locally-rooted businesses promote local wealth creation and re-circulate capital in the local economy.

Prosperity for All

In 2003, Tompkins County became one of the earliest adopters of a livable wage policy, noting that “any person who works full time should be able to support themselves on their earnings.” That policy established that one of the goals of the County’s economic development programs is “increasing the percentage of County residents who are able to support themselves on their own earnings.” The policy also calls on the County to consider wage levels and benefits when awarding bids or negotiating contracts and to encourage the payment of livable wages whenever practical and reasonable. While there are many different living wage estimates now being calculated at the state and national level, one of the oldest is prepared by Alternatives Federal Credit Union (AFCU). They update their living wage estimate every two years and in 2013 it was calculated to be \$12.62 per hour with health care benefits and \$13.94 without those benefits. This is the amount needed to support the basic needs of a single person working full time in Tompkins County, including costs for housing, transportation, health care, and other necessities, as well as a modest allowance for recreation and savings. While some living wage estimates place the local living wage higher, others place it lower. The Tompkins County Legislature chose to select AFCU’s estimate for its livable wage policy.

Economic development incentives, such as tax abatements, can be used to encourage employers to pay a living wage.

As the community works to grow the jobs of the future and to use workforce development investments to provide the necessary skills to local residents to fill these jobs, attention should be focused on the types of industries and businesses that can readily support good jobs with benefits across a variety of levels of skill and education.

Local business groups have expressed concern that paying a living wage puts some business sectors and industries at a competitive disadvantage under current economic conditions. Some businesses provide entry-level jobs that can provide supplemental income to a household or valuable experience in gaining general job skills and some of these businesses may also provide goods and services that are a net benefit to the community. Education and workforce development opportunities can help people move on to living wage or better jobs. Overall, supporting livable wages for workers is a major goal and the moral underpin-

ning of the Tompkins County Legislature’s approach to economic development.

Supporting Infrastructure for Economic Development

BROADBAND INTERNET. The lack of availability of broadband internet in some locations in Tompkins County limits certain types of economic development. A project developed by the Tompkins County Broadband Committee, and recently funded by a state grant, will expand broadband access to 96 percent of currently uncovered households in Newfield, Enfield, Danby, Groton, and Lansing and 40 percent of uncovered households in the Town of Caroline. This will be achieved via a fixed wireless broadband system, which uses radio signals rather than cables. Access to broadband internet plays an increasingly critical role in contemporary life, making it important for service to be affordable and easily accessible. In addition, the expansion of broadband internet access countywide can bring important economic development opportunities to rural businesses by enhancing access to marketing, technical, and business support resources. Also, enhanced access can allow for the development and expansion of home-based businesses and work-from-home options.

AIR SERVICE. Maintaining regular and reliable air service through the Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport is important to the county’s ongoing economic health. Beyond its contributions of 400 aviation-related jobs and more than \$66 million in economic activity, the airport improves the competitiveness and general business climate of Tompkins County by making it more accessible to major hubs of business and academic activity across the US and the globe. Recent decreases in flights and passenger numbers and the anticipated retirement of smaller planes cause concern that carriers may further reduce flights and impact the county’s ability to attract and retain businesses. Efforts are underway to maintain and expand service in order to reverse recent trends.

* For more information see the Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Chapter, “Consider Energy and the Economy Together” and “Explore Infrastructure in Energy Focus Areas” sections.

** For more information see the Development Patterns Chapter, “Nodal Development” section.

A living wage is the amount needed to support the basic needs of a single person working full time in Tompkins County.

Adequate energy infrastructure is necessary for job-creating projects and investments in efficiency and renewable energy systems can create local jobs.

ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE.* Energy infrastructure has a dual role with regard to economic development. Adequate energy infrastructure is necessary for certain job-creating projects and investment in efficiency and renewable energy systems can be a major driver in creating local jobs.

Deficiencies in our energy infrastructure have already impacted the cost for businesses to expand locally. There is a need in the community to better understand the sometimes complex energy demands of local businesses, as well as the advances made in new energy technologies that could allow for the development of homes and businesses without the need

for expansion of existing fossil fuel infrastructure. This will require energy experts, business leaders, and the community to come together to develop solutions that address energy, economic, housing, and transportation concerns for the betterment of the community as a whole.

