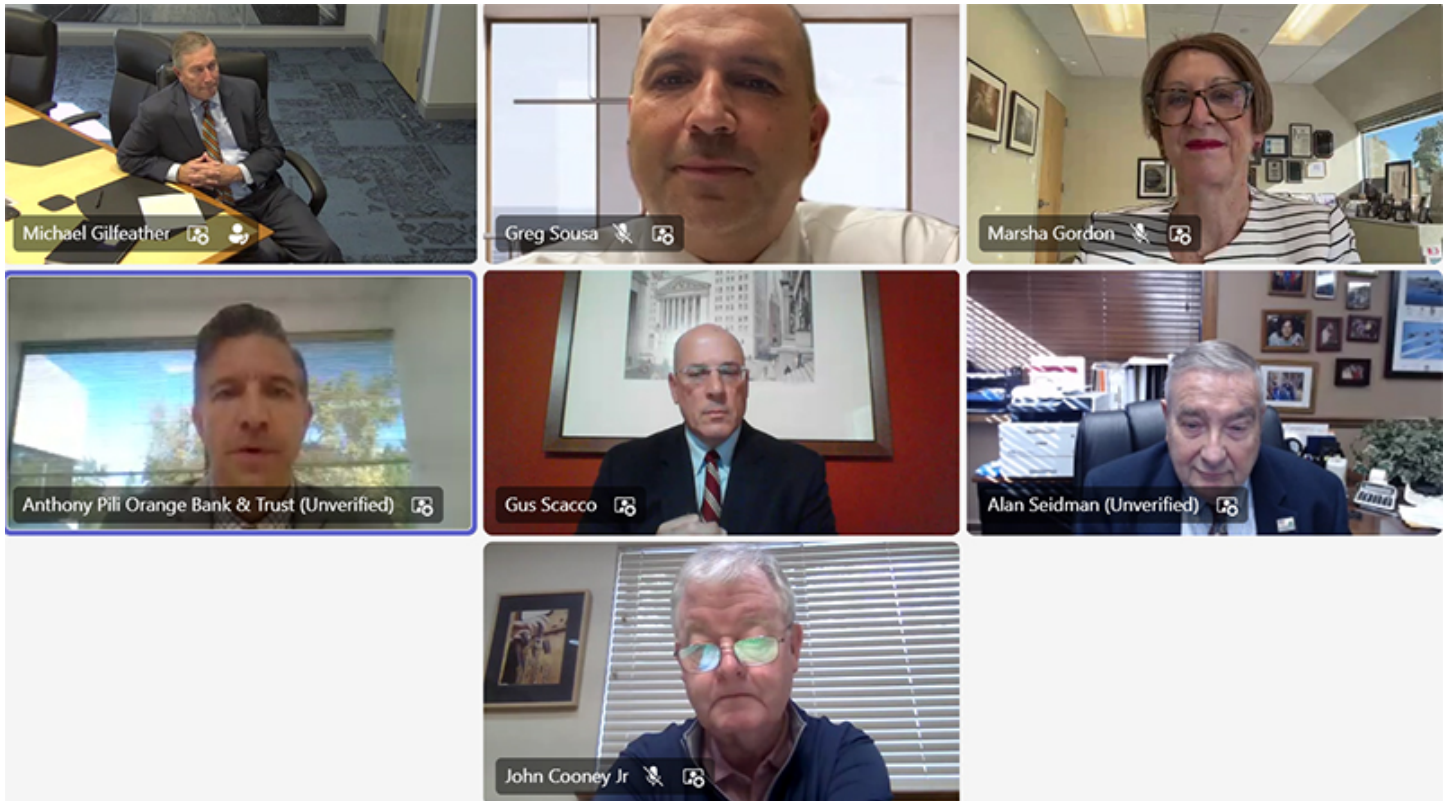




Orange Bank & Trust hosts Hudson Valley Economic Summit

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Middletown, NY A panel of local industry experts convened to discuss the state of the regional economy and resilience of the business community. “Hudson Valley Economic Summit: Navigating Growth, Challenges and Opportunities”, hosted by Orange Bank & Trust, featured Hudson Valley Investment Advisors Inc., The Business Council of Westchester, Construction Contractors Association of the Hudson Valley, and Construction Industry Council of Westchester & Hudson Valley Inc.

