

THE LIREDC OPPORTUNITY AGENDA: AN OVERVIEW

In its 2011 Strategic Plan, the LIREDC reckoned with the region's past and seized opportunities for its future. Our strategies placed special emphasis on ensuring that all of Long Island's communities – including those which had suffered from long-term isolation and disinvestment – would reap the benefits of the state's new, transformative approach. This year's **Opportunity Agenda** initiative will enable the region to realize the promise of the equity-oriented approach set forth in the strategic plan, by moving un- and underemployed people into the work force and revitalizing a distressed community.

The Long Island Regional Council has selected Wyandanch – encompassing the Census-Designated Place and the immediately surrounding area – as the region's 2013 Opportunity Area for reasons of demonstrated need and existing community assets. Based on information from national, state, and local data sources, Wyandanch ranks high on metrics of social need: over 10% of its working-age labor force is unemployed; its median household income is barely half of the county's, while one in six households receives food stamps, and one in ten receives cash assistance. (The figures are higher still in the central and eastern areas of the community.)

As to community assets, Wyandanch is ideally positioned, geographically and institutionally, to maximize the impact of CFA resources to create employment opportunities. Wyandanch is located at the nexus of major mass and surface public transportation, near a cluster of light industrial employers. Just as importantly, the Wyandanch Rising initiative has the leadership, governance, and implementation structure in place to achieve success. Over the past decade, the Town of Babylon has demonstrated commitment to the project by investing over \$50M in site assemblage, remediation and infrastructure improvements which has successfully leveraged additional investments of state, federal sources and private sector capital to advance the revitalization project. Numerous NYS and federal agencies have participated to date in the critical public improvements and subsidies needed to attract a private sector development partner and, significantly, support from the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council in Rounds 1 and 2 resulted in \$7M in funding for multiple project components. Building on this progress toward a truly holistic transformation will require additional partners, increased financial support, and public participation. Many local residents worry that reinvestment will not benefit them, and may even result in displacement. Effective economic development calls for a three-pronged approach that includes: (1) community outreach to all groups within the community, which is majority African American, Haitian, and Latino, to address issues of concern including crime, gang activity, skills gaps, unemployment and health needs; (2) continued support for place-based approaches that deliver affordable and sustainable housing as well as critical infrastructure, beautification, and ongoing implementation; and (3) expanded person-based initiatives such as education, workforce training, and substance abuse programs to complement the county's intensifying focus on Wyandanch and link workers to vital job centers in growing sectors.

The combined expertise of the work group participants, particularly in the areas of education and workforce training, will help the region identify unmet needs and new opportunities. Council and work group members have proposed several approaches to ensure access to college education: adapting “cradle-to-career” models for Wyandanch; focusing regional efforts such as the United Way's FAFSA Assistance programs at the local level; and utilizing local campuses to prepare youth for college and to encourage applications. Yet, we must also ensure opportunities to the non-college-bound, displaced and incumbent workers, the mentally ill, and the long-term unemployed (especially veterans, who account for more than five percent of Wyandanch's adult population). These initiatives could draw upon community-based service providers (Adelante and United Way) and labor organizations, as well as other agency stakeholders that currently provide basic job readiness and the soft skills needed for job acquisition and retention. Existing community assets and new opportunities could support initiatives across skill levels: with increased funding and new collaborations, the Wyandanch Community Resource Center and the Family Life Center could expand their vitally-important work at local, one-stop resource centers that direct at-risk youth and others to service providers. In addition, the P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) initiative has tremendous potential for this community. STEM exposure and outreach to K-12 students by Farmingdale State College and Suffolk County Community College can also be expanded to provide skill development for non-matriculating and two year students with potential for careers in technical fields (including advanced manufacturing) that do not require a Bachelor's degree.

We seek to broaden these proposals by building on local leadership and knowledge. Starting this month, the LIREDC will reach out to the community in print, electronically, and in person. The council will hold stakeholder meetings, gather local input (nys-longisland@esd.ny.gov), and engage community members in discussions about how the Opportunity Agenda and related CFA opportunities can advance the Wyandanch Rising Initiative, support local residents, and remove barriers to public participation in the local revitalization. These meetings will foster collaborations between council members, work group members, additional local stakeholders, and ESD staff as they identify emergent economic development opportunities, develop CFA proposals, and integrate new state support with existing investments.