

Watkins Glen

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Meeting Notes

Date: October 2, 2017

Project Name: Watkins Glen Downtown Revitalization Initiative
Subject: Local Planning Committee Meeting #1

Meeting Location: Watkins Glen Village Hall
Meeting Date: September 27, 2017

Participants:

Local Planning Committee
Hon. Laurie DeNardo, Trustee, Village of Watkins Glen (co-chair)
Judy McKinney Cherry, CEcD, Executive Director, SCOPED (co-chair)
Hon. Dennis Fagan, Chair, Schuyler County Legislature
Jeannette Frank, Executive Director, Arc of Schuyler
Peter Honsberger, Owner, Great Escape Ice Cream Shop
Keith Klug, Plant Manager, Cargill Inc
Tim O’Hearn, County Administrator, Schuyler County
Amanda Smith-Socaris, Seneca Physical Therapy
Ben Stamp, Board member, FLX Gateway CDC
Kristin VanHorn, Director, Schuyler County Planning
Ken Wilson, Resident

New York State
Julie Sweet, Office of Planning and Development, NYS DOS
Andrew Griffin, Office of Community Renewal, NYS HCR
Donna Howell, Southern Tier Regional Director, NYS ESD
Joe Roman, Southern Tier Deputy Regional Director, NYS ESD

Consultant Team
Sarah Yackel, Principal, BFJ Planning
Susan Favate, Principal, BFJ Planning
Simon Kates, Associate, BFJ Planning
Ariana Branchini, Planner, BFJ Planning

The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the committee and members of the consultant team, discuss a public engagement plan and begin the process of identifying opportunities for revitalization in Watkins Glen. Approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to Village staff and members of the committee, consultant team and New York State.

- **Welcome and Introductions**

- Project overview given by co-chairs Judy McKinney Cherry and Laurie DeNardo
- Introduction by Watkins Glen DRI Committee, BFJ Planning Team, and New York State.
- Sarah Yackel, BFJ Planning, introduced members of the consultant team

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- **Local and Regional Vision**
 - Recap of DRI Application - Kristin VanHorn, Schuyler County Director of Planning.
 - Recap included overview of the plans reviewed while preparing the DRI round two application, opportunities and projects identified including Clute Park, vacant sites, commercial district and coordination with LWRP funding.
 - Recap of vision, goals and strategies included in the DRI application. The LPC confirmed the Vision and Goals—since these items were developed as part of prior public outreach for the DRI Application, the team will test the Vision and Goals with the public, but are able to build from the language already developed.
- **What is DRI?**
 - Sarah Yackel, BFJ Planning, gave an overview of the program objectives and discussed a strategy to build on the successful DRI application to ease implementation.
 - Ms. Yackel discussed the role of the Local Planning Committee as an advisory group that will steer the consultant team's work in identifying opportunities, assessing and prioritizing projects, and ensuring maximum community outreach throughout the process.
 - Simon Kates, BFJ Planning, gave an overview of the project schedule and deliverables.
- **Public Engagement Plan**
 - Simon Kates, BFJ Planning, discussed the outlined Public Engagement Plan.
 - Outline included strategies to reach local community, outreach to community organizations, and public workshop format ideas.
 - The first public workshop will be an open house format to take place at the Community Center on October 18.
 - A public survey, which can be advertised in mailed electric bills, will be conducted later in the process to look at projects. The survey will be conducted online, but hard copies will also be made available.
 - LPC Meetings were scheduled to generally occur on the fourth Wednesday of each month through March 2018 from 6:00pm to 8:00 pm at Village Hall (with exceptions for holidays). The next LPC meeting is scheduled for October 25. The following LPC meeting is scheduled for November 29. Future dates will be confirmed at the 10/25 meeting.
 - During discussion, Committee members suggested that the BFJ Planning Team plan to promote the project using an informational Facebook page as well as traditional advertising including community bulletin boards. BFJ will also provide copies of flyers and posters via email for the LPC to distribute through their own social networks.
- **Committee Discussion/Q&A**
 - Stakeholders as part of outreach—will there be focus groups and who should they be? Franklin Street businesses are important but there are other businesses (particularly on Decatur St) who are not in the core area and may feel underrepresented. During the planning and outreach process, the LPC and consultant team can explore strategies that reach businesses that benefit the downtown but are not located directly on Franklin St.
 - Vacation rental owners should be included in a focus group meeting—this is a major issue the Village faces and the DRI plan can explore strategies that support vacation rentals as part of the village's hospitality economy while also understanding the impact on the housing market and promoting year-round living.

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- The LPC agreed on the DRI boundary, though slight modifications can be made, if justified. There are three general zones that can be explored within the DRI boundary—the eastern gateway, the downtown core, and the southern gateway. In particular this discussion focused on whether a project on the east side of Decatur St. would be excluded from consideration. A project could be outside of the boundary if it benefits downtown or contributes meaningfully.
- DOS will provide additional program guidance materials to the LPC. FAQs are included in the meeting materials provided to the LPC and will be made available to the public online.
- BFJ will provide meeting notification flyers as part of public outreach in 11x17 and notecard size for distribution around the Village.
- School districts could also be a partner in helping get word out about public events and the survey—they have an email list and possibly would do a backpack stuffer.
- What from the DRI framework can be used/leveraged for LWRP so there is as much alignment as possible?
 - DRI retail assessment will focus on project development, with potential to leverage LWRP Strategic Planning/Feasibility Study/Retail Assessment to provide further project details where appropriate.
- **Next Steps**
 - BFJ to prepare the Downtown Profile and Assessment
 - Dates set for upcoming committee meetings and public workshops
 - Committee Meetings:
 - 4th Wednesday each month (through March, changes will be made in November and December for holidays)
 - LPC Meeting 2: October 25, 2017
 - LPC Meeting 3: November 29, 2017
 - Public Workshops:
 - Public Workshop #1: October 18
 - Public Workshop #2: early December – date and location TBD
 - Public Workshop #3: early February – date and location TBD
 - Committee will send comments on vision statement by 10/5 (Committee, BFJ)
 - LPC members will receive a Code of Conduct document to review and sign.
- **Public Comments**
 - Concern over projects located in the southern edge of the DRI boundary—should remain business transition and not include projects that will be disruptive to the area’s residential character.
 - Zoning laws—a three story motel doesn’t fit in this area, it’s important that the committee is familiar with the zoning laws as updated in 2016. Concern expressed about second and third floor residential uses if they require zoning changes.
 - The mission statement should include sustainability and consideration for the environment. Preservation and trees are very important—should require a permit to remove a tree, beautification efforts should be made as well.
 - Local business owners do not want the purchase of private property for public use as this would remove property from the tax roll. How much will be allocated to private projects? This is to be determined throughout the process, nothing has been set.
 - The time of the meetings is good.

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- The Schuyler County legislature could be an important stakeholder—the council of governments and town leadership affects the entire county.
- There should be a “report back” at the end of each public workshop.
- Two key groups whose input seems important/valuable include hospitality/service industry employees, and young people.
 - Service industry employees have daily/regular interaction with residents and tourists alike, as such they may have important and valuable input for the DRI process. However many work in the evenings/during times public meetings may be scheduled. Further, while DRI may also conduct morning public meetings (like DOT did), many of these same service industry employees are up late and may not be as inclined to attend an early morning meeting.
 - Young people, and especially millennials, are critical to the future of the community. It may be worth considering how to solicit and incorporate input from young people as it relates to what they see/would like to see in the community; accounting early for what it will take to retain this demographic could be strategically prudent.