



## PUBLIC WORKSHOP #3 SUMMARY REPORT June 15, 2010



BFJ Planning

**ROCKLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
**PUBLIC WORKSHOP #3 SUMMARY REPORT**  
Rockland County, New York

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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 third public workshop (out of four planned public workshops) on June 9, 2010. The workshop was attended by approximately 45 participants, all with various backgrounds ranging from Rockland residents to business owners to historical preservation 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: Demographics, Aging, Historic and Cultural Resources, Housing, and Economic Development. Following the presentation and a brief coffee break, the audience split into roundtable discussion groups corresponding to the draft chapters reviewed.

With copies of the PowerPoint presentation at hand the attendees held meaningful discussions on the chapters they chose to discuss at the corresponding roundtable topic areas. Representatives from BFJ Planning assisted each table in acting as facilitators to guide discussion and listen. Rockland County Planning Department staff also assisted each table. 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 #3

9 June 2010

1. Introductions
2. Presentation by BFJ Planning
3. Coffee Break
4. Roundtable Discussions
  - ❖ Demographics and Aging / Housing
  - ❖ Historic and Cultural Resources
  - ❖ Economic Development
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, Regina Armstrong and Tina Lund of Urbanomics, Susan Favate, and Michael Keane):

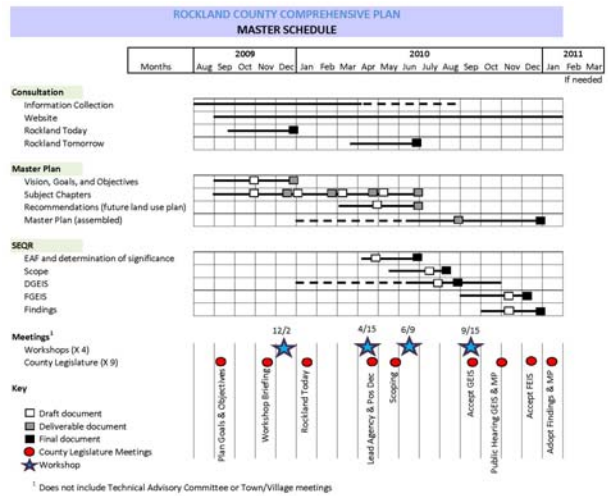
#### 1) Project Summary

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.

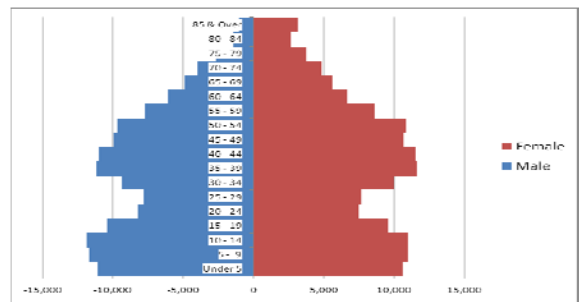
#### 2) Workshop #3 Topics

The next segment of the presentation included a review of the next few draft chapters of the Plan, including Demographics and Aging, Historic and Cultural Resources, and Economic Development. Tina Lund summarized the draft Demographics and Aging Chapters—initially discussed at the first workshop in December 2009 but with new sections covered, including population projections and senior characteristics. Major issues and preliminary recommendations included land use needs of seniors and youths, demand in healthcare, education, community facilities and services, and the need for accessible transportation.

Susan Favate continued with a summary of Historic and Cultural Resources. Historic resources such as National and State Register of Historic Places, National and Local Historic Districts, scenic roads, and architecturally significant buildings throughout the County were covered. Cultural resources and programs included those of the Rockland County Office of Tourism, the Arts in Public Spaces Program, Works Progress Administration Progress murals, historic trails, community organizations, theater, dance and music

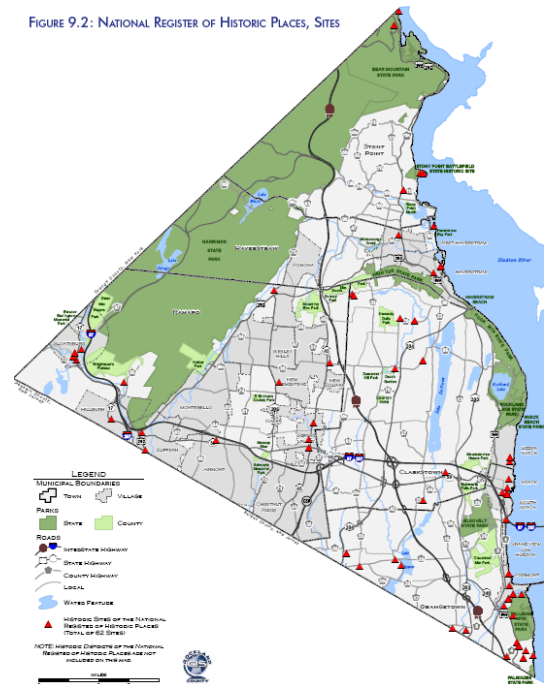


Rockland Comprehensive Plan Schedule



Rockland County Age Structure

FIGURE 9.2: NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, SITES



Rockland County National Register of Historic Places, Sites

organizations, and farms and markets. Some of the issues discussed included participation in historic and cultural programs, gaps in scenic roads designation, coordination among layers of historic preservation, and building on Rockland’s cultural assets to attract visitors. Some of the preliminary recommendations presented included creating a County historic roads program, encouraging towns and villages to become Greenway Compact Communities, developing strategies to attract visitors to Rockland, and providing assistance to local arts and cultural groups.

