



CAYUGA COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

FIVE YEAR
STRATEGIC
Plan 2026-2031





TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Mission and Vision	9	Strategic Priorities
5	About the Strategic Plan	15	Priority Action Matrix
6	The Economic Context	16	Board Members & Attachments
8	Engagement Summary	17	Contact Information



MISSION AND VISION

MISSION

The Chamber's mission is to advocate as the voice of the business community, provide value-added services to our members, and facilitate collaboration that supports economic development for the greater good of Cayuga County

VISION

The Chamber envisions a prosperous, vibrant, and interconnected business community in Cayuga County. Our benefits enable members to strengthen their businesses and organizations through marketing and publicity, education and training, cost savings, and involvement in programs and events. The Chamber connects like-minded organizations and resources, taking a collaborative approach to doing business throughout all of Cayuga County.

ABOUT THE STRATEGIC *Plan*

WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC PLAN?

The Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce Five-Year Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the Chamber's work through 2031. It identifies five Strategic Priorities that will most shape the future of the county's business community and pairs each with a clear vision and a concrete work plan.

HOW IT WAS BUILT

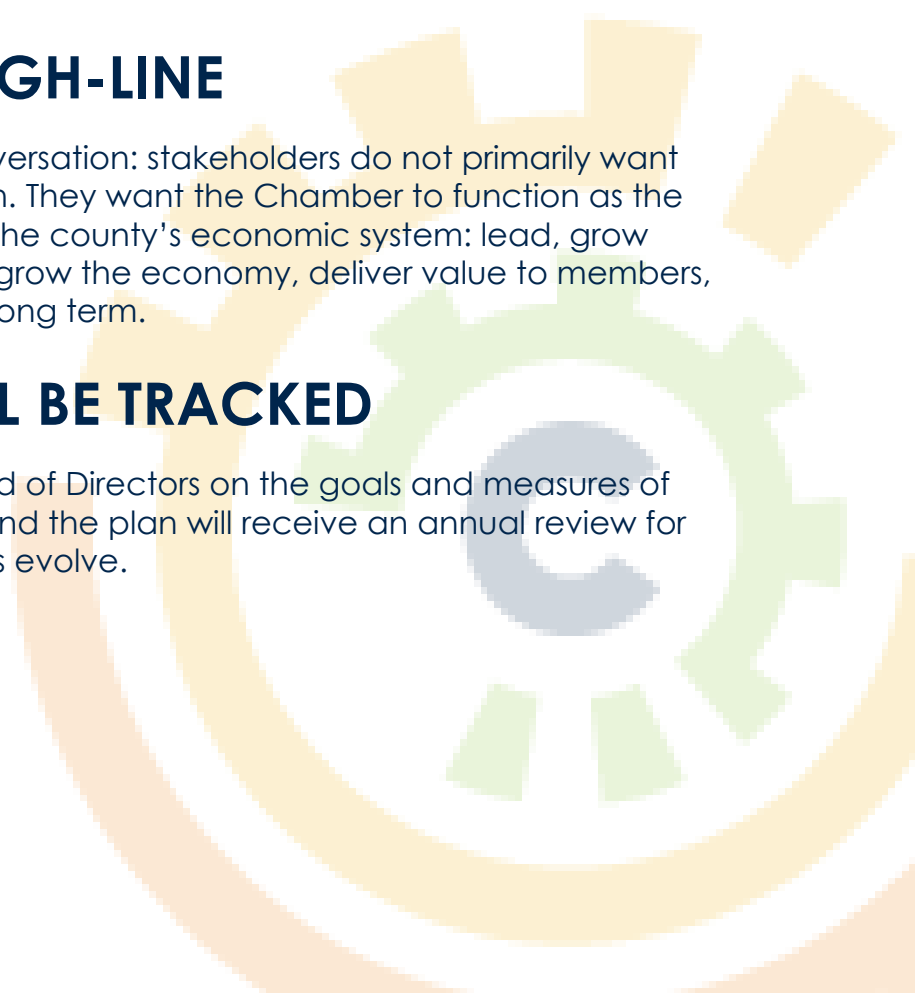
The plan was informed by a countywide community engagement process conducted in 2025–2026, including a survey of 76 business and community stakeholders, two facilitated focus groups, and five in-depth stakeholder interviews. It is further grounded in an Economic and Demographic Base Report drawing on current labor-market, industry, and demographic data. These findings are summarized in the pages that follow and included in full as attachments.

