



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF THE HUDSON VALLEY

# Voices of the Hudson Valley

*What We Learned From YOU*

2025



## Thank You

Many thanks to all who participated in our Community Conversations series, as well as individuals who engaged in one-on-one interviews, small group discussions, and the nearly 250 respondents who completed our survey. Your willingness to share your perspectives and experiences has enhanced our understanding of the community's needs and aspirations.

Your insights have contributed critical depth and context to our findings and informed the development of this report and the direction of future initiatives. We appreciate your thoughtful engagement and ongoing support.

We encourage you to visit our website for a full list of organizations involved in the Community Conversations, along with the names of our Advisory Committee members and the local shops that generously provided refreshments and light bites.

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# Your voice. Our mission.

Dear Community Members,

I am thrilled to share *Voices of the Hudson Valley*, a report that places your insights, concerns, and aspirations at the heart of our work at the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley (CFHV).

Over the past year, I've had the privilege of listening to hundreds of you—residents, nonprofit leaders, business owners, and civic partners—through Community Conversations, surveys, and one-on-one discussions across Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties. Your voices have shaped our understanding of both the challenges facing our region and the strengths that make our communities thrive.

At CFHV, we believe that philanthropy begins with listening. *Voices of the Hudson Valley* captures the key themes that emerged from our discussions, from pressing needs in housing and education to the deep sense of pride people have in our region's natural beauty and cultural vibrancy.

More than just a report, this is a roadmap—one that will guide our grantmaking and help us build a stronger, more connected Hudson Valley.

I invite you to explore this report and use it as a tool to inform your own work. By amplifying the voices of our community, we can drive meaningful change together.

Thank you for sharing your stories, your insights, and your vision for the future. We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

With gratitude,



Laura Washington  
President & CEO  
Community Foundations  
of the Hudson Valley



Participants at the CFHV community conversation in Kingston.

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The **MISSION** of the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley (CFHV) is to deliver community leadership and strategic philanthropy to inspire and celebrate local charitable giving and civic engagement.

We work to strengthen our community by helping individuals, businesses, and organizations establish and administer funds that support vital causes and charities. Partnering with our generous donors, we address current and emerging community needs through effective grantmaking to improve the quality of life for all. Additionally, we provide technical assistance to help nonprofits operate more effectively.

CFHV is governed by a Board of Trustees that includes local leaders in business, philanthropy, and our community. Each is dedicated to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization, while targeting meaningful investments to meet the needs of the community. In addition, CFHV is supported by local Advisory Committees in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties.

Our well-informed, involved team is the vital link between donors, grantees, the Board of Trustees, Advisory Committees, and the community at large. We are proud of their expertise, sensitivity to community issues, and accessibility to donors and grant seekers.

# Your voice. Our mission.

## How Community Foundations Work



## Why Your Voice Matters

The Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley (CFHV) is your partner for good. We strengthen our communities by connecting donors with opportunities to create lasting impact, funding local nonprofits, and providing leadership on key issues.

We're part of a nationwide network of more than 800 community foundations, each dedicated to serving its unique region. While we operate independently, we share a common mission:

- Helping individuals, businesses, and organizations give back
- Directing resources to high-impact charitable programs
- Strengthening our communities for generations to come

**Our work is guided by you**—the people who live, work, and lead in the Hudson Valley. We listen to our community, identify pressing needs, and ensure philanthropy is responsive, strategic, and impactful. Together, we ensure resources are directed where they're needed most.



View from Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, New Paltz

# Regional Snapshot

# Regional Snapshot

The Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley serves Dutchess, Ulster, and Putnam counties—three distinct yet interconnected communities that together reflect the region’s diversity and evolution. Spanning rural landscapes, small towns, and growing urban centers, these counties have undergone significant demographic and economic shifts over the past two decades.

Major events like the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic have shaped how residents live and work, altering neighborhood dynamics and economic opportunities. Compared to a decade ago, Dutchess, Ulster, and Putnam counties are more diverse, more highly educated, and aging. Families are smaller, remote work is more common, and rising costs are putting pressure on households at all income levels. Meanwhile, wages have struggled to keep pace, creating both challenges and opportunities for the future.

The data presented in this report were collected from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, Internal Revenue Services, ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), NYS Office of Child and Family Services, NYS Office of Mental Health, NYSAR, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Regional Food Bank, Feeding America, and from each individual county for data such as transportation, scenic beauty, and more.

These data offer a snapshot from 2025, highlighting how our communities have changed and the trends are shaping their future.



## Population

The total population in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties has remained flat over the past decade. In fact, the three counties **saw their total population decline by 1,948 people since 2013**, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The counties are now home to 577,241 people.



## Aging

The Hudson Valley is aging because the Baby Boomer generation makes up a significant proportion of the total population, and because families are having fewer children.

Since 2013, the senior citizen population in Dutchess County has grown from 20% to 26% of the total population; from 19% to 27% in Putnam; and 22% to 28% in Ulster. **There are 156,294 people over the age of 60 living in the three counties**, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Senior citizens comprise 27% of the total population in the three counties.

By contrast, the youth population has rapidly declined in all three counties. **There are 18,957 fewer infants, children, and teens living in the three counties than a decade ago.** The shrinking youth population is a consequence of two factors. Since 2000, births are down by 25% to 30% in each county. What’s more, IRS data show that hundreds of young families have left the region over the past two decades, many of them moving to our neighboring states or to the South.

# Regional Snapshot



## Diversity

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau also show that our region has become more racially and ethnically diverse over the past decade. That trend has been led by people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. **The Hispanic and Latino population increased by 38% in Dutchess, 56% in Putnam, and 31% in Ulster since 2013.**

The number of people who identify as multiracial more than doubled across the three-county region during that time. **A total of 25,333 people, or nearly 5% of the population, have more than one racial heritage.**



## Education

College graduates also made up a greater proportion of the total population in all three counties over the past decade. **More than 47% of residents in every county had a college degree.**

Meanwhile, **the total number of people with a high school diploma increased** in all three counties during the same time.

