

DRAFT Meeting Notes
City of Plattsburgh
Downtown Revitalization Initiative
Local Planning Committee Meeting One
City Hall
September 15, 2016



Welcome (Agenda Item 1 – See Attached Agenda)

Mayor Calnon welcomed over 50 people to the organizational meeting of the Local Planning Committee for the Plattsburgh Downtown Revitalization Initiative and expressed his excitement about the process beginning and the opportunity it presents to the City. He remarked that the meeting would be streamed on the City website and YouTube. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyLzzutjyCI>.

The Mayor introduced his Co-Chair, SUNY Plattsburgh President and North Country REDC Member Dr. John Ettling. President Ettling introduced himself, mentioning his role on the North Country REDC and commenting that the “Region is on a roll.”

Introductions (Agenda Item 2)

The Mayor asked each Local Planning Committee Member present to introduce themselves and share some thoughts about the DRI opportunity.

Comments by Local Planning Committee Members present include:

- Amy Bonn, Owner, Finch Network Consulting – Ms. Bonn is a community and economic development consultant who has worked with the City and written many successful grants that have advanced local planning and projects. She is interested in the community engagement process, including helping to engage low-income people and other groups who may not always participate in programs like this.
- Rodney Brown, Director of Planning, Clinton County Planning Department – Mr. Brown mentioned that he has worked in Clinton County for many years and felt that this is a “real opportunity to move forward.”
- Michael Cashman, Supervisor, Town of Plattsburgh – Supervisor Cashman introduced the Town as “uptown Plattsburgh” and stressed the close working relationship between the Town and the City and the County that was moving important projects forward. He also mentioned that many committee members wear multiple hats and that the Committee represents a wealth of information and experience.
- Victoria Duley, Member, Development Corporation – Ms. Duley expressed the commitment of The Development Corporation and its role as operator of three industrial parks that are drawing companies and creating jobs.
- Neil Fesette, Broker and Owner, Fesette Realty, LLC – Mr. Fesette offered his experience as a broker with a strong real estate background to help understand the development economics of various projects.
- Katelyn Imhoff, President, Downtown Business Association – Ms. Imhoff, a downtown resident with a young child, will help bring the businesses together. She mentioned the importance of attracting downtown businesses while also helping current businesses to expand.

- Kristy Kennedy, Vice President Marketing, NC Chamber of Commerce – Ms. Kennedy commented that the Chamber is focused on making Plattsburgh a great destination that will improve quality of life.
- Harry McManus, Chairman, Clinton County Legislature – Mr. McManus expressed the importance of all levels of government working together: City, Town and County.
- Leigh Mundy, Chair, Strand Theater – Ms. Mundy talked about her experience raising funds for the Strand Theater – the heart of the City and the important role arts and cultural organizations can play in downtown revitalization.
- Sam Pirofsky, Owner, Ashley's Furniture – Mr. Pirofsky looks forward to using this process to help the community grow.
- Keith Tyo, Assistant to the President, SUNY Plattsburgh – Mr. Tyo is SUNY Plattsburgh's coordinator for the Start-Up NY initiative and the University's community liaison. He stressed the importance of engaging students in the process.
- Jeremiah Ward, Treasurer, Project Manager, North Country Food Co-op – Mr. Ward expressed excitement about the DRI and looks forward to helping integrate thinking about the City's food systems.

NYS State Agency Partners Present:

- Jeffrey Farrell, Governor's North Country Regional Representative
- Erin Hynes, North Country Deputy Regional Director, Empire State Development
- Barbara Kendall, Coastal Resources Specialist, NYS Department of State
- Andrew Labruzzo, Coastal Resources Specialist, NYS Department of State
- June O'Neil, Regional Representative, NYS Department of Labor
- Stephen Hunt, North Country Regional Director, Empire State Development (via teleconference)

Plattsburgh City Staff Present:

- Paul DeDominicas, Community Development Director, City of Plattsburgh
- Kevin Farrington, City Engineer, City of Plattsburgh
- Sandra Geddes, Events and Promotions Coordinator, City of Plattsburgh

Plattsburgh City Councilmembers Present:

- Becky Kasper, Ward 5
- Dale Dowdle, Ward 3
- Joshua Kretser, Ward 6
- Paul O'Connell, Ward 4

HR&A Team Members Present:

- Kate Collignon, Partner, HR&A Advisors
- Bret Collazzi, Principal, HR&A Advisors
- Conor Muldoon, Senior Analyst, HR&A Advisors

- Jackie Hakes, Director of Planning, MJ Engineering
- Margaret Irwin, Principal, River Street Planning & Development

Other Introductions

The Mayor introduced Paul DeDominicas, Community Development Director for the City, who will be the point person for City staff.

