



**2023**

# **Annual Report**

Lewis County Planning & Community Development



**LEWIS**  
**COUNTY**  
NEW YORK

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# Introduction

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Lewis County Department of Planning & Community Development, at the direction of the Lewis County Board of Legislators, is to provide services to our municipalities, organizations, businesses and citizens to ensure that carefully planned and successful development occurs within the County in accord with the Lewis County Comprehensive Plan.

In support of this mission, the Department will provide assistance and resources to Lewis County municipalities and organizations for community development, project planning, zoning, and grant writing & administration. We will work with businesses to provide information and guidance to meet their business development needs and to create growth in our County. The Department will also provide general information and resources to citizens for various planning, zoning and economic development issues.

## FINANCE & RULES LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE - 2023

Thomas Osborne, Chair  
Phil Hathaway, Vice-Chair  
Jeffrey Nellenback  
Jessica Moser  
Josh Leviker

## LEWIS COUNTY PLANNING BOARD - 2023

Tim Petersen, Chair  
John Lehman, Vice-Chair  
Donald Cook  
Sarah Metott  
Thomas Osborne, Finance & Rules Committee Chair\*  
Eric Virkler, County Treasurer\*  
Timothy Hunt, County Highway Superintendent\*  
Lawrence Dolhof, BOL Chairman (Non-Voting)\*  
\*Ex-Officio Member



# Our Team

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## Department Director

Casandra Buell, MBA, AICP



## Office Manager

Susan Kulzer



## Community Development Specialist

Megan Krokowski



## Community Development Specialist

Lauryn Tabolt



## Community Development Program Specialist

Samantha Brown

(Left Department on 12/8/23)



# What We Do

We love what we do and work hard to make Lewis County the best place to live, work, and thrive. Naturally, our department is heavily involved in a variety of initiatives. From expanding broadband to developing land use applications, we support the communities' needs and strive to empower our municipalities so that they can provide the best services to their residents. In all aspects, the Planning and Community Development Department continues to work closely with the Department of Recreation, Forestry and Parks, Chamber of Commerce, Naturally Lewis, the Tug Hill Commission, Lewis County Soil & Water District, as well as other various County agencies. As you will see in the report that follows, we work with a wide range of constituents, and we make every effort to help any organization that asks for our assistance.

The following will discuss different project areas in our department: Planning and Community Development.



## 01. Planning

The planning function of our department enables us to work with municipalities, businesses, and community groups and agencies to assist in planning processes that will add value to the community and possibly provide answers to community problems.



## 02. Community Development

Community Development would involve any activity or development that positively impacts the community. Most municipalities are limited in staff and resources and are not able to solely undertake large projects that would benefit their community. This is where our office steps in to provide technical support, staffing assistance, and guidance to these municipalities.

# 2023 Department Goals

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This year, we set our goals high to implement key projects necessary for comprehensive community development. The below 2023 initiatives were set as part of our annual department budget and we have progressed in each area effectively.



## Complete Streets

**Develop a County-wide Complete Streets Plan and Establish a Policy**

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- RFP posted in January
- B&L Awarded Contract
- Draft Completed

## Land Use Portal

**Establish a Streamlined County Referral & Codes Portal**

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- RFP posted in March
- Cloud Permit Awarded Contract
- Project Kick-Off in October

## Housing

**Increase Affordable & Market Rate Housing Options**

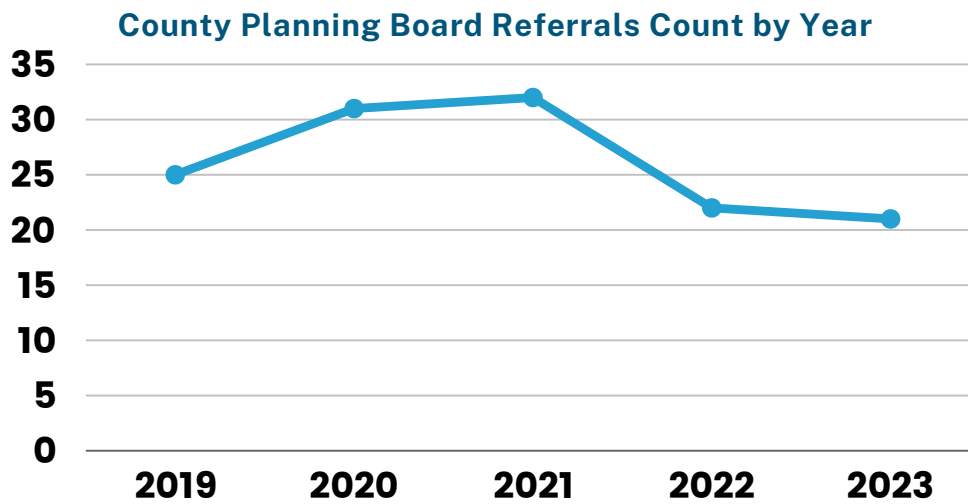
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- Stevens Block Redevelopment
- Pro-Housing Community Designations
- CDBG Housing Rehab Award

# Planning

## Lewis County Planning Board

The County Planning Board is appointed by the Board of Legislators, and our office serves as staff to this Board. In accordance with its By-laws, the County Planning Board consists of eight (8) members representative of the county-at-large and elected county officials: Tim Petersen, Chair, John Lehman, Vice-Chair, Donald Cook, Sarah Metott, Thomas Osborne, Finance & Rules Committee Chair (Ex-Officio Member), Eric Virkler, County Treasurer (Ex-Officio Member), Timothy Hunt, County Highway Superintendent (Ex-Officio Member), Lawrence Dolhof, BOL Chairman (Non-Voting Ex-Officio Member).



**21**

Reviews in 2023

**-5%**

Since 2022

The County Planning Board is responsible for reviewing local-level projects that require review by local planning and zoning boards of appeals that meet certain criteria. These criteria are established under General Municipal Law 239m and are used to identify when a potential project may have a county-wide impact. Municipalities that have local zoning or land use regulations must refer projects that meet these criteria to the County Planning Board for review, prior to the local municipality taking final action.

Our office is the repository for these municipal referrals and is responsible for the administration of the County Planning Board. Planning staff is responsible for performing a formal review of the proposed municipal project for the County Planning Board members, who then are responsible for approving, with or without conditions, or disapproving the project. The review of the proposed municipal project is a technical process, and our analysis is the basis for the County Planning Board's evaluation. Our office also prepares the agenda, notices to the public, and takes meeting minutes for all County Planning Board meetings. Additionally, our office is also responsible for responding to the municipality regarding the Board's determination and for keeping record of all projects that have been referred to and reviewed by the County Planning Board.



## **Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board**

In 2023, our office oversaw the comprehensive review of Lewis County Agricultural District No. 6, a process undertaken every eight years. This review encompassed 246,809 acres of active agricultural lands, with no comments received during the 30-day comment period. Concurrently, we accepted applications for inclusion or removal of parcels within the district, aligning with the eight-year review timeframe.