A STRATEGIC THROUGH-LINE

One theme united nearly every conversation: stakeholders do not primarily want new programs, they want integration. They want the Chamber to function as the central connector and translator of the county's economic system: lead, grow opportunities in talent and business, grow the economy, deliver value to members, and sustain the organization for the long term.

HOW PROGRESS WILL BE TRACKED

Chamber staff will report to the Board of Directors on the goals and measures of success identified for each priority, and the plan will receive an annual review for any necessary updates as conditions evolve.



THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

This strategy is disciplined by Cayuga County's real economic conditions. Five findings frame the work ahead.

1

A stable but softening labor market. Unemployment is low at 3.6% (Sept. 2025), but employment declined 0.7% over the year and is projected to contract by roughly 292 jobs over the next year.

2

Strong annual wage growth (2025-2025,) partially offset by costs. Average wages grew 6.7% year-over-year, faster than the nation, though local wages (\$63,516) still trail the U.S. average (\$75,686), and cost of living sits slightly above the national mark.

3

A highly concentrated industry base. The economy leans heavily on healthcare, manufacturing, public administration, and agriculture. Employment in agricultural industries is 4 times more concentrated in Cayuga County than in the US as a whole. (Location quotient = 4.24)

4

Demographic and workforce headwinds. Population in Cayuga County fell ~4.7% from 2010–2020, with an older median age (43.1), youth outmigration, and a smaller share of bachelor's degree holders (23.9%) than the Central New York region (32.8%).

5

Steady Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth led by manufacturing. County GDP reached \$3.5 billion in 2024, up 5.5%, led by manufacturing (\$643MM). This anchor, plus regional semiconductor momentum, offers a bridge to emerging high-growth industries.

THE COUNTY AT A GLANCE

INDICATOR	CAYUGA COUNTY	BENCHMARK
Population change, 2010–2020	–4.7%	U.S. +7.4%
Median household income	\$66,583	CNY region \$71,924
Median home value	\$211,351	≈ CNY region
Median age	43.1	CNY region 40.1
Bachelor’s degree or higher	23.9%	CNY region 32.8%
Unemployment rate (Sept. 2025)	3.6%	U.S. 4.3%
Avg. annual wages (2025 Q2)	\$63,516	U.S. \$75,686
Wage growth, year-over-year	+6.7%	outpaces U.S. wage growth
Total GDP (2024)	\$3.50 B	+5.5% YOY

CNY region = Counties of Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego

Source: Economic and Demographic Base Report (JobsEQ®, BLS, BEA; data as of 2025Q2–2025Q3). Full report included as an attachment.

LARGEST INDUSTRY SECTORS BY EMPLOYMENT

SECTOR	EMPLOYMENT	AVERAGE WAGE	LQ
Healthcare & Social Assistance	4,219	\$64,172	1.04
Manufacturing	3,378	\$72,153	1.65
Retail Trade	3,055	\$37,438	1.21
Public Administration	2,672	\$100,087	2.14
Educational Services	2,471	\$60,416	1.16
Accommodation & Food Services	1,998	\$27,509	0.87
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	1,332	\$64,527	4.24
All Industries (total)	26,354	\$64,425	1.00

Note: LQ = location quotient (concentration vs. national average). Agriculture (LQ 4.24) and Public Administration (LQ 2.14) are the county's most concentrated sectors. Source: JobsEQ®, 2025Q3.

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Between February and April 2026, the planning team conducted a countywide engagement process to inform this strategic plan drawing on three methods: a stakeholder survey, facilitated focus groups, and one-on-one stakeholder interviews. Across all three methods, participants called for the Chamber to take a more active and visible role in Cayuga County's economy. The resulting strategic direction is clear: expand the Chamber's county-wide presence, connect businesses with resources and partners, and focus its leadership on regional advocacy building off existing relationships.