Public school enrollment dropped significantly in all three counties from 2004 to 2024. Enrollments declined by 28% in Dutchess, 29% in Putnam, and 38% in Ulster, as fewer children lived in each county.



## Income

The outlook for household incomes has been mixed over the past decade. The median household income has grown by 34% in Dutchess and Putnam, and 40% in Ulster during that time.

However, **incomes adjusted for inflation have only grown by 3% in Dutchess and Putnam, and 7% in Ulster**—in all cases, below the 12% growth seen throughout the State of New York.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of New York City residents moved into the region and brought significant wealth with them. This trend was most noticeable in Dutchess and Ulster counties. At the peak of the pandemic, new households moving into Dutchess brought incomes that were \$45,000 greater than those moving out; and new households moving into Ulster brought incomes that were \$50,000 greater than those who left the county, according to IRS data.

Still, many workers saw their wages flatten and their purchasing power decline during this time. **The bottom 40% of earners in every county saw their wages decrease or stagnate relative to inflation.** This relative lack of wage growth has worsened the affordability crisis for people with low and moderate incomes in all three counties.

# Regional Snapshot



## Commuting

Working patterns have been relatively steady in the three-county region over the past decade. About two-thirds of people who live in Dutchess and Ulster counties also work within those counties. The opposite is true for Putnam County, where about 61% of its residents commute outside the county for work. This underscores Putnam County's role as a home for people who mostly work in Westchester County and New York City.



## Working from home

Remote work is a significant change for the residential and commercial rhythms of the Hudson Valley.

Census data show that the number of people working from home grew by nearly double from 2016–2023. Now, an estimated 40,000 people are working from home across the three counties, up 16,000 over the seven-year period.

Ulster has the greatest proportion of remote workers; 15.4% of the total workforce is now working from home. That is compared to 13.9% of workers in Dutchess and 13.7% in Putnam who are working remotely.



# Regional Snapshot



## Affordability

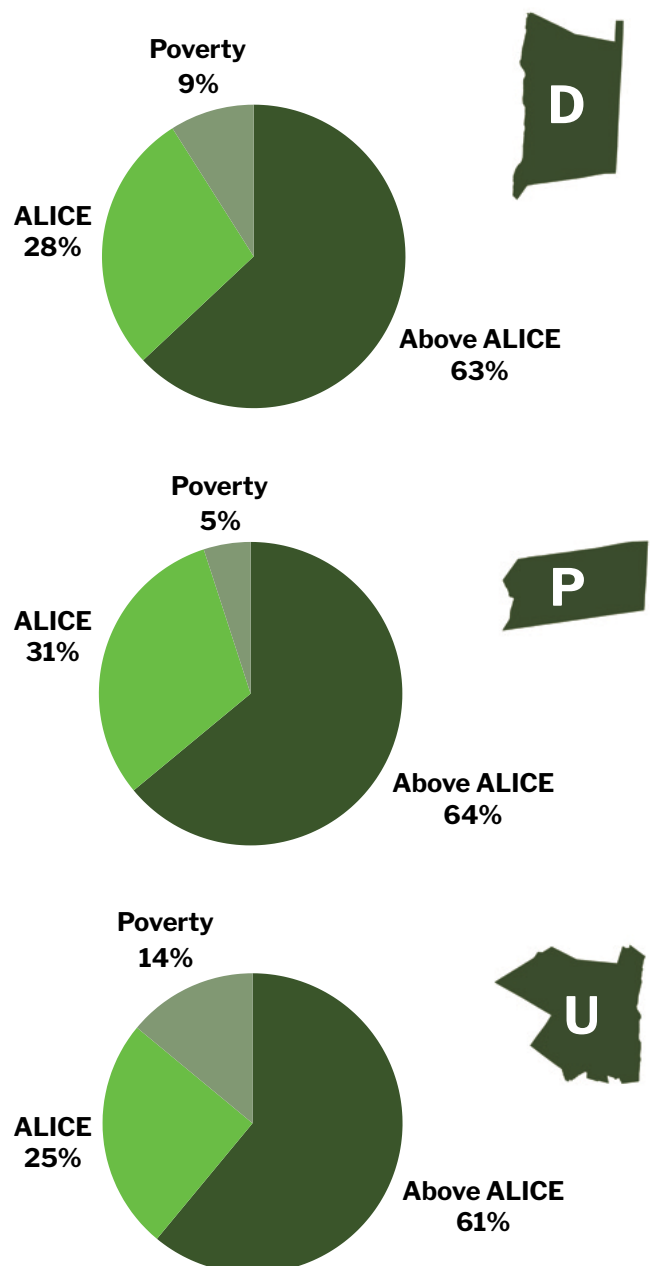
Affordability has quickly become a more serious issue in the Hudson Valley. The rapidly rising cost of housing, combined with inflation's effects on the cost of food, energy, transportation, and other essentials, has stretched household budgets beyond what our neighbors can afford.

Since 2009, The United Way has published an annual report on affordability that includes data from most states throughout the nation. This report is known as ALICE - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.

ALICE seeks to measure the number of people who earn more than the federal poverty level, but not enough to afford the basics where they live. These households are often faced with hard choices between paying for rent or food, or forgoing important services such as healthcare and childcare. These choices often have long-term consequences for families, their communities, and society.

The ALICE designation is based off "survival budgets" that utilize very conservative numbers for the cost of housing, food, transportation, healthcare, childcare, taxes, and miscellaneous expenses. These budgets are tailored for households of different types and sizes, and for senior citizens.

