

***St. Lawrence County Planning Office***  
***STAFF WORK REPORT***  
***JANUARY 2025***



**ADVISORY BOARD SUPPORT**

***Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB).*** The AFPB's next meeting will be 6 p.m. February 6<sup>th</sup> in the Conference room on the second floor of the HSC Building. The board will discuss the Ag Census 2022, NYS Comptroller Profile of Agriculture 2024, status of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, 2025 County Ag Tour planning, report on the consolidation of Ag Districts, updates on solar development and methane digesters in the County.

***County Planning Board (CPB).*** The CPB met on January 9<sup>th</sup> in the Conference room on the second floor of the HSC Building. Three full review projects were discussed; a site plan review for a greenhouse facility in the Town of Massena (conditionally approved); a site plan review for a substation in the Town of Massena (conditionally approved); and a special use permit for a wedding venue in the Town of Potsdam (conditionally approved).

***Environmental Management Council (EMC).*** The EMC met on January 15<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. in the HSC Building. Two DEC representatives, Region 6 Director and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Coordinator, discussed projects affecting the County. There were two DEC funded grants regarding management of the AIS, the water chestnut, in Black Lake and the Oswegatchie River. A St. Lawrence University professor researching management received funding to pay for labor to cut the tops off before the water chestnut can fruit, in order to stop spread. The Town of Oswegatchie received funding to purchase a machine that uproots the plants. Both processes help eradicate and prevent the spread of the AIS. Collaborations with SLELO PRISM, Black Lake Association, Town of Oswegatchie and Village of Heuvelton are occurring. Prognosis is good to contain and eradicate the water chestnut in the area. Further discussions and updates with the DEC included PFAS testing, the Massena hydrogen plant construction, the Deer River pollution situation, the National Marine Sanctuary, the Walleye stocking program, multi-use trail and black fly/ mosquito control. Current projects that are under way include public outreach for earth day events, County property tree management, and the directory. Next meeting will occur February 19, 2025.

***Fair Housing Task Force.*** On the 21<sup>st</sup>, Preston and Matilda hosted the How to Handle Housing Complaints webinar. This was a virtual panel-style discussion in which featured speakers detailed the responsibilities of their organizations in the context of housing complaints. They discussed their role, service area, types of housing complaints they can address, how issues are resolved, and common pitfalls to avoid. Featured speakers included PJ Herne from Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY, Pamela Weed-Nichols and Deanna Nelson from the NYS Attorney General's Office, Greg Thompson from the Village of Potsdam Code Enforcement Office, and Sally Santangelo from CNY Fair Housing. Preston also spoke at a Points North Housing Coalition Board meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to discuss the Fair Housing Task Force and its role in promoting equal housing opportunity in St. Lawrence County. Finally, the Fair Housing Task Force will assist with a training session hosted by CNY Fair Housing on Tuesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. There will be two training sessions; a landlord session in the morning and a tenant and service provider session in the afternoon. Additional information will be distributed as the date gets closer. The next meeting will be February 25<sup>th</sup> in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room at the HSC.

## **BOARD OF LEGISLATORS**

***Countywide Broadband Assessment.*** Staff facilitated one committee meeting, participated in one working group meeting, managed contract extensions for ARPA-funded projects, and managed reimbursement of \$647,356 in ARPA funds. Staff reviewed mapped State data of broadband access against local data to look for discrepancies.

***OCF Repurpose Committee.*** Staff have been assigned to the County's Ogdensburg Correctional Facility Repurpose Committee. The group last met in August.

***SLC Water/Waste Water Infrastructure American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding Initiative.*** The BOL allocated \$3 million for municipal water and waste water projects. Twelve municipalities have been awarded a total of \$2,969,563. To date, disbursements have been made totaling \$2,301,366.18. Nine municipalities have expended all their awarded funds and/or completed their project: Ogdensburg, Colton, Brasher, DeKalb, Hermon, Heuvelton, Lisbon, Louisville, and Parishville. The remaining three municipalities have drawn down a portion of their awarded funds.

