



September 25, 2024 @ 6:00 – 7:30 pm | Senior Citizens Center
35 Main Street, Tonawanda, NY 14150

Attendees

State Partners

- Ben Bidell, NYS Department of State
- Angela Keppel, NYS Department of State
- Erin Corrado, Empire State Development
- Mo Sumbundu, Empire State Development
- Lenny Skrill, NYS Homes and Community Renewal

City of Tonawanda

- Sharon Stuart, City of Tonawanda
- Judy Kurtzworth, City of Tonawanda

Local Planning Committee

- Co-chair Hon. John White, Mayor
- Co-chair Paul Brown, WNY Regional Economic Development Council
- Marty Grunzweig
- Skip Johnson
- Nhi Kha
- Debbie Jaeger
- Alice Roth
- Joan Horn
- Jeffrey Ross
- Mark Saltarelli
- Michelle Lockett
- Suzanne Zuchlewski

Consultant Team

- WSP
- Highland Planning
- Prospect Hill

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and introductions

- LPC co-chair Mayor White called the meeting to order, and Ben Bidell (DOS) led the pledge of allegiance.
- Mayor White gave opening remarks, emphasizing the importance of this meeting in the overall DRI process.
- Stephanie Camay (WSP) led introductions of the LPC, state partners, and the consultant team.
- LPC Co-Chair Paul Brown (WNY REDC) recited the Code of Conduct preamble. The Preamble reminds LPC members of their obligation to act in the public interest and recuse themselves, if necessary, from talking or making decisions about projects where they have a conflict. The following conflicts are documented:
 - Alice Roth

- Affiliation: Volunteer and Trustee for Historical Society of the Tonawandas
- Project: Long Homestead and Historical Museum Improvements
- Skip Johnson
 - Affiliation: Member and Treasurer of the Historical Society of the Tonawandas
 - Project: Long Homestead and Historical Museum Improvements
- Deb Jaegar
 - Affiliation: Former owner of 77 Young St.
 - Project: Construct a Mixed-Use, Waterfront Building at 77 Young St.

2. Planning process and engagement updates

- Brendan Kelly (WSP) summarized the DRI scope and process, including a recap of LPC Meeting #4, the agenda for LPC Meeting #5, and what to expect at LPC Meeting #6.
- Brendan presented a high-level overview of the public Project Feedback Form, which was open from August 6 to September 11. There were 320 responses to the form.
- The Project Feedback Form asked members of the public the following questions for each of the proposed projects:
 - Does the project align with the Tonawanda DRI Vision and Goals? (Yes or No)
 - Will the project transform Downtown Tonawanda? (Yes or No)
 - What is your level of support for the project? (Scale of 1-10)
 - Do you have any additional comments about the project?
- Brendan gave an update on the Food Truck Thursday pop-up engagement event, which provided a final opportunity to promote the Project Feedback Form.

3. Project updates since last meeting

- Bob Gibson (WSP) gave updates on projects for which additional information was received since LPC Meeting #4.
- Two representatives for the project “Construct the Mixed-Use ‘Elli’ Building at 20-40 Fillmore were invited to answer questions regarding the project’s requested increase in DRI funds from \$1,000,000 to \$4,000,000. The project sponsor cited the cost of decarbonization as the primary reason for the requested increase. The project sponsors indicated that the minimum DRI award needed to advance the project is \$3,400,000.
- Mayor White gave an update on the requested increase in DRI funds for the “Improve Downtown Access and Waterfront Connections” project. The previous project costs included only basic improvements to the City-owned parking lot. The project has been expanded to include full reconstruction of the parking lot with new paving, landscaping, lighting and ADA accessibility; commissioning a local artist for a new sculpture on Canal Street Plaza; installation of seasonal sidewalls on the public pavilion and extension of the pavilion roof over electrical equipment; and improved branding and wayfinding signage.

