

Meeting Summary

Catskill Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Local Planning Committee Meeting #2

June 26, 2025 | 5:00 – 6:30 pm

Attendees:

Local Planning Committee (LPC)

- Natasha Law (Co-Chair), Village of Catskill
- Joe Wildermuth (Co-Chair), Capital Regional Economic Development Council (CREDC)
- Gilbert Bagnell, Catskill Public Library
- Thomas Boomhower, Upstate Capital Association of New York
- Bertram Downes, Mental Health Association (MHA)
- Rachel Puckett Fisher, Mid-Hudson Fiber
- Jared Giordano, RC Lacy
- Jennifer Griem, Thomas Cole House
- Henry Haye, Resident
- Kai Hillman, MHA
- Elliott Matos, Hudson/Catskill Housing Coalition (HCHC)
- Junait Shah, Coxsackie-Athens School District
- Stella Yoon, Greene County Council of the Arts

State Agencies

- Lesley Zlatev, New York State Department of State (DOS)
- MaryElise Rees, Empire State Development (ESD)

Consultant Team

- Lynn Chong, HR&A Advisors
- Bret Collazzi, HR&A Advisors
- Jon Haragold, HR&A Advisors
- Matthew Rivas, HR&A Advisors
- Margaret Irwin, River Street Planning and Development
- Sophie Henderson, Upstate Consulting

Welcome Remarks and Timeline

- Jon Haragold welcomed all attendees and started the meeting.
- Haragold introduced the Local Planning Committee and provided an overview of the DRI timeline, including where the project is today.

Engagement Updates & Open Call for Projects

- Haragold provided an overview of all engagement efforts to date, including the stakeholder interviews, Farmers Market tabling, and the Hop-O-Nose community engagement.
- Margaret Irwin highlighted that the public workshop is happening tonight (6/26, 7-9pm) and walked through the goals and run of show for the workshop. Irwin also reminded attendees that the online survey is available on the DRI Catskill website for those who cannot attend the in-

person public workshop. Finally, Irwin showcased all the engagement and publicity materials that have been created thus far, including press releases, local media releases, email blasts, and various print-out materials for in-person engagement events.

- Haragold reminded attendees that the Open Call for Projects is opening today and encouraged LPC members to spread the word. Haragold emphasized that early submission is encouraged as it helps start a conversation between the potential project sponsor and the Consultant Team. Haragold also provided an overview of the types of questions asked in the project proposal form as well as the brief interest form intended for the Small Project Fund.
 - Key points about the Open Call for Projects:
 - \$12-15M worth of projects should be recommended in the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) of which \$10M worth of projects will be funded by the DRI. It is important to consider the synergistic potential of the slated projects.
 - Projects that were not included in the DRI application can still submit a project proposal through the Open Call for Projects process. Projects that were in the DRI application are still expected to submit through the Open Call process.
- Q&A:
 - Stella Yoon: What is the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) and what happens after it?
 - Haragold noted that SIP is the final product of the DRI planning process. Its core purpose is to recommend specific projects to be funded by the DRI fund and provide key context about the Village to help the State determine which projects to fund.
 - Lesley Zlatev added that the SIP is something that is drafted throughout the DRI planning process, not just something created at the very end.
 - Irwin noted that the State website has all past SIPs publicized for reference.
 - Gilbert Bagenell: When the SIP is delivered to the State, who exactly reviews the material?
 - Zlatev answered that Department of State (DOS), Division of Housing and Community Renewal (HCR), New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and Empire State Development (ESD) are part of the review panel.
 - Kai Hillman: Are other funds available for DRI projects?
 - Zlatev answered that other state programs can be leveraged to finance projects being proposed through the DRI process.