Municipalities and landowners had the opportunity to propose modifications to the district during October 2023, with a public informational session and hearing held in December 2023. Notably, 23 requests totaling 662.288 acres sought removal, attributed partly to solar and battery storage development pressures.

Nineteen inclusion requests were reviewed for viability, totaling 1,667.9 acres. After accounting for removal requests, a net addition of 1,005.612 acres was proposed, which would expand Agricultural District No. 6 to 247,814.612 acres, pending approval by the New York State Ag and Markets Commissioner.

## County-wide Comprehensive Plan



### LEWIS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



*"Working to be the premier rural county in New York State"*

**FINAL PLAN  
OCTOBER 6, 2009**



In 2007, the County Legislature supported a process to develop the County's first comprehensive plan. The Plan was completed and adopted by the Board of Legislators in October 2009. The full Lewis County Comprehensive Plan can be found on the [county website](#).

The Comprehensive Plan provides a road map and guide for much of the activities of our office. The document deals with many topics with an emphasis on the economy and communities. The eighteen-month process to create the Plan involved outreach to many organizations and individuals in the county. A Steering Committee oversaw the process and multiple workgroups were engaged. A consulting firm completed the actual document and guided our local participants. Fourteen years later, much of our department's work is still driven by action items in the Comprehensive Plan. There are still many important topics that need to be addressed and while our office might be involved in many activities, we cannot manage every action item in the Plan.

Our department uses the County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2009, as the guideline for many of our activities. We have made great strides in building communication, shared services with our municipalities and expanding our support in education and tourism. While there are many aspects of the Comprehensive Plan that have not been executed to-date, a collaborative agency approach began in late 2020 to efficiently implement the tasks. There is much more that can be accomplished within the existing framework of the Plan, being that much of the plan has been accomplished. It is our intention to continue this collaboration; however, we are also looking to begin planning the next County Comprehensive Plan update in 2025, and we plan to pursue funding for this update in 2024.



## **Training & Project Support**

### **01. Annual Land Use Training Workshop**

In September, our office partnered with the NYS Department of Local Government Training Services to host a 4-hour training workshop that provided information on Affordable Housing, Community Design Tools, and Public Meetings & Hearings. This workshop was advertised to Town and Village planning board, zoning board, and code enforcement officials. There were 40 municipal land use officials that attended this workshop.



### **02. GIS Training Workshop**

This year, we partnered with Clarkson University to provide training focused on ArcGIS Online administration, data management, web maps, and applications. The Instructor, Clarkson University Professor William Olsen, walked 14 attendees through the fundamentals of ArcGIS Online and showed users how to utilize the tool to better visualize data to meet mapping needs for a variety of projects.

### **03. Municipal Water Infrastructure Training**

In November 2023, our department worked with the River Area Council of Governments, Environmental Finance Center of Syracuse University, and the Tug Hill Commission to facilitate a workshop focused on exploring state and federal Funding for water infrastructure projects. Participants were able to learn about funding opportunities relative to safe clean water management and other community investments from state and federal agency representatives. Our work on the Village and Town of Turin Water Infrastructure project was highlighted as a successful case study.

# Community Development

## **County-wide Shared Services Initiative (CWSSI)**

Throughout 2023, department staff worked on the development of a 2023 Lewis County Shared Services Plan. The Shared Services Panel, made up of the Village Mayors and Town Supervisors, worked with the County Manager and Director of Planning & Community Development to develop a list of future shared services projects that would result in taxpayers savings. Eleven (11) projects were identified and included the addition of an Assessor and Data Collector within the Lewis County Real Property Department, shared water district maintenance between the Village of Croghan, Town of Croghan, and County of Lewis, and the enrollment in a cooperative purchasing initiative for Medicare savings. The final 2023 CWSSI Plan was approved by the Shared Services Panel on December 20, 2023. With this Plan, Lewis County projects a total anticipated savings of \$4,860,200.

## **Zoning & Comprehensive Plan Development**

Our department provides guidance and technical assistance to municipalities and their various boards, allocating annual budget funds to support comprehensive planning and land use law updates. In 2023, we pursued a Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Grant Program through the New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) to cover 90% of the costs for updating the Town of Diana's Zoning Law, although this grant was not awarded. Currently, we are pursuing a NYS DEC Smart Growth Grant for the Town of Diana's rezoning efforts. If unsuccessful, we plan to utilize 2024 department budgeted funds for the project.

In 2022, we assisted the Village of Turin in securing funding to collaborate with the Development Authority of the North Country on their Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in July 2022, guiding village decisions with a focus on recreational opportunities, education, and safe neighborhoods. Similarly, in 2021, we supported the Town of Watson with their Comprehensive Plan update and subsequently aided in revising their land use policies. Although delayed in receiving the contract until January 2024, we laid the groundwork by drafting the Request for Proposals and establishing a Planning Committee to ensure efficient progress once the contract was received.



## Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI)



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP ROW: CHEYENNE STERIA, JENNA LAURINE, ANTHONY ADSIT, ANDREA MOROUGHAN, TIM WIDRICK, RYAN PICHE. BOTTOM ROW: CASANDRA BUELL, PAUL DENISE, KATHY HOCHUL, DANNY SALMON, CHARLES TERILLION, AND VINNY NORTZ

Since 2019, Lewis County has provided technical assistance and support to the Village of Lowville in pursuing New York State Downtown Revitalization Funding. With the creation of an active and walkable commercial corridor, the opening of new and niche businesses, the expansion of downtown housing options, and the enhancement of recreational and quality of life amenities, the Village sees itself transforming into a thriving, family-friendly, and economically viable place for people of all ages to live, work, and visit.

The Village of Lowville was selected as a Round 7 recipient of the NYS DRI program. Lowville's Downtown Revitalization Initiative application — titled "RESTORE REDISCOVER CONNECT" — demonstrated the Village's readiness and capacity to transform its downtown into a more vibrant neighborhood through private and public sector project opportunities that will achieve its vision for the downtown. As the "urban heart" of Lewis County, the Village seeks to preserve and enhance its small-town, rural charm, while diversifying and expanding its economic base in ways consistent with its unique character. We're proud to have assisted with this application over the past 4 rounds and are looking forward to assisting with the implementation of this funding as a Local Planning Committee (LPC) Member.