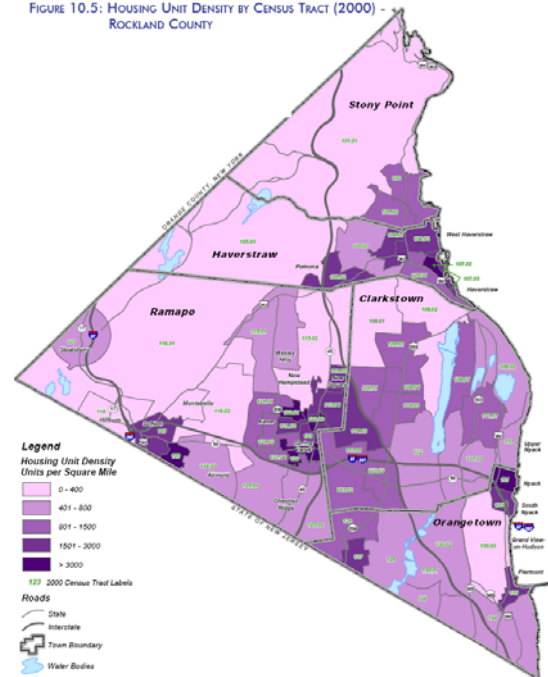
Michael Keane followed with a discussion of the Housing chapter, including housing conditions, density, forecasts, and demand. Major housing issues included housing affordability and availability for Rockland’s diverse population. Preliminary recommendations consisted of affordable housing options for youths and seniors and strategies that can balance future residential development with the preservation of open space.

Regina Armstrong concluded the summary of the completed draft Plan chapters with a review of Economic Development, which also was covered at the first public workshop but updated since then. Topics covered included existing conditions for jobs, leading job sectors and employers in the County, and job and workforce growth. Major issues focused on positioning Rockland County to share in regional growth, aligning skills for workforce and employer demand, balancing job growth in moderate and lower wages, providing employment opportunities for young adults, and moving forward with shovel-ready sites for economic development. Opportunities and preliminary recommendations included promoting biomedical research and production, front office and professional services and tourism, strengthening traditional downtown centers, and

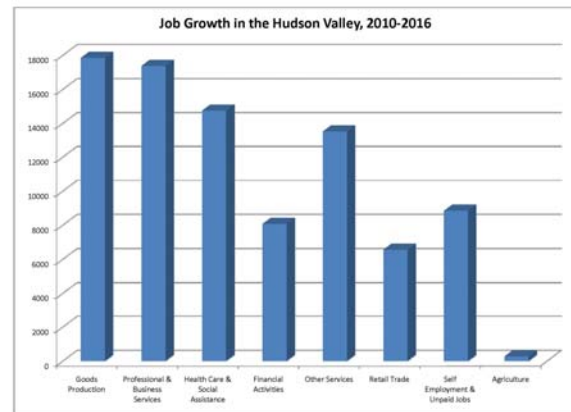
	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	Percentage Point Change 2005-2035
Under 20	30.8%	30.3%	29.9%	29.9%	30.2%	30.9%	31.5%	0.7%
Young Adults (20-29)	10.4%	10.9%	11.1%	11.0%	10.8%	10.6%	10.5%	0.1%
Prime Labor Force Age (30-44)	21.2%	19.2%	18.2%	18.2%	18.5%	18.3%	18.0%	-3.2%
Mature Labor Force Age (45-64)	25.3%	26.5%	26.4%	25.6%	24.2%	23.0%	22.6%	-2.6%
Early Retirement (65-74)	6.7%	7.0%	8.0%	8.4%	8.7%	9.0%	8.7%	2.0%
Established Retirement (75-84)	4.1%	4.4%	4.4%	4.7%	5.4%	5.8%	6.0%	1.9%
Elderly (85+)	1.5%	1.8%	2.0%	2.1%	2.1%	2.3%	2.7%	1.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%

*Rockland County Population Distribution by Age Grouping, 2005-2035*

FIGURE 10.5: HOUSING UNIT DENSITY BY CENSUS TRACT (2000) - ROCKLAND COUNTY



*Rockland County Housing Unit Density by Census Tract (2000)*



*Job Growth in the Hudson Valley, 2010-2016*

supporting Rockland County Empire Zones and agencies, such as the Rockland Economic Development Corporation and Rockland Industrial Development Agency.

