



## **Background and Planning Process**

The North East Community Center, Inc. (NECC), a 501 (c) 3 non-profit based in Millerton, NY provides social support services in northeastern Dutchess County. Communities NECC serves include: Amenia, Wassaic, Dover Plains, Pine Plains, Millbrook and Stanford, as well as some adjoining towns in Columbia County and northwestern Connecticut. NECC currently has a budget of \$3,414,253 and 41 full time and part time employees, as well as many volunteers and collaborative partners.

NECC's last Strategic Plan spanned the time period of 2017 – 2021. The five strategic priorities outlined in that plan were:

1. Continue and Improve Existing Programs; Evaluate and Prioritize New and Expanded Programs
2. Strengthen and Broaden Financial Base for Ongoing Operations, Facility Expansion, Staff Enhancement and Program Implementation and Growth
3. Maximize Staff and Board Effectiveness and Support
4. Work toward the Creation of an Accessible, Functional Community Center Facility for the Future
5. Enhance our Community Visibility, Outreach, Engagement and Ongoing Dialogue.

The successful achievement of most of the Strategic Priorities of the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, the extraordinary challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March of 2020 and other organizational needs led the Board of NECC to choose a more focused approach for its next Strategic Planning process. This process sought to clarify and affirm the understanding among board members and management staff of what NECC needed to accomplish in the next three years, 2024-2026. NECC hired Anne Gardon of *Strategies for Change Now* as a consultant to guide NECC through the process.

## **Planning Process**

The Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG), which was diverse in terms of expertise, length of tenure and ability to participate, was formed to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives from the board and management team.

First, Anne Gardon conducted in-depth interviews with the members of the SPWG. The SPWG members were asked to share their perceptions of NECC, its role and the context in which the organization operates and further they were asked what aspirations they held for NECC's future. The SPWG used the results of these interviews as a jumping off point for discussion on the first of four half-day workshops. Over the course of these meetings the group worked to develop a shared understanding of the external and internal context in which NECC operates. From this agreement the group extracted three strategic priorities to be the focus of the next three years. Based on these

strategic priorities the group described five aspirations that will describe our reality in 2026. During these deliberations the group also created an updated Mission and Vision Statement for NECC.

### **NECC Staff and Board Retreat**

The Key Findings (Appendix A) together with a draft Strategic Framework formed the foundation for the discussions at the Joint Staff and Board Retreat in June of 2023. The work product of the retreat is the Strategic Framework graphic (Appendix B), which was presented to the Board for review and edits, and then a final vote.

### **Strategic Framework**

The Strategic Framework begins with a reworked Mission Statement, NECC's Statement of Purpose – our WHY.

**Mission: NECC advances the well-being of all people in our rural region by responding to their diverse needs through services, programs, and partnerships.**

Our Vision Statement states what we want our community to look like in the future.

**Vision: Everyone in our rural region has equal access to the support and opportunities they need to thrive.**

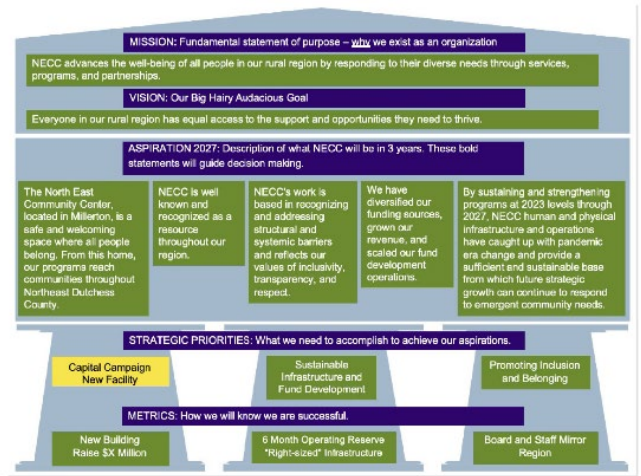
Our Aspirations for 2027 will guide our decision making for the next three years.

- The North East Community Center, Inc., located in Millerton, is a safe and welcoming space where all people belong. From this home, its programs reach communities throughout northeast Dutchess County
- NECC is well known and recognized as a resource throughout its region.
- NECC's work is based on recognizing and addressing structural and systemic barriers, and reflects its values of inclusivity, transparency and respect.
- NECC has diversified its funding sources, grown its revenue, and scaled its fund development operations.
- By sustaining and strengthening programs at 2023 levels through 2027, NECC's human and physical infrastructure and operations have caught up with COVID-19 pandemic era change and provide a sufficient and sustainable base from which future strategic growth can continue to respond to emergent community needs.

