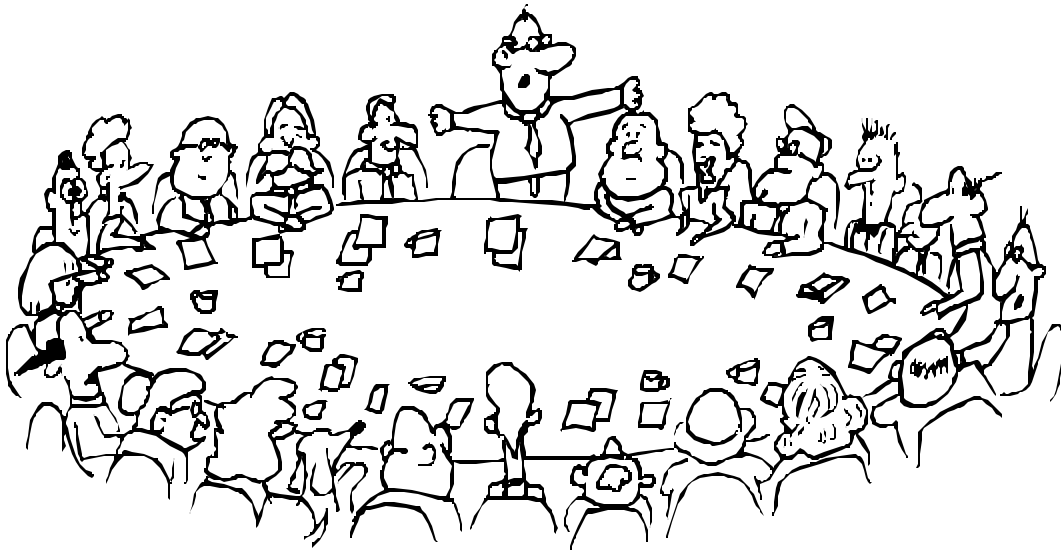

Community Visioning Workshop Results

ROCK HILL

NEW YORK



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A VISION FOR ROCK HILL

INTRODUCTION

EARLY IN 2005, the Gerry Foundation began soliciting applications for the latest round of its **Sullivan Renaissance** community beautification program. Now in its fifth year, the expanded program included a new focus on helping communities develop long-range plans for their beautification and community development activities. Through this program, several communities - including the hamlet of Rock Hill -- received free technical planning assistance in the form of facilitated “community visioning workshops.”

The workshops were organized and facilitated by staff from **The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development** and the **Sullivan County Division of Planning and Community Development** and were designed to help each community take stock of where it stands today, and to develop a vision for where it wants to go in the future.

Sponsored by the **Rock Hill Business and Community Association**, the workshops involved direct participation of residents, business owners and community leaders from throughout the hamlet. Through two facilitated meetings, participants were guided through a process that resulted in a list of possible projects that could be implemented at the local level to beautify and revitalize Rock Hill’s commercial district.

This report summarizes the process that was undertaken and describes the results and recommendations that were generated at each step along the way. It is intended to be used not only as a reference and documentation of the process itself, but as a starting point for the gradual implementation of various projects designed to revitalize the community.

The project ideas and information generated through this process are dynamic and ever-changing. The visioning process was designed as a starting-point to stimulate thinking about the future and the qualities of the community that should be preserved and/or changed. As conditions change over time, the vision for the future must change as well. Therefore, this document should not be viewed as a static set of guidelines and recommendations, but rather a fluid document that itself should change over time.

Contained within this document is the information and tools with which a few motivated individuals can change the community in which they live for the better. The information itself is meaningless -- the real power to effectuate change lies in the hands of the people who call Rock Hill home and are concerned about its future. For only by working together, will its residents be able to see their preferred vision for their community become a reality.

Vision
means not
only seeing
things as
they are,
but as they
will be...

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

THE FIRST STEP IN THE VISIONING PROCESS was an exercise designed to stimulate thinking about what qualities Rock Hill currently possesses that makes it unique and special, and what conditions could be changed to make it better. This exercise was undertaken by participants at the first workshop meeting held on **Wednesday, June 15th**. In all, over 30 residents participated in the first workshop, where they were asked to state one thing they love about Rock Hill, and one thing they would like to change.

What is there to love about Rock Hill?

Rock Hill residents expressed some of the many reasons why they cherished their community. Below is a summary of just some of the reasons:



Its Country Character

Residents spoke of the love they feel for the small town feeling that Rock Hill possesses. The unspoiled character of the surrounding area and the fact that the area hasn't changed much over the years were also mentioned. Residents seemed content with their community, but saw opportunities for growth.

Its Natural Beauty

Being located in the Southern Catskills region, Rock Hill is blessed with a great beauty, a beauty which its residents love and admire. Residents spoke of the beauty of the scenery, the changing of the seasons with great fall foliage, and the fact that being surrounded by nature makes Rock Hill "exercise-friendly."

