

**Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council  
Ulster County Community Forum  
September 21, 2011  
SUNY Ulster, Stone Ridge, NY  
Small Group Discussion Notes**

Approximately 100 individuals attended the Ulster 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 Dr. Don Katt, President, SUNY Ulster. Mary Rodriguez attended as co-chair of the Public Participation Workgroup. Staff included Thom Kleiner and Johny Nelson. Facilitation team members Tanya White, 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***

- Agriculture
- Natural resources
- Clean water
- Strong regional identity and quality of life

***Opportunities***

- Agriculture and agro-tourism
- Partnerships with other counties
- Green energy development (incl. solar energy and recycling)
- Expansion of recreational-based tourism around trail network

## **Red Group Discussion**

Facilitator – Sally Drake

### ***Issues***

- Unskilled workforce
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of well-paying jobs
- Spotty broadband access
- Workforce impediments incl. quality day care and access to public transportation
- Watershed issues (DEP)
- Challenging demographics/ aging population, out-migration of youth
- High property taxes
- SEQRA and other planning issues

### ***Assets***

- Natural and Environmental Resources
  - Water Resources
  - The Walkway Over The Hudson
  - Trail network
  - Mohonk Preserve
- Proximity to New York City
- Strong, brand-able regional identity
- Belleayre Ski Center
- Educated Workforce
- A creative and artistic community
- Strong of quality of life
- Educated Workforce
- Strong agricultural base
  - Supports emerging small agriculture businesses
  - Growing number of farmers' markets

### ***Opportunities***

- Growth of small businesses
  - Including niche and cottage industries created by local artisans
- Tourism
  - 4-season destination
  - Brand-able region “Hudson Valley” is recognized worldwide
- 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
- The community is flexible—willing to try new things and be bold.

## **Blue Group Discussion**

Facilitator – Fran Dunwell

### ***Issues***

- Disjointed planning and permitting process
- Shortage of workforce housing, affordable housing, housing for seniors
- Transportation issues for poor and youth
- Environmental process (8-10 years)
- Education – lack of graduate level programs (tech)
  - Need to re-education adults/professionals
- Cost of owning property (property/school taxes)
- Housing mix match – aging, energy inefficient, suburban homes don't match population
- Empire Zone tax credits withdrawn – impact on development
- Childhood obesity (40%)
- Aging population
- Inability to attract young professionals
- Lack of aggressive tax credits
- Lack of shovel ready sites
- Mix uneducated work-ready soft skills
- Relationship with communities and RNC watershed
  - Fiscal
  - Environmental
  - Lack of concern
- Public infrastructure – need functional infrastructure roadways impact of weather patterns
- Assets/issues in conflict with one another
  - Property taxes – education \*reconcile
- Seasonality of area tourism, eg.

### ***Assets***

- Green EC Dev Movement
- Extraordinary Ag base
- Clean Water/Clean Air
- Agri tourism
- Scenic beauty of County
- Location – proximity to NYC and Albany
- Strong workforce development system strong network of business
- Colleges (Marist, New Paltz, Ulster)
- Strong BOCES, CCs, 4 year SUNY
- Good workforce
- Heritage opportunities/tourism

- Waterfront development
- Recreation (rail trails, biking)
- City Hamlets
- Historical sites
- Healthcare (unified hospital systems, no shortage of physicians – established training program)
- Small cities/urban downtowns/walk-able communities
- Policy in place non motorized transportation
- Weekend community from NYC
  - Fight to preserve overdevelopment and sprawl
- Artists
- Preventing sprawl/preserving Open Space
- Med in Kingston
- Commercial rail (CSX)

### ***Opportunities***

- Recycling vs. incinerating (done in Kingston)
- Micro tech (solar)
- Retrofit commercial and residential buildings
- Developing light rail
- Rid of burdensome requirements
- Revamp all handicaps/challenges with processes currently in place
- County housing policy
- Natural resources – eco tourism, increased use of reservoir
- Mitigate cost of living (heat, property taxes, need for auto dependency on cars)
- Implementation of enhanced building codes
- Market for solar energy – utility industry regulation review
- Comp planning process in Kingston – go countywide
- Develop clear market brand that targets specific types of tourism
- Make NYS more competitive state level impacts local level regional
  - Tax/finance doc.
- Use work product of “Ulster Tomorrow”
- International Businesses (manufacturing tourists)
- Public marketing/government procurement
  - Show how to get to RFPs/RFQs
- Niche Manufacturing
  - (EI) manufacturing
  - Wineries
  - Agriculture
  - Freeze-dried products
  - Ec. Gardening
- Fracking impact on water
- Bring foreign engineering companies

- Hudson River
- Shovel ready sites

## **Yellow Group Discussion**

**Facilitator: Tanya N. White**

### ***Issues***

- Over regulation – specifically DEC
- Need to streamline the process – incentives/minimum environmental impact)
- Taxes – too high/land tax is a big one/homestead tax
- School funding – current tax scheme is uncompetitive and unfair
- Workforce development
- Make workforce attractive to businesses and employers
- Need to engage in strategic execution/implementation
- The County leadership needs additional training
- Not highest use of real estate
- Shortage of Commercial real estate that is turnkey ready
- 40% of commercial real estate in Kingston is owned by NYS
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of transportation
- SEQRA
- Higher Education development
- Government waste – lack of oversight/too many layers of government

### ***Assets***

- Nat'l/historic resources – Nat'l and cultural infrastructure
- Proximity to NYC and Albany
- 84 and 87 – 7 Thruways – lends itself to commerce
- Agriculture
- Arts community
- Strong public higher education institutions
- Green jobs – strong potential for green jobs
- Utilization of solar/green energy (all alternative energies)
- NYSERDA
- Tourism
- Quality of Life
- Existing infrastructure
- A caring community

### ***Opportunities***

- Community Development

- Opportunity to make the County a great place to work (it is already a great place to live/visit)
- Opportunity to participate in coherent strategic plan  
Solar energy consortium
- Data/M Measurement – Development competitive metrics re: various industries (i.e.tourism) to make county attractive to job seekers/businesses

### **OPEN COMMENT PERIOD**

- Many of the region’s assets and issues are in conflict. For instance, a better educational system means higher taxes. The Council needs to work on how to address that kind of conflict.
- High taxes
  - Statewide something must be done about property taxes
- Funding sources are still too separate and distinct. Can the Council address those difference or amend regulations so that project applicants can leverage public and private funding sources at one time. Urge the Council to look at Senate Bill 5445 on public-private infrastructure funding.
- The Council should build on the regional economy and determine what the counties already have in common.
- SEQRA is a weapon against affordable housing and is an impediment to economic development.
- Ulster County has been the “poor step-child” in regional funding—how do we ensure the county does not get left out.
- The discontinuation of the Empire Zone program left certain projects unfunded and there needs to be a mechanism to help restart those projects
- The role of affordable housing must be acknowledged as central to economic development
- Hydro-fracking is a danger for the region’s water supply
- Discussion of strategic plan process and decision making process