



MEETING SUMMARY

Rensselaer Rising Public Workshop #1

Thursday, March 7, 2024

6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

Rensselaer City School

The first Rensselaer Rising Public Workshop was held on Thursday March 7, 2024, from 6-7:30 PM at the Rensselaer City School. The workshop was open to the public and was attended by 14 members of the community and Rensselaer Rising committee members.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the Rensselaer Rising project so far, review preliminary findings, summarize public survey results, and get public feedback on visioning and goals for the project and study area. Following the project overview, attendees were provided with post-it notes, pens, and six interactive stations to gather feedback on a community vision for the project. Each station included questions to guide conversation, and members of the community were free to visit each one to discuss their ideas for specific topics.

The first station included some general visioning questions for participants, and the other five stations each corresponded with major topic areas of the project, including economic development, waterfront access and open spaces, community services, housing, and transportation. The following is a summary of the public feedback from the event organized by station and question.

Station 1 – Overall Visioning

- **Describe your vision for the City of Rensselaer in one word:**
 - Responses included visions of a revitalized, historic, clean, revamped, and redeveloped area, with an identifiable downtown core.
- **What strengths does the City of Rensselaer have?**
 - Participants identified several strengths of the City, including its potential to start fresh, riverfront access, proximity to transportation hubs and other communities, affordability, especially relative to neighboring areas, natural resources, its people, history, and its small size.
- **How do you envision the City 5-10 years from now?**
 - Participants highlighted their hopes of seeing new opportunities and progress for the community, more access to the waterfront, new business and industry, and for the City to become an interconnected, diverse, hub in the region.
- **Is there anything else you want to add? Including outside of the study area.**
 - Other general recommendations included more parking for residents and businesses, prioritizing industries and businesses that will not pollute, improving boating access to the Hudson through a boat launch at the riverfront park, and addressing concerns surrounding the Dunn Landfill.



Station 2 – Economic Development

- **What types of businesses and amenities would you like to see in the study area? Where should they be located?**
 - Suggestions included adding more amenities in walking distance of the train station for visitors to access, a grocery store for residents, a barge restaurant or waterfront restaurant, banks or a credit union, a tourist trolley that uses existing and underutilized railways, and a cluster of bars, restaurants, and nightlife to allow people to walk between multiple locations.
- **How can we attract these types of businesses?**
 - Several suggestions within the study area were discussed for attracting businesses and amenities to the City, these included:
 - Focusing on attraction of the arts and music,
 - Creating an event space for all ages and a gymnasium for youth and adult sports and events,
 - Utilizing the waterfront park space more frequently for events like 5K races, food trucks etc., and considering more specialized and holiday/seasonal community events,
 - Considering the creation of a BID and use of PILOTs and other tax incentives,
 - Addressing the misuse of commercial storefronts, improving clarity of what existing businesses are in the storefronts,
 - Considering modernized systems for business owners to interface and connect with the City, and for residents to engage in community events,
 - Prioritizing sustainable energy conscious development,
 - Communicating with the CDTA and Amtrak to have signage within the Train Station directing visitors to local amenities, and
 - Centralizing development to create 'hubs' that are logical for residents and visitors who are traveling through, stopping on their way home from work, walking, or biking.

Station 3 – Open Spaces

- **What would you like to see along the waterfront?**
 - Ideas for the waterfront included a canoe and kayak launch, as well as swimming access near the riverfront park, restaurants along the water, more access to groceries, and one participant suggested to add more native plantings to support the habitats of local species (not only along the waterfront but in the community as a whole).
- **What is the greatest restraint of development along the waterfront?**
 - Participants identified restraints of development along the waterfront, including private property ownership of waterfront parcels, extensive railroad tracks and infrastructure, and limited access to the actual river due to fences and other private properties. Participants also noted that there are several pedestrian and cyclist safety concerns that limit accessibility to the



waterfront, like proper lighting at night, high traffic speeds, and a general lack of infrastructure for walking and biking.

- **Which open spaces in the community do you use the most, and where would you like to see more?**
 - Large parking lots in the study area were identified as potential areas for more community open spaces, and the riverfront park was identified as the most frequented green space in the community.
- **How can we better connect green spaces in the community?**
 - Participants recommended bike lanes, bike racks, bikeable paths, and walkable routes throughout the community to encourage connections between existing green spaces. It was also recommended to connect with and expand the Albany-Hudson Electric Trail.
 - One suggestion to improve the connectivity of green spaces in the City was to have a unified 'branding' approach for parks by having all facilities have the same types and styles of signage, benches, facilities, etc.
 - Other recommendations included maps indicating where green spaces and trails are, working with the County to free up land currently owned by RPI, improving ADA accessibility, community gardens, more street trees, planters, and vegetation throughout the City, and addressing vacant, underutilized, and abandoned properties.

Station 4 – Community Services

- **What types of programs are needed for youth, adults, and seniors?**
 - Participants noted that the City should first highlight and expand its existing programming, like at the Boys and Girls Club, local museums, and parks.
 - New recommendations included:
 - Outdoor gym/recreational activities for all ages,
 - Indoor gym,
 - Disc golf course,
 - A kayak launch,
 - A community center/public meeting space with programming,
 - A community empowerment project,
 - Historic lectures about the City,
 - A dance hall, and
 - Fishing regulation classes.
- **What types of events would you like to see, and where should they be held?**
 - Recommendations included:
 - Events along the riverfront or at the riverfront park, including food trucks, a large annual summer event like the Troy Stoll, vendors, music, and fall festivals,
 - Art and mural tours,
 - Shows/nightlife along Broadway,
 - Public problem-solving conversations, and
 - Fishing.



Station 5 - Housing

Discussion on housing focused on the potential of redevelopment at Zappala Block, and the need for less absentee landlords in the community; one participant suggested more one-family homes in the City. Other recommendations included promoting mixed-use buildings and repurposing existing buildings for housing.

Station 6 – Transportation

Participants were asked to mark up a map of the study area with their recommendations related to transportation and a downtown business district.

- A potential location for a downtown business district was identified surrounding the current NYS OCFS building, the southern end of Broadway, Washington Street, and including Walker Street and part of the Columbia Turnpike.
- It was noted that employees of OCFS tend to walk on their lunch break to the Stewart's that is in the northeast corner of the study area. Making a clearer walking path in that area was suggested and could be helpful for people already walking.
- A participant noted that there are currently no bus stops north of City Hall, which may be worth considering for expansion.
- Participants also identified the potential for some bike paths throughout the study area.