Downtown Profile & Assessment

- Haragold and Lynn Chong presented five key observations about the Downtown Creek District accompanied by demographic, economic, and observational data supporting the observations.
- Key Observation 1: Eclectic and Historic Downtown
 - Stella Yoon: Where did we find the data about storefront vacancies on Main Street?
 - Chong answered that it was provided by the Village of Catskill.
- Key Observation 2: Unique Downtown Waterfront
 - No questions.
- Key Observation 3: Population and Housing Affordability



- Jared Giordano: Where did we find the data on average annual earnings for each top occupation and why is it different from the median household income?
 - Haragold clarified that earnings data is pulled from the County level as the data is not available at a smaller geography. Moreover, the median household income is higher because it's across all occupations and calculated per household, not per job or individual job holder.
- Key Observation 4: Growing Tourism
 - No questions.
- Key Observation 5: Employment Opportunities
 - Stella Yoon: Employers are always looking for workers, but retention is an issue.
 - Haragold agreed and noted that workers are finding it difficult to afford living in the Village.
 - Jared Giordano also noted that the village is getting older (aging workforce). There aren't enough people of prime working age to fill those open positions. The hiring pool is getting smaller.
 - Stella Yoon added that workforce training is lacking. Employers are often trying to bring people from New York City to fill positions, but that is not a sustainable solution for the Village.
 - Rachel Puckett Fisher is on board for Columbia-Greene Workforce and mentioned that most kids graduating from high school in Catskill leave the area for employment opportunities. Further analysis is needed to understand why they are leaving and to where, but generally it is difficult to show youth that they can have a stable career here.
 - Henry Haye added that his kids worked locally but eventually moved to Ravena since the wage is low in Catskill.
 - Jennifer Griem: What does industrial / manufacturing mean and does the Village have enough water capacity to support those industries?
 - Natasha Law mentioned that the Village of Catskill is working on increasing water capacity.
 - Bret Collazzi noted that most industrial and manufacturing sites are currently outside the Village boundaries but within the Town of Catskill, closer to major highways.

Vision and Goals

- Matthew Rivas and Bret Collazzi presented the draft vision and goals and facilitated a discussion with LPC members to refine them.
- LPC feedback on Vision Statement:
 - Suggested Additions:
 - "Small-town, **historical** character"
 - "Grow into a more dynamic and **modern** place to live" (E.g., more modern and upgraded infrastructure)



- Include language about sustainability and environmental consciousness (E.g., ***"natural beauty"*** and not just parks and public spaces)
 - Potentially change "dynamic" to ***"enhanced"*** or ***"innovative"*** (Related to the needed focus on retaining residents in Catskill)
 - "remaining ***accessible*** to all people" (instead of "affordable")
 - Include language about attracting more families to the village
 - Include language about historic education (E.g., historical markers)
- Other comments:
 - Likes the emphasis on people of income levels and backgrounds
 - Elliot Matos: Who drafted the vision and goals and does the ordering/numbering of the goals matter?
 - Collazzi noted that they were drafted by HR&A based on our research and observations. Ordering/numbering of the goals is not meant to represent relative importance, but the team should consider reordering them regardless.
- Goal 1:
 - Suggested Edits: None
 - Suggested Strategies/Comments:
 - Junait Shah: New tourism center? How can we get people to come to Catskill, instead of Coxsackie?
 - Some LPC members think there are enough events happening in Catskill and it's more about needing improved infrastructure.
 - Gilbert Bagnell: Wayfinding, signage, and branding that can be done in a centralized place online (similar to the QR code tour at the cemetery)
 - Currently, people use Google, Facebook, and Great Northern Catskills website
 - Natasha Law: Should focus on bringing both visitors and residents to local events
 - Bertram Downes: How can we attract people during colder months?
- [Ran out of time to discuss the other goals in detail]
- General comments:
 - Gilbert Bagnell: The challenge with the Catskill Creek is that most of the available spaces on the waterfront are outside of community control (e.g., LUMBERYARD, tombstones, Cone-E Island, County transportation facilities)
 - Stella Yoon: We should think about sustainability for 10-20 years in the future.
 - Junait Shah: What are success stories from other small towns in New York?
 - Collazzi mentioned housing and public spaces have been key focus areas for other DRI towns
 - Zlatev added sustainability is also a big focus
 - Zlatev encouraged LPC members to make the vision and goals very specific to Catskill rather than comparing them to other towns.

Next Steps

- Open Call for Projects and online survey reminder

Public Comment

- Catskill Tree Council: Are the Small Project Funds also a reimbursement grant?
 - Zlatev confirmed that Small Project Funds are also disbursed as reimbursements.