

**Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
Dutchess County Community Forum
October 4, 2011
Locust Grove Estate, Poughkeepsie NY
Small Group Discussion Notes**

Approximately 120 individuals attended the Dutchess County Public Forum in addition to Council Co-Chair Dennis Murray and Council Members Mary Rodrigues and Robin Douglas, co-chairs of the Public Participation Workgroup. Also in attendance were Councilmember Ned Sullivan, Dutchess County Executive Bill Steinhaus and NYS Assemblyman Marc Molinaro. Opening remarks and a brief power point were presented by Dr. Murray. Staff included Thom Kleiner. Facilitation team members Fran Dunwell, Tanya White, Daphne Forezzi 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

- Skills gap in workforce
- High taxes—specifically school and MTA tax
- Burdensome state and local approval processes
- Competition with neighboring states

Assets

- Strong community and high quality of life
- Higher education
- Hudson River and abundant natural resources
- Access to multi-modal transportation
- Major tourist attractions including historic sites, Walkway, and Culinary Institute for America

Opportunities

- Agriculture—potential for growth in agri-tourism and value-added agri-business
- Potential for growth and revenue in Tourism sector
- Waterfront Development
- Investment in cities
- Re-use of vacant properties

Yellow Group Discussion

Facilitator – Sally Drake

Issues

- Burdensome state and local regulatory and permit processes incl. SEQRA
- Brain-drain
- High school taxes
- Lots of unused and abandoned spaces
- Topography limits development
- Lack of sewer/water infrastructure in some areas, and lack of coordination to plan for these
- Transportation infrastructure is limited East-West

- MTA tax
- Lack of diversity in housing (including affordable apartments)
- Difficult for tractor-trailer transportation through and in the county
- Suburban sprawl
- Too many municipal entities and not enough shared services
- Lack of availability of micro-credit
- Lack of access to broadband in some areas
- High taxpayer expectations
- Changes to Empire Zone program stalling development projects
- Lack of state support for small businesses
- Inter-state competition for business
- Rules and regulations imposed by the Tax Dept.
- Lack of business model for tourism—need to embrace the potential for a revenue stream in this sector
- High cost of utilities—specifically water

Assets

- Substantial high value manufacturing exists in county
- Agriculture
- Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park
- Strong tourism—historic sites, parks
- Hudson River
- Metro-North
- Diversity
- Urban infrastructure
- IBM
- Strong community
- Beautiful natural resources
- Strong transportation infrastructure—particularly north-south
- Higher Education
- Culinary Institute of America
- Strong arts and culture
- Proximity to NYC
- Lots of shopping and dining
- Strong medical sector
- Relatively affordable housing
- Strong non-profit sector
- Decision makers value the county's assets
- Great place for families to live
- Strong public utilities in some areas
- Stagnating incomes/lower wages
- High high-school drop-out rate
- Skills gap
- Lack of support for alternative energy sector

Opportunities

- Potential for growth in tourism sector
- Potential for growth in alternative energy sector
- Agricultural base is strong and can grow

- Waterfront development
- Job creation potential in green/bio-mass/agri-business sector
- Re-use of abandoned space including Hudson Valley Pysch. Center
- CSX rail-line
- Development for local farming opportunities including value-added initiatives
- Green and alternative energy development
- Location is poised for a distribution center

Blue Group Discussion

Facilitator – Daphne Forezzi

Issues

- Inadequate infrastructure: need wastewater/sewage treatment facilities
 - Too many unremediated superfund/brownfield sites
 - A lot of available/empty real estate – both commercial and residential
 - Shortage of quality industrial sites
 - High hidden unemployment numbers (e.g., state’s figures do not capture full picture)
 - Not enough qualified/skilled labor (e.g., machinists, tool/die makers)
 - Barriers to employment and training
 - Technical training is missing from schools – regents vs. school diploma issue
 - Difficulty in getting projects approved – whole process is too much red tape at all levels, discourages project sponsors
 - Lack of uniform planning/zoning
 - High property taxes
 - Limited access to capital
 - State economic revitalization projects are slow to work thru the bureaucracy
 - Duplication of services
 - Lack of public transportation to support jobs (e.g., no bus service on Sunday)
 - MTA taxes
 - Poor regional planning of transportation projects
 - Communication between school districts and businesses – businesses wondering why paying so much in school taxes
 - Local projects being awarded out of state
 - Unfunded mandates
 - Tax cap affects cost of living/cost of doing business
 - High percentage of educated young adults leaving the area
 - Not a right-to-work state
- Summary of Issues*
- Manpower Issues
 - Infrastructure Issues
 - Cost of Doing Business/Cost of Living Issues (e.g., taxes)
 - Underutilized Properties

Assets:

- Available real estate for repurposing
- Educated population
- Proximity to NYC
- Robust transportation infrastructure (e.g., commuter rails, airports, highways)
- Quality of life – scenic and natural resources

- Arts
- Colleges – Vassar, Marist, Culinary Institute
- Walkable communities
- Recreational assets
- Collaborative industrial teams
- Diverse manufacturing base
- Hospital and medical services; healthcare
- Hospitality
- Tourism (historic sites, natural resources, Walkway over Hudson, agricultural sites, etc.)
- Adequate water supply ready to be tapped
- Lower cost of energy and robust access to energy sources
- Culturally diverse population
- Location
- Significant economic activity with regard to expansions/contractions
- Open Space
- Hudson River

