

**Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
Putnam County Community Forum
October 3, 2011
Putnam Hospital Center, Carmel NY
Small Group Discussion Notes**

Approximately 60 individuals attended the Putnam County Public Forum in addition to Council Co-Chair Len Schleifer and Councilmember Robin Douglas, co-chair of the Public Participation Workgroup. Also attending were NYS Senator Greg Ball and Assemblyman Steve Katz. Opening remarks and a brief power point were presented by Dr. Schleifer. Staff included Aimee Vargas and Thom Kleiner. 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

- Burdensome state and local regulatory and permit processes
- Lack of countywide master plan
- High taxes/low sales tax revenue
- Lack of higher education center (SUNY or community college) in county

Assets

- Educated and skilled workforce
- Strong quality of life
- Location and access to transportation (rail, highway and air)
- Abundant natural resources

Opportunities

- Engaging small businesses and start-ups
- Plan for a centrally located community or performing arts center
- Green energy development
- Strong location for distribution center
- Potential to reuse empty spaces in county

Red Group Discussion

Facilitator – Sally Drake

Issues

- Burdensome state and local regulatory and permit processes
- Aging population
- Brain drain
- High property taxes
- Low sales tax revenue
- Retail competition with border state (Ct.)
- Empty retail stores, office buildings and gas stations

- No higher education institutions located in county
- High rent for businesses
- Transportation infrastructure—one lane highways
- MTA tax
- Lack of support and resources for start-up businesses
- No community or performing arts center

Assets

- Highly educated workforce
- Low unemployment
- Proximity to New York City
- Great quality of life
- Access to air, rail and highway transportation
- Strong support for business
- Growing cultural diversity
- Low crime rate
- Strong community services, including Office for the Aging
- Good balance between development and open space
- Beautiful natural resources

Opportunities

- Pursue the possibility of locating a SUNY branch or satellite in the County.
- Plan a centrally located performing arts and/or community center
- Develop a county-wide master plan—community is willing to engage in this process
- Encourage incubator projects particularly in green energy sector
- Green energy development
- Location is poised for a distribution center
- Good potential for infrastructure development—willingness to reuse abandoned buildings and other spaces

Blue Group Discussion

Facilitator – Fran Dunwell

Issues

- Legacy costs younger communities have an advantage over aging communities in hiring system.
- Fragmented municipal systems—300 government units
- No broadband
- Inconsistent local regulations and laws
- NYC Watershed regions
- Limited access to start-up capital
- High cost of living for blue collar workers
- Hard to get permits and too many permitting agencies
- “Not in my backyard” mentality
- Limited public transportation
- Limited access to water and sewer
- Lack of planning and vision
- High taxes

Assets

- Location including proximity to NYC, airports and transportation
- Highly educated and skilled workforce
- Abundant outdoor recreation resources—boating, trails, hunting, fishing
- Low crime rate
- Range of housing options
- High medical income and excellent medical facilities
- Strong arts community
- Diversity
- Ambitious people
- Natural resources and beauty

Opportunities

- Cluster development potential—bio-tech; agriculture; food and beverage
- Engage small businesses
- Incentive green energy development
- Streamline regulatory processes
- Engage in county-wide planning
- Pursue community college in county
- Lower taxes
- Make strong villages an asset if made viable
- Pursue strategic retail incentives
- Combine road and sewer work
- Increase tourism
- Compete with Ct.
- Streamline municipal services and permitting regulations
- Create an economy of scale through joint government and private sector facilities

Public Comment and Q&A

- Commenter was skeptical of this process but now is fully behind it. Kudos! Don't forget the small counties. Take care of existing business. Retain them, especially small business.

Response from RC: Westchester will not dominate the process. All counties will be equal. The projects will compete, not the counties.

- Question: How will Putnam fit in?

Response from RC: The council will hear you. Lobby for your ideas, put in an application, submit your ideas and build support. People live in Putnam because they like to hunt, fish, hike. They work in Westchester. Bring proposals.

- NYSERDA will fund Cleaner Greener Communities \$1 million. Get involved. Tie the strategic plan to the NYSERDA \$
- Retail cluster. Strategy for small and large stores along the CT border to expand.
- Commenter: The process is window-dressing. Small businesses do not ask for money. They want taxes, fees and regulations to be repealed. NC, SC, TX are open for business, NYS is not. Expand and support existing business. Lure new business. Focus on results not activity. Handing out checks and incentives is not the way to create results without grass roots action and small business. Hold a special session in Albany to repeal laws, taxes, fees. Large corporate giants are getting the big checks. Find out the inhibitors.

Response from RC: This is not window dressing. The Council is tackling the problems and bringing the issues to the Governor. Come up with solutions. Give out the money in a wise way. How leveraged is the funding? A whole consortium, if funded, has a multiplier effect. Some big stuff supports the small business. Tell us specifically what the good ideas are.

- Commenter: This process is great. Caused him to put together a complete strategic plan. Are you asking the IDA to file a CFA for each project? Next to impossible. How can he post his plan to the REDC website?

Response from RC: You must submit a project to the CFA if you are requesting money.

- There are lots of shovel ready projects. We need diversification not clusters.