SURVEY

Seventy-six respondents representing businesses, nonprofits, and public sector organizations across the county. Rising costs (72%) and labor shortages (59%) top the list of business concerns. The Chamber earned a Net Promoter Score (NPS*) of ~60 and positive perception scores across all dimensions with countywide presence and proactive outreach identified as the clearest areas for growth. Businesses want the Chamber to lead business attraction, workforce development, marketing visibility, and advocacy over the next 3 – 5 years.

*An NPS score measures customer loyalty by looking at their likelihood of recommending a given business.

FOCUS GROUP

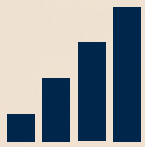
Two facilitated sessions showed a consistent picture: the local economy is stable but fragile, with workforce, housing, and population challenges deeply interconnected. Participants felt the county's economic strengths — agriculture, tourism, healthcare, manufacturing — are underleveraged. The Chamber was seen as well-positioned to serve as a “system navigator,” helping businesses find and access resources, but needing a more visible and countywide presence to do so effectively.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Five interviews with leaders across tourism, civic, rural, and board sectors reinforced a single theme: the Chamber has the credibility and relationships to play a much more active role in Cayuga County's economic life. Interviewees consistently used the word “bridge” to describe what the Chamber should be. The most urgent cap identified was countywide reach, communities outside of Auburn feel disconnected, and several perspective members cited this as a reason for not joining.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The economic base report and engagement findings informed five strategic priorities that will guide the Chamber's work over the next three to five years. Together, they position the Chamber to provide stronger business leadership, expand its countywide reach, support workforce and leadership development, strengthen partnerships, and build a more sustainable membership organization. Each priority includes focused actions and measurable outcomes designed to translate this direction into results.



BUSINESS LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY & ECONOMIC GROWTH



COUNTYWIDE ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS



ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY & MEMBERSHIP GROWTH



WORKFORCE, TALENT & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

PRIORITY: BUSINESS LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY & ECONOMIC GROWTH

Position the Chamber as the leading voice and convener for business and economic prosperity in Cayuga County. Through advocacy, collaboration, and strategic leadership, the Chamber will advance policies, partnerships, and initiatives that strengthen the local economy, support business growth, and address shared community challenges.

STRATEGIC VISION

- Cayuga County businesses speak with a coordinated and influential voice.
- The Chamber is the county's central convener for addressing business challenges.
- Priority industries are better connected to resources, partners, and growth opportunities.
- Workforce programs respond more directly to employer needs.
- Cayuga County benefits from regional growth while maintaining its distinct identity.

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

- Establish a Public Policy Committee, set an annual advocacy agenda, and report on outcomes.
- Identify emerging needs quarterly and hold at least four stakeholder forums across the county each year.
- Select two or three sector priorities annually and convene businesses and partners around specific actions.
- Assess talent needs annually and participate in at least three major workforce or economic-development initiatives each year.
- Coordinate with government and regional partners, identify county opportunities, and advocate for them at the regional and state levels.

PRIORITY: COUNTYWIDE ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

Strengthen the Chamber's role as the primary connector of businesses, opportunities, and resources across Cayuga County. Ensure businesses everywhere in the county understand available opportunities, feel represented, and can access the information and relationships that support their success. Countywide reach was the single most consistent priority raised across every engagement method.

STRATEGIC VISION

- Businesses throughout the county understand and can access Chamber and regional resources.
- The Chamber has a visible presence beyond Auburn, particularly in northern, southern, and rural communities.
- Businesses receive useful information through multiple, reliable channels.
- Chamber communications reflect the full range of Cayuga County businesses and communities.
- Membership and participation become more representative of the county.
- Members understand the Chamber's value and impact.

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

- Implement a countywide communications strategy and create a central source for programs, funding, events, and workforce opportunities.
- Hold programs throughout the county and track participation by community and region.
- Coordinate content across the newsletter, website, and social media, and use engagement data to improve each channel.
- Regularly feature businesses from different regions, industries, and backgrounds in Chamber events and storytelling.
- Target recruitment to underrepresented industries, business sizes, and geographies, and measure progress annually.
- Publish an annual impact report and use member surveys to track awareness, engagement, and satisfaction.