## NY Forward

In 2022, department staff worked with Naturally Lewis and the Village of Lyons Falls to develop and submit a NY Forward application for the Village of Lyons Falls. While the program sought a submission detailing a need for \$4.5 million in funding, Lyons Falls was able to show a combined \$10 million in public and private investment need to fulfill their vision. Multiple projects were submitted as part of this “mini-DRI” application, to include an outfitter at the train depot, apartments at the former AGWAY, an amphitheater at the former Lyons Falls Mill site, and mixed-use development at the former Lyons Falls Elementary School building. In January 2023, Governor Hochul announced that Lyons Falls was the North Country recipient of the first round of NY Forward funding; however, it was for a reduced amount of \$2.25 million. Department staff were assigned to the Local Planning Committee (LPC) for the NY Forward Strategic Implementation Plan development and working alongside stakeholders to identify the best projects to propose for the final monetary awards. The final Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) was submitted by the LPC to NYS for their final review and subsequent awards. It is expected that final award contracts will be announced in April 2024





## **Restore NY Applications**

The Restore NY Communities Initiative's purpose is to revitalize urban and rural areas, disadvantaged communities, and stabilize neighborhoods. In January 2023, department staff worked with host municipalities and project sponsors to submit the following applications for this funding: Village of Lowville (Tug Hill Artisan Roasters/Old Jail) in the amount of \$900,000 and the Village of Port Leyden (Port Leyden Portal) in the amount of \$1,062,000. Fortunately, both projects were funded and are proceeding with the awarded improvements.



## **NYS Septic System Replacement Program**

In April 2021, Lewis County was offered participation in Round 2 of the State Septic System Replacement Fund Program, with a maximum allocation of \$85,000 by December 31, 2026. Established under the Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017, this program aims to reduce environmental and public health impacts associated with cesspools and inadequate septic systems near priority waterbodies, like the Beaver River and Lower tribs in Lewis County. Property owners within 250 feet of these waterbodies may receive reimbursement of up to 50%, capped at \$10,000 per project.

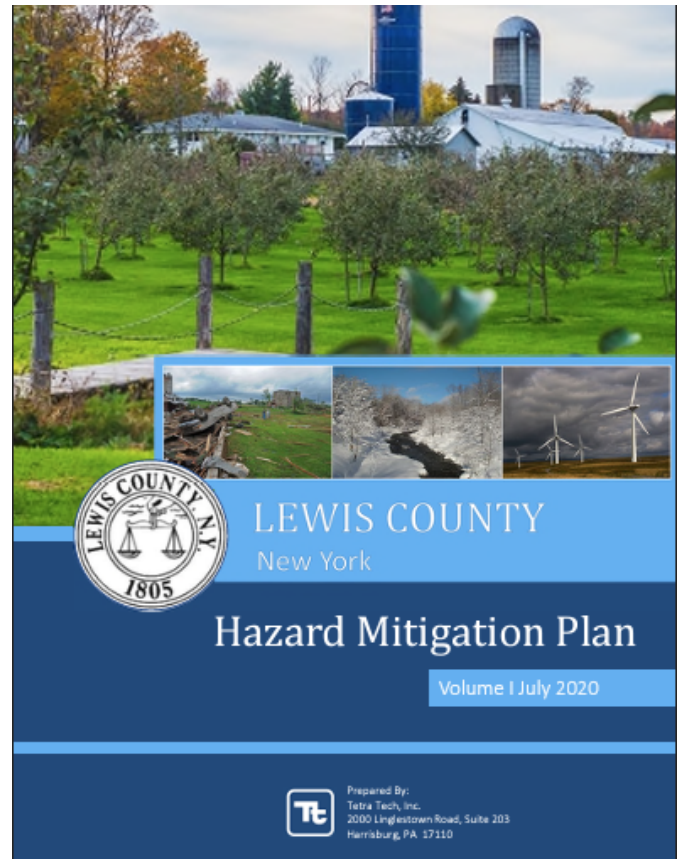
In 2021, Lewis County funded one eligible project, receiving \$2,450 in reimbursement. Subsequently, an additional \$275,000 was awarded for the same priority waterbody, with county legislators approving the funding. This year, \$2,613.73 was utilized for another eligible septic system replacement project. Outreach efforts included website and social media postings, direct mailings, articles in local publications, fliers at nearby businesses, and monthly information sessions at the Croghan Free Library. While there has been interest from various areas of the county, one eligible property in Beaver Falls has not proceeded due to affordability concerns. Efforts are ongoing to secure additional funding to assist this applicant and others facing similar challenges.

## HOME Consortium

The Director of Planning & Community Development is the County's designated representative on the three-county HOME Consortium Board. This group works with the Development Authority of the North Country to administer and allocate federal funding for housing projects annually within the tri-county region.

## Lewis County Hazard Mitigation Planning

Our office has taken proactive steps to update the 2020 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which was lead by Lewis County Emergency Management Services, recognizing the vital role of safeguarding communities against potential hazards. Here are the key initiatives undertaken in 2023:



### 01. Awarded FEMA BRIC Funding for 2025 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Our office successfully secured \$150,000 in FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) funding in 2023 to update Lewis County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, ensuring its validity until 2030. This funding will support the comprehensive update of the plan, involving input from participating municipalities. Each municipality's representative will have the opportunity to contribute insights into hazards specific to their community, ensuring comprehensive hazard identification and mitigation strategies. The project is scheduled to go out to Request for Proposals (RFP) in Q1 2024 and is anticipated to be completed by Q2 2025, well before the expiration of the current plan.

### 02. FEMA BRIC Application for E. Martinsburg Road

In addition to securing funding for the Hazard Mitigation Plan update, our office applied for \$250,000 in FEMA BRIC funding for project scoping to address flooding on the East Martinsburg Road. This project was referenced in the 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan as a desired action for Lewis County.

## **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**

In 2022, we were fortunate enough to add another Community Development Specialist to our team who could further assist with the cumbersome CDBG grant administration process. From broadband to housing, this year we proved our capabilities of tackling and successfully closing multiple CDBG programs simultaneously. We hope to continue utilizing multiple CDBG program funds year after year.

### **01. CDBG Project No. 636HO133-20: Homeownership Assistance Program**

In 2021, Lewis County was awarded \$377,239 in Small Cities CDBG funding to assist approximately nine (9) low- and moderate-income first-time homebuyers to purchase existing single-family homes on scattered sites throughout the County. With Snow Belt Housing as the subrecipient, we anticipate awarding each purchaser approximately \$35,000.

At the conclusion of 2022, Snow Belt Housing reported that approximately 63% of the funds have been committed to active projects and of the 31 applications they received, 7 have been approved. They estimate that all committed funds will be expended by June 23, 2023.

While we were hoping to utilize all \$377,239 in funds available, the last project rescinded their application at the last minute and declined their loan offer; therefore, funds were deobligated. There is; however, a waitlist of 20 applicants that have responded to Snow Belt's outreach efforts so future funding is certainly needed.

### **02. CDBG Project No. 636HR134-20: Housing Rehabilitation Program**

In 2021, Lewis County was awarded \$610,064 in CDBG funds to rehabilitate fourteen (14) substandard homes occupied by low-and moderate-income households located on scatter sites throughout the County. With Snow Belt Housing as the subrecipient, the county would give priority to households with the lowest incomes living in the most severely substandard conditions.

