

Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
Sullivan County Community Forum
September 12, 2011
Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, Bethel, NY
Small Group Discussion Notes

Approximately 110 individuals attended the Sullivan County Public Forum in addition to Council Co-Chair Dennis Murray and several Council Members. Opening remarks and a brief power point were presented by Dr. Murray; remarks were provided by Jonathan Rouis, Chair of the Sullivan County Legislature, and Terri Ward, President of the Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce. Mary Rodriguez and Robin Douglas attended as co-chairs of the Public Participation Workgroup. Staff included Aimee Vargas, Thom Kleiner, Tanya White and Johny Nelson. Facilitation team members Daphne Forezzi, 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

- Infrastructure -> transportation, broadband, hotels
- Healthcare
- Taxes/Non taxable properties

Assets

- Workforce (*some also listed as Issue*)
- Location related to large markets
- Natural resources
- Clean water
- Sullivan County Community College

Opportunities

- Tourism (also an asset)
- Agriculture
- Partnerships with other counties
- Potential to be regional food shed
- I-86 Corridor

Red Group Discussion

Facilitator – Sally Drake

Issues

- Lack of foot traffic in villages and distressed downtowns
- Unskilled workforce
- Poor health indicators among residents
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of well-paying jobs

- Spotty broadband access
- Lack of tourist lodging (hotels)
- Outdated county-wide master plan
- Lack of value-added agricultural infrastructure (e.g.: food storage facilities)
- Lack of attention to river-based communities
- Lack of shovel ready sites
- Watershed issues (DEP)
- Challenging demographics/high poverty, aging population
- Non-taxable properties
- Outmigration of young people

Assets

- Natural and Environmental Resources
 - Delaware River
 - Beautiful landscapes
 - Abundant open space
 - Clean air and water
- Proximity to New York City
- The community is well-situated for smart-growth—there is enough land to develop (commercially) in certain areas while also maintaining historic, natural and cultural resources in villages and towns.
- Historic villages offer unique opportunity for “Main Street” revitalization
- Sullivan County is a unique and special place
 - A place for healing, rejuvenation and reinvention
 - Community attracts interesting people
- Abundant Outdoor Recreation
 - Fly-fishing
 - Hiking
 - Camping
- Vibrant arts and cultural community
- Large second home ownership and large inventory of housing
- Plentiful farmland
 - Supports emerging small agriculture businesses
 - Growing number of farmers’ markets
- Emerging “Green” economy
- Strong community volunteerism—Sullivan Renaissance

Opportunities

- Potential of Route 17/future I-86 corridor
- Reviving a once-bustling film industry
- Sullivan County Community College
 - Supporting and increasing a skilled workforce
 - Including possibly becoming a 4-year institution
- Growth of small businesses
 - Including niche and cottage industries created by local artisans
- Tourism
 - Destination point close to major Northeast cities

- Marketing the area as “staycation destination”
- Potential for growth in hotel industry
- Creating a winter economy
- Potential for Main Street development in historic villages
- Creating a food-shed to supply locally grown foods to regional and NYC markets
- Plentiful and clean water resources
- Willingness to partner with other counties—using the unique and rural characteristics to complement the more urban-based settings in surrounding counties
- Good potential for infrastructure development—willingness to reuse abandoned buildings and other spaces
- The community is flexible—willing to try new things and be bold.
- “Small is good”: small, close-knit community fosters communication and consensus building

Yellow Group Discussion

Facilitator – Fran Dunwell

Issues

- “Our issues and assets frame our opportunities”
- Infrastructure needs: high speed internet/ broad band, roads, water and sewer
- Workforce: lots of unemployed people, lacking skills, college degrees and “soft skills” such as showing up on time etc.
- Taxes, lots of non-taxable properties
- Seasonal surges make it hard to sustain large hotels, but small B&Bs are an opportunity to cultivate
- Need 4 year college degree opportunity
- Need labor training, including “soft skills”
- Apathy, hopelessness, waiting for a savior
- No sense of region; East /West split; Sullivan is not usually seen as Hudson Valley
- Ghost town; Buildings are falling down
- Need opportunities to keep multi-generation families here
- Not enough health care professionals to meet the need
- Population spread out, taxes high for road maintenance, no public transportation
- Lack of access to retail; cash leaves the county

Assets

- Natural resources including scenic beauty, abundant water, clean air, parks & preserves, hunting, fishing, inexpensive property, fertile agriculture soil, a population of people who love nature, National Park, Wild Scenic River, free flowing streams
- Reputation as a “Healing Environment” which could support healthcare businesses
- This is the “Sweet Spot” - uncongested, beautiful but also close to the city; has access to multiple markets-- Binghamton, NYC, Pennsylvania—and the proximity to NYC allows businesses to develop here that flourish with this proximity, e.g. second homes
- Culture and history including Bethel Woods, Roebling bridge, WJFF Radio
- The “Woodstock” legacy has defined Sullivan County as a place to lead the world on green, a place to reinvent yourself , a healing environment, a peaceful place, a musical Mecca
- Diverse workforce – huge variety of skills
- Accessible to 25% of the US population

