



**PUBLIC WORKSHOP #2 SUMMARY REPORT**  
**April 28, 2010**



**BFJ Planning**

**ROCKLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
**PUBLIC WORKSHOP #2 SUMMARY REPORT**  
Rockland County, New York

**Prepared on behalf of:**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In August 2009, with the support of County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef and the County Legislature, the Rockland County Department of Planning launched the process to update the County's Comprehensive Plan.

The goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a framework for future consensus-building and planning collaboration between the County and the various local governments. The Plan will not dictate local land use decisions and zoning designations, but it will build on the existing town and village plans. The Plan will provide general suggestions on future County land use issues and policies to address matters under direct County jurisdiction and to identify specific land use and zoning conflicts among municipalities that should be resolved for better functioning of zoning regulations.

In recent years, Rockland County has experienced a transformation from a rapidly growing area to a stabilized, maturing suburb. This shift in development has ushered in new issues of land use and transportation, such as water quantity and quality, traffic congestion, replacement of aging infrastructure, reuse of former industrial areas, development of State facility lands, redevelopment of the Hudson River shoreline, job creation and retention, protection of critical environmental areas, and revitalization of older village and hamlet areas. Rockland County's demographics have also undergone a shift, as its elderly residents have grown at a faster pace than the rest of the population, and are expected to represent a significantly larger portion of the County's residents in the future. This growth will have major implications for housing, transportation and community and social services.

Rockland County has hired BFJ Planning and subconsultants Urbanomics and McLaren Engineering Group to prepare a comprehensive plan that will address the issues described above and provide a strategy for implementing



the goals and objectives of the plan. As part of the planning process, the County hosted their second public workshop (out of four planned public workshops) on April 15, 2010. The workshop was a very well-attended meeting with approximately 70 attendees, all with various backgrounds ranging from Rockland residents to business owners to environmental advocates. Their participation and ideas helped to better inform the planning process.

At the workshop, BFJ Planning presented an overview of the comprehensive plan process and several draft chapters of the Comprehensive Plan (“Plan”) to solicit feedback from attendees. BFJ reviewed the following draft chapters: Transportation, Natural and Environmental Resources, and Parks and Open Space. Following the presentation and a brief coffee break the audience split into roundtable discussion groups corresponding to the draft chapters reviewed, as well as a roundtable discussion on general issues. With handout materials and maps as a starting-off point, the tables held meaningful discussions both on their specific topic and on a range of other issues. Representatives from BFJ Planning and the Rockland County Planning Department assisted each table in acting as facilitators to guide discussion and listen. A participant from each table volunteered to be a “scribe” to compile the salient points while another roundtable participant volunteered to be a “reporter” who was responsible for presenting the respective group’s discussion to the entire workshop group.



After the discussion period, the attendees reconvened and a reporter from each table presented a summary of the issues they discussed. The presentations were beneficial for all the attendees because they provided an opportunity to hear all the points discussed, and to see the interconnectedness of issues facing the County. Understanding how these issues are related, and how they impact each other, is a key step in the development of goals and objectives for the Plan. The roundtable discussions also helped test preliminary recommendations identified during BFJ's presentation, as well as identify other potential recommendations.



## II. WORKSHOP AGENDA

### Rockland County Comprehensive Plan Public Workshop #2

15 April 2010

1. Introductions
2. Presentation by BFJ Planning
3. Coffee Break
4. Roundtable Discussions
  - ❖ General Issues
  - ❖ Transportation
  - ❖ Natural and Environmental Resources
  - ❖ Parks and Open Space
5. Public Sharing of Items Discussed at the Roundtable Groups



### III. PRESENTATION BY BFJ PLANNING

Below is a summary of BFJ’s presentation (by Frank Fish, Todd Okolichany, John West, Susan Favate, and Michael Keane):

#### 1) Project Summary

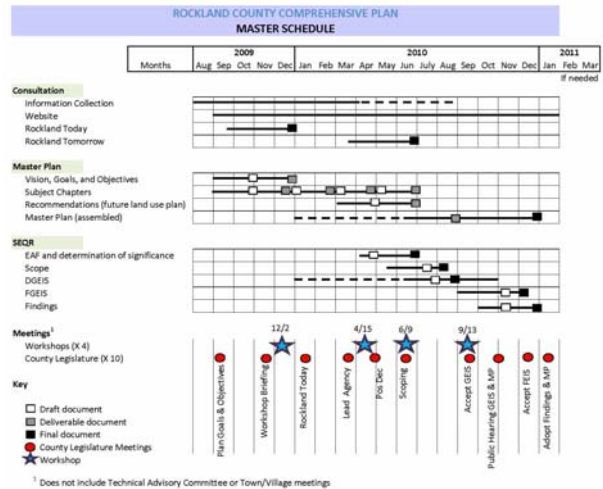
Frank Fish, Principal of BFJ Planning, provided an overview of the comprehensive plan process, including the project team, the schedule, a description of the Plan contents and its general purpose. The public workshop schedule and project website were also discussed.