At the conclusion of 2022, Snow Belt Housing reported that they received forty-one (41) applications, sixteen (16) of which were awarded. They estimated that approximately 74% of funds had been committed to active projects and the balance will be expended by June 23, 2023.

With the shortage of participating contractors in the area, it was difficult to utilize the entire budget of \$610,064 in the short timeframe allotted; however, we were able to complete 21 rehabilitation projects. There is a waitlist of 21 applicants; which can now be served through the new pot of funding awarded to Lewis County in December 2023.

### **03. CDBG Project No. 636ME980-21: Microenterprise Grant Program**

In 2021, Lewis County was awarded \$200,000 in CDBG Microenterprise Grant funds to assist approximately seven (7) businesses with grants up to \$35,000. With the Lewis County IDA as the subrecipient, they hoped to assist approximately four (4) start-ups and three (3) existing businesses to create seven (7) new jobs to low-to-moderate income individuals.

The subrecipient, the Lewis County IDA, awarded funding to 8 businesses: Sterling Valley Maple, The Tack Shack, munch, Simmons Tree Farm, Vanilla Bean Bake Shop, World Famous Osceola Hotel, Cogumelo Mushrooms, and Grassroot Meats. At the conclusion of 2022, the IDA has disbursed \$82,453 in CDBG microenterprise funds and completed 2 of the 8 projects. Due to the exhaustive environmental review process required for construction projects, the IDA was unable to award the Turin Highland Lodge funding through this program; however, they were encouraged to come back in the future for equipment funds once the construction was completed.

In the Spring of 2023, the subrecipient was able to award the remaining \$20,000 to Randall's Cornerstone, with the final disbursement disseminated in October 2023. This program was closed out and a new Microenterprise Program is anticipated to begin in early 2024, pending the CDBG funding award from NYS HCR.

### **04. CDBG Project No. 636CVPF9-21: Broadband LMI Connections**

In 2021, Lewis County was awarded \$747,790 in CDBG Cares Act Funding to increase affordable wireless internet access for approximately 752 households in several LMI communities: Lyonsdale, Port Leyden and Census Tract 9502 in the Town of Diana. This project included the installation of wireless antennas and several free downtown Wi-Fi access points.



## Fair Housing

In 2016, our department collaborated with CNY Fair Housing of Syracuse to conduct a Housing Impediment Analysis (IA) Report, identifying areas for improvement within our housing program. Two key recommendations from the report were the establishment of a Housing Officer, to be fulfilled by the Director of Planning, and the formation of a Housing Taskforce. In 2017, we implemented these recommendations: the Taskforce convened in November 2017, devising an education and awareness plan through social media channels. Additionally, a dedicated webpage was launched on our county website, now integrated into our Housing Hub webpage, providing comprehensive housing regulatory information.

Working in partnership with Snow Belt Housing and CNY Fair Housing of Syracuse, our department hosts annual training sessions for various agencies. Our most recent session, a Fair Housing Roundtable held on April 13, 2023, saw participation from 16 individuals.

Furthermore, the Director of Planning & Community Development serves as the Fair Housing Officer for the County. In 2023, our office handled a fair housing complaint currently under investigation by CNY Fair Housing. Additionally, we provided assistance to several citizens with housing-related inquiries, offering guidance on specific complaints and facilitating connections with the legal resources available through CNY Fair Housing.

### Fair Housing Task Force Members:

- Casandra Buell, Fair Housing Officer, LCPCD
- Lauryn Tabolt, LCPCD
- Jaylyn Heames, Snow Belt Housing, Inc.
- Tammie Lambert, Community Bank
- Scott Mathys, Lewis Co. Opportunities
- Henry Avalone, Landlord
- Shannon Sullivan, NRCIL
- Kevin McArdle, Company, McArdle, & Randall, PLLC
- Britt Abbey, Good Morning Realty





## **New York Main Street Funding**

The Planning & Community Development Department has been actively involved in leveraging New York Main Street (NYMS) funding to support revitalization efforts in Downtown Lowville. Here are the key projects undertaken in 2023:

### **01. Downtown Stabilization Grant - Tug Hill Artisan Roasters**

A NYMS-funded project was completed, with Lewis County receiving \$188,201 in funding to renovate the former Sherriff's office and jail site on South State Street, Lowville. The funds were utilized for repairs to the façade and roof, lead and asbestos abatement, and the installation of an elevator to create a multi-use commercial space for small businesses. Tug Hill Artisan Roasters, the property owner, contributed \$64,000 in matching funds.

### **02. Downtown Design Guidelines Grant**

An application for funding to create Downtown Design Guidelines was submitted in July 2023. These guidelines aim to integrate future development with the existing landscape, preserve historical architecture, and encourage aesthetically pleasing developments that enhance the community's appeal. The project, awarded to Lewis County, is expected to be completed by July 2024, contributing to economic stimulation and the long-term vitality of the region.

### **03. Mixed-Use Downtown Stabilization Grant - Stevens Block**

Another NYMS-funded project was initiated in July 2023 to support renovations to the Stevens Block, a brick block building located on North State Street, Lowville NY. The project includes asbestos abatement, roof replacement, elevator shaft construction, and the purchase and installation of an elevator. The building will be revitalized for mixed commercial and residential use, with retail on the first floor and eight market-rate housing units between the second and third floors. Additional funding from Vacant Property Revitalization Funding and Sherburne DG has been secured to supplement the NYMS funds. The project, awarded to Lewis County, is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.

These projects demonstrate the department's commitment to revitalizing Downtown Lowville, fostering economic growth, and preserving the historical and architectural heritage of the region. Through strategic investment and collaboration, these initiatives aim to create a vibrant and attractive downtown environment for residents and visitors alike.



## **Broadband**

Lewis County and the Development Authority of the North Country (DANC) received the final Broadband Inventory Report and BAAT Analysis from ECC Technologies in April 2021. The reports illustrated the lack of broadband access in Lewis County and provided the data needed to apply for broadband infrastructure funding. In order to properly strategize on the path forward, the Board of Legislators Chairman created a Broadband Ad Hoc Committee that is focused on broadband expansion in Lewis County. Our office immediately began working with DANC on grant applications to serve unserved and underserved areas identified in ECC's inventory report. In addition to the CDBG-CV funding received for LMI communities, the following initiatives were pursued:

### **01. Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) 2021 State Economic & Infrastructure Development (SEID) Grant**

In May 2021, Lewis County applied for and was later awarded \$263,053 in NBRC funds to provide affordable, reliable, and high-speed broadband to approximately 1,173 homes and businesses covering a 10-mile radius to include the Village of Copenhagen and surrounding communities that are underserved or have no access to internet. The project includes the purchase and installation of several wireless antennas on an existing telecommunication tower in the Town of Denmark/Pinckney area as well as the installation of three (3) free Wi-Fi access points in the Village of Copenhagen. Funding would also cover an estimated 200 end user devices to eliminate any monetary barriers to users looking to access the service.