The following Strategic Priorities will be the focus of the next three years:

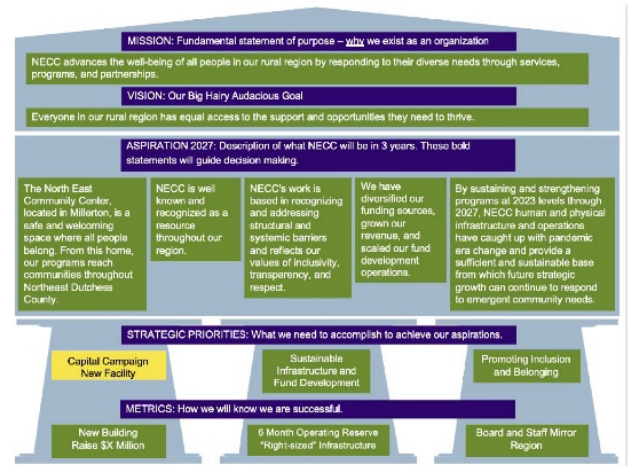
**Capital Campaign: Raise monies necessary to build new space.**

- Key Dates:
- 9/1/2023 Form Capital Campaign Committee
  - 10/1/2023 Hire Campaign Consultant; Launch Capital Campaign Feasibility Study
  - 12/1/2023 Complete Capital Campaign Feasibility Study
  - 12/15/2023 Present above results to Board; Board decision on Capital Campaign Goal



**Building: Where will NECC live, what will our new space look like?**

- Key Dates:
- 8/15/2023
    - Form Building Committee
    - Identify Locations for New Space
    - Evaluate the Locations
    - Present Options and Make Recommendation to the Board
  - 9/1/2023 Review Space Needs Assessment
  - 12/15/2023 Present Recommendations to the Board; Board Decision on Building



**Intersection of Building and Capital Campaign:**

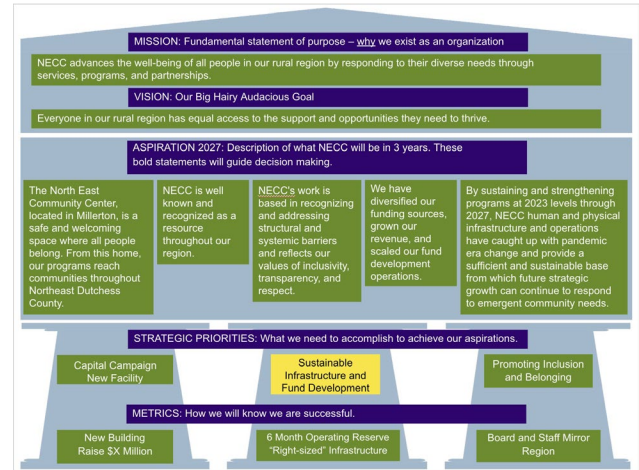
The findings of the Capital Campaign Committee will inform the ability of NECC to implement the recommendations of the Building Committee.

- Key Date:
- 2/26/2024 Final Decision on Building – Capital Campaign Committee, Building Committee and Finance Committee to develop Plan to Board

## Right-sized Infrastructure:

### Assumptions:

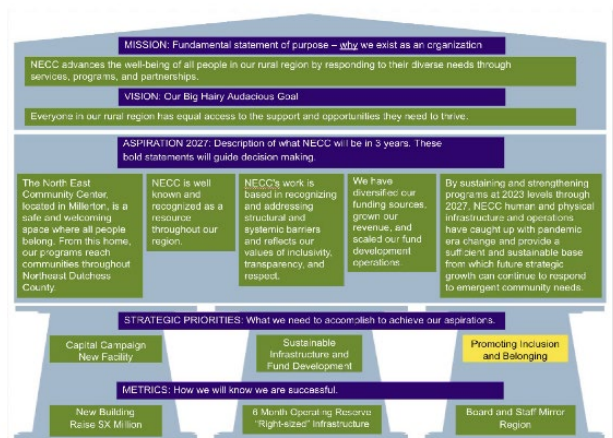
- Steady state programming (no growth)
- Staff assessment: need more grant writing capacity
- Budget has tripled, need to increase unrestricted fundraising to get back to efforts comprising 28% of the budget (has to grow in proportion to budget)
  - Build fundraising (admin) capacity to raise \$750,000 annually in unrestricted funds in order to meet increased need and contribute to reserve
  - The Board will continue to support the ED in her work with Staff and Board Committees to meet ongoing developments in the organization



## Promote Inclusion and Belonging:

### Key Dates:

- |           |                                                                                           |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8/28/2023 | Presentation of Diversity Audit Form to Board                                             |
| 9/1/2023  | Form Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement Committee                                  |
| Oct. 2023 | Complete Board Diversity and Skills Audit; Present results to the Board                   |
| Jan. 2024 | Present Draft Board DEI Statement to Board                                                |
| 2024      | Develop Board Staff process for review and creation of final organizational DEI Statement |



Once preliminary tasks and decisions as outlined above have been completed, further goals and objectives will be developed, and the plan will be updated on an ongoing basis. While this plan is less detailed than previous strategic plans and as may be customary, the Board at this point feels that this approach will provide the necessary flexibility to meet that strategic objective outlined in this plan.