### Affordability by county





Hudson Valley Shakespeare, Garrison

# What You Love

# What You Love

## Scenic Beauty



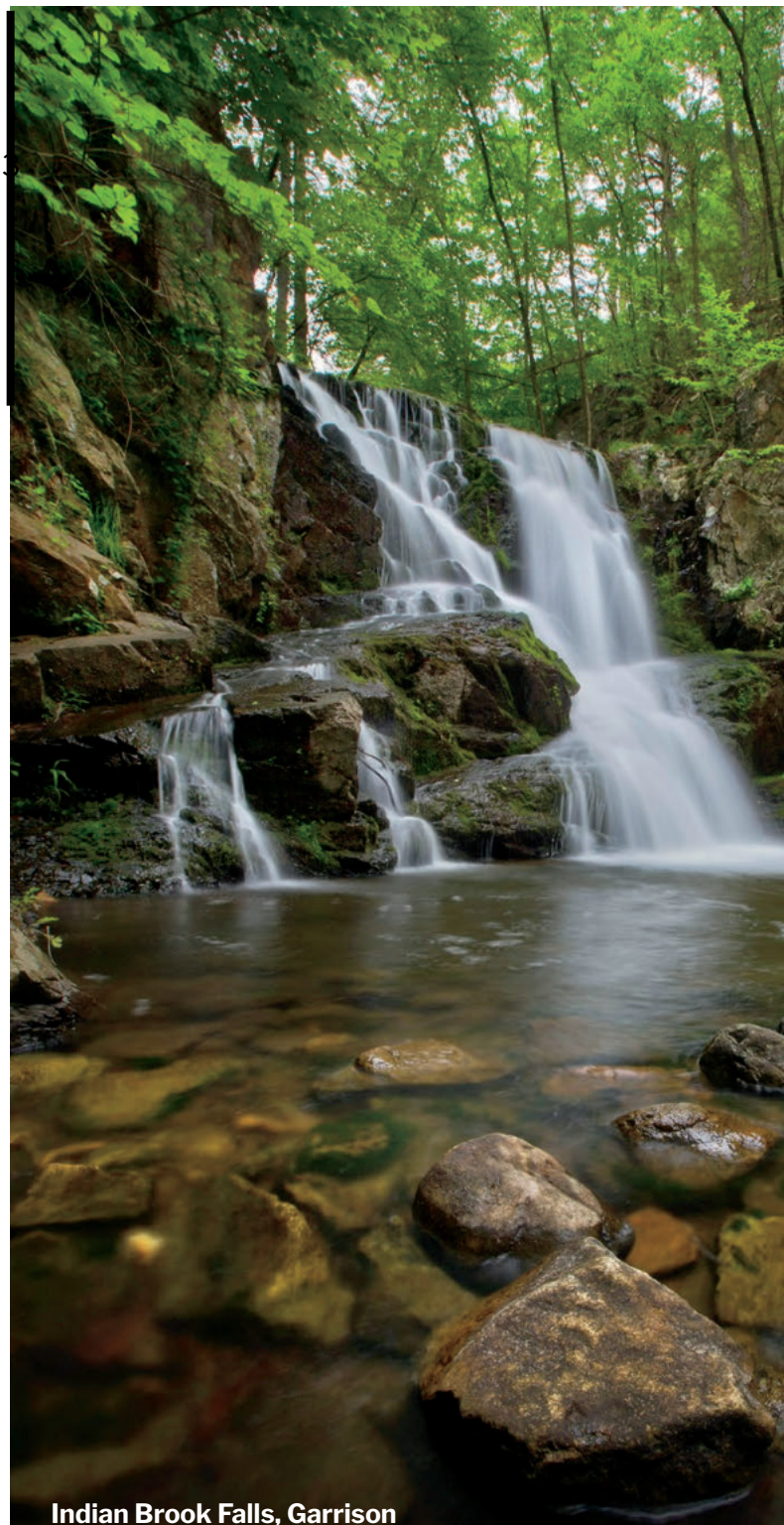
### What we heard

There is one thing that everyone in the Hudson Valley can agree on: we love the scenic beauty of our region.

Scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, and environmental stewardship were themes that always came to the forefront when CFHV asked our neighbors what they love most about their communities. In fact, 70% of respondents to our survey ranked scenic beauty and recreation in their top three favorite qualities of the Hudson Valley.

The feedback at our Community Conversations was as diverse as the ecosystems that make up our region. People enjoyed hiking in our mountains, fishing and paddling in our lakes and rivers, and bringing their families to dozens of parks in all three counties.

There was broad consensus that these special places deserve to be protected so that future generations in the Hudson Valley can enjoy their biodiversity and first-rate recreational opportunities. People wanted to preserve a heritage of stewardship that has protected natural resources in the Hudson Valley, making it a source of pride for visitors and residents alike.



Indian Brook Falls, Garrison

# What You Love

## Scenic Beauty



### What we know

Scenic beauty is not easy to quantify, especially when parks, trails, and protected waterbodies are interwoven into the hearts of our communities.

Here is a county-by-county rundown of scenic sites and recreation spaces that people often associate with life in the Hudson Valley.

#### Dutchess County

- Parks - 199 covering 26,372 acres
- Trails - 383 linear miles
- Waterways - 383 miles
- Lakes and ponds - 3,300
- Scenic byways - 64 miles

#### Putnam County

- Parks - 58 covering 27,896 acres
- Rail trails - 25 linear miles
- Hiking trails - 190 linear miles
- Waterways - 809 miles
- Lakes and ponds - 681

#### Ulster County

- Hiking trails - 204 linear miles
- Rail trails - 123 linear miles
- Waterways - 2,600 linear miles
- Lakes and ponds - 477
- Scenic byways - 106 miles



Mohonk Preserve, Gardiner

# What You Love

## Arts & Culture



### What we heard

Performance venues, urban murals, and centuries-old historic sites give the Hudson Valley a unique identity, making our region a great place to live and visit. Community leaders told CFHV that arts and culture venues, projects, and destinations have become invaluable assets in their neighborhoods. Arts and culture ranked second in our survey of things that people love most about the Hudson Valley.

Examples of this importance are diverse. People talked about urban murals and arts projects that have helped to revitalize our downtowns; historic sites that attract visitors from across the globe; performance venues that host great bands, comedians, and stage performances; and studios that are filming TV shows, movies, and online productions. We also heard about the value of arts and culture for everyday residents of the Hudson Valley who have unique opportunities to take a class or see a show in their home counties.

