

**Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
Orange County Community Forum
September 22, 2011
Orange County Emergency Services Center, Goshen, NY
Small Group Discussion Notes**

Approximately 75 individuals attended the Orange County Public Forum in addition to several Council Members. Opening remarks and a brief power point were presented by Mid-Hudson Regional Council Deputy Director Thom Kleiner; remarks were provided by County Executive Ed Diana. Staff included Johny Nelson and Tanya White. Facilitation team members Fran Dunwell and Sally Drake facilitated the small group discussions. After small group reports, general comments were invited from the public. The following summarizes the discussions:

Common Elements from All Groups

Issues

- Workforce impediments including:
 - Lack of skilled workers
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Lack of broadband access
- Regional competition with larger counties
- Over-regulation and burdensome permitting processes (including SEQRA)
- Demographic challenges including aging population and out-migration of young people

Assets

- Strong economic development foundation and support
- Brand-able and highly marketable regional identity
- Abundant natural and recreational resources and popular tourist attractions
- Transportation infrastructure

Opportunities

- Potential to expand distribution industry sector
- Growth in agricultural sector
- Small city initiatives
- Availability of land and vacant manufacturing-based buildings to adapt for re-use

Red Group Discussion

Facilitator – Sally Drake

Issues

- High school taxes
- Too many local governments and duplicative services
- Northern counties suffer in the region
- Lack of affordable housing
- Losing manufacturing
- Resistance to development, “NIMBY”
- Lack of industry cluster data to identify what has most potential in the county
- Low skills and poor quality of secondary education
- Competing with neighboring states
- No strategies to deal with empty manufacturing buildings
- Out-migration of skilled workforce
- Insufficient rail capacity
- High poverty rate
- Brownfields
- Lack of coordinated business strategy
- Lack of funding for shovel ready sites
- Conflict between development and environment (SEQRA issues, recent designation of 20 thousand acres of wetlands in county)
- Challenges unique to the urban centers in the county

Assets

- Rich historic legacy
 - Many historic sites and historic architecture
 - West Point
- Two major interstates
- Proximity to New York City
- Woodbury Commons
- Strong, brand-able regional identity
- Abundant parkland
- Diverse population
- Variety of transportation—rail, air, road
- Roads support tandem trucking
- Three urban centers in one county
- Rivers
- County Emergency Services Building
- A vibrant artistic and cultural community
- Supportive business community and strong economic development foundation
 - OC Partnership

- Chamber of Commerce
- IDA
- Educated Workforce/Availability of higher education
- Strong agricultural base
 - Supports emerging small agriculture businesses
 - Growing number of farmers' markets

Opportunities

- Branding a strong Regional Identity—marketable and sellable to attract businesses and people to the region.
- Empty manufacturing buildings have potential for new uses
- Creating a small city urban initiative
- County is efficient in planning and permitting
- Growth in agricultural sector
- The county is well-positioned to expand in the Distribution industry sector
- Green jobs sector
 - Including stormwater

Blue Group Discussion

Facilitator – Fran Dunwell

Assets

- Infrastructure – 3 major highways
- Water & Sewer
- Proximity to airports
- Post secondary /learning institutions
- Tourism
- Quality of life City and county ; people want to live here
- Historic City centers
- Proximity to NYC
- Logistically location world enter
- Major rivers – Hudson, Delaware, Wallkill
- Skilled workforce
- Affordable housing and real estate
- Quality healthcare
- Airport county and Stewart
- Parks and recreation
- Farms/produce/fresh food
- Colleges, universities, partnerships
- #2 tourist destination in NYS (Woodbury Commons)
- Bear Mt. Park, WestPoint
- Historic sites
- Agriculture

- Water supply
- Black rock Forest Park
- Arts Center
- Home to Purple Heart Museum
- Washington Headquarters
- Underground RR Newburgh, entrance
- Birth of the Environmental Movement
- Decrease in crime rate
- Good economic development Corp. IDA, etc.