The Mayor introduced Kate Collignon, Partner with HR&A Advisors. HR&A team members introduced themselves and described their roles. Kate Collignon will be the partner in charge. Bret Collazzi will be the project director and Conor Muldoon will be the day-to-day project manager; Margaret Irwin from River Street Planning & Development will organize the community engagement process; and Jackie Hakes from MJ Engineering will help with site planning and engineering assessment.

Downtown Revitalization Overview (Agenda items 3. Overview, 4. Context and Goals, 5. Schedule and Scope, and 6. Community Engagement Strategy)

Ms. Collignon, Mr. Collazzi, Mr. Muldoon and Ms. Irwin shared the PowerPoint presentation (attached.)

At the end of the presentation, Ms. Collignon asked if the Committee members had any questions or comments.

The following comments were offered:

- Can the team share information about what other DRI communities are doing and maybe put them in touch? Andy Labruzzo from NYS DOS said that had not been suggested before but that he and Barbara Kendall are also working in Glens Falls and would ask to share content. Ms. Collignon mentioned that the team members were working in two other DRI communities: Jamestown and New York City. Ms. Irwin mentioned that the State is planning to have a website where information about each effort will be shared and that the team members have relationships with other DRI communities.
- Supervisor Cashman mentioned that he is happy the team represents such a comprehensive range of experience. He suggested that future meetings not be during the day when many people, including many downtown businesses and workers, find it hard to attend. He also stressed “harnessing social media” to engage younger participants and also the need to get out and talk to people, since face to face contact does matter.
- Mr. Fresette said that people are reporting that the \$10 million in DRI support has to be used in Durkee Street Parking Lot and it is important to make sure people know that other ideas and other projects can be advanced under this initiative.
- Mr. Brown said that the team and participants should be “prepared for great ideas,” and that there is “pent up demand” for this kind of effort. He stressed that Plattsburgh is the downtown for a larger region and reaching those people through surveys or other means should be considered.
- Mayor Calnon mentioned that 2/3 of the City’s visitors are from out-of-state and Quebec and wondered if there are ways to engage them in this process. In response to this, Ms. Kennedy said that Quebec visitors have different experiences and expectations of the downtown and that she would help the team to understand those expectations.

- Supervisor Cashman commented that “government works at glacial speed” and this process is going to be very fast. The Committee needs to stay positive.
- Mr. Tyo stressed the importance of involving the students.

Discussion and Next Steps (Agenda Item 7)

Then, Ms. Collignon returned to the presentation slide 12, which listed strategies the City has identified in past plans including:

- Develop underutilized centrally-located sites, including City Center;
- Support cultural assets and establish a downtown arts corridor;
- Activate the waterfront with recreational and visitor serving uses;
- Celebrate the natural resources with increased access to beaches and trails;
- Strengthen the existing manufacturing base and transportation cluster; and
- Protect and raise awareness of historic assets.

She mentioned that some ideas were listed in the DRI application like developing an incubator or maker space, and asked if there were any strategies the Committee would add to the list or wanted to speak about further. Responses included:

- Ms. Bonn mentioned that Mr. Ward had shared information with many people about the Strong Towns movement (<http://www.strongtowns.org>). She remarked that the City “rises and falls” on the quality of its school system and that educational institutions including public, private and parochial schools should be engaged. The City has an active and engaged new Superintendent of Schools who should be involved. It was also suggested that including groups like the JCEO (Joint Council for Economic Opportunity for Clinton and Franklin Counties) and the Plattsburgh Housing Authority will help ensure “holistic engagement.”
- Mr. Ward followed up by discussing the array of vacant retail storefronts and vacant upper stories in downtown buildings. He suggested that while new development is important, it’s also important and cost effective to look at reusing and rehabilitating buildings. Today’s retail rents can be very high for certain businesses and many small businesses are priced out of downtown. He remarked that the Downtown Association is motivating business and he sees an incubator strategy as key.

Mr. Fresette commented that many people living downtown don’t have disposable income and that new people need to be attracted who can live downtown and help support new businesses. This requires the City to have a better mix of rental offerings (more diversity) at higher price points.

- Mr. McManus stressed that attention has to be placed on the employment components and job creation. He commented that at high school reunions, most people who grew up in Plattsburgh are not coming back, in part because they could not find the work they want to do.
- Supervisor Cashman commented that there is a strong international influence in the City from Canadian visitors and also from international students. (SUNY Plattsburgh has one of the largest international student enrollments of any SUNY campus.) The multicultural experience is varied and the cultural expectations of these residents and visitors needs to be reflected in the plans. He suggested that the international influence is one to be celebrated.
- Ms. Duley echoed the call for development of market-rate housing at higher price points than currently exist.