In 2022, Lewis County, through formal procurement, was able to award a service provider/construction contract with Hudson Valley Wireless and a structural analysis engineering contract with Tectonic Engineering. The structural analysis on the selected tower was completed in July 2022; however, the report identified that the current state of the structure was inadequate for our needs. With assistance from the Development Authority of the North Country and Hudson Valley Wireless, we were able to move forward with the necessary tower stabilization efforts and launched this much needed service to users in November 2023.

### **02. Hamlet and Village Wi-Fi Access Points**

As part of a county-wide community and economic development initiative, our office, with the support of the Board of Legislators, moved forward with a three-year Spectrum Enterprise agreement to install and manage Wi-Fi access point equipment or coax internet equipment at various Hamlets and Villages across the County. This service is free to the public for the term of the contract. The contract was authorized in December 2021 and has been available for public use since 2022.

03. Spectrum Fiber Expansion

In May 2022, Lewis County entered into an agreement with Spectrum to provide the much-needed infrastructure to approximately 366 passings in the Towns of Croghan, Denmark, Greig, Lowville, and Watson. As part of this agreement, the following addresses will be served with either COAX or FIBER broadband infrastructure within 12 months from the last approved pole permit from National Grid:

**Town of Denmark**

- 10100 – 10387 Old State Road
- 10305 – 10398 Vorce Road
- 3208 – 3618 Roberts Road
- 4101 – 4108 Carlowden Drive
- 3405 – 3923 Halifax Road
- 9597 – 9804 Number Three Road
- 10314 – 10423 Stoddard Road
- 3182 – 3307 Fuller Road
- 10702 – 10728 Harris Road
- 10564 – 10587 Old State Road
- 3636 – 3658 Vandewater Falls Road
- 10104 – 10244 State Route 12
- 10244 Fleming Road
- 9616 – 10420 East Road
- 4135 – 4152 N. Boshart Road
- 9023 – 9226 Ridge Road
- 9755 Railroad Street
- 4527 – 4577 State Route 410
- 4505 Hasar Road

**Town of Croghan**

- 12174 – 12563 Beartown Road

**Town of Greig**

- 5865 – 6570 Partridgeville Road

**Town of Watson**

- 6406 – 6416 Joslyn Road
- 6412 – 6422 Ross Road
- 6424 – 6426 Journeys End Road
- 8381 – 8455 Stony Lake Truck Road

**Town of Lowville**

- 5006 – 5016 Phinny Road
- 4633 – 4729 Shack Road
- 4834 – 4862 Sharp Road
- 7708 – 9088 East Road
- 7849 – 7967 Ridge Road
- 4361 – 4405 Patten Road
- 4359 – 4550 Boshart Road
- 8524 – 8695 State Route 26
- 9001 Hoffman Road
- 4481 – 4594 Arthur Road

Spectrum completed the above build out in December 2023 and high-speed internet service is now available to all of the above addresses.

04. Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) 2023 Catalyst Grant

In May 2023, Lewis County worked alongside the Development Authority of the North Country (DANC) to submit an application for funding under the new Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Catalyst Program to complete a fixed wireless and public fiber expansion project. The application, submitted by DANC, also included broadband expansions in Jefferson County and St. Lawrence County. Fortunately, DANC received the award and is working towards servicing approximately 930 passings with a \$250,000 match investment from Lewis County. The fixed wireless portion of this project will benefit households and businesses in the Towns of Greig, West Turin, Lyonsdale, Leyden, Turin, Lewis, Watson, Osceola, Montague, Martinsburg, and Constableville. Additionally, as part of this project, DANC will deploy fiber in the Towns of Denmark, Pinckney, Lowville, Turin, and West Turin.



## Childcare Initiative

Since 2020, our department has worked with a variety of agencies and organizations to identify childcare expansion opportunities. The Board of Legislators set aside \$200,000 in American Rescue Plan Act Funding (ARPA) to contribute towards the innovative In-home Childcare Training Program, led by Jefferson Community College, in-home childcare grants, childcare facility retention bonuses, and childcare facility staffing expansions. While these initiatives were successful, there was still a recognized void that needed attention.

Building on the home-based childcare programs that Legislators utilized County ARPA funds for, staff worked with Hand in Hand Early Childcare to develop an application for newly available Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Catalyst fundings. This funding could provide the much-needed funding to expand their Lowville facility and establish satellite locations in Harrisville Central School District and South Lewis Central School District. Fortunately, the Commission recognized that this funding could not only help mitigate the childcare desert in Lewis County, it could also pave the way for other schools to take on satellite locations like those proposed by Hand in Hand in their application.



The awarded NBRC Catalyst funds will be used to expand the existing childcare facility in Lowville, adding 2 rooms for 24 additional childcare slots and multiple new full-time and part-time employment opportunities. The \$2,996,422.80 in awarded funds also includes the expansion of Hand in Hand into two, school districts, South Lewis Central School and Harrisville Central School. Each satellite location will add 32 childcare slots and multiple job opportunities. Thanks to innovative ideas from various partner agencies, to include Naturally Lewis, the Community Action Planning Council, Jefferson Community College, and the Lewis County School Districts, this funding will transform childcare in the region. Harrisville Central School District is set to open their center in April 2024 and construction is expected to begin on the Lowville site expansion in Fall 2024. South Lewis Central School District's satellite location is expected to be up and running in the fall of 2026.



## Façade & Streetscape Improvement Program

In September 2023, Lewis County launched the third round of their Façade and Streetscape Improvement Program in which nearly \$200,000 was awarded to municipalities and businesses in the County's Hamlets and Villages. We received a total of 14 applications for approximately \$420,000 in requested funding and, ultimately, we were able to award funding for 8 projects. Awards were made to businesses and municipalities from the Hamlet of Harrisville to the Village of Turin.

This office will continue to monitor and administrate the grant program on behalf of Lewis County. Grant recipients have until December 1, 2024 to complete their projects. Another round of funding, up to \$200,000 in budgeted County funds, will be requested as part of the 2025 Planning & Community Development budget.