PRIORITY: ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY & MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

Strengthen the Chamber's financial sustainability, organizational effectiveness, and capacity to deliver value. More clearly demonstrate the Chamber's value to existing and prospective members. Diversify revenue, grow membership, and ensure the organization has the systems and resources necessary for long-term impact because organizational capacity will shape progress across every other priority.

STRATEGIC VISION

- The Chamber has stable, diverse revenue and adequate financial reserves.
- Membership grows because businesses understand the value of joining and remaining involved.
- Members receive benefits, connections, and experiences that respond to their needs.
- Staff have the systems and technology needed to work efficiently and support growth.
- The Chamber has strong governance and continuity of leadership.

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

- Set annual targets for dues and non-dues revenue, pursue sponsorships and grants, and review pricing for programs and services.
- Implement a membership growth and retention strategy, strengthen onboarding and renewal efforts, and track results annually.
- Review member benefits and events annually, using participation and satisfaction data to guide improvements.
- Assess operational systems, address technology gaps, and document core processes.
- Strengthen board and volunteer roles, develop future leaders, and establish succession plans for key positions.

PRIORITY: WORKFORCE, TALENT & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Support the attraction, development, and retention of the talent needed for a thriving local economy, and build leadership capacity throughout the county. Stakeholders were clear that opportunity exists in Cayuga County but awareness and access remain uneven. The Chamber's role is to translate opportunity in ways that resonate, especially for younger generations.

STRATEGIC VISION

- Cayuga County has a growing pipeline of prepared business and community leaders.
- Young professionals, entrepreneurs, and emerging leaders have clear ways to build connections and contribute.
- Employers are better able to attract and retain the talent they need.
- Residents understand the career opportunities available within the county.
- More Chamber members move into civic and community leadership.

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

- Expand Leadership Cayuga and increase participation in leadership-development programs.
- Create targeted engagement opportunities and recruit emerging leaders into Chamber committees, events, and leadership roles.
- Build partnerships with employers, schools, and workforce organizations around specific recruitment and retention needs.
- Promote local careers, skilled trades, mentorship, and professional-development opportunities.
- Connect interested members with leadership opportunities and track participation and placements.

PRIORITY: CAYUGA COUNTY PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

Leverage partnerships and collaborative relationships to maximize impact and address challenges no single organization can solve alone. Stakeholders repeatedly described the Chamber's ideal role with one word "bridge" — a connector among businesses, resources, government, and community across the full county.

STRATEGIC VISION

- Businesses can more easily find and access the organizations and resources they need.
- Key institutions work together on shared Chamber and county priorities.
- Countywide challenges are addressed through coordinated cross-sector action.
- Cayuga County benefits from regional collaboration while retaining a clear identity and voice.
- Partnerships produce visible, measurable benefits,

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

- Clarify partner roles, strengthen referral networks, and improve how resources are shared with members.
- Formalize 2-3 strategic partnerships with government, education, workforce, nonprofit, or economic-development organizations.
- Convene partners around specific issues and participate in projects and coalitions with defined roles and outcomes.
- Represent county priorities in regional initiatives and connect regional opportunities to local businesses and communities.
- Track resources secured, businesses served, and projects advanced through collaborative efforts.