### NORTH EAST COMMUNITY CENTER, INC.

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*NECC is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Program Provider, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, political belief, marital status, veteran's status, or disability.*

## Appendix A:

Date: June 7, 2023  
To: NECC Board and Management Team  
From: Irene Banning on behalf of Strategic Plan Working Group  
Re: **Proposed Strategic Framework: Executive Summary**

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As we approach the date of our Strategic Planning Retreat on June 13, we would like to provide you with an update on the work of the Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG). This memo will summarize the planning process to date, and the shared understanding that led to the proposed “Strategic Framework” we offer as the basis for our retreat. The retreat is the opportunity for all of us -- Board and Management Team -- to be in conversation about the proposed direction of the NECC for the next 3 years and to build agreements about the strategic priorities that will drive our important work together.

### **Background and Process**

At the beginning of this year the Board decided to embark on a new Strategic Planning Process, with Anne Gardon of Strategies for Change Now as the consultant guiding the process. The Board specifically decided on a streamlined strategic planning process that would seek to clarify an emerging understanding among board members and the management staff about what NECC needs to accomplish in the next three years, 2024-2026. All agreed the desired results will be a concise, clear guide for decision-making and growth.

A Strategic Plan Working Group was formed to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives from the board and management team in terms of expertise, length of tenure and ability to participate.

The members included:

- Executive Director Christine Sargent
- Board Chair Irene Banning
- Family Program Director Jessica Raymond
- Board Member and Chair of Fundraising Committee Nancy Elting
- Administrative Manager Mollee Alquesta
- Board Member Julie Fajgenbaum
- Community Program Director Paul Bengtson
- Board Member Kevin McAliley
- Youth Program Director Brendan Wolfe.

Anne first interviewed all the members of the SPWG. In the interviews the participants were asked to share their perceptions of NECC, its role and the context in which the organization operates, and further they were asked what aspirations they held for NECC’s future. The SPWG used the results of these interviews as a jumping-off point for discussion in our first half-day workshop on April 11th. Over four meetings the group worked to develop a shared understanding of the external and internal context in which NECC operates, from which we extracted three strategic priorities essential to the next three years. Based on these three strategic priorities we created five aspirations that will describe our reality in 2026. We simultaneously created an updated Mission and Vision statement for NECC. A summary of key highlights from our discussion of the context follows with sample quotes from the interview results.

### **Key Findings**

**Environmental Trends and Challenges.** Through the interviews and our discussions, the SPWG gained a shared understanding of the environment in which we operate. Not just Millerton and North East, but the entire region we serve, is experiencing a substantial shift in its demographics. We are experiencing an ever-growing wealth divide in previously working-class communities. The increasing cost of living everybody is experiencing particularly impacts those less well off.

Our communities are losing young people and families, the population is skewing towards older, together with a growing immigrant population.

With all these changes our communities are experiencing increasing food insecurity, lack access to affordable housing, while the lack of public transportation leads to social isolation and creates barriers to employment for the working poor and youth participation in our programs. Medical and mental health services are difficult to access. All of this is occurring in a county and state funding environment which does not prioritize rural communities. It is important to note that many of these realities impact our own workforce and the NECC's ability to hire and retain staff.

NECC also calls Millerton home, where there has been a perception of NECC's leadership as not inclusive of the local, established community. Many people still do not understand what NECC really does, leading some folks to perceive NECC as less inclusive of working with others (or their ideas) than we could be.

### **Internal Organizational Needs and Opportunities**

A new Space: In this process we affirmed what the board and staff have known for many years: We need more and better space. Furthermore, we agreed that the space NECC inhabits needs to be a welcoming and attractive community center and one that enables a positive workplace culture. A space that allows programs to be co-located and to eliminate program silos and a space that represents NECC's substantive role in the community. Our current space has accessibility issues and is expensive and difficult to maintain.