Issues

- Brain drain, migration out of those educated here
- Over-regulation
- Increase in crime rate in urban centers
- Over-population
- Transportation unreliable trains, not good infrastructure, lack of mass transit, no coordination mass transit to cities
- Lack of affordable housing for seniors, single parents, first time home buyers
- 2nd highest unsolved crime rate in the world (#1 is Los Angeles)
- Duplication of government services, need consolidation
- Resistance to growth, “not in my back yard”, better selling of ideas to people re: economic development
- Increase taxes, property
- Concentrated poverty lack of resources (in cities)
- Lack of brand strategy for the region
- Aging water and sewer infrastructure (roads, bridges, buildings)
- Newburgh (9W), Middletown (211) not enough infrastructure
- Lack initiative to rehab urban areas
- Lack of equality housing for all incomes
- Increase in homeless numbers
- Lack of manufacturing/ producing products
- Negative impact on one county/city/area
- Zero sum gain
- Increase cost of doing business, energy/labor/insurance/ etc.
- Lack of tax incentives that result in jobs, not best use of taxes
- 3 highways, increase drug trafficking= need for more police. Gateway for drug trafficking.
- Lack of government leadership
- Lack of vocational education in urban centers/cities/communities
- Vacant Main Street – migration of small businesses

Opportunities

- Large amount of land for development

- Large amount of vacant buildings
- Large amount of abandoned factories
- Large pool of skilled and unskilled workers, marketable to wide range of industries
- Airport – we can build on (long runway)
- Population base of 26 million within 100 miles
- Extend tax credits – filmmaking, actors, extend credits about to expire
- Increasing population
- Extend water fronts, tall ships
- Re-open close state facilities use to industrialize
- Work with farmers to produce own meats, produce
- 3 large cities w/ large health care, existing zoning, infrastructure, skilled work force, etc.
- SUNY Orange, can provide national level training to businesses (new/existing)
- Businesses and environmental groups work together
- Growth at Stewart Airport: more flights, international
- Cargo shipping, airports, train (air, rail, sea)- Newburgh
- Collaboration is unique: working with colleges, Chamber of Commerce, government (Orange county) IDA.
- Food shed for NYC
- Nationally significant environmental advancements
- Storm King legal decision
- Historically rich (NE Newburgh)
- Increase # of actors
- 2nd largest /widest Main St. in the world (Broadway)

Public Comment and Q&A

- County wide transportation is too complex and is a hindrance to getting to employment, services, etc.
- Home rule: Pro-development towns have trouble with DEC. 5-7 years approval process. Hurricane Irene loosened the regulations on streams. Do more of that.
- Create a task force on cities and villages. Create a task force to retain businesses. Don't let them go.
- We need to find clusters that can relocate to urban areas and look at empty factories
- Plan adaptive re-use plan for old structures. Address the dropout rate with career building opportunities to give them hope. Tie the region together through the cities and villages
- Affordable housing is an economic development engine. 150 people get hired for 18-24 units for a single building, 60K square feet. Housing contractors hire plumbers, contractors, banks.

- Deputy County-Executive announced word of a 1.95 million grant for renewable energy project in County.
- The City of Newburgh is in distress. There is homelessness, unemployment, high crime rates. People are killing each other because there is nothing else to do, selling drugs. Single parents can't make it. Money sent to Newburgh hasn't been put to the best use. Focus on the distressed places first. Newburgh is the most distressed and we need to do it together.
- Brain Drain (migration of those educated here). Technological advances need to be investigated so that we know what is going to be happening 5-10 years out and try and attract those industries.
- Technology changes will affect the trends. For example, five years ago bookstores and movie rentals were hot but not any more. We need to be aware of emerging trends both short-term and long-term.
- Need creative solutions/business anchors (tourism, hospitality, etc.). Trying to build a kayak park.
- Is the sum total of all initiatives that go into increasing goods/services for which we get money? Producing more than we consume is key.