Strong Sense of Community

Rock Hill isn't just loved for its small-home town feeling, but also for the helpful and supportive people, and the "Mom and Pop" businesses that contribute to making it a special place. Workshop participants love the warmth and friendliness of their neighbors, and the fact that Rock Hill is a proactive community.

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What needs to change?

Residents expressed concern over a number of issues and conditions that, if changed, would improve Rock Hill, with a particular focus on the commercial business district. Most of the concerns brought up revolved around things such as the need for more growth and business development, the appearance of the business district and a desire to make it more pedestrian-friendly, as well as the lack of organized activities and areas for socializing.

Growth & Business Development

Many workshop participants spoke about their desire to see more businesses in Rock Hill, particularly more service-related establishments, such as a bakery or a dry cleaners. Residents also spoke about the need for better code enforcement, new codes dealing with aesthetics, and the need for planned growth to limit sprawl and unchecked development. Residents also spoke of how the community needs to decide if it primarily wants to be a “tourist trap” along the highway or a local service center for area residents.

More Aesthetically Pleasing

As beautiful as the surrounding lake communities are, Rock Hill residents expressed a desire to see the commercial business district cleaned up and beautified. They would like to see building facades improved, garbage cleaned up, organized signage, more landscaping and greenery, and less pavement on Rock Hill Drive.

More Activities & Socializing

When speaking of things they would like to see changed, many residents spoke of the need to have more events and community activities in general (not just for the youth). They also spoke of creating more areas within the commercial district for socializing, and creating a more walkable community to discourage the use of automobiles for short distances and promote physical activity. Specifically, residents would like to see a children’s park or playground, more outdoor sitting areas, and a “central square” for socializing.

Other Changes Sought

Many residents spoke about problems associated with truck traffic through the business district and the possible need for a traffic light. Participants would also like to see better sewer coverage to allow for additional infrastructure in the out-lying areas. Others spoke of the need for a more defined character in the business district, and would like to see more sidewalks.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

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COMMUNITY INVENTORY

THE SECOND STEP IN THE VISIONING PROCESS was to have residents conduct an inventory of Rock Hill's assets, problems and needs. This was done in order to identify what available resources in the community could be put to work for a better future, and what problems and/or obstacles exist that need to be overcome. This enabled a list of positives and negatives of the community to be created. The community inventory also took place during the first workshop as a facilitated group discussion. The results of this discussion would serve as the basis for generating and evaluating project ideas later in the process.

The narrative below summarizes some of the key assets, problems and needs that were identified by participants at the workshop. It is important to note that this inventory represents a static picture of conditions in the community at a given point in time, and are a reflection of the experiences and personal biases of those who participated in the process. The information should serve as a starting point and basis upon which future project ideas may be evaluated, and should be updated and changed over time.

Assets

Recreational Assets are abundant in and around Rock Hill, including the surrounding lakes and ponds, the Neversink River and Neversink Gorge, as well as the nearby Bashakill Wetland. Other assets include the peacefulness at night, the many hiking and biking trails accessible to residents, and nearby Holiday Mountain.

Economic Assets are plentiful in Rock Hill: the airport, proximity to Route 17/I-86, the variety of local restaurants, and a relatively large employment base (Crystal Run, Trading Post, Frontier Insurance, Irving Siegel Building, The Lodge, and the Emerald Corporate Park).

Community Assets include the pro-active nature of Rock Hill and the many volunteers who work well together. Rock Hill also has a wealth of local talent, and a commercial district with great potential. High speed Internet access and a great local Fire Department were also cited as assets.

Problems & Needs

Some of the problems discussed at the workshop touched on topics such as the need for better code enforcement, increased fines for code violations, and a revision to current codes. Others spoke of the lack of available mass transit, and the need to make Rock Hill more walk-able and pedestrian-friendly.

Other problems mentioned include the traffic flow on Rock Hill Drive, the need for a traffic light and speed enforcement, as well as the poor condition of the road itself. Several people spoke about the fact that there is currently too much blacktop and not enough greenery on Rock Hill Drive as it goes through the business district, and the need to hire a landscape architect and/or traffic expert to help assess possible changes in this area.

Residents would also like to see a State Police Sub-Station in Rock Hill, and also an area or place that belongs to the people to provide for more socializing and community events.

GENERATING PROJECT IDEAS

THE NEXT STEP IN THE WORKSHOP SERIES was designed to review the lists of assets, problems and needs generated in the previous step, and begin to develop **project ideas**. Ideas for projects were generated by using the community inventory as a basis for determining how Rock Hill's existing assets and resources could be used to address some of the problems and needs of the community.

At the second workshop held on **Wednesday, July 20th**, participants were asked to undertake a creative thinking exercise within **focus groups** to develop ideas for projects that could be implemented locally. The groups were in the following key areas:

- ❖ **Business Development and Tourism**
- ❖ **Recreation and Social Issues**
- ❖ **Community Appearance & Aesthetics**

Project idea worksheets were distributed to members of each focus group. The worksheets contained a series of questions designed to help flesh out ideas in more detail. In addition to a description of the project, participants were asked to determine how long the project would take to implement, whether it was realistic, the relative cost, and whether it would be controversial.