- *"The Board has committed to addressing the space needs."*
- *"(We want to) live into our name...The North East Community Center will be a hub of activities and relationships."*
- *"(In the current facility) we lack sufficient interweaving among programs and with administration" (Interview response)*

Administrative capacity and infrastructure. Furthermore, over the last three years NECC has experienced substantial growth. The Covid epidemic and its demands required the expansion of several of our services; NECC was presented with strategic opportunities such as the Early Learning Program (ELP), adding an entirely new program. The last Strategic Plan called for an organizational restructuring and staffing up. That has been completed. NECC took steps to become competitive as an employer and must maintain that competitiveness. We also have grown our fund development capabilities to support this growth.

- *"(We need to) ensure administrative supports are built into every step of program growth."*

Sustainability. So, while we currently find ourselves fully staffed, we need to take time to determine how we can sustain our current successes. There is a strong sense that we must forgo expansion for the next three years, but rather reinforce and solidify our management and administrative structure and to develop leadership capacity across all programs and levels, in order to position ourselves for the future beyond 2026. Underlying and enmeshed in all of NECC's work is a strong desire to live into our DEI commitments.

- *"Grow roots, keep focus."*
- *"Grow into what NECC has become in terms of people and resources."*
- *"Board expansion guided by both best practices in board development and our DEI goals."*

**Assets that will help us navigate the future.** All members of the SPWG share a strong commitment to NECC and expressed pride in its long history of meeting the needs of our community members. As we move forward to realize our vision for the future, we can leverage NECC's strengths, including:

Track record. Our agency's responsiveness to community needs, its institutional flexibility, and the ability to pivot to emerging needs constitute some of our greatest strengths.

Agency leadership and culture. We are an organization led by an outstanding executive director, who is supported by a strong and committed workforce; an organization that fosters a positive workplace culture, promotes respect and teamwork and provides the staff with opportunities for growth and professional development.

Relationships. NECC's steadfast commitment to relationship-building internally and externally gives us the ability to leverage our work for even greater impact.

- *"(Our greatest strengths include) the resilience of the people who work in NECC – and also of the communities they work with."*
- *"Christine is a powerhouse."*
- *"We need to continue to position NECC as a collaborative community partner vs a competitor."*

### **Next Steps in the Planning Process**

Based upon this sober appraisal of NECC's external and internal context and the strengths we can build upon, the attached Strategic Framework seeks to describe a desired future for our agency. It outlines the SPWG's assessment of both what is needed and what we are capable of accomplishing. It is important to emphasize that it reflects the best thinking of a cross section of both the Board and Management Team.

From the beginning, the intention in this approach to planning has been to create an opportunity for engagement by all board members and the entire Management Team. This memo, together with the proposed Strategic Framework, is offered as a starting place for our retreat discussions on June 13<sup>th</sup>. Working with Anne, four desired outcomes have been identified for this day-long session.

1. Shared understanding of the context in which NECC is operating – externally and internally.
2. High level alignment re. the proposed direction and priorities for NECC for next 3 years to include:
  - a. Feedback on Strategic Framework elements (mission, vision, strategic priorities, etc.).
  - b. Preliminary identification of Objectives for each of the Strategic Priorities.
3. Agreements about next steps.
4. Members of the Board and MT get to know one another more and everyone learns something they did not know walking into the retreat.

The Strategic Plan Working Group joins me in expressing our excitement and enthusiasm about being in conversation with you all about the future of the precious community resource that is the NECC.

# Appendix B

**MISSION:** Fundamental statement of purpose – why we exist as an organization

NECC advances the well-being of all people in our rural region by responding to their diverse needs through services, programs, and partnerships.

**VISION:** Our Big Hairy Audacious Goal

Everyone in our rural region has equal access to the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

**ASPIRATION 2027:** Description of what NECC will be in 3 years. These bold statements will guide decision making.

The North East Community Center, located in Millerton, is a safe and welcoming space where all people belong. From this home, our programs reach communities throughout Northeast Dutchess County.

NECC is well known and recognized as a resource throughout our region.

NECC's work is based in recognizing and addressing structural and systemic barriers and reflects our values of inclusivity, transparency, and respect.

We have diversified our funding sources, grown our revenue, and scaled our fund development operations.

By sustaining and strengthening programs at 2023 levels through 2027, NECC human and physical infrastructure and operations have caught up with pandemic era change and provide a sufficient and sustainable base from which future strategic growth can continue to respond to emergent community needs.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:** What we need to accomplish to achieve our aspirations.

Capital Campaign  
New Facility

Sustainable  
Infrastructure and  
Fund Development

Promoting Inclusion  
and Belonging

**METRICS:** How we will know we are successful.

New Building  
Raise \$X Million

6 Month Operating Reserve  
"Right-sized" Infrastructure

Board and Staff Mirror  
Region