The community also underscored the need to sustain funding for arts and cultural sites. Grants are needed to maintain physical spaces and programs. Many hoped to attract new donors from the cohort of residents who recently moved into the region, and from the growing crowd of tourists who are coming to the Hudson Valley every year.



**Kaatsbaan Cultural Park, Tivoli**

# What You Love

## Arts & Culture



### What we know

We know that arts and culture have a huge impact on our regional economy and the vibrancy of our communities. New research in Ulster County has provided information about the size and scope of that impact.

IMAGINE Ulster is the county's new arts and culture master plan. Working alongside a team of consultants, 28 arts and culture experts in Ulster led the effort to quantify the impact of their sector within the county.

For example, **Ulster County is home to approximately 545 arts and culture assets**, including museums, performance venues, studios, and historic sites. Those locations actively **employ more than 2,000 people**, making up nearly 3% of the county's workforce. In total, arts and culture venues **generate more than \$300 million in direct impact** to the economy in Ulster County, and millions more in indirect impacts.

The data from Ulster County are indicators of the broader impact of arts and culture throughout the region, highlighting a key theme from our CFHV listening sessions—arts and culture provide invaluable benefits to our communities and the regional economy.



Center for Photography, Woodstock

# What You Love

## Libraries & Colleges



### What we heard

Our communities love that the Hudson Valley is packed with opportunities to learn. People told CFHV about the value of local colleges, adult and continuing education centers, community centers, and other venues for education. People expressed a strong connection to their local libraries as one of the most vibrant places in their towns. Libraries have evolved as community centers that offer far more than access to books. Most libraries now offer classes for kids, adults, and senior citizens, after-school programs and tutoring, and public lectures on many topics.

Colleges and universities remain one of the biggest employment sectors in the region. People told CFHV that colleges and universities are vital to the region because they attract new people to the Hudson Valley, train our workforce, provide outlets for arts and cultural events, and much more.



### What we know

The three-county region is served by 51 public libraries including:

- 22 in Dutchess
- 8 in Putnam
- 21 in Ulster

There are seven colleges and universities located within Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties. **More than 32,000 students are educated at these institutions for higher learning each year.**

Our colleges and universities also have a considerable impact on the local and regional economy. Several of them have recently studied their impact through employment, purchasing, capital upgrades, visitor spending, and other activities that stimulate the economy.

These analyses found that Marist University supports \$445.7 million in economic activity each year, SUNY New Paltz induced \$439.4 million in annual economic impact, and Vassar College had a local impact of approximately \$435.6 million annually.





Second Chance Foods, Brewster



Community Conversation, Eastdale

**Pressing Needs**

# Pressing Needs

## Housing



### What we heard

Survey respondents ranked housing the top challenge by far in their communities. People also shared a wide variety of concerns about housing during community discussions hosted by CFHV.

Many said that housing affordability and availability are major stressors on their neighbors and the regional economy. In particular, employers noted difficulty with hiring because they could not pay wages to keep up with the skyrocketing cost of housing. Many worried that the growing gap between wages and housing would exert more pressure on the workforce in the years to come.

Our regional partners also worried about housing availability. Many acknowledged that more of our local housing is being purchased by people from outside the region as second homes or short-term rentals. They wanted to see more housing built for full-time residents at monthly costs they could afford. Housing projects are too often countered by anti-development sentiments in the region, and the word “affordable” is often misinterpreted, eroding the support for projects that would help local families and workers.



Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County

# Pressing Needs

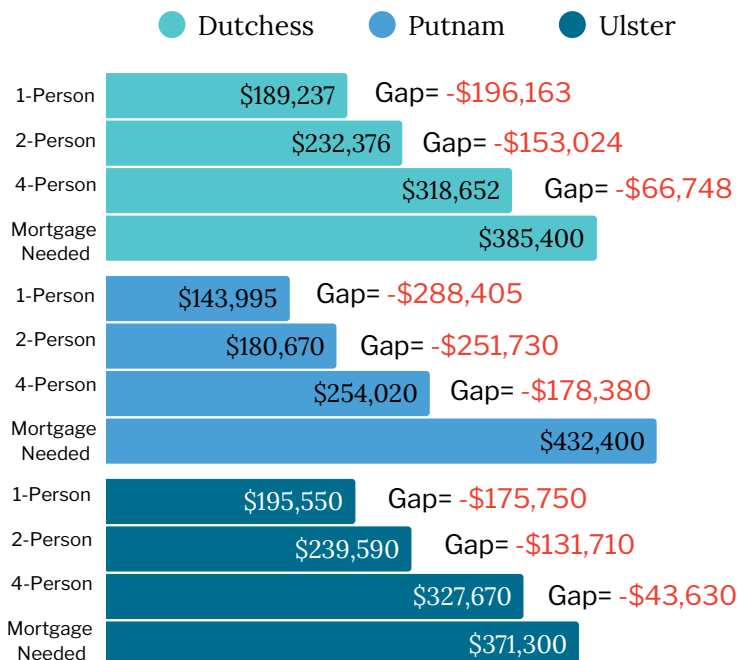
## Housing



### What we know

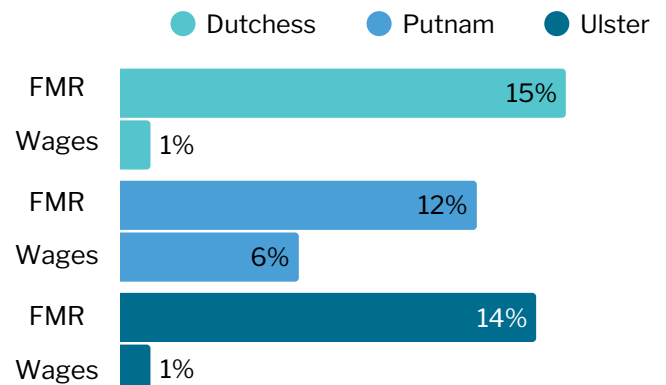
Homeownership is increasingly out of reach for people in the Hudson Valley. For the first time ever, the median price of homes in Dutchess and Ulster counties exceeded \$400,000 in 2024. The median home in Putnam surpassed \$500,000 for the first time. Households making the median wage cannot afford the median home price in each county.

