

North Country Regional Economic Development Council

Public Participation – 2012

The Regional Council engaged an active public participation committee to guide its activities for outreach to citizens. This committee met approximately every three to four weeks from March to September 2012. Members of the committee include: Eric Virkler and Keith Tyo – Co-Chairs, Garry Douglas and Anthony Collins – Council Co-Chairs, Kelly Chezum, Sue Matton, Jennifer Kowalczyk, and state agency staff – Rosemary Redmond, Roseanne Murphy, Kathy Amyot and Keith McKeever.

The Goal of the Public Participation committee is to ensure the North Country Regional Economic Development Council continues to educate and engage the public regarding its activities and the strategic plan. The NCREDC followed two key paths to engage the public in 2012 – active participation and presentations in the community as well as via the world wide web.

Following up on a successful public forum campaign in 2011, the Council again set a goal of visiting all seven of its counties for events. In June and July 2012, Council Co-Chairs Garry Douglas and Anthony Collins made presentations at public meetings in Watertown, Lowville, Massena, Plattsburgh, Elizabethtown, Tupper Lake and Indian Lake. These events were well attended.

The Co-Chairs delivered a presentation that was focused on relating the progress of the council in year two and how an organization or business could seek funding through the current year Consolidated Funding Application process. We noted the attendees at these public forums were not just individuals tied to the economic development and government agencies, but local citizens with ideas, comments and questions. The council heard about business ideas related to green energy, the need to develop our tourism assets and concerns for upgrades to municipal infrastructure. Now that the North Country's strategic plan is approved, it was evident that our citizens had reviewed this plan through their engagement and their willingness to discuss and participate in the process.

In addition to very successful public forums, the council had many other opportunities to engage members of our communities. We were included in the agenda at several significant regional events –

- Adirondack Local Government Days (March 20-21).
- North Country Clean Energy Conference (June 22)
- Common Ground Alliance (July 17)

At other smaller venues, council members carried the message about the regional council and the North Country plan to community meetings, including chambers, Rotary clubs, and others. The Council's Plan Implementation Committee met regularly throughout 2012, and this group also made a special effort to visit each of the seven counties. At each meeting, representatives of the local community spoke to the committee about priority projects or prospective projects in their area. This was a great opportunity for the council to get direct feedback from individuals in industry, health care, or community development. At these meetings, private business representatives from organizations such as Bombardier, Krog

Corporation, Kraft Foods, North Country Pasteured, The Adirondack Resort Community and others took their time to update the implementation committee on their business activities.

Another component of contact with citizens throughout the North Country occurred through work groups and other partnerships the Council has developed as it implements its strategic plan. The Council continued to solicit input from nine work groups focused on major segments of our economy. These work groups brought together approximately 200 individuals with expertise in their field to bring ideas and discussion forward for plan implementation. Included in these work groups, and in the project implementation committee were members of state agencies. Representatives from the Tug Hill Commission, NYS DEC, APA, DOS, DOL and other agencies were active resources for the North Country Council.

Representatives of the nine colleges and universities in the region (St. Lawrence University, Clarkson University, Paul Smith's College, SUNY Canton, SUNY Potsdam, SUNY Plattsburgh, Clinton, Community College, Jefferson Community College and North Country Community College), two research institutes (Trudeau Institute in Saranac Lake and William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute in Chazy) along with CITEC have formed a consortium to work on plan implementation. The North Country Higher Education Research and Development Consortium (NCHEARD) is coordinating development of performance measures to document the success of our economic development efforts. These institutions are also working together on workforce development issues and stimulating entrepreneurship. On top of all this, the NCREDC has been actively working with the North Country Alliance, Adirondack Economic Development Council, Thousand Islands Tourism Council, and the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council.

Along with direct contact with the public and members of our communities, the NCREDC utilized various multimedia to engage residents of the region. We have a strong focus on our website www.northcountryopenforbusiness.com. This user-friendly site has been very active throughout 2012 with information on program updates and time sensitive materials. It provides information on the North Country plan, upcoming meetings and the Consolidated Funding Application. At public forums and CFA training events, the web site was referred to for all the critical information needed for funding applications and consideration as a priority project. Our site included a downloadable recording of a CFA training session for individuals that could not attend in person. We believe our North Country web site has been a tremendous resource for our citizens and it is by far the most informative of the 10 regional web sites.

The Regional Council continues to maintain a NorthCountryOpenforBusiness Facebook page with approximately 150 friends. All of our public forums, CFA training sessions, and the regional events noted above have been publicized in local newspapers, radio and television outlets. North Country Public Radio, a popular NPR station, based in Canton, that broadcasts to virtually the entire region, completed a sequence of interviews and stories to highlight the activity of the council.

The North Country Region is a vast area. We believe our council has made great efforts, traveled thousands of miles, and utilized our digital technology to reach out and engage our communities.

Through comments received and participation at events, it is evident that North Country citizens are aware of our plan and have begun to take ownership of the actions it recommends. We expect to continue these efforts as the North Country Strategic Plan is implemented in future years