

**Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
Westchester County Community Forum
October 25, 2011
SUNY Purchase**

Approximately 45 individuals attended the Westchester County Public Forum in addition to several Council Members. Opening remarks and a brief power point were presented by Council Co-Chair Len Schleifer, followed by a question and answer session. Council member Marsha Gordon then presented the Council's preliminary draft strategies. After that presentation, Co-Chair Schleifer asked for comments from the audience on each strategy. A general public comment period followed. The following summarizes the public comment on the draft strategy document and the open comment period.

Question and Answers Session

Several questions were asked about the CFA process. Council members and staff encouraged potential applicants to visit the website to view strategies and align project applications accordingly. Council members and staff explained the process and discussed the Council's endorsement standards and the role of the Council in the CFA scoring system.

- Question was asked about how housing projects will be ranked in the CFA. Council members discussed the general endorsement criteria that will be used including creating jobs and leveraging resources.
- Several comments noted that the CFA process is time consuming and confusing.
- There was concern that there is a gap in the CFA for small businesses and that they could be forgotten in this process. What defines a small business? Is small business development supported enough in the plan?
 - In general, small businesses are defined as having fewer than 100 employees; sometimes the definition is 50 employees.
 - The strategies include small business and a working group has been working on the issue in the planning process.

Strategy One:

Target job creation investments in identifiable industry "clusters" (red circle industries) such as biotech, high-tech manufacturing, and information technology.

Comments:

- This strategy makes sense because it recognizes that different counties have different strengths.

Strategy Two:

Develop strategies to retain and stimulate more mature (purple circles) industries such as distribution, business and professional services, health care and food and beverage.

Comments:

- Retention of existing industries is a challenge. There are major cost inhibitors in the state and companies need to have a reason to stay here.

Council members pointed out that the Inhibitors workgroup has identified several areas to be addressed. The group has also identified statewide issues to bring to the attention of the Chair's Committee.

Strategy Three

Leverage the region's outstanding natural resources in a "natural infrastructure" strategy that views agriculture, tourism, and the environment (green circle industries) as quality of life attributes that are critical to attracting and retaining high-quality jobs for all key industry sectors.

- Energy efficiency projects can save millions in utility costs. There is also significant funding available for re-investment. Glad to see that energy issues are included in the strategies.

Strategy Four

Improve key regional infrastructure to make the region more business-ready

- Metrics should be used to assess infrastructure upgrades. Suggest the creation of a simple calculator to assess job creation results.
- Look at water resources

Strategy Five

Using housing investment to attract jobs in the region, create construction jobs, and support the overall health of the regional economy through a vibrant housing market.

- High taxes are an inhibitor to housing. Council members noted that this issue crosses all regions and will be brought to the Chairmen's council.
- Energy efficiency projects create jobs.

Strategy Six

Develop an Urban Strategy

Strategy Seven

Enhance the region's talent pipeline through its college and universities, One-Stop centers, BOCES and school systems. Support investments that build long term strategies for growth as well as short term responses to emerging needs.

- Access to quality, affordable child care has been identified as an issue that affects this strategy. Availability of child care affects the decision making of young families in terms of where they choose to work and live.
- NYU started its own venture capital fund that backs businesses that come out of state education system

Strategy Eight

Serve small and medium-sized businesses by making it easier for them to access public-and private-sector resources for access to capital; workforce training; and business and technical consulting.

Strategy Nine

Make the region and NY State more business friendly by removing tax and administrative policies that are major disincentives to businesses locating and staying in the region. Task Regional Co-Chairs with pursuing the following statewide issues

- Remove burdensome taxes.
- How to blend state and local interests—this needs organization.

Strategy 10

Develop non-mandated programs that encourage, educate, and foster green development projects as part of developing a green Hudson Valley economy.

- This strategy needs to be fleshed out more.
- Council members noted that audience members should email suggestions to the Council.
- Green energy will have transformative impact on region.
- The diagram should reflect true conditions and shows relationship. As it now, it looks more like silos.

Council members asked audience to submit comments on the remaining strategies.