Michael Gilfeather, president and CEO of Orange Bank & Trust welcomed the virtual audience and the program was moderated by Anthony Pili, senior vice president and chief innovation officer of Orange Bank & Trust. Featured on the panel were: John Cooney Jr., executive director, Construction Industry Council of Westchester & Hudson Valley; Dr. Marsha Gordon, CEO, The Business Council of Westchester; Gus Scacco, CEO, Hudson Valley Investment Advisors; Alan Seidman, executive director, Construction Contractors Association of the Hudson Valley; and Greg Sousa, EVP and chief lending officer, Orange Bank & Trust.

“We are thrilled to once again host this annual program that’s deeply important to the local business community, bringing focus to topics that are essential to the health and growth of Hudson Valley’s economy,” said Gilfeather.

Pili kicked off the discussion with the Federal Reserve's recent interest rate cut, noting, "We all share in that mindset that cuts are good for construction, for lending, for economic expansion." He asked the panel to weigh in on how this and other financial factors are affecting their industries.

Scacco, a Wall Street industry veteran and one of the Hudson Valley's leading financial experts, presented an in-depth look at the economic climate and key factors driving and hampering its growth, including inflation and interest rates. However, he does not see a recession on the horizon.

"We think it's less than a 20 percent chance that we will see a recession. Right now, we call this the 'roaring 2020s' – we're actually in an up-cycle. The companies we are speaking with are looking to expand. Everyone is looking to invest and build their businesses. We're anticipating an acceleration as we move into 2025, once we get past the presidential election. Regardless of the outcome, generally the U.S. economy is an upward trending cycle and we look for growth to continue no matter what," he said.

Cooney spoke of the strength of the construction sector in the region, but emphasized the need for further investment in infrastructure to counter inflation, stating, "Our roads and bridges in the Hudson Valley are in the worst condition of any region in New York State. I'm bullish on continued growth in the private economy in the area, but for the State of New York – and our Senate and Assembly delegations have been responding to this – we're going to need Governor Hochul to recognize that our region needs an additional infusion of capital investment."

Seidman talked about some of the public sector work contractors have been involved with, including for educational and health care facilities, and expressed optimism for a rebound with private projects.

"The private sector work that has been on the back burner for a while, post-Covid, I think that backlog is going to go away as the interest rates come down. So, we're looking at the next two to three years being very, very strong," said Seidman, who cited opportunities for the construction industry with the \$250 million expansion planned for Woodbury Common Premium Outlets, which includes new retail and restaurant space, two 120-room hotels and two parking structures on the 149.5-acre property located just off Route 17 in Orange County.

Gordon talked about some of the transformational projects reshaping Westchester County's business landscape, including Cappelli Development's \$2.5 billion mixed-use plan for the former Galleria mall in White Plains, to include residential towers, office and retail space. She also noted "tremendous growth" in the film and TV production industry, with Lionsgate Studios, a video and film production facility on a one-million-square-foot campus in Yonkers.

"Yonkers has become Hollywood on the Hudson – it's really amazing to see the changes and how this is transforming the community," she said. "Also, we're all being transformed, in terms of how AI is affecting our businesses, which has been a big focus for The Business Council of Westchester this year."

When it comes to the lending environment, Sousa said emerging technologies will have a major impact in the near term. “I’m bullish on the market over the next couple of years. Loan applications have been coming in, and I’m feeling re-energized with this conversation today. Internally, we’ve been speaking about the renewable energy segment and we’ve done several projects throughout the tristate, but we’re happy to hear about more opportunities to help contractors in this market.”

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