

MEETING RECORD
City of Newburgh Vision Plan
Public Workshop 2

May 30, 2018, 6:30 pm, Newburgh Free Library



On Wednesday May 30, 2018, BFJ Planning facilitated the second Public Workshop for the Newburgh Vision Plan. The event was held at the Newburgh Free Library and started with a presentation on how the vision planning process works, an overview of public outreach strategies, review of feedback from the first public workshop, and an introduction to the round table discussion portion of the workshop. The workshop was attended by over 50 people, including members of the City Council, City staff, the County legislature, local nonprofit organizations, and members of the public. Public attendees participated in round table discussions, providing feedback and comments on the topic areas of the existing 2008 Comprehensive Plan. Each table included a member of the consultant team or City planning department, and a series of questions to encourage discussion of the top priorities for the topic area. The purpose of the exercise was to engage with participants to hear their priorities, and offer new ideas.

Chuck Thomas, Director of the Newburgh Free Library, opened the workshop by welcoming members of the public, and introducing the consultant team.

Frank Fish, Principal of BFJ Planning, began the presentation with an overview of the vision planning process. The overview included a description of the project timeline, which includes two focus groups to date, a survey, and a final workshop scheduled for June 18. Mr. Fish then described the concepts that will be addressed in the Plan, including a focus on prioritizing implementation for existing recommendations and plans.

Simon Kates, BFJ Planning, presented an outline of the Vision Plan, which will include a brief existing conditions section, an updated vision statement and series of goals, and a section on implementation and

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next steps. Mr. Kates announced the survey (available online at www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewburghVision), and addressed questions regarding ongoing outreach, which will continue after the vision planning process has finished. The final public workshop for the Vision Plan will be held on June 18 at 6:30 pm, location to be determined. Finally, Mr. Kates discussed feedback on the vision statement received during the first public workshop. Overall, members of the public indicated their vision for the future of Newburgh should address a need for job opportunities, a greater sense of identity, promoting homeownership, an emphasis on environmental issues, support for existing residents balanced with the need for growth, and a need to achieve financial stability and increase the tax base.

Ariana Branchini, BFJ Planning, provided an overview of feedback on the seven topic areas presented on boards during the first public workshop. Public response to the “Social Well-Being” topic included a need for additional community facilities, prioritizing municipal employees for residential rehab assistance, providing job skills training, expanding green space, and attracting tourism. Responses to “Governance” included a need for transparency in local government, encouraging community input and participation, and thoughtful expansion of the local tax base by encouraging development and bringing in new businesses with a prudent use of PILOTs. For “Housing” the public provided comments including a need to promote homeownership, a need for affordable housing and help for low-income residents, existing tensions between investors or newcomers and longtime residents, and a desire to limit displacement and absentee landlords. In response to the “Natural Environment” section, the public indicated the importance of the Hudson River in Newburgh, a need for strong waterfront connections, opportunities for job creation through environmental initiatives, and a desire for more energy efficiency in new development. From the “Economic Development” section, a need for workforce opportunities for existing residents, greater diversity of business development, need for accountability to identify responsible parties, and support for the development of Stewart Airport were discussed. Finally, the public response to the “Municipal Services” section included a need to ensure financial stability, improve water quality in the Hudson River as well as drinking water quality, and a need to implement improved waste management programs.

Frank Fish, BFJ Planning, discussed future outreach, including ways the Vision Plan will serve as a starting point for gaining meaningful community feedback, and will provide a framework for the community to get directly involved in the planning process. Finally, Mr. Fish introduced the round table exercise, where members of the public were invited to join one of six round tables to discuss their top priorities for the Vision. Tables were organized according to the seven chapters of the 2008 Plan: Social Well-Being/Arts & Culture, Economic Development, Governance/Municipal Services, Transportation, Natural Environment, and Housing.

Following the presentation, the public was invited to join one of the tables, which were staffed by a member of the BFJ team, and planners with the City of Newburgh. Each table discussed a wide range of issues, ideas, and strategies, including those identified by Plan-It Newburgh in 2008. After a 45-minute discussion, a volunteer from each group



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presented their top priorities for the topic area in a report back to the full group. Below is a summary of the discussion at each table:

Social Well-Being

The Social Well-Being and Arts & Culture group discussed the most important aspects of social well-being, and identified some of their top priorities for improving the quality of life in the City. Quality of life is defined by the ability to live comfortably and safely, access to education, recreation, open space, and job opportunities. The group agreed that connectivity is a key barrier to improving social well-being in Newburgh, and that a major generator of improved quality of life is economic mobility, which will be made possible through education, job training, and job opportunities for residents.