### Round 2 Finished Projects



# Façade & Streetscape Program | 2023 Awardees

## ① Harrisville Free Library

\$11,122.26 | Town of Diana

## ② Alex DeLong

\$24,150.00 | Village of Croghan

## ③ Elements Day Spa

\$50,000.00 | Village of Lowville

## ④ James Henry Development

\$56,250.00 | Village of Lowville

## ⑤ Terrence Thisse

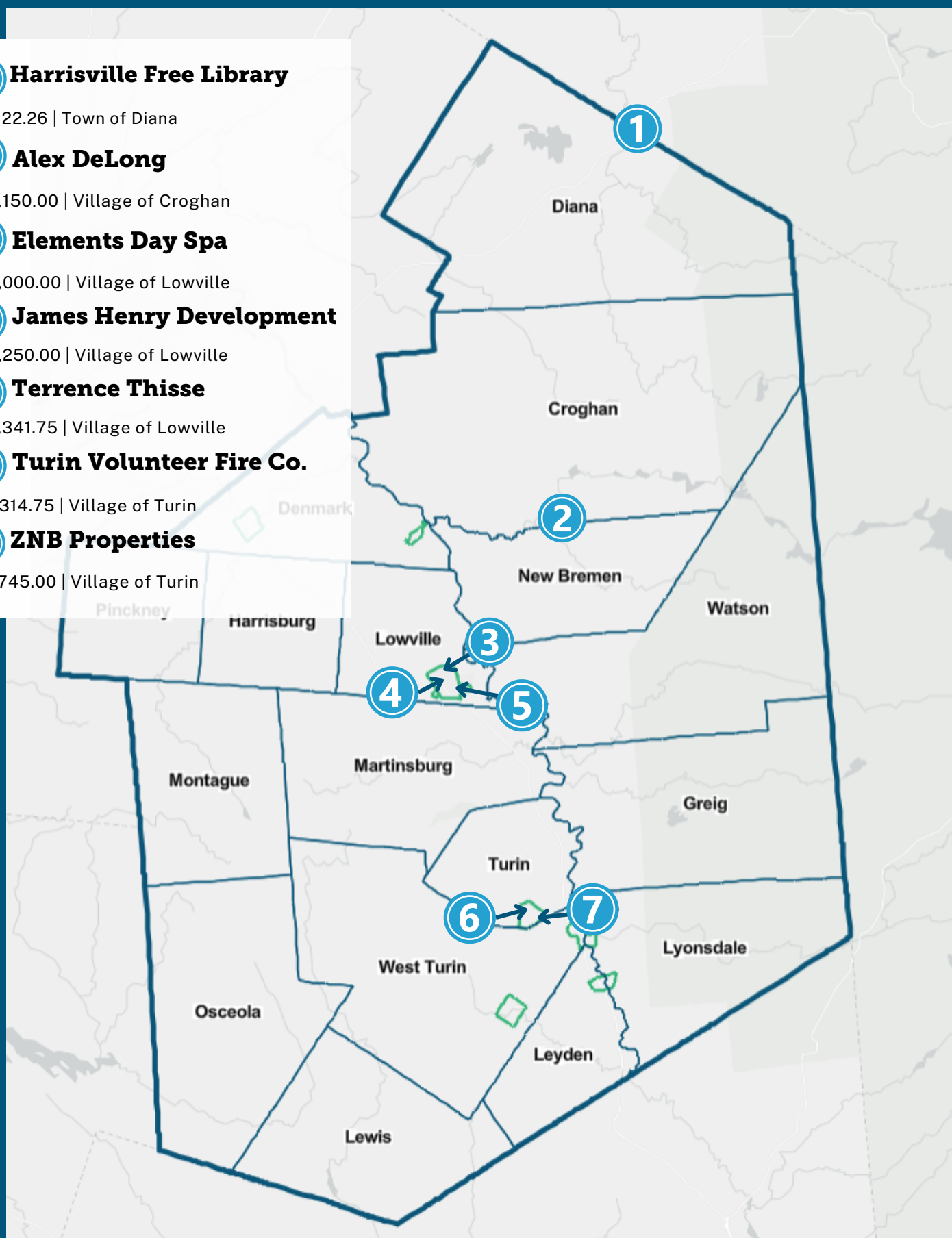
\$25,341.75 | Village of Lowville

## ⑥ Turin Volunteer Fire Co.

\$13,314.75 | Village of Turin

## ⑦ ZNB Properties

\$17,745.00 | Village of Turin





## **Municipal Water Infrastructure Planning Assistance**

Our department realizes that community development, economic development, and public health are directly impacted by the accessibility of a safe and healthy water supply. Staff has worked with water districts to implement the goals identified in the Southern and Central Lewis County Water Studies and will continue to support improvement and expansion efforts. This year, we began assisting water districts with Preliminary Engineering Reports (PERs) so that they can begin moving forward with implementing the recommendations of these plans and apply for the funding necessary to complete their projects. In 2023, we provided monetary assistance to the Town of Turin, Village of Turin, and Village of Copenhagen.

The Village of Turin's water system consists of two groundwater wells, a manganese greensand filtration and chlorination system, a 200,000-gallon elevated water storage tank, and a distribution system. The last major water system improvements project was completed in 1995 when the wells, treatment system, tank, and distribution system improvements were brought on-line to replace 90-year old infrastructure. With the "newer" infrastructure approaching 30 years of age, Lewis County is assisting the Village with undertaking necessary improvements and the Town needs to establish a formal water district. They have contracted with Barton and Loguidice (B&L) to complete a Professional Engineering Report (PER) and prepare the Village and Town of Turin for funding applications. In June 2023, B&L submitted the projects to be listed on the Intended Use Plan (IUP) and began the grant writing process to fund the implementation of said projects. In December 2023, the Village of Turin received notice that our efforts were rewarded with a \$4,866,750 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law General Supplemental (BIL-GS) grant and Base Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Hardship interest free financing of \$2,085,750.

The Village of Copenhagen Water District serves approximately 850 people with an estimated total water usage of 65,000 gpd. Due to recent water supply challenges, sometimes landing the Village of Copenhagen in a state of emergency, Lewis County is assisting the Village with identifying the best course of action to ensure users have a healthy and reliable water supply for decades to come. BCA has been contracted to evaluate an interconnection with the Village of West Carthage's water supply while also investigating water system main and laterals, as required by the new Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (OCRR), to ensure compliance. This is expected to yield a final report in the coming months.

With the success of the 2023 County investments, we've already received requests from the Village of Lyons Falls, Village of Croghan, Village of Constableville, and Town of Lowville to assist with their water district projects. In December 2023, we assisted both municipalities with the development of RFQs to secure engineers for their projects and grant applications. Our 2024 budget includes the funds necessary to complete PERs, environmental records, and grant applications for these projects.





## Lewis County Public Transportation

Throughout 2023, the Planning & Community Development Department diligently managed Lewis County's public transportation system, overseeing daily operations, coordinating with the contractor, Birnie Bus, and handling various administrative tasks such as reporting to NYSDOT for STOA and CARES Act reimbursements, and preparing annual reports and budgets for federal funding. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, significant achievements were made in public transportation-related activities:

### 01. Route Updates & Expansions

Management of various routes including four Fixed Routes, the Lowville Loop, seasonal transportation to Old Forge, the Utica Connector, JCC Connector Route, and Fort Drum Circuit.