### 3) 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 on September 15, 2010.

#### **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 Demographics and Aging, Historic and Cultural Resources, Housing, and Economic Development. Each table was given a set of questions to guide their discussion; participants also were encouraged 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:

##### **DEMOGRAPHICS AND AGING / HOUSING**

Participants of this table discussed a broad range of topics and issues, as well as offering their ideas and recommendations on how to best plan for the County's current and projected needs for youths, seniors, and housing demands. A priority for this group was for the Comprehensive Plan to make a strong statement for more housing choices in targeted areas.

Attendees at this table recognized the need to provide housing for young professionals and Rockland's aging population, as well as caregivers and volunteer workers. They reinforced some of the preliminary recommendations from the presentation, such as providing multi-family units and concentrating growth in existing town centers (located in south and eastern Rockland County) and new town centers. Participants expressed the importance of attractive centers with higher densities that would provide better access to buses and biking opportunities. A suggestion was made to locate new housing units over existing commercial strip centers.

##### **HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Attendees at this table offered some new recommendations, as well as questions for some of the preliminary recommendations from the presentation. One participant questioned the accomplishments of the current Hudson River Valley Greenway Program, a voluntary program that was covered in more detail during the second Public Workshop. An issue was also raised regarding historic roads and the coordination between the State, County, and local municipalities in having continuity along designated roads. The lack of scenic byways in the County was also raised for discussion.

To promote Rockland's historic and cultural resources, a suggestion was made to improve gateways into villages and historic sites, as well as improving wayfinding to cultural sites and important landmarks (e.g. signs or flags). The idea of "mini-museums" was suggested to expand historic resources across Rockland County. It was recommended that the Haverstraw Brick Museum be better advertised. Expanding bus transit to historic and cultural areas (with educated bus guides) was recommended. Attendees at this table agreed that the countywide River Day and ice festivals were good models for events that are beneficial to Rockland residents and visitors and that could expand in the County.

Issues regarding municipal coordination were discussed. Attendees felt that there should be better coordination among municipalities for identifying historic buildings and areas, expanding resources, and promoting historic preservation standards. Inter-municipal historic districts were suggested that preclude borders, since "history doesn't follow borders." Historic preservation and the lack of enforcement of historic structure teardowns were also expressed as major issues,

as was the issue of upholding historic preservation codes in the legal system. Attendees also felt that laws regarding “bed and breakfasts” should be less restrictive in order to encourage them throughout the County.

Specific sites were recommended for new cultural activities, including transferring an Off-Track Betting facility into a museum and promoting a performance arts and conference center at an abandoned Tilcon property. Finally, attendees expressed the importance of having a directory of historic and cultural resource contacts in the Comprehensive Plan.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Economic Development table discussed ways to improve Rockland’s economic sustainability and well-being. In response to a current issue, which involves Rockland County municipalities converting light industrial zoning districts to residential zoning districts, attendees expressed their desire to preserve existing zoning districts that promote economic development, ratables, and high-quality employment in commercial, office and industrial sectors. In order to better serve Rockland’s business community, a pre-permitting process was recommended at the local municipal level for certain industrial zones. A recommendation was made to use one regional Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement in industrial zones to streamline the pre-approval process. In an effort to create an environment for businesses to flourish, attendees suggested that Rockland look for ways to stay ahead in the competitive Hudson Valley market. To achieve this, one participant recommended that municipalities examine the feasibility of creating flexible zoning that permits new planned light industrial zones mixed with office uses, as well as a revolving assistance fund for business improvements.

Ensuring adequate infrastructure (e.g. roads) and “economic spectrum housing” (i.e. affordable or workforce housing) were seen as strategies that could support businesses and the people who want to live and work in the County. Transit Oriented Development was another example of how Rockland could stay competitive, while establishing an attractive environment where people could live, work, play, and/or commute. The Economic Development table concluded by recommending that the County and municipalities support the fostering of clusters of businesses that will better attract companies to conduct business in Rockland and thereby help sustain its workforce. The biomedical sector in particular was viewed as a potential growth sector. Finally, it was recommended that Rockland actively support businesses that rely on employment skills that already exist in the County.

## V. CONCLUSION

The public workshop attracted approximately 45 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 chapter for roundtable discussion, the table presentations at the end of the workshop demonstrated that the four discussion areas (Demographics and Aging / Housing, Historic and Cultural Resources, and Economic Development) 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:

- Providing housing choices for all Rockland County residents, including seniors, young adults, volunteer workers, and caregivers.
- Coordination between the County and the municipalities (i.e. planning policies, regional planning, consistent guidelines, etc.)
- Improving wayfinding to cultural sites and important landmarks
- Examining new sites for cultural activities and promoting historic preservation standards
- Directing growth to existing town/village centers and establishing Transit Oriented Development where residents can live, work, play and commute.
- Expanding alternative transportation modes (e.g. bus transit, biking and walking) to support economic development, town/village centers and historic and cultural resources
- Rockland County government as a leader in planning for future economic development growth
- Supporting businesses that are based on strengths that already exist in the County, while attracting businesses for growing sectors (e.g. biomedical)
- Exploring zoning changes that support economic development (e.g. mixed light industrial and office zones), as well as funding strategies for business improvements (e.g. revolving assistance fund).