

# 2019

PUBLIC POLICY

# AGENDA



AMHERST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE CHAIRS

## Welcome 2019!

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce enters the new year with new investors, new community partners, new members, new programs and a renewed commitment to improve the economic climate in our region.

With the backdrop of political change in Albany, the Chamber remains focused on the issues outlined in our Public Policy Agenda that help create an environment where businesses can prosper.

But we can't do this alone. We are asking you to **#StepUp** and get involved in government. We have engaged several elected officials from both sides of the political aisle representing Amherst and beyond on their priorities for 2019.

As you will see in our **#StepUp** video, courtesy of Chamber member Nickel City Graphics, they stand with the Amherst Chamber dedicated to continuing our region's economic resurgence.



We look forward to working with you throughout 2019 on these public policy matters.

Thank you for your support.



Laura Zaepfel  
*Chair of the Board*



Mary Grace Welch  
*Co-Chair Economic Dev./  
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Mike Pietkiewicz  
*Co-Chair Economic Dev./  
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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

## Follow Us



The Amherst Chamber will continue to follow our strategic plan with a focus on supporting programs, policies and other strategic initiatives that facilitate economic growth in Amherst, Erie County and the Buffalo Niagara region. Our region will need to focus heavily on a concise plan that is targeted and well-conceived in nature from infrastructure upgrades, responsible redevelopment of existing structures and the new economy. The Chamber is uniquely positioned through its membership and relationships with like-minded organizations not only to advocate, but deliver real results going forward.



**Western New York  
Regional Economic  
Development Council**

## SMART HIGHWAYS:

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce supports Governor Cuomo's call for the full implementation of a cashless toll system throughout the Thruway by the end of 2020. This much-needed upgrade to our Thruway will alleviate traffic, specifically the buildup at the Williamsville tolls.

## THRUWAY INTERCHANGE:

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce will continue its support of properly assessing the possibility of a Youngs Road interchange that would allow better access for commuters to and from our town, as well as another



access point to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport. Working together with the Town of Amherst, the NFTA and the State of New York, we hope to make a final determination on whether this type of change is in the near future.

## WESTWOOD COUNTRY CLUB / AUDUBON GOLF COURSE:

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce will work with our partners in government and lend its resources in helping to strategically redesign these two centralized pieces of property within our town. These two properties are not only centrally located within the town, they are also within proximity to the University at Buffalo. The opportunity to develop these two pieces of property holds a unique distinction of having a dramatic ripple effect throughout the entire town. It is imperative that we continue to foster a working partnership ensuring the most reasonable and economically responsible plan is attained, along with exploring all possible funding streams within the state and federal system to assist in creatively developing these parcels.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

## (CONTINUED)

### **NFTA / The Amherst Extension / DL&W:**

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce continues to support the expansion of the Metro Rail to provide a one-seat ride from a new DL&W Station at Canalside/Key Bank Center through the UB North Campus. Expanded Metro Rail provides direct, high capacity access to nearly 20 percent of the region's jobs and provides an asset for underutilized sites like the Boulevard Mall and DL&W Terminal that make redevelopment more competitive than other similarly situated sites in similarly-sized metro areas. Expanding our current transit system is also vital in our efforts to attract larger companies to our region, as was reflected in the Amazon RFP. Providing residents the opportunity to travel throughout our region in a safe, comfortable manner is critical to our continued growth and prosperity, as studies have shown traditional transportation habits may not reflect those of Millennials and Generation Z.



The Chamber supports the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council's grant allowing the NFTA to take the third step in its continued exploration of the feasibility of DL&W Linear Park. This type of urban rail corridor in a park-like setting has proven successful in other markets such as Detroit, Chicago and New York City. This endeavor will assist in the continuation of creating a more walkable community from South Buffalo to Downtown.

### **Opportunity Zones:**

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce recognizes the benefit of utilizing Qualified Opportunity Zones as provided for under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Under this policy, every census tract along Niagara Falls Boulevard and the Interstate 990 Corridor in Amherst are eligible for the QOZ designation. Incentive plans, such as brownfield tax credits or historic tax credits for adaptive reuse are not useful in most first-ring suburbs. It is our hope that this program will be accessed to assist future redevelopment of outdated singleuse office parks and struggling big box retail locations.

