

ENVISION

New Rochelle Comprehensive Plan
June 4-7, 2012

Summary - Comments from Public Meetings

The following are summaries of strengths, challenges, and opportunities organized by categories as identified by participants in the first set of public meetings.

Neighborhoods and Housing

Strengths

1. Diversity of housing stock in New Rochelle
2. Multicultural nature of populace
3. Character of the city's residential neighborhoods: human scale and small town feel.
4. Streetscape: tree lined streets that are well-maintained and walkable
5. Neighborhood Associations
6. PACT officers that attend meetings; presence and access to PACT officers

Challenges

1. Streetscape: Many places New Rochelle was not walkable
2. Lack of safe bicycling routes
3. The increase in apartment units -apartment tenants were less likely to participate in the community.
4. Noise and vandalism: particularly noisy by the waterfront and near the colleges
5. A rise in vacancies in New Rochelle
6. No system to document vacancies or track absentee landlords
7. Lack of affordable housing for middle-income groups.
8. Traffic: particularly around the waterfront
9. Segregation between upper income North End residents and the South End
10. Lack of affordable housing, neighborhoods racially + economically segregated
11. Lack of outreach in neighborhood- from city council or community organizers
12. Overhead Wires

Opportunities (Neighborhoods & Housing)

1. Create a sense of empowerment among residents
2. Maintain communication between the city and residents
3. Continue community engagement
4. Town hall meetings
5. Neighborhood Associations should work together with the city to attack challenges
6. Community-building events, such as street festivals and a bike race
7. Utilize banners advertising community events
8. Preservation of historic housing
9. Turn unmaintained islands into community gardens
10. Utilize vacant storefront spaces for pop-up businesses
11. Utilize the 3 colleges by drawing on their manpower and skills
12. City wide beautification program- ongoing and effective
13. Town hall meeting- citywide
14. Community Awards - Help community feel like they are making a difference if they get involved

Economic Development

Strengths

1. Variety of restaurants and retail opportunities
2. Access: to New York City lower Westchester & Fairfield County
3. Thriving transportation hub and Amtrak availability
4. Community resources: the hospital, library, art center, parks and waterfront
5. New Roc Center/Entertainment centers
6. Presence of colleges
7. Pool of potential volunteers with related expertise
8. IMAX theatre
9. Beach clubs with great meeting facilities
10. Commercial diversity
11. Two hotels (always full)
12. Small business/local mom and pop shops
13. Access to big box stores (commercial options)

Challenges

1. Lack of thriving downtown; Lack of diversity of uses in downtown
2. Perception that downtown is unsafe
3. Unattractive entries to downtown
4. Lack of vibrancy of North Ave. corridor- empty storefronts
5. Inadequate access to parking in certain areas; downtown some neighborhoods
6. Inadequate and infrequent public transportation
7. Non-profit institutions of New Rochelle: the colleges and hospital do not contribute to the tax base
8. Iona is buying up houses and taking them off the tax rolls
9. The number of homeless people is preventing retail development
10. Significant monetary leakage to nearby communities
11. Too much residential development and not enough commercial development
12. Change the mindset of residents to a more urban rather than suburban perspective

Opportunities

1. Turn New Rochelle into a destination community not a bedroom community
2. Hire a location-based tourism expert to draw people to New Rochelle
3. Capture I-95 traffic and sales tax revenues
4. Develop a branding and marketing strategy
5. Create a citizen's advisory bureau geared towards attracting tourist dollars
6. Expand artist space or the creation of an arts district
7. Expand office space
8. Initiatives to bring locally owned businesses downtown
9. Keep downtown open late night
10. Retail and restaurants at Echo Bay
11. Improve retail on North Ave
12. More diverse retail environment on Palmer Ave
13. More specialty shops
14. Rezoning to allow bed and breakfasts
15. Programs or incentives to attract and retain small businesses

Mobility and Infrastructure

Strengths

1. The transportation hub and rail access
2. Streetscapes and walkability
3. Proximity to the waterfront
4. Regional location of New Rochelle: Proximity to New York City, Stamford, and Westchester Airport
5. Taxi services

Challenges

1. Lack of sidewalks
2. Not enough parking
3. Not enough convenient parking
4. Parking is incorrectly regulated
5. Not enough parking near open space resources
6. You have to pay for parking downtown until midnight
7. Congestion on North Ave, downtown, and Echo Bay
8. In too many places, New Rochelle is unwalkable
9. Need to maintain sidewalks; many upturned by tree roots
10. Businesses are using sidewalks that are not wide enough to accommodate them
11. In other places sidewalks were just not wide enough
12. Sewer infrastructure may be too old and over capacity (odors)
13. Stormwater management issues are pervasive
14. Lack of delivery and loading zones
15. No adequate transit connection between downtown and the waterfront
16. Confusing automobile access to the waterfront
17. Failure to connect the city to other downtowns in Westchester
18. Failure to connect north end to south end
19. Difficulties in closing down streets for festivals and events
20. Hard to live here without car- lack of frequent transit options

Opportunities

1. Night life (extended hours) around downtown transit hub
2. Use of Signboard at train station for public advertisements of community event meetings
3. Put power lines underground
4. Develop stormwater and sewage control
5. Revert some one-way streets back to two-way
6. Create more walkable communities
7. Improve bicycle accessibility
8. Park Shuttle to move people from one park to the next
9. Trolley down North Ave to connect the north end to downtown
10. Utilizing the train station for communication and to boost tourism
11. Public boating accessibility
12. Create a two-way bicycle path and connect it to a greenway system for stormwater relief
13. Create New Rochelle smartphone app
14. Bike routes- need to be on website
15. Decrease apathy by increasing communications

