

## **Town of Hunter Economic Development Focus Group Meeting**

October 18, 2017, 6 PM – 8 PM, Mountain Top Library, Tannersville, NY

### Attendees:

Chandra Knotts, 23Arts  
Warren Hart, Greene County  
Russ Colton, Peaks Resort  
Pam Weisberg, Catskill Mountain Foundation  
Jeff Fromer, Hunter Environmental  
Bradd Morse, Zipline  
David Kukle, Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway  
Daniel King, Hunter Foundation  
Jeff Friedman, Chamber of Commerce  
Lee McGunnigle, Village of Tannersville  
Jim Meigs, Local Businessman  
Geri Marino, Snow Bird Ski Shop  
Craig Bates, Mountain Propane, Inc.

### Committee Members Observing:

Susan Kukle  
Dave Kashman  
Charlie Knopp

Facilitated by Consultant Nan Stolzenburg

The Focus Group met to explore the following questions:

- What is your vision for future economic development and business growth?
- What are the challenges, obstacles and barriers to doing business in the Town of Hunter?
- What opportunities exist to improve the business climate and what is needed to encourage economic development and business recruitment? Are there specific types of businesses that are needed, actions that should be taken by local government, or projects that should be pursued to strengthen the local economy?

### **Statements Made on What the Vision for Future Economic Condition Should Be Like**

- The Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway provides a network that drives the community. People come here to spend time and money.
- The crest into Haines Falls is beautiful, immaculate, welcoming and pristine. The appearance of the Town and its entrances are improved. (Aesthetics were mentioned by many people).
- There are more attractions, more hotels, booming economy based on tourism.
- Lots of jobs as we grow including facilities for both community and employee housing.
- Economy based on hospitality industries.

- Tourism is important, but there are opportunities for cottage industries. We will take advantage of the NYC market to attract people who will live and work here and easily get to NYC. We market and take advantage of this group to get homeowners to invest here.
- We look like an area doing well.
- Address needs of tourism industry.
- Market the unique lifestyle here that you can't get anywhere else – the beauty of the area with easy travel to urban areas.
- Don't be completely reliant on tourism industry.
- Work to develop the area to attract young families and workers.
- How things look is important.
- We will have more businesses, retail, more population that provide support for alternative industries other than tourism. We market our assets, cultural and historical relevance. We tell people what we have here with a unified identity that is clear about what we offer.
- We focus more on year-round, 4-season, and weekday businesses and activities. Meaning we are busy all week long and all year. (This was a theme mentioned repeatedly)
- We offer employment, benefits and housing for young people.
- We are clearly a recreational based economy, but strengthen other sectors for sustainability. We will do a better job telling the story of what is unique about Hunter.
- We will increase the arts presence in schools.
- We will increase the transportation TO the area and WITHIN the town. There are two transportation audiences we need to pay attention to: Local travelers and tourists.
- We need more continuity to improve business sector located off Main Street – including wayfinding signage to these resources. But key is transportation – we have to have a pleasant experience to get people here and to western portions of Town.
- School curriculum tied more to outdoor and watershed.
- We will be a dance destination and more of a creative economy with the arts and dance.
- We will have a lot of collaboration between government entities, and groups.
- There are more offerings for children in the evening so they don't have to travel to Kingston.
- We will have affordable and available housing for our workforce.
- Our school will have more enrolled students.

### **Challenges, Barriers and Obstacles Identified**

- Competition with other areas for tourist time and dollars.
- We have a beautiful area but the aesthetics of some areas make it feel like an impoverished location.
- Gateways need aesthetic improvement.
- We lack quality hotels plus the infrastructure that supports them.
- Restaurants and businesses are closed during the week. This makes it hard for locals, but very hard for resident artists, and in attracting workers here.
- We need more activities other than skiing.
- The shopping opportunities need improvement.
- We need quality and reliable internet services and electricity.

- Young people now have expectations for what goes on and what amenities they want where they live and we lack those things. That makes it very difficult to attract workers here.
- We are a very old population here – aging. We need more young people for workers and growing the community.
- Lack of population base to support local businesses.
- Lack of seasonality in our offerings.
- There is a very competitive digital marketing atmosphere now and we don't need to change, but we need to focus our message and our story.
- Young people move away.
- Lack businesses and restaurants that stay open late. This is problematic for artists/dancers that need to find a place to eat after performances.
- Lack of transportation. This is a key issue that must be addressed.
- Arts organizations are very competitive for small funding. Very difficult to get funding.
- Lack of housing for visiting artists.
- Lack of activities for children. Some visitors travel to Kingston for family activities (movies, bowling, etc).
- Too many regulatory restrictions. It makes it impossible for the small business or entrepreneur to afford to get through the process.
- Lack of employees. There are plenty of jobs, but housing availability and affordability, and lack of transportation is a significant obstacle to filling those positions. With advent of Air B&B's many of the houses that used to be available for seasonal workforce housing are now taken up with the B&B and no longer available to support workers. We can't run our businesses as first class levels because we don't have enough workers.
- Lack of trained workforce is a huge deficit.
- Many employees live off the mountain. They drive in from other places.
- We lack support for non-hospitality based businesses. There is not enough assistance and business planning for other small businesses not related to tourism. There are opportunities to strengthen this area.
- Lack of policing for trash and littering. We need to levy fines and get tough on it.
- Lack of acknowledgement of the positive changes that have taken place over the past 20 years. There is an unappealing perception about the area that turns people off. This relates to difficulty of finding workers to come here. The area has greatly improved and we are not getting the word out about this.