The chart below shows the maximum amount of mortgage that one-person, two-person, and four-person households would qualify for in each county, compared to the amount of mortgage necessary to buy the median-priced home in each county.



The rising cost of rent has also exerted pressure on household budgets across Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster. Rent has increased at a greater rate than renter wages for much of the past decade.

The chart below shows the percent change for Fair Market Rent (FMR) and average renter wages between the years 2023 and 2024.



According to federal standards, housing is “affordable” when people pay no more than 30% of their wages toward housing costs. Based on the average renter wage in each county, renters would need to work more than one job to afford rent. Single renters would need to work 60 hours per week in Dutchess, 113 hours per week in Putnam, and 69 hours per week in Ulster.

The affordability crisis has been especially difficult on service workers who make low wages. Data show that these workers—including grocery clerks, administrative aides, and certain healthcare workers—are increasingly living on public assistance in local hotels because apartments with modest rents are in short supply.

# Pressing Needs

## Food Security



### What we heard

More of our neighbors are seeking assistance at food pantries, soup kitchens, and other charities throughout the Hudson Valley. People told CFHV that the growing scale of hunger—and the massive resources necessary to feed the hungry—are not well known or understood across our three counties.

The growing scale of food insecurity is a symptom of broader affordability challenges in the region, experts said. More people with modest incomes, including senior citizens and households with children, are making the impossible choice to pay rent or buy food because they do not have enough money for both. Some organizations told CFHV that people who once donated to their local pantries are now in line to ask for food.

When CFHV surveyed the region and asked about nonprofits doing good work, people listed organizations providing food assistance more than any other type of nonprofit. People also noted the importance of all efforts, big and small, from massive food banks to informal boxes at the back of a church, or small refrigerators in libraries, where people knew they could get food when they needed it.



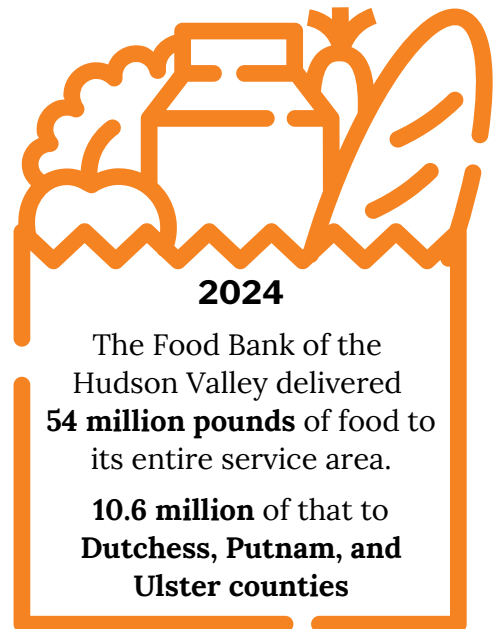
Second Chance Foods, Brewster

## Pressing Needs

### Food Security

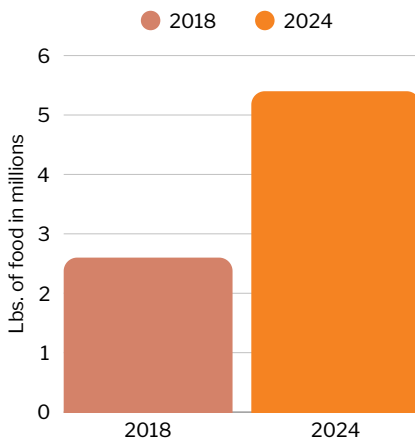


#### What we know



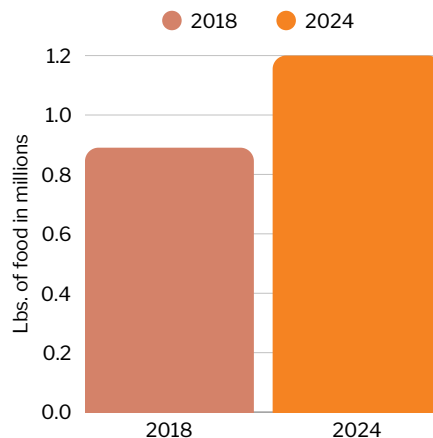
#### DUTCHESS

**29,700** - Food insecure including **6,620 children**



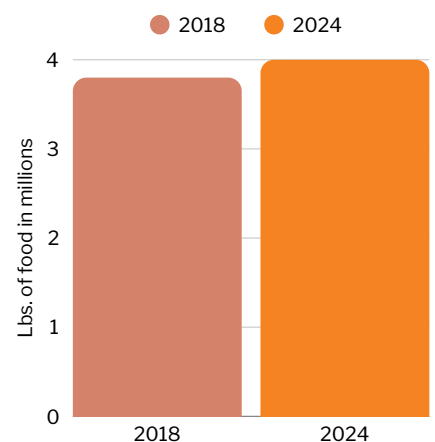
#### PUTNAM

**8,270** - Food insecure including **1,270 children**



#### ULSTER

**23,310** - Food insecure including **4,570 children**



# Pressing Needs

## Childcare



### What we heard

Parents and employers were both concerned about declining childcare availability throughout the Hudson Valley, and the sharply rising cost.

Business owners told CFHV that they were losing employees because of childcare scarcity, and some new parents were not coming back to work after having a child because they could not find an available childcare slot. Many decried the need to travel far to bring their children to the nearest childcare center, or the closest one with an available slot. Aside from being a workforce support, people also acknowledged that childcare is important for the early education and enrichment that it provides to young, growing minds.