#### 2) Review of *Rockland Today* and First Public Workshop

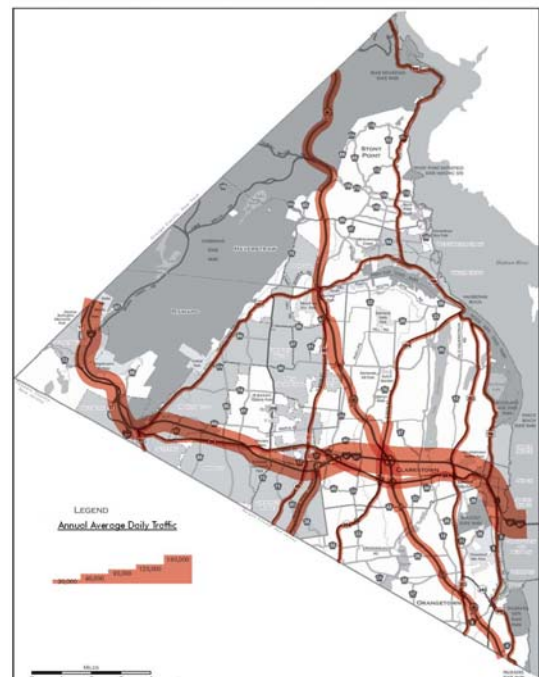
Todd Okolichany continued with a summary of *Rockland Today*, which was presented and handed out at the first public workshop in December 2009. *Rockland Today* included the first few draft chapters, including preliminary Goals and Objectives, Regional Setting, Demographics, Aging Population, and Land Use and Zoning. Maps identified Rockland County’s place within the region (including regional transportation network), its generalized county land use and municipal zoning. Mr. Okolichany then reviewed the highlights and results of the first public workshop, including an overview of priority issues discussed at each roundtable group from that workshop.

#### 3) Workshop #2 Topics

The next segment of the presentation included a review of the next few draft chapters of the Plan, including Transportation, Natural and Environmental Resources, and Parks and Open Space. John West summarized the draft Transportation Chapter, including existing roadway conditions, commuter and private bus transit routes, passenger and freight rail



*Rockland Comprehensive Plan Schedule*

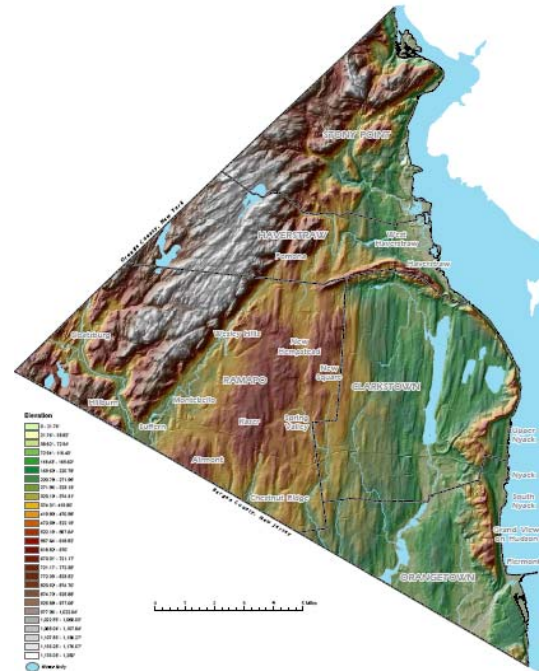


*Rockland County Existing Traffic Volumes*

lines, existing and projected traffic volumes, existing transportation policies, and proposed alternatives from the New York State Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT) (in conjunction with MTA/Metro-North/Thruway Authority) I-87/287 corridor and Tappan Zee Bridge replacement project. Preliminary recommendations, such as congestion relief on I-87/287, commutation and freight rail improvements, and transportation best practices also were discussed.