PRIORITY ACTION MATRIX

PRIORITY	POTENTIAL KEY ACTIONS	POTENTIAL SUCCESS MEASURES	PRIMARY LEAD	TIMELINE	YEAR 1 FOCUS
Business Leadership, Advocacy & Economic Growth	Establish a Public Policy Committee and advocacy agenda; conduct annual business climate surveys; convene industry and stakeholder forums; advocate on local and regional business issues; engage in Micron-related opportunities and planning efforts.	- Public Policy Committee established - Annual legislative agenda adopted # stakeholder forums annually - Increased # of members participate in advocacy efforts # major economic development initiatives Chamber is involved in annually	President/CEO, Public Policy Committee, Board of Directors	Immediate & Ongoing	- Conduct first Business Climate Survey - Convene first county-wide business forum
County-Wide Engagement & Strategic Communications	Implement county-wide communications strategy; create a Business Opportunity Hub; expand outreach in northern and southern Cayuga County; develop storytelling and impact reporting campaigns; strengthen member recruitment and engagement efforts.	- Increased awareness of Chamber programs and opportunities - Increased participation from businesses outside Auburn - Growth in publication, website, and social media engagement - Increased member satisfaction regarding communications - Improved geographic representation in events and communications	President/CEO, Communications Committee, Staff	Immediate & Ongoing	- Complete communications audit and strategy - Establish baseline data through annual member survey
Organizational Sustainability & Membership Growth	Diversify revenue streams; implement membership recruitment and retention strategies; Clearly communicate membership value; evaluate membership and event pricing; invest in technology and systems; strengthen governance and board development.	- Annual membership growth target achieved - Membership retention exceeds target - Increased non-dues revenue - Financial reserves maintained - Increased member satisfaction and perceived value	President/CEO, Finance Committee, Board of Directors, Staff	Short-Term & Ongoing	- Convene committee to discuss membership value & strategy - Review membership pricing structures - Establish annual membership growth targets
Workforce, Talent & Leadership Development	Expand Leadership Cayuga; create a Young Professionals Network; support workforce attraction and retention efforts; promote career awareness and entrepreneurship; develop mentorship opportunities	- Increased Leadership Cayuga participation - Active Young Professionals Network - Increased engagement of emerging leaders - New workforce and education partnerships formed - Demonstrated contributions to workforce attraction and retention efforts	Leadership Cayuga Committee, Workforce Partners, Employers, Staff	Mid-Term & Ongoing	- Evaluate Leadership Cayuga for growth opportunities - Convene workforce partners to identify shared priorities and define roles
Strategic Partnerships & Community Connectivity	Formalize strategic partnerships; participate in regional economic development initiatives; convene cross-sector leadership discussions; pursue collaborative funding opportunities; advocate for Cayuga County interests in regional planning efforts	# formal strategic partnerships established - Increased participation in collaborative initiatives - Additional resources leveraged through partnerships - Improved stakeholder perception of Chamber influence - Measurable outcomes from collaborative projects	President/CEO, Board of Directors, Strategic Partners	Immediate & Ongoing	- Map regional initiatives where Chamber representation is needed - Develop partnership framework and criteria - Identify top 5 priority partners - Formalize 1–2 partnership agreements

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair

Megan Popkess, Cayuga-Onondaga
BOCES Regional Education Center

Vice-Chair

Daryl Schermerhorn, Markert USA

Secretary

Melissa Leader, Empower FCU

Treasurer

Tessa Crawford, Auburn Enlarged City
School District

Legal Counsel

Trevor Hinman, Boyle & Anderson, PC

Joshua Alexander, Auburn Community
Hospital

Amanda Grover, NUCOR

Jacob Hamilton, The Hamilton Salon &
Apothecary/Moravia Locke Chamber

Emily Hilimire, Lyons National Bank

Chris Iven, Unity House of Cayuga
County

Melody Johnson, Melody's

Kimberly Jones, Inns of Aurora

Jesse Kline, Auburn Downtown BID

Joseph Kime, Beardsley Architects +
Engineers

Norman Lee, Cayuga Community
College

Diane Piscioti, Currier

STRATEGIC PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Jacob Hamilton, The Hamilton Salon &
Apothecary/Moravia Locke Chamber

Chris Iven, Unity House of Cayuga
County

Ginny Kent, Auburn City Council,
Community Advocate

David Kimmel, Two Plus Four Management

Megan Popkess, Cayuga-Onondaga
BOCES Regional Education Center

Julisa Stone-Szpaicher, United Way of
Cayuga County

Gwendolyn Webber-McLeod, Gwen Inc

ATTACHMENTS

- **Economic and Demographic Base Report** — full labor-market, industry, occupation, and demographic analysis.
- **Community Engagement Summary** — survey (n=76), focus groups, and stakeholder interview findings.
- **SWOT Summary** — May 2025 strategic planning session findings.

CONTACT US



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