Our neighbors also noted the heft of childcare expenses. In the Hudson Valley, the cost of childcare for a family with two children often outpaces housing as the largest household expense. The high cost of childcare puts additional stress on family budgets at a time when households are often thinking about buying a home or paying off college loans, creating a paradox of competing interests for limited income.



Center for Creative Education, Kingston

# Pressing Needs

## Childcare



### What we know

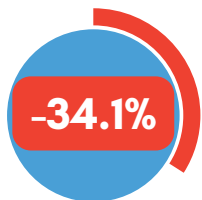
Childcare in the Hudson Valley is dwindling, expensive, and struggling to remain viable under stress from declining youth populations, economic challenges, and shifting public policies.

Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties have lost a total of 233 licensed childcare businesses since 2007 because of these stressors. The following table shows the percent change in childcare businesses in each county, and the current number of licensed childcare slots per the total population of children ages 10 and under.



#### DUTCHESS:

- Loss of 33.1% of childcare businesses since 2007
- 0.29 licensed seats per child



#### PUTNAM:

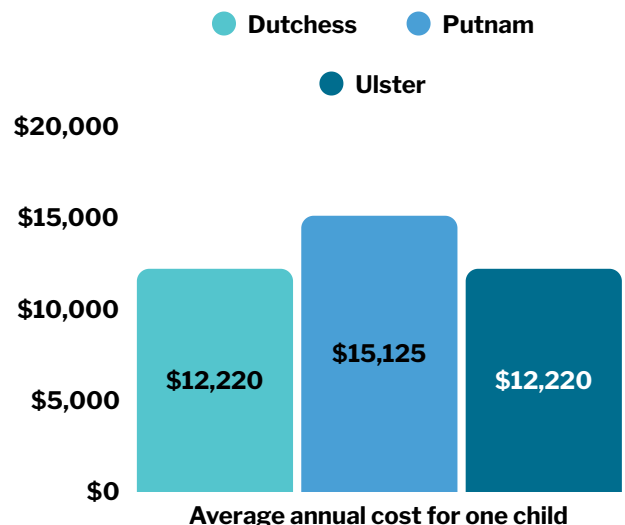
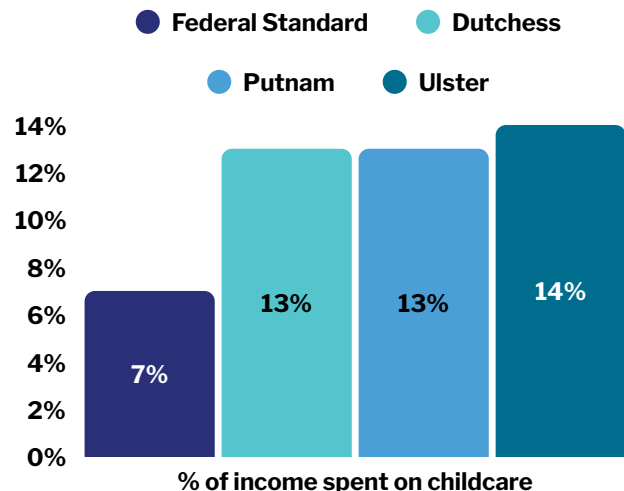
- Loss of 34.1% of childcare businesses since 2007
- 0.35 licensed seats per child



#### ULSTER:

- Loss of 45% of childcare businesses since 2007
- 0.26 licensed seats per child

Childcare is very expensive in the Hudson Valley. Federal standards say that households should spend no more than 7% of their income on childcare. However, median-earning households in Dutchess and Putnam spend 13% of their income on childcare for one child; and Ulster families spend 14%. **The average annual cost of care for one child in 2023 was \$12,220 in Dutchess, \$15,125 in Putnam, and \$12,220 in Ulster**, according to the state Office of Children & Family Services.



## Pressing Needs

### Mental Health & Addiction Services



#### What we heard

Communities in all three counties reported a shortage of resources to fight the mental health and addiction crises that have afflicted our neighbors. Your concern was so great that mental health and addiction ranked second, just behind housing, as the most significant challenges people identified for their communities. Mental health, in particular, also ranked third as the topic for which the region wanted to see nonprofits provide more service.

Although mental health and addiction challenges are distinct from one another, participants in CFHV community conversations found an important commonality between them. Both issues are affecting more people in our neighborhoods, even as their struggles remain relatively invisible to the broader community. Our conversations and our survey urged more attention and funding to help people in the Hudson Valley who are battling addiction and trying to improve their mental health.



#### What we know

Data from the New York State Department of Health show that New York State and the Hudson Valley have made measurable progress in the fight against overdoses and overdose deaths. Annualized overdose deaths in New York are down roughly 33%, and the number of **overdose deaths in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster are down by more than half since their peak two years ago.**

Mental health trends are slightly more difficult to measure because our neighbors seek help from a mix of private and public practitioners. Still, data from the New York State Office of Mental Health show a growing demand for mental health service in the Hudson Valley. **Last year, 129,600 people in the Hudson Valley sought mental health care through the public mental health system.** That represented a 12% increase from one decade ago. Children and teens accounted for the largest proportion of that increase. **State data showed that 7,109 additional youth under the age of 20 sought care through the public system since 2014. That marked a 21% increase in demand among kids and teens.**

# Pressing Needs

## Transportation



### What we heard

Many communities told CFHV about the need for more public transportation options, especially to access medical appointments and grocery stores. People told us that the need for public transportation is growing, especially as a greater number of senior citizens lose their ability to drive and the affordability crisis leaves more people without access to a personal vehicle.

Many said the need is most dire in rural areas, where people do not have walkable access to the goods and services they need. Experts said that inaccessible transportation in these areas can also cause isolation for senior citizens, which is associated with a range of poor health and quality-of-life outcomes.

Public transportation in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster is almost exclusively provided by fixed-route bus systems that are operated by each of the counties. These bus systems generally run along specific highway corridors, and between large population centers and key destinations such as grocery stores, colleges, and hospitals. The bus systems generally do not provide pick-up services in residential areas outside small cities or large villages.