Opportunities

- Under-utilized Properties such as:
 - Wassaic Developmental Center
 - Wappinger Falls Bleachery
 - Harlem Valley Psych Center
 - Hudson River Psych Center
 - Long Dock
 - Carvel site
 - Casperkill
 - Dutchess Mall
 - Route 9 box stores
 - Texaco Research Center
 - Delavalle
 - Dutchess airport
 - Fairchild/Myers Corners
- Large open spaces
- Match education system with technical needs
- Revitalize existing historic clusters
- Expand retail corridor and rethink retail jobs
- Invest in cities – “TOD or transit-oriented development”
- Proven talent base that can work together to get things done
- Work with existing plans and implement (e.g., Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan)
- Center of green technology – opportunity to collaborate with Capital District
- Enhance use of natural resources/remediate critical environmental areas (e.g., Wappinger Lake)
- Better marketing/packaging of our tourism resources
- Better packaging of restaurants in relation to other assets

Red Group Discussion

Facilitator: Fran Dunwell

Issues

- Water and Sewer infrastructure inadequate

- Base school systems – inconsistent and challenges variance from District to District (school boards/communities) Early Education inconsistent – no accountability
- Do not practice smart growth
- High Speed Rail, need better flights out of Airports (Stewart)
- Access to capital
- Affordable housing
- Lack of jobs
- Inconsistent goals throughout the region
- Need to align political systems to aid/foster shovel ready sites
- Lack of emphasis on exports
- Need to upgrade transportation infrastructure
- Taxes – local are high, multiple tax jurisdictions that prevent smart growth
- Inconsistent permitting process
- Political structures are incompatible with watershed understanding/thinking/planning/safety
- More effective ability to do regional planning ie: small school district, cross river integration
- City of Poughkeepsie – Crime/drugs impacts youth
- Disconnect within region – some will not cross Taconic South no cohesive feeling.

Assets

- Easily commutable – rural, sub, etc.
- Variety of land uses
- Existing high tech environment
- Prime farm land – close to major markets and transportation
- Tourist sites (Culinary Institute/Historic sites)
- Hospital (Redevelop)
- Hudson River
- Kingston/Poughkeepsie/Cortlandt trifecta
- Psych Center redevelopment
- Wide variety of higher-education institutions and more informal education opportunities – eg. community colleges, college
- Beautiful landscapes – high quality – supports tourism, Agriculture
- Bio-diversity
- Youth – tech savvy well educated
- Hudson River
- Educated workforce and unemployed ready to work – attractive to incoming businesses
- Proximity to NYC
- F. Bros Hospital and medical facilities – fast growth
- IBM (Hi-Tech)
- Cultural institutions

Opportunities

- Regional collaboration re: opportunities
- Young people – retain after education
- Fresh food – county grows itself economically
- Articulate clear vision at all government levels
- Reverse commute – infrastructure not utilized
- Reverse education, arts, scientific – collaboration among them
- HS and college collaboration to train workforce

- Consortium for not-profits and competing against each other
- Transition to green energy economy
- Responsive higher education institutions
- Community should work with IBM to
 - promote medium and small business
 - Benefit to small business
 - Tax rebate – negotiate with IBM
- Expand tourist-oriented destination businesses (rich cultural and historic sites)
- Re-develop and revitalize waterfront
- Silo Ridge – Biggest development – Amenia project increase tourism destination
- Manufacturing background into green technology should be re-tapped and tap newer workforce couple with Education
- Diverse population – utilize talents, diversity to aid in tourism, manufacturing, business
- Collaboration with other regions (i.e. Tourism)

Public Comment and Q&A

- Commenter runs a general store. Getting a permit costs \$400 regardless of company size which is not equitable. Big box stores pay the same as small businesses. The region has lost nine newspapers – communities no longer have shared values and knowledge. Methodology – need trend thinking. Basic assumption that everything has to grow should be challenged.
- NYSERDA grant \$1 million for cleaner greener communities. Make it one single application from the region. Transition to green energy.
- Changes to Empire Zone program: Tax credit vanished mid-stream for his project. New projects not eligible because not new. Stalled projects. 485a – need more projects like that.
- MTA tax is an issue: Commenter built office in Poughkeepsie close to residential area so his employees could walk to work. He feels the MTA tax is unfair and burdensome.
- Women’s Enterprise Leadership Center, located in Westchester. 2006 census shows lots of small business accounts for half the jobs and half the income. Small business is key to economic growth but needs access to capital.
- Hudson Valley housing potential resources. 1-800-DIG is not cost effective. Not eligible for NYSERDA programs. Multi-generation housing needed. To generate funds for jobs fast spend on housing. Vacancy rate of less than 3.5%. 14 months of funding for each project. Generates equity leveraged with private financing Economic locomotive.
- Building wireless infrastructure was profitable in the last decade because of consumer demand. The community will support what they will be willing to pay for. Invest in and incentivize alternative energy.
- Natural resources are key to economic development and quality of life in this community – build a walkway around Wappaguet Lake. Tourism attraction, fishing, kayaking, swimming
- Farming in the Mid-Hudson generates \$250 million in business. With multiplier it is near \$1billion for related jobs such as truck drivers and mechanics.
- Question about the CFA workshop and the CFA decision making process.
- Small business – how big does it have to be for people to care about it? See federal government definition (50 or less)
- Emphasize exports