Notable achievements include the successful 12th season of the Old Forge service, serving 7,296 riders despite pandemic challenges, and the sustained operation of the JCC Connector Route.

Collaborations with organizations ensured transportation services for events such as the 15th Annual Cream Cheese Festival.

### 02. Renewed Partnerships

Reestablishment of the partnership with The Arc, Oneida Lewis, in June 2022, bolstering routes and benefiting both entities until 2024.

### 03. Van Pool Service

Launch of a vanpool service in 2022, aimed at providing access to employment opportunities, with ongoing efforts to implement the program effectively.

## 04. Transit App

Collaboration with Transit and Swiftly resulted in the launch of the Transit App in August 2023, enabling riders to plan trips and track buses in real-time.

## 05. Marketing Campaign

Execution of a comprehensive marketing campaign with local media outlets and Spectrum Reach, enhancing visibility and awareness of Lewis County Public Transportation.

## 06. Lewis County Transportation Task Force

Leadership in the Lewis County Transportation Task Force, facilitating four meetings in 2023 to address transportation needs and bridge gaps through local and regional efforts.

## 07. Additional Assets

Acquisition of assets including buses and bus stop shelters through various grants and funding programs, ensuring continued enhancement and modernization of the transportation system.

## 08. Financial Planning

Successful securing of 2021-2023 5311 funds, totaling \$1,037,527, to support various transportation expenses, with funds expected upon filing the 2023 Annual Report in March 2024.



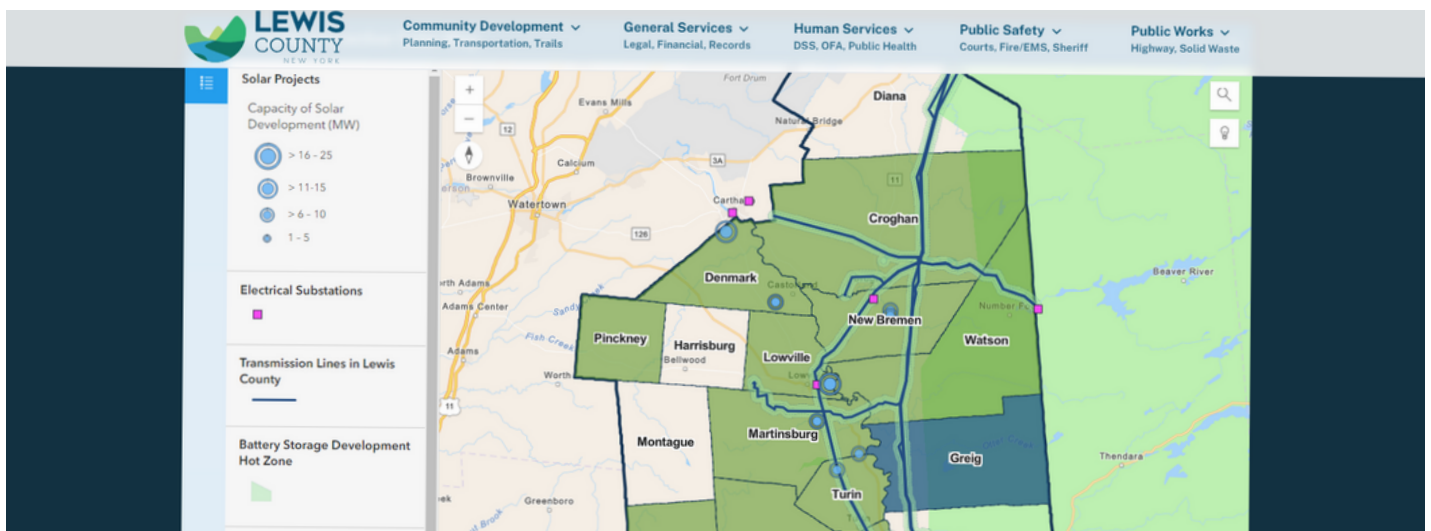
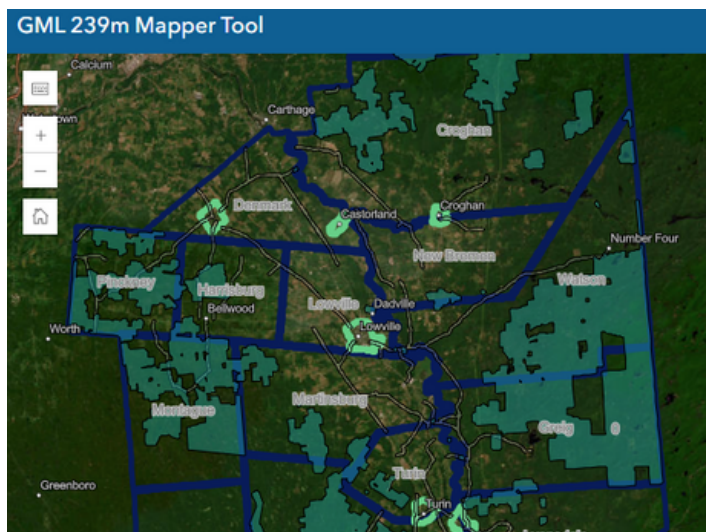
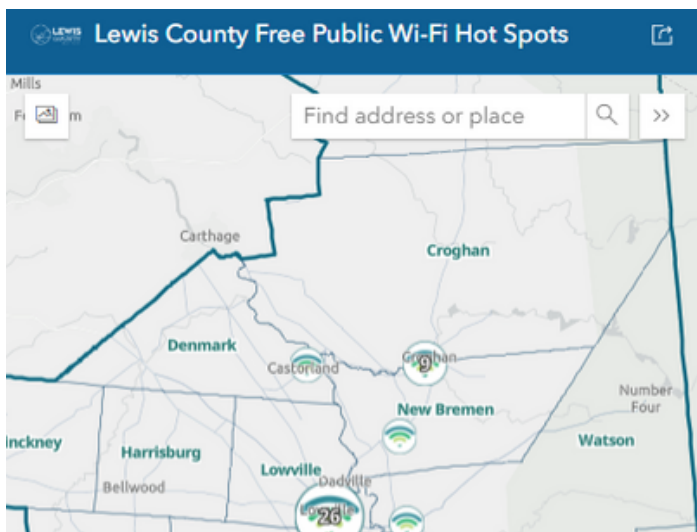


## Website Updates

Staff has continued to update and maintain the Planning & Community Development and Public Transportation pages on the County's new website. Department staff have put a lot of time and effort into our website so that it is all encompassing. From Broadband to our Housing Hub to Grant Opportunities, we've put together a comprehensive resource for public and municipal use.

### 01. Interactive Maps

The website now features interactive maps, including the Lewis County Solar Map, which shows where electrical substations are located, where the upgraded transmission lines are located, and municipalities with solar laws or moratoria, and the County Planning Board map which helps municipalities determine whether or not a project needs to be sent to the County for 239-m review. There is also a map app that was created to show "Lewis County Free Wi-Fi Hot Spots" throughout the County.