### What we know

Approximately 39,000 adults do not have access to a motor vehicle in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This underscores the importance of public transportation. **The number of people without a vehicle includes 7.2% of all people in Dutchess and Ulster, and 4.1% in Putnam.**

The existing bus systems in each county have seen ridership increase in their most recent year-over-year data.

**Dutchess County Public Transit** saw its ridership increase by approximately **9,000** rides to a total of 822,922 rides in 2024.

**Putnam Area Rapid Transit** saw its ridership increase by nearly **10,000** rides to a total of 106,006 rides provided in 2024.

**Ulster County Area Transit** saw its ridership increase by approximately **105,000** rides in 2024 to a total of 540,974 rides. It was the first year that UCAT service was provided free of charge, contributing to a large spike in ridership.



**Second Chance Foods, Brewster**



**Unshattered, Wappingers Falls**

## **Additional Reflections**

Over the course of our Community Conversations and regional survey, nonprofit, business, and civic leaders—as well as community members—shared more than their most pressing priorities. They also offered meaningful reflections on the character, challenges, and potential of the places they call home. While the topics below did not emerge as dominant themes, the insights highlighted here were echoed across multiple discussions and are worthy of recognition. These insights, often grounded in lived experience and deep community knowledge, enrich our understanding of what matters to Hudson Valley residents and illuminate the hopes they hold for a more connected, vibrant future.

### Volunteerism: Making a Commitment to Serve

“It is my personal belief that the best thing anyone in the Hudson Valley could give is time...their own time.”

In community after community, we heard a truth that lives in the quiet corners of the Hudson Valley: our strength is our willingness to show up for one another. Many told us that volunteerism is one of the most beautiful ways people in this region express care. But they also told us something else—it's under strain.

Nonprofit leaders across Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster counties spoke with gratitude for the thousands of individuals who continue to give their time. “It is my personal belief that the best thing anyone in the Hudson Valley could give is time...their own time,” said one resident. “It's the thing they prize most, and yet they themselves are the first and foremost beneficiary of pure service.”

Individuals who volunteer in their communities often report that witnessing the tangible impact of their contributions instills a sense of pride, strengthens their connection to neighbors, and underscores a key advantage of residing in smaller towns and cities.

At the same time, many organizations shared that the number of people volunteering has declined—and the balance of who is volunteering has shifted. Retirees are stepping up in inspiring numbers. Younger generations, meanwhile, are present but fewer in number, often citing time constraints, work obligations, and lack of awareness of local opportunities as barriers to involvement.

We heard that a deep commitment to serve lives in many hearts. **“The community is full of leaders who do the work,” someone said. “We just need better ways to connect them.”**

Nonprofits asked for help recruiting volunteers and building better systems to match people with causes they care about. As one coalition member put it: “The passion to serve is here. The challenge is access.”

We were repeatedly reminded in these conversations that service isn't a transaction. It's an invitation to belong.

## Additional Reflections

### Communication Gaps: A Need for Connection in the Age of Disconnection

Across our conversations—whether in town halls, libraries, community centers, or local event spaces—one theme emerged consistently: Residents are eager to feel more connected. They want to better understand what’s happening in their towns, engage with their neighbors, and access the information that ties it all together.

Despite a plethora of local organizations offering events, services, and educational opportunities, many residents reported increasing difficulty in staying informed. As traditional communication channels like local newspapers and word-of-mouth networks have dwindled, they’ve often been replaced by fragmented digital tools and social networks that fail to reach everyone. One participant from Ulster County shared, “Half the time, I only find out about an event after it happens. I’d love to attend more things, but I just don’t know where to look.” This experience was echoed throughout the region, revealing a common frustration with the lack of a central, reliable source of information.

The consequences of these communication gaps extend beyond missed events—they hinder collaboration and the pursuit of common goals. A nonprofit leader in Dutchess County noted, “There’s so much good work being done here, but we’re all in our own silos. If we could just talk to each other, we could do so much more together.” This sentiment illustrates how disconnection affects not only residents but also the organizations trying to serve them.

“**There’s so much good work being done here, but we’re all in our own silos. If we could just talk to each other, we could do so much more together.**”

Newer residents, in particular, emphasized the challenge of integrating into local networks. As one person in Putnam County said, “Sometimes it feels like unless you’re already ‘in the know,’ you’re out of the loop. We need a shared place where all of this lives.” The desire for a central hub of information—and a shared sense of purpose—was a recurring theme in nearly every conversation.

Many attendees expressed that participating in the Community Conversations left them feeling more informed and connected. These gatherings were described as a rare opportunity to hear what others are doing and discover ways to engage. Participants urged that more forums like these be held regularly, not just for information sharing but as a way to strengthen relationships and foster a deeper sense of community.

While no single organization was identified to lead this work, the message was clear: the region would benefit from more connectors—centralized, trusted resources that illuminate what’s happening and help individuals and organizations move forward together.

## Additional Reflections



Tania Barricklo/Daily Freeman

**Aging community** – Our senior citizen population is growing rapidly. Since 2010, the total number of people over age 65 in Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster has grown by approximately 35,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Our communities told CFHV that they are concerned about providing enough medical services and transportation, helping seniors to age in place, and preventing isolation for seniors who are living alone.

