

NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030: ECONOMY WORKSHOP SUMMARY

November 14, 2012

OVERVIEW

This North Adams economy-focused workshop for the city's comprehensive plan, *North Adams Vision 2030*, was structured as a two-hour interactive event.

The agenda for the evening was as follows:

1. Open House (30 minutes)
2. Presentation with Q&A (30 minutes)
3. Small Group Work (45 minutes)
4. Wrap-up and Next Steps (15 minutes)

ATTENDANCE

Twenty-two residents of the city were in attendance. The Mayor and Community Development Director also attended. The meeting was organized and facilitated by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff, Amy Kacala, Project Manager and Senior Planner, and Mackenzie Greer, Community Planner.

OPEN HOUSE

The Open House presented the draft goals, policies and action steps for economic development in the city. Posters were displayed around the room for participants to review and write any comments or ideas on Post-It notes and place them directly onto the posters in space provided. Goal and policy language was directed toward city-wide actions but also three specific target areas: Downtown, the Route 8 corridor from Adams toward Downtown, and the Route 2 corridor from Downtown toward Williamstown.

The comments received are incorporated into posters provided as a separate document.

PRESENTATION WITH Q & A

Mayor Alcombright welcomed the attendees and introduced Amy Kacala, the project manager from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Ms. Kacala began the presentation by introducing the project staff and formally welcoming everyone to the workshop. She then laid out the agenda for the remainder of the evening's workshop.

Ms. Kacala then provided an overview of the Comprehensive Planning process¹ and how this Economy section fits into the overall plan. The main focus of the night's activities was to solicit input from

¹ Plans allow communities to focus and align ideas, efforts and funding to achieve desired outcomes (in this case the city's vision and goals). There are different types of plans communities can develop which as topic based, area specific or are comprehensive. She explained that most plans have a designated shelf life of 10 years; the city's last comprehensive plan was adopted 40-years ago. The city has initiated and developed during that time period other planning documents. A comprehensive plan, however, is the most important because it provides a city-wide perspective and holistic approach to addressing key issues and concerns through the integration of all topic and areas. A

attendees about goals, policies and actions developed to date from previous input activities, including the Steering Committee meetings.

Ms. Kacala noted that this plan is being developed over three years and alongside the regional plan, *Sustainable Berkshires*. The tandem development of these two plans allows the community to utilize information and data to conduct in depth analysis of factors impacting the city, and ensures alignment of priorities and strategies.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE ATTENDEES

One resident noted her concern that Route 2 east was not included in the analysis or goals. Ms. Kacala explained that this is going to be treated as an area of focus, but the downtown and the corridors were selected for this workshop. Since the Route 2 east area includes multiple, roadways and land areas, it will be addressed through the Neighborhoods section of this plan.

There was discussion about the planning outreach process. Some attendees expressed concern that most of the people in the room are like-minded with similar backgrounds, thus there is limited variation in community input. There were some ideas generated about other groups to engage with. Ms. Kacala described the need to balance outreach activities with the realities of time and resources but said they are willing to try some new and different options in the Housing and Neighborhoods section. Others in the audience suggested that those present need to act as ambassadors for the project. Another attendee described the goals, policies and actions as being well-representative of the community at large.

These two concerns expressed will be discussed further at the next Steering Committee meeting.

SMALL GROUP SESSION

Ms. Kacala introduced a small group exercise with the table top worksheet. The attendees were asked to discuss the future vision, needs and opportunities in the overall city, downtown, and the Route 2 & Route 8 corridors. Groups were given 40 minutes to work, at the end of which they were asked to note their Top Priorities, and to share them with the other groups in the room.

Guiding questions were presented to help frame each group's discussion:

- **Overall City Assets:** In your opinion, what City assets are underutilized? What needs to be done in order to better utilize those special city features?
- **Downtown:** What do you think downtown North Adams needs to become more lively? What additional businesses or uses would you use if there? How can the downtown better serve and attract residents, visitors and businesses?
- **Route 2:** Are there key areas along this corridor which are underutilized? What needs to happen to make it more useful and inviting?
- **Route 8:** Are there key areas along this corridor which are underutilized? What needs to happen to make it more useful and inviting?

The comments presented by the small groups are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Small Group Exercise Results

	<i>City: Underutilized Assets</i>	<i>Downtown</i>	<i>Route 8</i>	<i>Route 2</i>	<i>Top Priorities</i>
GROUP #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The River is inaccessible • Trails on the mountains could connect better to downtown • The hospital has potential as a wellness center • The fine-grained street grid exists, connections are lacking • The traditional/historic building stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The River is inaccessible • Bike paths and trails in an interconnected network • Less blacktop • A public green • Businesses w/evening hours, activities • Integrated programming between cultural institutions and downtown • Relocate farmer’s market to a part of downtown with a stronger sense of place – a more “focused” location • Remove overpass that separates MASS MoCA from downtown • Connect the Freight Yard with Main Street and MASS MoCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the sprawl. The corridor is largely a lost cause, except for Noel Field and the recreational facilities. Investment there could pay off. • Focus on the River, green the corridor • Bike path • Improve pedestrian experience between Main Street, Noel Field, and River • Improve signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to the River, i.e. boat access • Reduce the visual clutter billboards create • Traffic calming 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greening/River (i.e. public green, park space) 2. Access, connectivity, pedestrian experience 3. Evening activities, commerce, retail, i.e. something to do at night
GROUP #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural resources and recreation • Technology apps, i.e. “Around Me” or QR codes linked into sites and search engines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses open later • Light store fronts • More retail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large open area for events & festivals • Arts & Crafts shows • Create walking trail along berm (take fence) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing availability and lessons similar to Berkshire Outfitters 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technology to key in on all resources for access to what is here (i.e. apps, blogging) 2. Create a tour company featuring area highlights i.e. waterfalls, fishing holes, walk on the AT
GROUP #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All outdoor recreation is underutilized • Provide a guide to North Adams recreation – parks, swimming, sports • Historic tours, sights, cemeteries • River (due to flood chutes) • Airport • Civic organizations (aren’t communicating with each other) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More green space, dog park, clothing, shoes, suits, stores etc. • Make Route 2 overpass more attractive • Crossing Route 2 – poor placement of crossings • Parking signage • Lack of parking in many neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River access/recreation • More events @ Noel Field • Tear down Walmart, consider locating public safety there • Streetscape between downtown, fields and Heritage Park • Business District signage • Define bike path route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize Cariddi and other mills for housing and commercial space • Fort Massachusetts - revisit • Improvements in front of Price Chopper, etc. • Curb appeal/user friendly for more residential • Define bike path route 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Streetscape & greening 2. Promote underutilized assets

GROUP EXERCISE - GENERAL COMMENTS

Some general comments from the audience followed. There is a common theme expressed that many of the city's assets aren't well known, so locals don't always visit, and visitors don't know about them. This is where a wiki app might come in useful.

Some of the issues are perception. There has been great improvement over the last twenty years. But there is a need to address the younger crowd's needs. Try surveying these groups of people to find out what they want/need.

WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS

The notes from this and other workshops will be posted on the City's webpage. The next sections to be started are Conservation and Recreation and Housing and Neighborhoods. Staff remained for another half hour to take any additional comments and suggestions. Each participant was then given five colored dots to place next to actions they want to see implemented as soon as possible. The results of this priority exercise are included in the Draft Economic Goals, Policies and Strategies, also on the city webpage.