## **02. Grant Opportunities**

The Grant Headquarters page highlights current grant opportunities as well as programs like the Lewis County Façade and Streetscape Improvement Program.

## **03. Municipal Land Use Laws**

All land use laws for each municipality are available on our website under “Municipal Land Use Laws” section, making them more accessible and easy to find.

## **04. Housing Hub**

The “Housing Hub” on our website contains a wealth of information about housing in Lewis County. It has data and information that is useful to municipalities, as well as documents and information that is useful to tenants and landlords. As the Fair Housing Office for Lewis County, it is important to provide resources to residents that wish to submit Fair Housing Complaints, which is why our staff worked to create a Fair Housing Discrimination form that is also accessible under the “Housing Hub” on our website.

## **Plan LC**

Over the last several years, we’ve worked with many of our municipalities on a variety of initiatives. From zoning revisions to broadband deployment to grant applications, our goal is to support and assist municipalities as best we can. While we do focus much of our efforts on individual municipal needs, we work on a variety of county-wide initiatives, such as the Agricultural Enhancement Plan, Complete Streets Plan, Childcare Expansions, and Broadband Deployment, that aim to benefit all Towns and Villages in the County.

In an effort to keep our local officials updated and informed on our department’s county-wide initiatives, land use topics, grant programs, and everything in between, we’ve ‘taken our show on the road!’ Each month, we work with municipal leaders to schedule an informational session where we review any current initiatives and open it up for each community to share their needs with us. In 2023, we visited the Village of Copenhagen, Town of West Turin, and Village of Turin. Plans are already underway to schedule a Plan LC session in the Town of Greig to kick off 2024.



# Climate Smart Communities

## Certified Bronze

### **Climate Smart Communities: Bronze Certification**

Lewis County became the **first County in the North Country** region to become a Bronze Certified Climate Smart Community on October 2, 2023 when Governor Kathy Hochul unveiled the most recent group of communities that have earned certification. This initiative backs local endeavors to address the economic, social, and environmental challenges stemming from climate change. Our office has been working to attain this certification since 2021.

The NYS Climate Smart Communities Program recognizes municipalities for their efforts in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and taking steps to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The bronze certification is awarded to municipalities that have successfully implemented a range of sustainable practices, policies, and initiatives.

Lewis County received its designation as a Climate Smart Community for 28 actions already taken over the years from 9 different categories. Some of those actions include:

- Government Operations GHG Inventory
- Interior Lighting Upgrades, Benchmarking – Municipal Buildings
- Access to Public Transit
- Climate Resilient Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Solar Energy Installation.

This year, we also began an application through NYS DEC in collaboration with Della Terra Farm to establish a Lewis County Organics Waste Management Pilot Program. If awarded, this grant would be used to provide education to the community about organics and the importance of reducing food waste, provide residential compost pick-up for select municipalities, as well as earn points towards maintaining Lewis County's Climate Smart Communities bronze certification.

# 2023 Grant Awards

Totaling:

\$7,831,139.80

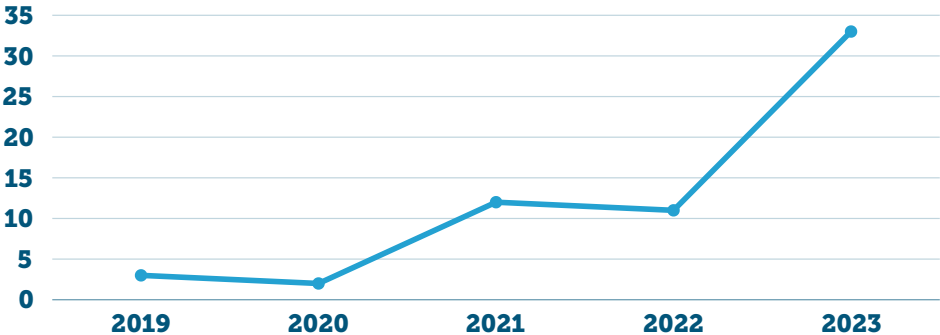
33

Grants applied  
for in 2023

+1000%

Increase in  
applications since 2019

Grant Applications Submitted by Year



PRIORITY AREA	PROJECT	PARTNER	FUNDING AWARDED
Broadband	NBRC Broadband Expansion	DANC	\$800,000.00
Childcare	NBRC Childcare	Hand in Hand	\$2,996,422.80
Hazard Mitigation	Lewis County Health Services Generator		\$630,000.00
	FEMA BRIC Hazard Mitigation Plan Update		\$150,000.00
Lewis Co. Public Transportation	2023 NYS DOT 5311		\$1,037,527.00
Housing	NYMS Downtown Stabilization: Steven's Block		\$500,000.00
	CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program	Snow Belt Housing, Inc.	\$621,950.00
Community Development	NYMS Technical Assistance: Lewis County Design Guidelines		\$20,000.00
	National Grid Brownfield Development: Lyons Falls School		\$175,240.00
	RESTORE NY: Tug Hill Artisan Roasters	Village of Lowville	\$900,000.00

# Budget Highlights

## 2023

### Community Development Funds

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Grant Application Development/Local Contributions	\$61,039
Water Infrastructure Planning	\$26,225
Studies & Plans	\$13,000
Architect/Engineer	\$36,435
Training/Education for Municipalities	\$2,657
Transportation Services	\$871
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$140,227</b>

### Land Use Planning Policies

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County-wide Complete Streets Plan & Policy Development	\$49,104
Policy Planning Documents	\$65
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$49,169</b>

### Grant Administrative Revenue

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Grant Admin Revenue	<b>+ \$94,658</b>
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# 2024 Department Goals

We are always looking to build on our past successes and learn from our shortcomings. In 2024, we hope to focus on the following initiatives in order to build on the momentum that our collaborations have built up.



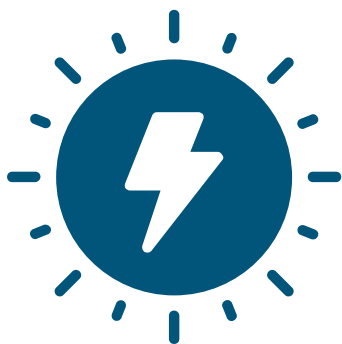
## 01. Housing Development

In alignment with New York State's housing expansion goals, we hope to assist municipalities with their Pro Housing Communities Designation and land funding for various private housing projects.



## 02. Water Infrastructure

Building on the success of our initial PER investments, we are looking to continue to provide the technical assistance and seed funding needed to access water improvement and expansion grants for at least 4 systems.



## 03. Solar Policy Development

With the National Grid capacity increases expected in the coming years, we will be assisting municipalities to ensure each Town and Village has the appropriate solar land use laws and overlay districts established.