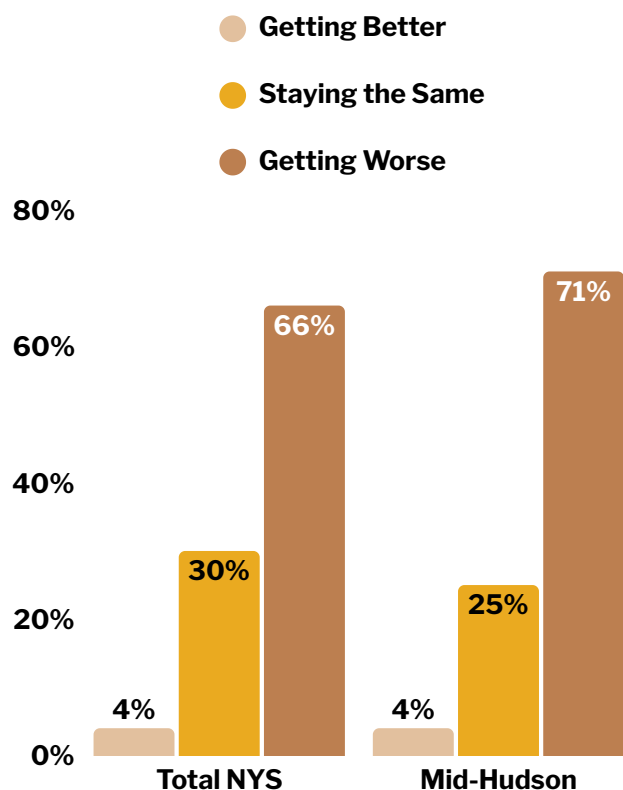
**Agriculture** – Our neighbors enjoy living in a region where they have access to locally grown food. There is a strong desire to support our local producers, preserve our agricultural history, and maintain a rural character throughout much of the region. Many people take pride in their connection to the land and the food that is grown and raised locally. Local families also expressed the value and importance of taking their children to local farms to enjoy time outdoors and to educate the next generation about the source of their food.

**Nonprofit sector challenges** – Nonprofit leaders told CFHV that a number of stressors are affecting their ability to provide services in our communities. The cost of administrative overhead to find, pursue, and manage grants has become greater over time. Many nonprofit leaders also noted the need for capital to upgrade their decades-old facilities, and they were dismayed by the long process and bureaucratic requirements that made state capital grants practically unusable. They also noted a more difficult competition with private-sector businesses for a dwindling pool of workers in the Hudson Valley. Amid uncertainty with government funding and grants, many nonprofits were concerned that they could not compete with private-sector wages and could not pay their employees a living wage for the region.

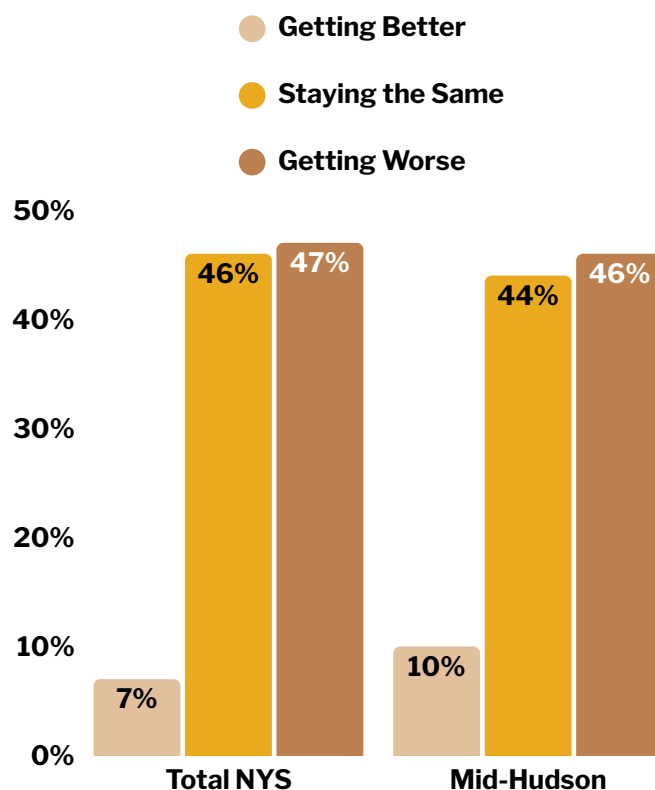
## Additional Reflections

**Business and entrepreneurship** – People expressed mixed opinions about the business environment in the Hudson Valley. On the positive side, several members of the community said that more entrepreneurs and investors have pushed into the Hudson Valley to start businesses here. But others noted that high commercial rents and taxes, onerous regulations, and other factors have dissuaded people from starting businesses in the region. There was a desire to see more support for local entrepreneurs, especially young people who would like to start their own business or take over the management of an existing business in the region. CEOs and business owners expressed a rather gloomy outlook for the Mid-Hudson in a recent survey by the Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation. Of the 533 business leaders surveyed, 71% said the business climate was getting worse in New York State, and 90% said the conditions for business in the Mid-Hudson were either staying the same or getting worse.

**As you consider all aspects of doing business in New York State, do you think the business conditions in New York State are getting better, staying the same, or getting worse?**



**How about in your local area? Are business conditions getting better, staying the same, or getting worse in your local area?**



## A Call to Action

*Voices of the Hudson Valley* isn't just a report; it's a call to action for all of us to engage deeply with our community and each other. As we navigate the complexities of today's environment, the challenges facing nonprofits are more pronounced than ever. Local nonprofits provide essential goods and services that depend on the kindness and generosity of their community, whether through volunteering or funding.

Your Voice Matters. No one knows your community better than you. We prioritize listening and want to hear your ideas. Reach out to me directly at

**[lwashington@communityfoundationshv.org](mailto:lwashington@communityfoundationshv.org)**.

Your Action Matters. Here are ways you can make a difference:

- Join a local initiative: Contact us about your interests. We can connect you to projects that resonate with you.
- Volunteer your time: Your skills and passion are needed to support and stabilize local nonprofits in this time of uncertainty.
- Advocate for nonprofits: Use your voice to raise awareness about the importance of nonprofit work in our region.
- Establish a fund with CFHV to address the Hudson Valley's most pressing community needs. Your contribution creates lasting impact and inspires others to join the cause. Ask us what others have done through a partnership with Community Foundations.

Together, we can harness our collective strength to overcome challenges and celebrate the vibrant spirit of Community. Add your voice to the conversation and take actionable steps toward a stronger, more resilient Hudson Valley!



**Hudson River Housing, Poughkeepsie**



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