

MEETING RECORD
City of Newburgh Vision Plan
Public Workshop 1

April 26, 2018, 7:00 pm, Newburgh Free Library



On Thursday April 26, 2018, BFJ Planning facilitated the first Public Workshop for the Newburgh Vision Plan. The event was held at the Newburgh Public Library and started with a presentation on how the vision planning process works, an outline of existing demographic and economic conditions, and an introduction to the interactive exercise and town hall portion of the workshop. The workshop was attended by over 100 people, including members of the City Council, City staff, the County legislature, local nonprofit organizations, and members of the public. Public attendees provided feedback and comments on the existing 2008 Comprehensive Plan's Vision by placing dots and writing comments on boards describing each goal. The purpose of the exercise was to provide the public with an opportunity to share input on the City's existing vision, and offer new ideas, potential revisions, and indicate which goals should be emphasized.

Mayor Torrance Harvey opened the workshop by welcoming members of the public, introducing the consultant team, and describing the purpose of gaining public feedback in an open visioning process.

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 additional workshops, including one scheduled for May 30, and another to take place in June. Mr. Fish then described the concepts that will be addressed in the Plan, including a focus on regional economic changes that have occurred since the previous plan was completed.

City of Newburgh

Vision Plan

Ariana Branchini, BFJ Planning, provided an overview of the existing land use, zoning, demographic, and socio-economic conditions. The Plan will provide a brief overview of existing conditions in the City, as updated since 2008. The 2011 Land Use Update provides a snapshot of the existing land use patterns in Newburgh, where residential and institutional uses are high percentages of the overall land area. The majority of commercial land use is located south of Broadway. In 2015 the City updated its zoning code to streamline the development process. The new zoning map includes four form-based districts. Census data show the City's population has slightly decreased from 2010, and is currently just over 28,000 people. Approximately 50% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, 25% African American, 20% white, and 5% fall into other categories of race or ethnicity. The Hispanic population has grown by more than 20% from 2000-2016 in Newburgh, a rate higher than the County as a whole. Median income in Newburgh was just over \$33,000 in 2016, lower than the median in Orange County, an increasing rate of unemployment and poverty and a growing household size and family size. Housing in Newburgh is only 80% occupied, the majority of which is renter-occupied (68%). While median rent in the City is lower than the County-wide median, the percentage of the population that is cost burdened is high.



Simon Kates, BFJ Planning, provided an overview of existing plan's Vision Statement and goals. The 2018 Vision Plan will use these goals as a starting point to begin the visioning process. The goals from the 2008 Plan were organized according to the seven chapters of the Plan: Social Well-Being, Economic Development, Municipal Services, Transportation, Natural Environment, Housing, and Governance. Mr. Kates presented the eight boards located around the room, which presented the Vision Statement and seven chapters' goals, and described the interactive exercise.

Following the presentation, the public was invited to provide feedback on the existing goals and vision. Each participant used green dots located at each board, and was asked to put them next to the goals they thought were most significant. There were boards available for the public to provide feedback and share their ideas (see attached).

City of Newburgh

Vision Plan

Vision

At the Vision station, participants were able to review the city's existing vision and add their own aspirations for the future of their community. Comments covered a wide range of themes that the Vision Plan should try to address. Some comments focused on Newburgh's brand, advocating for a clear identity of innovation and inclusiveness to help change existing negative connotations. Branding can also help to market the city and increase tourism. Other comments highlighted environmental issues, suggesting that the Newburgh create an eco-district, green jobs training, and prepare for climate change. Participants also discussed issues related to the workforce, suggesting that Newburgh become a place where residents don't need to commute to New York City, perhaps by bringing creative and tech industry to the city. Comments also discussed housing and development, suggesting that homeownership should be promoted and that future growth should be supportive of the community.

Social Well-Being

The goal that received the most dots at the Social Well-Being station was *"Support an effective, just, and humane system for rehabilitation of formerly incarcerated people."* Commenters emphasized the need for a wide range of community facilities, including a physical fitness center, support and programming for older adults, and resources for young people such as a children's museum. Others were concerned with housing and workforce training, such as prioritizing municipal employees for residential rehabilitation assistance and providing training in building trades. Comments also focused on expanding green space and providing additional institutions to attract tourism.

Governance

The goal that received the most dots was *"Ensure that local government remains accountable, responsive, open, and effective."* Commenters noted that local government must be transparent, that there should be open data sharing, and that Newburgh should be encouraging community input and participation is very important. Others pointed out the importance of economic growth and future development. There are also questions about how to expand the local tax base—while non-profit organizations are exempt from property taxes, the city should seek a balance with other businesses when providing tax incentives.