Susan Favate continued with a summary on Natural and Environmental Resources. She reviewed the County's varied topography (i.e. sensitive ridgeline areas, scenic views, etc.), existing water supply, County-regulated streams, unique tidal and freshwater wetlands, National Natural Landmarks, and critical environmental areas (e.g. waterfront areas). Some of the issues discussed included a lack of consistent ridgeline protection, protection of the County's sole-source aquifer, air, noise, and light pollution, and future climate change. Some of the preliminary recommendations presented included suggestions to the County to develop a model ridgeline ordinance, working with Rockland towns and villages on developing consistent wetland regulations, tools for reducing impervious surfaces, and strategies to improve air quality.

Michael Keane concluded the summary of the completed draft Plan chapters with a review of Parks and Open Space. Mr. Keane discussed existing conditions, issues, policies, and programs related to State, County and local parklands (e.g. Greenway Planning programs), hiking and biking trails, farms and orchards, private recreation, and parks and open space acquisition. Some of the issues discussed included preservation and maintenance of existing open space resources, interconnecting open space holdings, increasing access to the Hudson



*Rockland County Elevation Map*

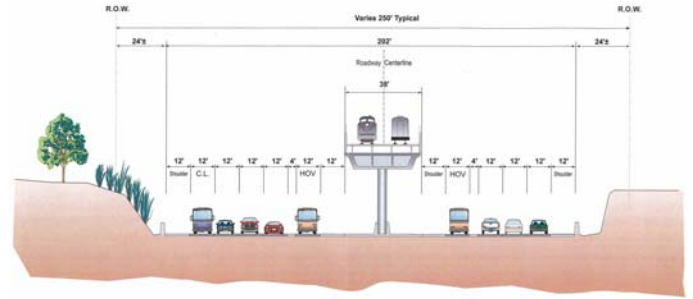


*Rockland County Open Space Acquisitions (since 2000)*

River waterfront, and balancing development with conservation. Preliminary recommendations presented included identifying open space and recreation opportunities (e.g. PIP bike/pedestrian trail), interconnecting acquired open space with recreation, brownfield clean-up and reuse, and inventory of parkland and recreation.

#### 4) Opportunities for Public Participation

Mr. Fish wrapped up the presentation by providing information to the public on how to leave comments on the Plan website and reviewing the upcoming workshop schedule, including the next public workshop to be held in June 2010.



*NYS DOT/MTA Metro-North/Thruway Authority  
Proposed Transit Alternative for I-87/287 Corridor &  
Tappan Zee Bridge*

#### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Following the presentation and brief coffee break, workshop participants were asked to discuss the next few draft chapters of the Plan, including Transportation, Natural and Environmental Resources, and Parks and Open Space. A table covering General Issues, which included discussions on topics ranging from land use to economic development issues, was also formed. Each table was given a set of questions to guide their discussion and it was also suggested to discuss other issues pertaining to the specific topic/chapter if a particular question was not asked. A summary of each table's discussion, including notes taken by the designated "scribe", is as follows:

##### **GENERAL ISSUES**

Participants of this table discussed a broad range of topics and issues, as well as offering their ideas and recommendations on how to improve the County. In line with Rockland's affinity for recreation, bike trails and bike lanes were discussed. Several recommendations included bike racks at Rockland train stations and incentives for people to want to bike to work, an effort that would help improve physical fitness and alleviate some rush hour traffic congestion. The idea of "Complete Streets" was also discussed where roads could safely be shared by cars, bikes, and people. The trade-offs of accommodating multiple transportation users on Rockland's roads were discussed, including the potential adverse impacts of widening roads. One participant mentioned that, while no new roads were being built in the County, intersection improvements were occurring. There also were concerns regarding the walkability of Route 202; strategies were discussed that could improve these conditions.

Participants recognized that some growth is inevitable. As a land use policy, participants generally supported the idea of concentrating growth in existing hamlet centers in order to create walkable and bicycle-friendly communities and to preserve open space in other areas of the County. At the same time, participants recognized that Rockland has many rural, suburban, and open space qualities that separate it from New York City, and that these qualities should be preserved. Therefore, high rise buildings were generally discouraged, but three to six stories were generally supported. An economic imbalance was mentioned as a problem throughout Rockland where some areas of the County fair better economically than other areas. Empire Zones were seen as a possible solution, and although they already exist, it was stressed that there needs to be accountability for job creation in Empire Zones.