- Ms. Kennedy stressed the City's incredible natural resources and asked that the plan create more ways for people to use the waterfronts and re-orient to the river.
- Dr. Ettlring remarked that the NC REDC has been very successful in the annual competitions and that the City should look to align its priorities with the NC REDC Strategic Plan. Ms. Collignon replied that the REDC plan would be closely reviewed.
- Mr. Fresette asked what thoughts the team has for leveraging funding. Ms. Collignon responded that the program creates opportunities to identify projects and bring together State Agencies with the resources to fund them, and use that to leverage the private sector interest and action.
- Ms. Bonn discussed the City as a "catalytic hub" that brings together a lot of incredible resources including Wilcox Dock, Dock Street, the Saranac Bridge and the River, etc. The DRI Plan needs to identify other catalysts that can draw on other funds and create a framework for investment in and around that hub.
- Ms. Mundy asked if the rules for spending the money are known. Ms. Collignon said they are being evaluated and the City has the ability to put forward projects that may influence how the funds can be spent.

Next Steps

Ms. Collignon discussed next steps including additional meetings, refining the engagement approach and setting the date for meetings - especially for an event in October/November. Ms. Duley suggested that setting the dates as soon as possible and well in advance of the events is important.

Public Comment Period (Agenda Item 8)

The Mayor opened the session to public comment. The following comments were offered:

- Aaron Benner talked about the importance of "living by example." He has recently moved downtown with his family and operates a business in the train station. He said that moving downtown was a big step and that families moving downtown is "where we turn the tide."
- Don Milz is an Environmental Planner and faculty member at SUNY Plattsburgh who offered some advice: 1. This is a very short timeframe and the group needs to be concerned about "process legitimacy." The process has to include lower-income homeowners to arrive at an investment strategy that benefits the downtown without gentrification. 2. The Team and Committee need to pay attention to ecosystem services when defining a downtown boundary. The City has some of the most advanced green infrastructure projects in the region and has been willing to demonstrate new and more sustainable solutions that have both social and ecological benefits. 3. Don't underestimate students. The City and his students work closely on planning projects throughout the year. They can add real value to the process.
- Julia Devine is from the SUNY Center for Public Services and wants the plan to be "creative" and use place-making principles using the arts as an economic driver. She pointed to public art installations and the murals downtown as examples of these principles in action. She is interested in helping to bring students into the process.
- John Seiden has been redeveloping downtown properties since the 1990's and sees it as the "heart and soul and the economic driver" for the City. He feels the priority is generating tax and other revenue for the City and that "housing is not a net gain." He suggests thinking creatively and differently and not squandering this opportunity by rushing. Think big – for example, could the waterways generate power?
- Sara Rouden has been in Plattsburgh many years: "BM and AM" - "Before the Mall and After the Mall" - and knows how negatively the Mall impacted downtown. She hopes the plan will embrace

healthy community principles like complete streets to create a walkable environment. She mentioned that tourists want to come to a healthy community.

- Matt Drowne owns a business downtown, Kinetic Running, and wants the plan to look at what is happening on the east side of the bridge. Focusing things on Durkee Street alone won't address the needs of those businesses. Other than some very good events, downtown is dead on Sunday. Being a seven-day community is a goal. People are also being priced out of living downtown – there should be a focus on people earning between \$25,000 and \$40,000 and meeting their housing needs. The plan also needs to be constructed so that it can survive political succession and be supportable over a long period of time.
- Devi Momot is a resident and property investor who talked about buying and rehabilitating downtown buildings and being “upside down” on the investment because it is expensive to make old buildings safe and decent to live in. Assistance to owners to save these buildings and attract people to live downtown is needed. The plan should also help to outline a strategy for “the other nine months of the year” when it's cold and there is much less activity downtown.
- Dave Merkel has been investing in downtown properties for over 40 years. He feels that the DRI process should be proactive. Meetings should not be scheduled in the afternoon, people need more notice and a contact database of emails should be developed to make sure the process has wide reach.
- Beverly Eichenlaub is an architect who recently moved downtown and hopes the plan will be inspirational and set high standards. She sees Plattsburgh's downtown as potentially being a model of a creative and culturally rich place.
- Trevor Cole is the Senior Planner for the Town of Plattsburgh and his office is also available to help however it can.
- Keith Herkelo talked about the work that was done for the destination master plan and his experience traveling to many places where tourists, including people on tourist bus trips, can help support a downtown.
- Laurie Saunders is not a resident, but is a city user with disposable income. She said that downtown is not user friendly for her with her grandchild, and lacks retail options she would like to see. She would like to see improved transportation to downtown that would not require driving and finding a parking space. She is excited to see the ideas that come from this effort.

Conclusion

The Mayor concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and inviting interested participants to join a brief walking tour of the downtown immediately following the meeting.