### **Predictive Scheduling:**

In 2018, the New York State Labor Department proposed changes to the regulations for "just-in-time," "call-in," or "on-call" scheduling of those covered by the Minimum Wage Order for Miscellaneous Industries and Occupations. The original proposal was opposed by the Chamber and the Department of Labor has since implemented revisions. The Chamber agrees with finding a solution that balances the needs of both the employee and the employer. Revising the original proposal for call-in pay for an employee from a 14 day notice to 72 hours exemplifies striking that balance, however some of these regulations remain overly burdensome for small business.

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY (CONTINUED)

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### Tip Wage Workers:

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce remains steadfastly opposed to eliminating the tip credit. The tip credit allows tipped workers to be paid a lower minimum wage, as long as they earn at least the full minimum wage when their tips are included. Without a tip credit, most employers will do away with tipping, thus cutting the hourly wage of workers dramatically, which in many cases, currently exceeds the minimum wage. This policy is not only detrimental to tip wage workers, but to restaurant owners who will pass this additional cost onto the consumer.



### Property Tax Cap - Mandate Relief:

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce supports Governor Cuomo and his agenda in making the 2% property tax cap permanent. New Yorkers pay some of the highest property taxes in the country compared to home values. With Federal changes to state and local income tax deductions, it is even more imperative that we provide a slowdown in the growth of property taxes in New York State. In doing this, the state must eliminate the burden of

unfunded mandates such as Medicaid on our local governments. Continuing to shift this unfunded mandate back to the state will help local governments hold the line on their own budgets.



# HEALTH CARE POLICY

## Single Payer:

The increasing cost of providing health care is impacting the ability of our businesses to compete and, consequently, the Amherst Chamber of Commerce fully supports legislation that would reduce health care costs. While the New York Health Act would address the approximately 5% of New Yorkers who remain uninsured, the Chamber has concerns about the ability of this proposal, as written, to effectively impact costs and could potentially affect the ability to control health plans. The estimated cost of the legislation ranges from \$92 – \$226 billion that would need to be raised through new taxes and fees levied on the state's taxpayers, and relies on the assumption the federal government would grant waivers to redirect current Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP enrollees into the new program. Currently, over 50% of New York residents are covered by employer-sponsored insurance (referred to as self-insured plans) and are exempt from this proposal, further skewing the funding mechanisms and risk pool assessments. The Chamber instead welcomes conversations and legislation addressing the underlying costs of care to ensure that healthcare is affordable and accessible to everyone, regardless of their health status.

## Market Stability:

Since multiple attempts to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act (ACA) have not come to fruition, the Amherst Chamber of Commerce urges Congress to focus on market stabilization to ensure consumers have access to affordable health coverage. Bipartisan market stabilization measures could include appropriating funds for cost sharing reductions, a dedicated stability fund to help support care for those with high-cost conditions, the repeal of the ACA's medical device and health insurance taxes and more flexibility for states.

## Drug Costs:

Spending on drugs has continued to increase and is consuming a greater part of total health care spending, and the Amherst Chamber supports proposals that look to reverse this trend. There are a number of players within the delivery of a drug, creating a complicated and opaque system of various payment schemes of rebates and third party payments. The Chamber appreciates the efforts that have been made at both the federal and state levels to reduce costs. To build on these efforts, the Amherst Chamber would support legislation that further advances this work, especially bills that implement greater transparency, early warning of drug price increases, and a prohibition on mid-year price increases which cause confusion and financial instability for insurers and consumers.



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# HEALTH CARE POLICY (CONTINUED)

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## The Opioid Epidemic and the Mental Health Access Crisis:

Our community members' need for Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Mental Health treatment is at an all-time high. One in ten people receive the SUD treatment they need. One in four people suffer from a mental health disorder. The crisis we are experiencing has caused the average life expectancy to decrease for the third consecutive year. The Amherst Chamber of Commerce fully understands the demand for services put on our local treatment providers and supports the Federal legislation

(H.R.6) enacted to support SUD patients and their families. To continue to combat this crisis,

we need to ensure that behavioral healthcare providers are treated as equal partners in a patient's overall healthcare. We support the need for parity, because the real cost lies in not treating behavioral health disorders. Behavioral healthcare reimbursement rates must be fully loaded to include the wrap-around and support services, such as family intervention necessary for successful outcomes. The Chamber also supports investment in the treatment industry's workforce,



which is significantly under resourced as compared to other healthcare specialties. We support loan forgiveness for licensed behavioral healthcare professionals.





# HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce will continue its efforts to increase access and affordability of higher education for the residents of our region and across the State. With the changing dynamics and priorities of our state legislators, the Chamber will continue to work closely with elected officials and other policymakers to help ensure that any changes within the higher education policy are fiscally responsible while maintaining the utmost standards.



The Town of Amherst is unique in having three major institutions of higher education (SUNY UB, SUNY Erie and Daemen College) that continue to be significant economic development drivers in the region. The Amherst Chamber of Commerce continues to support high priority public policy initiatives that will allow both public and private colleges and universities to prepare the workforce of the 21st century for Buffalo, the region and the State. To these ends, the Chamber supports the following initiatives in 2019:

- Renewal of the Higher Education Capital (HECap) Matching Grant Program to meet critical higher education infrastructure needs while creating jobs in our region. This is a cost effective, 3:1 higher education-State matching program that has benefited both public and private institutions over the past decade;
- Provide capital funding for a new building for the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences at the University at Buffalo. Enrollment at the School of Engineering has grown by 60% in the last five years, and there is a high demand for engineering graduates from area business and industry. The University at Buffalo needs a new building, on the North Campus in Amherst, for classrooms, laboratories and collaborative learning spaces to accommodate this growth and demand.
- Fully fund the State-based Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) that allows both public and private institutions to make college more affordable for low income and first-generation students and their families;
- Establish a predictable base level of State funding: setting a “floor” for each campus, which will provide the colleges – for the first time – an ability to plan for their future costs and programmatic development;
- Close New York’s skills gap by supporting the expansion of community college workforce development programs and supporting the adult students seeking these career pathways critical to our State’s economic growth by increasing the traditional State base of FTE by \$125, from \$2,847 to \$2,972 per student. This proposal will enable community colleges to strategically plan for future operations, as well as grow existing high-demand programs; add new technical and health science programs that are costly by their nature; and provide services essential to student success. This proposal is endorsed by all 30 community college presidents, the New York Community College Trustees, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, the SUNY Student Assembly and the SUNY Board of Trustees.



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# ENERGY POLICY

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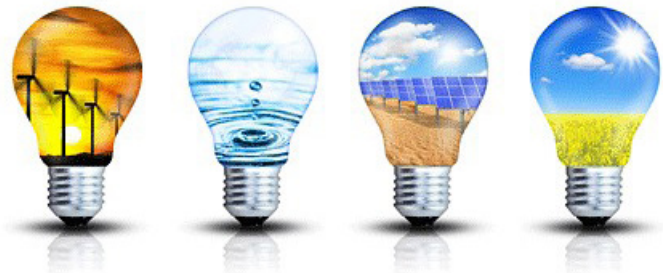


As renewable penetration in the upstate regions exceeds the load in those same regions, additional energy transfers from upstate renewable resources to downstate load centers are necessary, subject to transmission system capability.

- Failure to expand transmission capabilities from upstate to downstate will induce market inefficiencies, including increased curtailment of renewable generation to maintain transmission system reliability or generator deactivations notice from units needed for reliability.
- Further, if markets are unable to produce appropriate price signals due to the expansion of renewable capacity without an adequate expansion of transmission capability, the goal of achieving 50% renewable energy generation by 2030 is jeopardized because energy delivery from renewable resources to downstate load centers will be constrained.

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce supports National Grid's six year deployment plan to introduce Advanced Metering Infrastructure to customers. Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) or "smart metering" will allow customers

to receive real-time energy consumption and cost information that will allow more active participation in the marketplace. The goal is to have customers become smart consumers by reducing electric demand and market supply prices.



We continue to strongly support the construction of National Fuel's Northern Access pipeline. The Amherst Chamber stands united with organized labor and in particular, the Building and Construction Trades Councils in Erie, Niagara and Cattaraugus Counties. Northern Access would have a significant economic impact by creating up to 1,200 skilled trade jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenues for local and state governments. National Fuel is committed to investing approximately \$500 million into this critically important clean, natural gas pipeline infrastructure project without seeking any taxpayer money.



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