Attendees examined locations where new businesses and moderate income housing might be supported, and discussed the proportionality of locating land uses in different areas, as well as issues with upward mobility for moderate income residents. New Jersey's affordable housing laws were discussed as positive models in integrating moderate income housing with market rate housing, rather than excluding the two types. It also was noted that Rockland's diverse population requires diverse housing and other needs. For example, there were calls for more affordable senior housing. At the same time, so-called "55 and over" developments were criticized for reportedly allowing other age groups to move in in the event that the developer is unable to sell all of the units to the senior group.

In response to Rockland's increasing traffic congestion, participants identified traffic calming (e.g. landscaped medians, modern roundabouts, etc.) as possible solutions to alleviate some traffic.

Innovative public transport, such as light rail or streetcars, was also suggested. For infrastructure needs, participants felt that utility services should be coordinated before a development occurs rather than making spot infrastructure improvements. Finally, participants felt that comprehensive plans should be coordinated between local municipalities and with the County's Plan.

#### GENERAL ISSUES PAD NOTES

##### Bike Trails & Lanes

- Bus policy: all buses must carry bike
- Concern is about recreation & commute
- Need for secure bike racks at stations
- Should bike paths be separate from the road or part of the road?

##### Impacts on Growth

- Development
- Congestion
- Various ethnicities & varying needs

##### Economics

- Need more projection of economic impact of development & infrastructure
- Need accountability for corporations who come to the county & fail
- Proportionality: what is weight of actions such as attracting non-profits?

##### Walkability

- Concern for places where walking is difficult
- Concern for unsafe traffic, i.e., speeding in high-pedestrians areas

##### Roads

- To help alleviate traffic and/or allow bikers to share roads with drivers, should roads be widened or work within parameters of existing roadway footprint?

##### Coordination of Services

- Dig up lines before paving

##### Affordable Housing

- Discussion of NJ state policy (i.e. Council for Affordable Housing) that all building must include 20% moderate income housing
- Moderate income housing in NJ is mixed in with market rate housing instead of being concentrated – this is a good thing

##### Municipal Planning

- Coordinate various village comp plans with county and other villages
- “ “ water districts

## TRANSPORTATION

Participants at this table emphasized the importance of community participation and involvement in proposed large scale transportation projects, such as the I-87/287 and Tappan Zee Bridge Corridor project. A generally shared view at this table was that the I-87/287 project – including all of its main alternatives – could potentially add development pressure onto Rockland’s resources. Similar to the Natural and Environmental Resources group, the Transportation table felt that protecting Rockland’s natural resources and current character are priorities. One way to achieve this, as well as sustain the existing population, was to examine the suitability of Transit Oriented Development in existing hamlet/village centers. Participants expressed the need to alleviate current traffic volumes with transportation strategies aimed at making travel more efficient. This included enhanced north-south bus transit, a possible bus system in Nyack, and an interconnected trail and bikeway network. An item was brought up to use technology for the public transit system, such as GPS, NEXT BUS, electronic fare cards, and provide more web based information for the system. Finally, the County’s role in coordinating utilities was discussed, including the recommendation that there should be a better coordination of services throughout the County.

### TRANSPORTATION PAD NOTES

#### I-87/287 and Tappan Zee Bridge Corridor

- Does Rockland County need a massive transportation building project that will increase its population & apply pressure on resources?
- Less emphases in Rockland Comprehensive Plan on engineering & more on what actually meets our needs, not on increasing our needs

#### Other Proposed Transportation Projects (by Others)

- Don’t predicate Comprehensive Plan on population that will result from proposed major transportation projects (e.g. proposed Tappan Zee Bridge project)
- Population projections assume massive transportation project that will bring people and more efficient, better transportation, not bigger

#### North-South Public Transportation

- Need more/better north-south transportation
- Make bus travel more convenient – bus companies have eliminated buses that go from NYC-Rockland

#### County and Municipal Planning/Biking and Trails

- Towns coordinate comprehensive Plans, official maps
- Contiguous acquisition of open space, trails, bikeways again - - coordination of towns and Rockland County is needed
- Use of official map as a tool for trails
- Prioritization of open spaces, pathways, pedestrian paths – so can be purchased when available

#### General Transportation Issues

- Better use of existing transportation
- Establish realistic recommendations & specific things to be done with dates in accomplishment at County & town level. Don’t just say “you could” or “you might consider”. Be as firm & specific as possible

## NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The Natural and Environmental Resources roundtable discussion focused on impacts to natural resources resulting from continued population growth in the County, water conservation and policies, and the role of Rockland County and local municipalities in environmental planning. As a policy issue, participants felt that planning for conservation/protection of natural resources should take a proactive approach, rather than reacting to development proposals. Realizing there is a limit to the County's natural resources, a goal of this group was to plan for growth based on the availability of natural resources rather than planning for unlimited population growth. It was mentioned that the cost of (and burden on) infrastructure (e.g. roads, utilities, etc.) be considered when planning for future growth. It was expressed that the County could take an active leadership role in promoting policies that protect water resources and reducing air, light, and other pollution. A participant recommended that Rockland County should create an Office of Sustainability that would assist in "green" planning and regional issues, such as climate change.

Water conservation was a major topic of discussion. On a regional level, it was noted that the Plan or further planning studies should investigate the increased water demand in New Jersey and whether it would have an impact on Rockland's need for water resources. There was a feeling that towns and villages often ignore water conservation policies set at the County level. It was recommended that consistent water quality/quantity guidelines, such as stormwater management strategies, should occur among municipalities. There was a suggestion to update the Rockland County Sanitary Code with strategies for water quality, such as adding lawn watering restrictions for residential and commercial properties. Public education of water conservation programs/policies was also recommended.

### NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PAD NOTES

#### General Natural Resources Issues

- Protection of natural resources is a priority rather than let it go "as usual"

#### County Growth and Impacts on Natural Resources

- Tone: Towards resource availability rather than unlimited growth
- There are limits to our resources
- Also applies to new and open space
- Have population fit into resources available
- Consider infrastructure & other costs

#### Water Conservation

- Issue – not only Rockland's demands – NJ?
- Increased water demand in NJ
- Impacts Rockland's need for water resources?
- Questions remain on the releases of water to NJ
- Conservation of water resources – recapture and reuse of rainwater & better storm water management
- Towns and villages routinely overrule – ignore Rockland County planning
- Politics trumps planning
- Excess development and water infiltration overwhelms the local sewer systems costs
- 10 years ago 1999-2001 water not really mentioned (see River to Ridge)
- Lack of or change in each town/village land use policies creates "stop-go"

- Water critical issue re: land use planning
- Uses groundwater (2/3) (release soon)
- But surface water assessment needed
- Bi-State water commission NY –NJ
- Concern: supply water for Rockland’s growing population, which is truly sustainable, start with resources instead
- What Rockland can do?
- What codes can be put in sanitary code i.e. no limited lawn watering restrictions
- Who will enforce it?

United Water

- Who is going to “police” any new regulations?
- Public education needed: individual homeowners & incentives; schools/children

Rockland County and Municipal Planning

- County needs to take a leadership role in water, climate, air, etc.
- Towns struggle to develop on their own
- County office of sustainability needed?
- Office could provide ideas, funding sources, efficiency guidance

**PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**

Participants at the Parks and Open Space table discussed a range of issues and challenges pertaining to parks and open space resources in Rockland County, and offered ideas and recommendations for enhancing this component of the comprehensive plan. While it was recognized that the County is home to a significant amount of open space (more than 30 percent of total area), concerns were raised regarding the loss of particular kinds of open space facilities, the lack or unequal distribution of open space, and poor connectivity between and among particular open space holdings.

The alarming loss of farms, orchards and nurseries over the last 100 years —and the impact this trend has had on the availability of and appreciation for locally-grown foods—emerged as one of the highest concerns among participants. A representative from the Rockland Farm Alliance emphasized the need for urban and suburban communities to develop a template to support the development and implementation of “small acreage community farms,” in acknowledgement of the limitations of more developed communities. Benefits of these community farms include preservation of natural areas such as environmentally-sensitive lands, and the preservation of green space and productive agriculture. Clarkstown was identified as having a plan for community gardens that could be potentially be used in other towns/villages.

Participants expressed frustration at the lack of a comprehensive, integrated bikeway network, as well as the unsafe conditions under which many resident bicyclists currently ride. Recommendations addressing this challenge included adding more bike lanes along streets and implementing an exclusive bike lane network, based on the European model known as “Safe Ways.”

Despite the vast amount of parks and open space in Rockland, round table participants pointed to a lack of open space resources – specifically, recreational facilities – in the more County’s more urbanized areas, as well as a lack of connectivity between existing open space holdings.