Open Space and Community Resources

Strengths

1. The parks system- many small parks
2. Abundant recreation opportunities
3. The waterfront
4. Quality of the schools
5. Community service organizations- the Youth Bureau, YMCA, Senior Center, the PACT unit and the 325th Anniversary Committee
6. Strong arts institutions- opera company and the Arts Council
7. Developing artists community
8. Recreation- tennis, golf, pool, community gardens, parks
9. City park restoration
10. Senior Center
11. Leather Stocking Trail

Challenges

1. Preservation of the parks system
2. Drainage at baseball fields
3. Underutilization of the parks system due to access restrictions
4. Not enough access to public waterfront
5. Ineffective stormwater management could be affecting the harbor
6. Concern about lakes suffering from hypoxia as a result of pollution and runoff
7. Lack of a visitor center
8. The lack of a link between New Rochelle's historic resources such as the Thomas Paine house and the intermodal transit center
9. Farmer's market needs better hours
10. Maintenance of city owned property (Armory, ward acres barn)
11. David's Island/ Underutilized waterfront

Opportunities

1. Combined visitor center and community center
2. Kiosk/directory
3. Increase efficiency by promoting and supporting volunteerism
4. Coordinate with the Neighborhood Associations and the colleges
5. Greater dialogue between the city and the city government
6. Hosting a regatta in New Rochelle
7. Making more community gardens
8. Host year-round festivals
9. Services sharing between city & school district
10. Adopt a plot- volunteer beautification
11. Bike routes- need to be on website
12. Capitalize on intellectual capital and manpower of colleges
13. Use universities and HS as resource/ outreach/ churches/ synagogues
14. Renting kayaks, canoes, fishing summer fun
15. Echo Bay is an opportunity to reshape the last remaining piece of waterfront
16. Increase gov't efficiency by capturing volunteerism

Land Use and Zoning

Strengths

1. Diversity of land uses
2. The presence of both big box retail and small business retail
3. Selection of restaurants
4. Variety of churches
5. Diversity of park types and recreation options
6. Small hamlet commercial centers
7. Commercial options downtown
8. Revitalization of Division Street
9. Diversity between residential neighborhoods
10. The rezoning of multi-family residence (RMF) zones
11. Creation of the growth areas Downtown Mixed Use and Downtown Mixed Use Urban Renewal (DMU/DMUR)
12. College campuses
13. David's Island
14. Waterfront
15. Proper permitted uses within districts
16. Trees as resource

Challenges

1. Lack of thriving downtown
2. Unattractive entries to downtown
3. Spot zoning-encroachment of commercial development into residential areas: change of community character.
4. Transition between residential neighborhoods and commercial uses needs to be reviewed
5. Connectivity problems that need to be addressed between the north end and downtown
6. Too many rental units
7. Growing illegal occupancy
8. Lack of affordable housing
9. Spot zoning is causing commercial encroachment into residential neighborhoods
10. There is nowhere for students to go after school
11. Unpleasant + not pedestrian friendly to walk downtown from north
12. Lack of vibrancy of North Ave. corridor- empty storefronts
13. Geography of the city, long & narrow= leads to disconnect among neighborhoods
14. Lack of regional + collaboration: Failure to connect with other downtowns
15. Maintenance of city owned property (Armory, ward acres barn)
16. David's Island/ Underutilized waterfront

Opportunities (Land Use and Zoning)

1. Attract small shops by removing regulatory barriers
2. Zone for high tech, light industrial
3. Rezone to allow bed and breakfasts
4. Develop more small shopping centers
5. Green building mandate
6. Wind turbines on existing structures
7. Hydroelectric generation
8. Recycling Center, like Mamaroneck.
9. Baseline for clean electricity generation on school and municipal structures
10. Allow rooftops to be used for rooftop farming
11. Develop green roofs
12. Change the zoning code to promote community gardening
13. Increase public access to the waterfront through a public boat launch
14. Creation of more artist spaces, possibly through the creation of an arts district.
15. Allow Pop-ups for local art in vacant storefronts
16. Armory for arts/cultural events
17. Reutilization of vacant parcels as community gardens

Urban Design and Preservation

Strengths

1. Beautiful historic architecture; Important monuments
2. Historic homes; Historic signs; Heritage awards
3. City is getting stronger- Division Street, old homes restoration, improvements to North Avenue, intermodal transit center
4. Façade program/ renovations
5. Strong, rich history
6. BID improvements
7. Targeted area of Division Street was a success
8. Residential Park- planned neighborhoods with aesthetic appeal

Challenges

1. A lack of funding and incentive for preservation
2. Difficulty of obtaining funding that does exist: understanding what efforts are necessary to secure that funding
3. Preservation of the parks system and open space
4. Mismanagement of historic properties
5. Lack of public art downtown
6. Unattractive entryways to the city
7. Poor transition between mixed use areas and single-use residential neighborhoods
8. No uniformity in signage
9. North Avenue corridor lacks vibrancy
10. Downtown is mostly built out
11. Vacant buildings fall into disrepair; armory, greenhouse, Wildcliff Manor
12. Lack of code enforcement
13. Pedestrian environment unfriendly- particularly north of library to downtown

Opportunities

1. Improve walkability by improving the aesthetics of neighborhoods
2. Improve aesthetics around the train station
3. Create a cohesive look for Main Street
4. Create bikeable streets
5. Create a preservation and design board
6. Clean up downtown to make it more attractive to both businesses and shoppers
7. Use of Ward Acres for agricultural center/farm/restaurant