Planning

**Improving Economic Vitality:** Economic Development is the primary focus of the department. While this section addresses direct economic development projects and assistance, it should be recognized that all department work that improves quality of life has a positive, long term economic impact. The department worked collaboratively with various partners to advance economic development projects, including those identified in the County’s Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, such as markets for local foods and agri-tourism. The department assisted with local law amendments for wind and solar energy developments; and assisted local governments with projects such as the new St. James Hospital and large wind farm projects regulated under Article X. The Department worked closely with the Village of Bath to gather data for potential downtown revitalization. GIS (Geographic Information System) services were provided, including access to Business Analyst software. Staff participated on various local and regional boards, including the Regional Economic Development Council’s Food & Agriculture Working Group, to promote economic growth and plan economic development projects. The department promoted tourism development by assisting the Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau with hiring a new director and developing a new strategic plan. Tourism was also advanced through other projects such as the state snowmobile trail grant program, where we successfully added 51 new funded miles, including a trail connecting to Allegany County trails.

**Increasing the Viability of Agriculture and Protecting Farmland:** The department worked collaboratively with agricultural agencies on various programs and policies to protect agriculture lands, promote local agricultural products, and advance the agricultural economy. To protect farmland, an eight-year review of Agricultural District No. 10 was conducted and 2,600 acres were added to several districts during the annual “open” period. The department fielded many questions about the agricultural districts program and its benefits. The department worked with the Finger Lakes Land Trust to develop a pre-proposal process to identify farms that would be good candidates for NYS’s Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program (FPIG) in 2018. A workshop about FPIG was held and various measures were taken to advertise the preproposal process. The Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board met twice.

**Increasing Energy Production and Protecting the Environment:** The department assisted 11 municipalities with wind energy generation laws and stayed informed about three major industrial windfarms being developed under NYS Article X regulations. The Senior Planner offered technical assistance on various solar energy proposals, including evaluating potential projects on county-owned property. The department participated on the County Water Quality Committee and assisted with the Hazard Mitigation Plan, and a Flood Smart Communities Project.

**Increasing the Capacity of Local Governments:** The department provided GIS services to multiple municipalities. We also helped local governments with various planning and zoning procedural questions, environmental reviews, and general land use and sustainable development advice. The department created a new guidebook about General Municipal Law (GML) Section 239m (required referrals to the County) and held training attended by approximately 35 local officials. The department also helped plan the annual Regional Leadership Conference. The department completed 60 county-level reviews of local actions as required by GML Section 239m, a substantial increase over previous years. The department, through a contracted code enforcement officer, enforced the NYS Building Code in the Town of Addison, the only town in the County that has opted out of local enforcement. Staff increased outreach to local governments in order to provide more services.
Improving Housing: Housing is an important factor in economic development and the department has increased focus on housing quality and markets. Two Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) were administered by the department: 7 projects were completed in partnership with Arbor Housing and Development under the septic repair program, and upgrades to sewer and water infrastructure at the Woodlands Community in the Town of Hornellsville were designed and let for bid. Another well and septic CDBG application was prepared and submitted and $198,000 was awarded. The County was awarded NYS Septic Replacement Program funding to address failing septic systems around Smith Pond on a 50/50 cost share basis. The Senior Planner participated in Fair Housing training and began research to update the County's Fair Housing Plan. Department staff served on the Homeless Housing Task Force.

Improving Transportation: The department continued to manage public transportation funding: state and federal funding for Steuben County Transit (operated by First Transit) and federal funding for Steuben Area Rides (StAR, operated by Arc of Steuben.) We have been working with StAR and NYSDOT, to make StAR eligible for state funding. This effort will continue in 2018 and should increase our transportation budget. Additionally, we began working with First Transit to generate revenue through the advertising placement on the Steuben Transit buses. The transportation program underwent a major Federal Transportation Administration Compliance review by consultants on behalf of NYSDOT. Our program appears to have done well on the review and findings and recommendations will be issued in 2018. Three new buses and a support vehicle were procured. The 2017-2018 Funding application was prepared and submitted. An Accelerated Transportation Capital (ATC) grant was submitted requesting funds for bus cameras and funds were awarded for our 2015 and 2016 ATC grants (variable message signs, a passenger shelter, and bus bike transport racks). A study of transportation services, routes and scheduling, in partnership with Southern Tier Central Regional Planning Board, to better serve residents and find efficiencies, was completed at the end of the year. Department staff served on various transportation coordination committees. GIS services were provided for various transportation projects.

Expanding Geographic Information System (GIS) Services: The GIS Coordinator is responsible for the County’s geo-spatial data, providing various GIS services, increasing the County’s GIS capabilities, and coordinating GIS technicians from other departments and the IT staff that form the County’s GIS Unit. In January 2017, the GIS Coordinator was physically relocated to the Planning Department from the Department of Public Works to increase focus on coordination duties and increase the productivity of the GIS Unit overall. Five new mapping applications were developed and added to the County website. Training to use the apps was included in our 239m training session and was also provided one on one. The GIS Coordinator assisted 10 local governments and interviewed 18 departments in an effort to expand GIS use in County government. The GIS Coordinator assisted with various projects including, the Town of Corning’s fire and rescue service study, a Hazard Mitigation Plan update, and many others. The GIS Coordinator provided maps, charts, etc. for a special prosecutor for a high profile trial.

Improving Department Efficiency: In an effort to increase efficiency, the department improved file, calendar, and work flow sharing and communication. Progress on annual goals was reviewed on a quarterly basis. During the last quarter of 2017, department staff developed a strategic plan which will guide the department’s work through 2020. To better focus our efforts, a new mission statement was established: The Steuben County Planning Department serves to advance the sound, orderly, and sustainable economic and physical development of the County in order to increase prosperity and improve the quality of life for all Steuben County residents.