**Opportunities and Actions the Town of Hunter Can Take to Address These Issues and Meet Future Goals**

- Have to make it so young families find Hunter a desirable place to live. The excellent school system and great teacher/student ratio is an important message to get out.
- We need to do a better job of taking stock of what improvements have been made.
- Develop a walkway along Palenville Mountain Road.
- Place a large, and increased emphasis on solving the transportation issue. The Town needs to do a full court press on this. Re-start the Trolley system. Seek state operating assistance. Develop a specialized transit system that serves tourists and locals and look at it from the two audience

perspective. Look at Keened Valley and other areas – research and explore success stories elsewhere. Plan should encourage Town to research this and explore municipal, private and collaborative options.

- Planning and transportation need to focus on Villages as Hub. There is a unique need for tourism based transit and these must benefit and bring people to the Villages.
- There are big opportunities for new businesses here – especially those related to tourism such as guiding, food, etc. Attract these. Work with County program closely – the Buy In Greene/Invest in Greene Program. This county program was described by Warren. See website. It is free advertising to help existing businesses and recruit new ones. There needs to be more awareness about this program, which has been very successful. It allows County to follow up leads for new businesses and support them to come to Greene County. A clear marketing and promotion message is needed. What the County needs from the Town to help make this more successful for Hunter is a clear message about what you want to attract, what the community's story is, and a clear articulation of what the Town's needs are. There is need to boost communication between Town, businesses, and County for this effort. There is need for local organizations to partner with the program to ensure it stays up to date.
- Have an improved wayfinding signage program and one that attracts people from all directions here.
- Work to have the proposed Hunter Mountain expansion bring people through Villages.
- Encourage more restaurants.
- Have a portal or message board sponsored by or with the Town to allow people to know what is going on, who has services available, what venues are open, etc.
- Promote development but be careful about it so it does not ruin the environment that people come here for.
- Take advantage of the Schoharie Creek. It is underutilized and there is need for more public access to it. Support the proposed pocket park behind Doctorow (??).
- Create a pathway from Bridge St. looping on south side of Schoharie Creek to Mountain – like the Wyndham Path.
- Create an organization or entity that can coordinate, organize, and manage rentals for workforce housing. Collaborate with groups and businesses to find ways to provide for housing. The Town and villages should work together to develop a housing action plan to identify and prepare for meeting affordable housing needs. Consider forming a housing development corporation, or tap into existing regional housing development corporations to accomplish this. However, it was cautioned that care needs to be taken not to let these move into Section 8 housing. Develop a housing team that goes after State programs and funding and identifies land, partners and funding to get this done. There is need for a focused team looking just at these housing needs. There are models from the western part of US to help. Also, County has a housing plan – look at this for options. The Town needs to take a hard look at housing needs. Consider finding funding (State??) to rehab old buildings for workforce apartments. The Catskill Mountain Housing Corporation focuses now on senior housing, but the Town can work with them to emphasize workforce housing needs. Work also with groups like RUPCO.
- Have more collaboration between all segments and organizations in the Town. Work across the whole mountaintop and region to be more successful. Integrate and collaborate more with Wyndham. Take advantage of regional efforts like the upcoming bike events. Use the existing

work that has been done (Mountaintop Recreation Strategy; Carter Study from 2005, older economic development plans) as much of those are still relevant even though they were done years ago. Partnerships are also important for successful grant writing and always work towards that partnership and collaboration for big ideas.

- Have a regional grant coordinator or grant coordination program to assist in these partnerships.
- Partner with Hunter, Tannersville, Wyndham and others in the Corridor to put in a State Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant.
- Partner and creatively figure out how to get a grant coordinator and project coordinator to give the 'boots on the ground' support for getting all these things done. This needs a person to take the responsibility for ongoing communication, collaboration and connections so needs are met.
- Peaks Resort wanted group to know how excited and positive they are about Hunter and confident in the future opportunities here.