Housing

The goal that received the most dots was *"Empower residents to purchase and retain private homes to increase homeownership in the City."* The value in promoting homeownership was also expressed in *Plan-It Newburgh* and should continue to be a goal in the Vision Plan. Participants also noted the need for affordable housing and the ability of low-income residents to invest in their homes. Concerns were expressed about homes being "flipped" and the upheaval this causes on residential neighborhoods, as opposed to newcomers becoming integral parts of the community. Some commenters expressed the need for green building practices as well as inclusionary zoning to promote affordability. Others identified the need to expand the tax base and reduce property taxes by bringing in new residents.

Natural Environment

The goal that received the most dots was *"Encourage locally grown food with minimal environmental impact."* Some comments in this goal recognized the overlap between environmental issues and other objectives of the Vision Plan. For example, renewable energy or an indoor greenhouse could be ways to

City of Newburgh

Vision Plan

increase job creation. Also, new development could be energy efficient and provide new opportunities for open space. Participation in the Climate Smart Communities program could be one way for the city to lead the way. Several commenters highlighted the role of the Hudson River in Newburgh's culture, including the need to create a stronger connection from the city to the waterfront, prioritize the health of the river, and preserve views. Others were concerned about historic buildings, advocating that a new use be found to preserve the city's historic resources.

Economic Development

The goal that received the most dots was *"Create opportunities for Newburgh's workforce in secure, adequately paying jobs with opportunities at all income levels."* Commenters also focused on the need for workforce opportunities, especially for existing residents, and in building trades. Others also emphasized the need for a greater diversity of economic development in order to bring businesses other than tourism, arts, and retail. Some comments focused on the need to expand the tax base and were critical of tax incentives—in response, the city could seek out balanced incentive deals to ensure that new businesses are contributing their fair share. One comment highlighted the need for accountability in the plan to identify responsible parties and actionable goals.

Transportation

The goal that received the most dots was *"Create roads and streets that are safe, efficient, and welcoming for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and people with disabilities."* In support of this goal, one commenter noted that many in Newburgh do not drive so there needs to be an emphasis on non-vehicular transportation. Comments indicated that there is an important connection between transportation and economic development, job creation, and access to jobs. Commenters recognized a need to connect Newburgh to its neighbors, including making the Newburgh-Beacon Ferry a seven-day transportation option, creating a connection over the Beacon-Newburgh Bridge for cyclists, and providing light rail on Broadway to Stewart Airport. Participants also indicated an interest in alternative means of public transportation, including electric buses, streetcars, trolleys, a local jitney service, and decentralized transportation systems (e.g. Uber, Lyft), and carpooling instead of empty bus service. Maintenance of streets and sidewalks was a common theme. Streets have potholes that are dangerous for cyclists and hard on tires. Some sidewalks are in bad condition, discouraging walking even short distances.

Municipal Services

The goal that received the most dots was *"Maintain and improve water quality for all residents and the natural environment."* Perhaps most importantly, commenters noted the need for financial sustainability in Newburgh. In addition, participants identified improving Hudson River water quality, drinking water quality, and implementing improved recycling, composting, and leaf pick up program.

Town Hall

Following a brief coffee break and interactive exercise, members of the public returned to their seats and participated in an open town hall. Comments by members of the public included:

1. The City is changing and there is a need for new residents to understand the place they are moving into and be sensitive to existing housing conditions. The focus should be on uplifting existing

City of Newburgh

Vision Plan

residents. In addition, there should be a focus on protecting undocumented immigrants in Newburgh.

2. On the other side, although people moving into Newburgh are often perceived as outsiders or gentrifiers, many are moving here to become a part of the community. Many newcomers are not here for profit or to “flip” homes, but rather are looking for a place to live themselves. Overall, there is a recognition that existing residents need to be a part of the existing momentum. New energy coming into Newburgh should work in collaboration with existing residents to improve the City. An initiative to help renters purchase from landlords could be very helpful in ensuring that existing residents are not left behind.
3. What’s missing from the current vision is “how” to do these things. There is no shortage of plans for Newburgh. The issue is implementation and financing. The City must raise revenue and expand the tax base in order to implement plans and pay for services. Taxes are already high compared to surrounding communities. Fiscal engineering is needed and the plan should consider what will happen and how.
4. Although tourism is an important component of the local economy, the focus of the plan should be on existing residents and businesses, not visitors.
5. Need specific measurable achievements, or “SMART” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time bound). Accountability is important—the vision should look at why the existing goals haven’t been achieved before making new goals.
6. Economic leakage in Newburgh is high. Creating new businesses and keeping residents in jobs in Newburgh will help turn the local economy around. In order to generate new jobs, the City should help address the existing skills gap. Local colleges (e.g. SUNY Orange, Mount Saint Mary’s) should work with employers to train skilled workers. For example, a hospitality management program could support a new hotel. The City must be ready to move on new opportunities.
7. Restore confidence at county, state, federal level through transparency and fiscal responsibility.
8. Outreach to other groups is important—there should be additional outreach for low income and minority residents. This process should leverage existing initiatives and neighborhood resources, including the volunteer efforts of participants at the workshop to reach out to neighbors to ensure greater participation in the next Vision Plan workshop on May 30.