Connectivity is a major issue for Newburgh residents, particularly for those who do not drive, and as a result are not able to easily get from their home to a job. Neighborhoods in Newburgh are currently isolated because of the poor condition of the streets and sidewalks, and lacking public transit. Creating linkages within Newburgh, and improving major corridors such as Broadway and 9W, is one strategy to improve connectivity. Corridor improvements could include aesthetic upgrades for storefronts, signage, streetscaping, and plantings to make shops more attractive and encourage investment in underutilized properties. An important component of improving connectivity is creating better connections to job centers for residents. Currently, the Newburgh - Beacon Ferry serves as a commuter ferry, running only for a few hours in coordination with the morning and evening Metro-North schedule. While this is helpful to those who are taking the train, it leaves others behind, including workers who would like to work in Beacon at jobs that have evening hours. In addition, the walking path over the Newburgh – Beacon Bridge closes at dusk. Finding new ways to improve non-vehicular connectivity around Newburgh and surrounding areas will improve social well-being in Newburgh. In addition, improving connectivity will make Newburgh more accessible to visitors, who may want to come to the City as tourists. Those coming from New York City are likely to get as far as Beacon, but without weekend ferry service, have few public transit options to take them across the river to Newburgh where they might spend time and bring additional business to local shops and restaurants. **Economic mobility** can be improved through access to education, job training programs, and job opportunities for residents. Improving opportunities for residents to start a business, invest in their business, or work for other businesses will help improve social well-being. The City should seek partnerships with the two colleges, the school district, and local businesses and entrepreneurs, to create job skills training programs, and entrepreneurship incubators. In addition, the group discussed the concept of **accessibility and communication** as an important strategy for improving social well-being. Newburgh currently offers many good services that contribute to social well-being, including, arts and culture events, after school programs, investment opportunities, and recreation opportunities. While expanding upon these to ensure they have the capacity to reach more residents is important, it is also important that there is improved communication of these opportunities,

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and greater access to them for residents. Some strategies may include a community bulletin/newsletter, better promotion and cross-promotion of events, and improved transportation.

Governance/Municipal Services

The **condition of streets and sidewalks** in Newburgh is the number one infrastructure priority. The City also needs a **unified communication plan** to improve awareness and public participation. Often assumptions are made about how to reach out to people, and the message is never received. There could be greater emphasis on online communication, as well as reaching out to key community organizations in order to get the word out and encourage meaningful participation in City processes and planning. The City government must take responsibility and ensure that other municipalities who **share services** with Newburgh contribute fairly so that the City is compensated and not overburdened.

Housing

Housing and economic development are closely connected, and both issues are defined the **tax issue** in Newburgh: the City needs greater tax revenue in order to provide the services and programs to support a high standard of living. As a result, the City should attract ratables (businesses and new market-rate residents) to improve fiscal stability in order to continue to serve existing residents, rather than attracting additional populations in need of services. The City needs to **define affordable housing**, which could be as a percentage of income including taxes. There is a need for data and transparency in order to make informed decisions. Code enforcement is an issue that needs to be addressed. The City should **seek funding** from the county and the state, and needs strong leadership in order to ensure these funds are well utilized. There should be an **incentive to fix up homes**, not a penalty in the form of higher taxes.

Natural Environment

Residents should have a **ten minute walk to green and open space**, and school grounds should be open to the public. There is interest in the development of Crystal Lake and improved access to the lake for swimming and fishing, which used to exist. People's Park and the waterfront should be accessible to the public. The most significant environmental issue in Newburgh is dumping. This issue involves landlords, and a partial solution would be to **reinstate bulk pick up** and make the existing regulations clear and available on the water bill in English and Spanish. The City needs an arborist, and the City should have greater control over its water source to ensure better water quality. A great source of open space is the streets, they should be cleaned up and beautified.

Economic Development

The Economic Development table was supportive of the **expansion of Stewart Airport**, and noted that there need to be assurances of local hiring policies and transportation available for workers. Stewart Airport could also bring additional visitors, and so local transportation and amenities for visitors would be needed. Currently, there are not enough hotel rooms, and the expansion could mean an influx of tourists. In order to generate additional job opportunities, Newburgh could focus on key industries including events such as **weddings, and the film industry**. There is a need for **job training** for film and service industry jobs to ensure these opportunities are not missed. The City should be applying for **grants**, CFA is an untapped opportunity for nonprofits and businesses.

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Transportation

There are many modes of transportation that must be considered, including wheelchair, stroller, bikes, walking, buses and public transit, and car. **Prioritizing multi-modal transportation** is the number one goal considering there is a large portion of the population that does not drive. Timing and **integrated systems** for transit will improve the overall transportation system and connectivity within Newburgh and to the region. **Bicycle infrastructure** and data transparency are important components of improving transportation in the City. In addition, the City should take **ownership of the transit system**, not Orange County, to ensure that necessary changes can be implemented at the local level. There is an emerging task force to look at some of these issues.