Opportunities

- Abundant labor force ready to work
- Healthy family activities
- Tourism: Agri-tourism, Eco-tourism, Heritage-tourism; need facilities to support tourism and second homes
- Agriculture: Support the farm industry - provide slaughterhouse accessible to local farms; help farmers get product to market; need a plan to attract young farmers in light of aging farm population; offer processing, light manufacturing
- Energy businesses gas, solar, wind , green buildings, natural gas (seen as both an opportunity and a hazard)
- Gateway for National Park, package and promote the NPS “Arrowhead brand” NPS, Unique National Park founded on partnerships, promote access to all parks and preserves
- Assisted living for aging parents with kids in NYC “Step Care” great place for grandkids to visit
- Don’t chase the big factory illusion; focus on small businesses, hamlets
- Nurture ecological developments such as Planned Unit Developments
- Use the SUNY CREEO Regional Well Being Project as a guide , defines useful metrics

BLUE GROUP DISCUSSION

Facilitator Daphne Forezzi

Issues

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of renewable energy credit/support from NYS
- Lack of (broadband) hi-speed internet , cable, and cell service
- Lack of workforce with secondary education
- Seasonal nature of activities e.g., tourism, agriculture; therefore sustainability an issue
- Population rise and fall seasonally – taxes the resources
- Tax exempt properties/limited tax base
- Lack of infrastructure to support agriculture and agriculture tourism
- No system to bring workers into agriculture
- Lack of quality infrastructure to support tourism (e.g., hotels); therefore can’t host large events
- Possibility of hydrofracking
 - +/-
 - Affects real estate market
- Diverse population needs not identified or addressed
- Lack of public health infrastructure/services
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of entertainment/stores
- Lack of activities, jobs, etc. for youth
- Lack of affordable housing, especially for senior citizens and young people
- Closing of state facilities (e.g., correctional facilities) and schools

Assets

- Bethel Woods
- Center for Discovery
- River
- Sullivan County Community College
- MMC
- Holiday Mountain Ski
- Forestburg Theatre
- Delaware Valley Arts Alliance
- Large Arts and Culture Community
- Roscoe Trout Town
- History (e.g. Woodstock)
- Affordable golf courses
- Parks and camping
- Affordability in general
- Good location/proximity to major metro areas, NYC - Could be food shed for NYC
- Big employers
 - Hospital
 - New Hope
 - Catskill Regional Medical Center
 - Chrystal Run Health Care
- Marcellus Shale
- Natural beauty and unspoiled environment
- Route 17/I-86
- Camps bring people in, e.g. Stage Door Camp
- 4 Seasons Recreation
- Agriculture industry
- People who care
- Clean/abundant ground water
- Eagle migration attracts photographers (abundant natural wildlife)
- Cultural diversity
- Hunting and Fishing clubs, etc.
- Cheap real estate
- Winery and Brewery coming in
- Monticello Racino
- Villa Roma
- Lots to do for kids
- Adult population that will invest in youth
- Sullivan Renaissance
- Agriculture expansion potential
 - Eggs
 - Dairy
 - Honey
 - Maple syrup
 - Lots of agriculture infrastructure already
- National Park Service designation of parks so they are widely recognized
- Sullivan County Airport/Wurtsboro Airport
- State Forest Preserve

Opportunities

- Come together as a community (demographics)
- Passenger train service (e.g. tourism)
- Niche farming (e.g. alpaca, potato, etc.)
- Agriculture distribution systems
- Build energy efficient buildings
- Green Energy production potential
- Recycling initiative as income potential
- Sullivan County Community College provide training for green/energy jobs
- Establish green energy farms – wind, solar
- Tie together agriculture and tourism
- Adaptive re-use for existing infrastructure, e.g. Red meat processing facility, Dairy production facility
- Expand/Increase capacity of youth sports programs
- Opportunities to provide affordable housing (land is cheap)
- Strengthen healthcare services for underprivileged
- Large labor pool
- Call centers to create jobs
- I-86 once finished will create opportunities
- Redevelopment of Apollo Project
- Develop/expand mentoring of youth

OPEN COMMENT PERIOD

- Hydrofracking effect on Sullivan County
 - Core issues we must address
 - We must prohibit
- High taxes
 - Statewide something must be done about property taxes
- Hydrofracking puts other sectors at risk
- Sullivan's concerns may be lost in voices of other counties that don't have similar issues
- Perfect opportunity for this region
 - Sullivan County can supply labor for business growth in other counties (abundant labor workforce)
- Support for leading state in green initiatives
- Hydrofracking will produce jobs
- Encourage and help young people/young families – make living and starting businesses more affordable; how can we help them move ahead?
- Refreshing not to hear the word “casino”
- Days of attracting large global corporations is gone
- Sullivan county – incredibly diverse people
- Beautiful area but no hotels
- Small scale tourism development is happening, B & B's, etc.
- How do all these assets/opportunities/issues distinguish Sullivan County and how can assets/opportunities work with other counties?
- Don't want to be competitive with own region