State regulatory agencies and utilities play a lead role, but the local community can also be proactive in identifying and communicating energy needs and opportunities to ensure that growth in key sectors can occur. Local efforts to promote a strategic approach to energy infrastructure that considers both supply and demand solutions and is consistent with community energy and development location goals are important to achieving other goals for the local economy. The Tompkins County Energy Roadmap currently being developed will endeavor to chart a course for the transition to a renewable energy economy that supports local job growth while ensuring adequate energy supply to meet current energy needs as well as future growth.

COMMERCIAL CENTERS.** Downtown retail areas are another important local asset to leverage for economic development. Focusing growth in areas with infrastructure and appropriate zoning, such as the Ithaca Commons and village centers, creates an environment where new jobs can

be effectively supported with existing infrastructure, the community's overall economic vitality is enhanced, goods and services are accessible, and the natural landscape and community character are protected.

TAKING ACTION

STRATEGIES. The County's *Economic Development Strategy* was last prepared in 2006, and it is currently being updated. The timing of its completion is likely to coincide with the completion of this Comprehensive Plan update, and it is expected that both will include mutually-supporting policies and actions. The *Tompkins County Workforce Strategy*, published in 2010, is the County's overarching strategy for workforce development. The County also completed a *2020 Strategic Tourism Plan* in 2012 to guide the use of county room tax investments and actions related to tourism development. The County's *Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan* was first prepared by the Tompkins County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board in 1996, and is currently being updated. The update will propose strategies

for supporting agriculture through economic development activities, promotion of local foods, and the important role agriculture plays in the economy. It will also provide an inventory of existing municipal, County, and State policies and identify options for local plans and policies to support agriculture.

PARTNERS. A variety of local actors work to implement strategies that combine to promote the community's overall economic prosperity. TCAD is the county's lead economic development agency, provides staff support for the county's Industrial Development Agency, and is currently leading the *Economic Development Strategy* update. TCAD also facilitates the Tompkins County Economic Development Collaborative, which coordinates economic development-related activities among local agencies and fosters inter-agency collaboration to advance mutual interests.

Tompkins County also has several very committed agencies working with specific populations to promote and provide employment. The Tompkins County Workforce Investment Board, together with Tompkins Workforce NY and TCAD, is the primary author of the County's *Workforce Strategy*. Partners include area public schools, TC3, the New York State Department of Labor, the Women's Opportunity Center, the County Office for the Aging, and T-S-T BOCES.

The Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce advocates for sound economic development and promotes business by forging links between and among business, government, community organizations, and institutions. It also hosts the Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau, which leads implementation of many tourism-related actions. The Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board, with staff support from the Planning Department, provides oversight and strategic direction for tourism-related initiatives including through room tax supported grants. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County works with the County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board to prepare the *Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan*. As noted above, Cornell University is leading efforts in support of the START-UP New York and Southern Tier Innovation Hot Spot programs.

COUNTY ROLE. County government plays many roles in economic development. Members of the County Legislature and County officials serve on the boards of the Industrial Development Agency, which provides tax incentives to local businesses, and TCAD which receives a significant portion of its operating funding from the County. The County



Photo by Shannon Williams

Downtown Ithaca

commonly serves as the primary applicant for Community Development Block Grant funded projects outside of the City of Ithaca. The Workforce Investment Board is a County program, and the airport is a County facility. The County approves tax-exempt bonds for area businesses, and collects and directs the use of local hotel room occupancy tax funds to support tourism and economic development activities. And the County Planning Department provides leadership on planning studies and analyses in support of economic development, for example the feasibility study for relocating the New York State DOT facility on the Cayuga Inlet Waterfront.

County Actions to be Initiated within Two Years

- Create implementation plans for agri-culinary tourism and heritage tourism, two of the focus areas in the *2020 Strategic Tourism Plan*.
- Develop an Energy Focus Areas Strategy to provide for the energy needs of growing businesses while prioritizing renewable energy solutions and addressing energy concerns in key geographical areas of the county.
- Seek increased funding to reimburse employers for on-the-job training that enhances employees' skills and increases their wages.

¹ 2000-2010 Tompkins County non-farm labor growth. Source: CES Current Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics

² 2010 Census

³ 2006-2010 American Community Survey, analysis by ITCTC

⁴ 2009 IMPLAN data, analysis by TCAD

⁵ 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture

⁶ 2012 Tourism Economics report for New York State, Finger Lakes Focus