***County Snowmobile Grant.*** St. Lawrence County Planning Office is the local sponsor for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Places Snowmobile Grant. The County was awarded \$293,840.00 in snowmobile trail maintenance for the 2024-2025 grant year. Staff processed payment from the State and paid the 70% award of funds to the Trail Maintenance Entities. Staff is preparing for Phase 3 by reviewing monthly work reports, and Phase 1 by reviewing trails that need gps updates.

***County Budget Preparation.*** Staff is again assisting with the annual preparation of the County Budget.

## **COMMUNITY / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

***Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).*** Countywide Housing Rehabilitation Program #5 (CHRP 5) is underway. The Development Authority of North Country (DANC), the subrecipient, and the Planning Office have been meeting regularly to discuss progress. Phase I consisted of five projects for low to moderate income households, and all five projects have been completed. Phase II consists of four more projects. DANC created scope of work; tested for radon, lead, and asbestos; and put out to bid. Contracts were signed on January 22, 2025. Staff and DANC reviewed the waiting list and identified four potential Phase III projects. Staff is beginning to assess an application for another countywide rehab program. Review of the waiting list suggests a mobile home replacement program is needed in the County, but due to capacity, it was decided to apply for a similar CDBG funded home rehab program, and strategize for a future mobile home replacement project.

## **GRANTS**

***Septic Repair Program.*** All projects completed and funds spent under this program since "Round One" have been combined to align the County's program benchmarks with NYS. To date, 88 systems have been repaired/replaced; \$622,290.87 has been expended; and \$977,709.13 in program funds remain available.

***Grants Notice Distribution.*** The Grants Notice is distributed to County Department Heads, Legislators,

Superintendents of Schools, local municipal officials and approximately 350 additional individuals representing organizations throughout the North Country.

## **PLANNING MATTERS**

**GIS.** Public Health requested assistance to develop a web-based dashboard for Overdose data in the County. The Overdose Dashboard officially launched to the public in mid-November. Staff update the OD Dashboard as new data comes in. Staff made a map, of eligible parcels for septic repair, web accessible allowing Public Health, an interactive way to view the data. Staff reviewed data on ARC Online, to make sure it is up to date and eliminating unnecessary files to save on token consumption. The State requested a review on broadband accessibility data, and so staff compared with local data to count the remaining households that do not have broadband access. Additional mapping of broadband activity is underway. The Planning Office has been in discussions with IT, Real Property, Highway, and Emergency Services on a coordinated County GIS plan.

***Town of Macomb Zoning Code Development Discussion.*** Staff met with the Town of Macomb Planning Board and other Town Officials on January 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss the development of a zoning code for the Town. The Town is deliberating on the proposal.

***Town of Hammond Comprehensive Plan Update.*** Draft plan narrative is complete; staff working on document format and map updates.

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

***County Transit System.*** At the beginning of the month, Matilda reviewed December trip and mileage data from the bus operator to prepare and submit a 4<sup>th</sup> quarter STOA report to the DOT. Matilda also prepared December trip and mileage reports for SUNY Canton, Clarkson University, and SUNY Potsdam. At the beginning of the month, Matilda, Lisa and County Mobility Manager Sonja Jensen distributed public notices announcing the County's intent to apply for Federal operating and capital funds for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. On the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, software vendor Passio delivered in-person training to The Arc's bus drivers and dispatch staff, and the Mobility Manager was present to assist with the preparation of standard operating procedures on use of the technology. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, Matilda and Sonja delivered an overview of the County's 5311 funding application at a Public Transit Task Force meeting. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, Matilda, The Arc's Transportation Supervisor and County Mobility Manager participated in a virtual meeting with Passio staff to review next steps to troubleshoot hardware in the bus fleet. Throughout the month, Matilda and Lisa processed 2024 invoices for payment to The Arc and to Volunteer Transportation Center. These year-end figures were used to populate data in the County's 2024-2025 5311 funding application which totals \$3.05 million. At the end of the month, Matilda and Heidi responded to questions from the DOT about the County's pending microtransit application.