One suggestion for addressing open space deficiencies involved identifying through the use of an official map(s) those areas in need of additional local parks and recreational facilities; however, a comprehensive inventory of open space was noted as being a difficult but needed task. Regarding issues of access and connectivity between and among open space holdings, participants emphasized the need for a more comprehensive hiking and biking trail network. Drawing attention to a “site specific” concern regarding open space connectivity, one individual shared with fellow participants an ongoing discussion addressing the possibility of “capping” a segment of I-87/287 in South Nyack, thereby connecting open space on either side.

#### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PAD NOTES

##### Biodiversity and Connectivity

- Biodiversity & connectivity - put some adjacent land (i.e. Bergen county) etc, because the water sheds etc do not end at the county borders
- Open space is for more than just recreational – needs to include biodiversity etc, Clarkstown, Ramapo, Orangetown have virtually identical plans so that it is comprehensive/ habitat for the area (trust for public land, west branch, NY, NJ trail conference) open space institute , scenic Hudson, ground water recharge, mating
- Connectivity of trails between counties

##### Proposed I-87/287 Corridor and Tappan Zee Bridge Replacement Plan (by NYSDOT/MTA/Metro-North/Thruway Authority)

- TZ bridge plan – what will happen with bike trails by S. Nyack

##### Other Possible Recommendations

- Feasibility of decking HWY by s. Nyack with park on top
- Transportation hub by exit II (will help preserve environmental as well)
- Bring recreation close to population centers
- Where should the proposed parks be in the county? – map it in the plan

##### Bicycling/Trails

- Biking for commuters – a real mode of transportation
- Safe ways, using models of places in Europe where bikes are not next to drivers, connected throughout the county
- Mountain bike & rail trails can interconnect with other trails

##### Greatest Open Space and Recreation Assets

- More access to the river for the public, farms, Palisades State Park System

##### Acquiring More Permanent Open Space or Connections between Open Space and Recreational Resources

- Need a good map to plan this that shows all open space

##### Open Space and Recreation

- Golf courses should not be considered open space
- As open space, horse stables & nurseries as well show the value of agriculture – education & community that grows from it (food safety & importance of local foods) re-enact farmland protection board
- Farm to school, school to farm near Viola Park there is farmland (Ericson – owned by city)

Review of Preliminary Recommendations (from PowerPoint Presentation)

- Cannot necessarily be separated out from one another, they are all important (add farming – create more)
- Resource accountability - open space cannot be infringed upon if it is not sustainable for our county development cannot exceed the resources of our county & should not lead to unnecessary building of plants for water & energy use
- We need smart accounting for use of permeable surfaces; rain gardens etc... gray water irrigation

## V. CONCLUSION

The public workshop attracted approximately 70 Rockland County residents, business owners, and officials who were eager to discuss a range of issues. While participants were asked to choose one general topic area/draft Plan chapter for roundtable discussion, the table presentations at the end of the workshop demonstrated that the four discussion areas (General Issues, Transportation, Natural and Environmental Resources, and Parks and Open Space) are interconnected and can significantly affect one another.

Despite the wide array of issues discussed at the workshop, several key themes emerged that should be addressed in the Plan. While workshop participants might not have agreed on all points raised, the fact that they were discussed by multiple tables indicates that the following themes are worthy of detailed discussion in the Plan:

- What constitutes the appropriate level and location of development? A number of residents were concerned about potential “overdevelopment” resulting from the growth of high-density residential uses. Others thought that density should be increased around transit hubs and in hamlet/village centers (transit-oriented development)
- Planning for growth based on the availability of natural resources rather than planning for unlimited population growth
- Preservation of Rockland County’s rural and semirural character
- Rockland County government as a leader in planning for future growth and conservation
- Coordination between the County and the towns and villages, and among the municipalities (i.e. comprehensive plans, planning policies, regional planning, consistent guidelines, etc.)
- The impact of the I-87/287 and Tappan Zee Bridge corridor project on the County
- Promotion of bicycling as both a recreational and commuting function
- Improvement of current traffic flow and safety by examining improvements to alternative transportation modes (e.g. bus transit, biking, and walking)
- Conservation of water resources in the County, both in terms of quality and quantity
- Housing affordability for all Rockland County residents, particularly seniors, first-time homebuyers, and volunteer workers and the need to mix moderate income units with market rate units, rather than concentrating moderate income housing
- Continued acquisition of open space, trails, and bikeways and coordinated efforts to connect them to open space/recreation resources and municipal centers
- Bringing local recreation closer to population centers