4. Summary of project evaluation

- Stephanie Camay presented results of the various project evaluation processes that will guide the LPC's decision-making for selecting a slate of projects representing \$12-\$15 million in DRI funding requests to be included in the Strategic Investment Plan and recommended to the State for funding.
- Methods of project evaluation included:
 - Project Feedback Form
 - Gathered public feedback on projects (alignment with DRI Vision and Goals, transformative potential, and overall level of support).
 - Consultant Evaluations
 - Provided the LPC with an objective evaluation of projects using the same state and local criteria as the LPC.
 - LPC Evaluations
 - Included draft project profiles, results from the Project Feedback Form, and consultant evaluations for reference.
 - The results of the LPC evaluations are a tool to help inform a final slate of projects to be recommended for DRI funding.
 - The LPC Evaluation Form asked the following questions:
 - Does the project align with the DRI Vision and Goals?
 - Does the project align with the State DRI Goals?
 - Does the project align with WNY Regional Economic Development Council Strategies?
 - Is the project consistent with State Evaluation Criteria?
 - Is the project consistent with Local Evaluation Criteria?
- Stephanie presented the results of each of the three evaluation methods for LPC consideration.

5. Preliminary slate of projects to recommend for funding

- Stephanie Camay led the discussion regarding the selection of a preliminary slate of projects to be recommended for funding. The slate of projects will be finalized at LPC Meeting #6 on October 24.
- Stephanie reminded the LPC of the available options in selecting the preliminary slate of projects:
 - Recommend for DRI funding directly
 - Recommend for funding through the proposed Small Project Fund
 - Keep as a priority in the Strategic Investment Plan, but recommend for other funding

- Remove from funding consideration and do not include the project in the Strategic Investment Plan
- Request more information (tabled until next meeting)
- The LPC agreed by consensus on a preliminary slate of projects as follows:
 - Recommend for DRI funding directly (total DRI request of \$13,204,000):
 - Construct the Mixed-Use "Elli" Building at 20-40 Fillmore Ave
 - Replace and Enhance City Docking Facilities on the Erie Canal
 - Improve Downtown Access and Waterfront Connections
 - Renovate the Tonawanda Castle to Reignite the Event Center and Introduce Commercial Spaces
 - Redevelop 60 Main Street into an Event Center and Overnight Suites
 - Renovate 98-100 Main Street into a New Restaurant and Bar
 - Replace the East Niagara Street Pedestrian Bridge
 - Construct a Mixed-Use Waterfront Building at 77 Young Street
 - Enhance the Historic Long Homestead
 - Redevelop Former Church at 116 Broad Street into Six Apartments
 - Preserve the Historical Society of the Tonawandas Museum
 - Small Project Fund
 - Recommend for Small Project Fund:
 - Add Outdoor Seating at Joey's Place Restaurant
 - Keep in the plan, but recommend for other funding:
 - Build a Seven-Story Mixed-Use Building at 17-31 Adam Street
 - Convert the Former Rite Aid into a Multi-Story Mixed-Use Building
 - Build a Natural Playground behind the Long Homestead
 - Convert Kohler Pool to Splash Pad and Improve Building
 - Improve Niagara Street Corridor between City Hall and Main Street

6. Next steps

- Stephanie gave an overview of the remaining steps in the DRI process.
- The final LPC Meeting will be held on October 24, location TBD.
- The meeting will include the following agenda items:
 - Remaining project updates and final draft project profiles
 - Reiterate project evaluation criteria used to select projects
 - Finalize and vote on slate of projects to recommend for funding
 - Next steps in the DRI process
 - Public comment

- Stephanie presented a list of upcoming deliverables:
 - Public Project Feedback Form summary
 - Final draft Project Profiles
 - Final draft Downtown Profile and Assessment
 - Draft Strategic Investment Plan

7. Public comment

- Stephanie opened the floor to comments from members of the public. The following comments were made:
 - Presentation slides are hard to read; hard copies of the slideshow should be made available to members of the public.
 - Noise level of boats and outdoor restaurants are a nuisance and should be considered when evaluating projects.