Several project ideas were generated by each focus group designed to address some of the existing problems and needs in the community. All of the ideas were summarized on large sheets of paper posted on the wall. After each group presented their ideas, all of the participants were given five sticky dots to “vote” on which ideas they liked the best and thought should be implemented right away.

In making their selections, participants were advised to take into consideration things like cost, feasibility, and how long the project would take to implement, in addition to how well it addressed the problems and needs in the community. Ideally, a mixture of short-term and long-term projects, with varying degrees of difficulty would be preferred.

It should be noted that this “voting” process was conducted to provide a framework and starting point for prioritizing projects for implementation. The results of the voting process do not necessarily mean that the projects either will or should be implemented in any particular order.

Likewise, the ideas presented on the following pages are intended to be used as a starting point for implementation. As additional ideas are generated beyond the initial visioning process, they should be evaluated based on whether or not they address any of the problems or needs already identified. This list may then be updated as the need arises.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM						
Project Title	Project Description	Cost?	Difficulty?	Timeframe?	Controversy?	Votes
Tourist Info Center	This project would involve reinstating the former tourist information center to attract visitors and market local businesses and attractions.	Medium	Medium	Medium	None	8
Community Newspaper	This project involves developing a community newspaper or newsletter that would be distributed to all Rock Hill residents. It would build on the existing news letter(s) distributed by the lake associations.	Medium	Medium	Medium	None	6
Promoting Natural Attractions	This project would involve developing promotional materials specifically geared toward highlighting the natural attractions in the vicinity of Rock Hill, such as the Neversink Gorge, Wolf Lake area, Bashakill wetlands and more. It could include a rack card, signage or other materials.	Low	Easy	Short	None	7
Business Development Corp	This project would involve creating a non-profit “business development corporation” that would work on attracting new businesses to the area. Such businesses could include a bookstore/café, bakery, bank, gym, deli, antique/gift shop, etc.	Medium	Hard	Long	None	12
Bandstand/ Gazebo	This project involves installing a bandstand, gazebo or other similar structure to create a focal point in the center of town. It could also be a location for a craft market, Octoberfest, or other community events.	High	Medium	Long	Moderately	11

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RECREATION & SOCIAL ISSUES						
Project Title	Project Description	Cost?	Difficulty?	Timeframe?	Controversy?	Votes
Outdoor Movies in the Fire Dept. Field	This project would entail first getting permission from the Fire Dept. Once granted, food vendors could be lined up to sell refreshments. We could talk to Livingston Manor to figure out how they started their movie system.	Medium	Medium	Long	No	7
Bingo Night	This project would be great for seniors, and could potentially be serious where you have to pay to play. A license would be needed to run such an event. Food could be served for refreshments. The event could take place at the Lodge.	Low	Medium	Medium	No	0
Halloween Activity	This project could incorporate a window decorating contest, trick-or-treating within the business area, pumpkin carving (Fire Dept.) and a parade/stroll through the town giving out candy.	Low	Medium	Medium	No	9
Winter Activities	This project would involve expanding on the current lighting ceremony, and putting out luminaries on the street(s). It would try to get more businesses involved and show off local crafts. Jim Goldfarb from SCCC could get info re: vendors.	Low	Medium - Hard	Long	No	3
Music in Field - Local Talent	This event could be for fundraisers or just to provide an avenue to show off local talent. The music could be a series, and could draw people to come with chairs and blankets to sit and listen.	Low	Medium	Long	No	2
Outside Classes	This project would develop classes for all ages. Classes such as ballroom dancing, martial arts, aerobics, etc.	Low	Medium	Medium	No	0
Playground	This project is in process, and would involve building a small playground for kids somewhere in Rock Hill.	Medium	Hard	Medium	Yes - Location	2

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COMMUNITY APPEARANCE & AESTHETICS						
Project Title	Project Description	Cost?	Difficulty?	Timeframe?	Controversy?	Votes
Beautify Highway Bridge	This project would require working with appropriate government agency to improve the aesthetics of the I-86 overpass. An idea would be to use “false stone”. The project would like to see parking on the sides and a sidewalk connecting the two sides.	Medium	Medium	Long	No	3
Control Signage	This project would involve Implementing an ordinance to control the size, height, style, and lighting of all signs. The project also calls for a control mechanism to be developed.	Low	Hard	Long	High	18
Walking Path	This project involves the continuation of the walking path project that has already been established. It would ensure the path is completed.	High	Medium	Long	No	0
Master Street/Landscape	This project involves creating - with the assistance of a professional landscape architect -- a master plan/streetscape plan for the central area of Rock Hill on both sides of the highway.	High	Medium	Long	No	17
Honor Local Residents	This project calls for an area to honor special Rock Hill residents - past and present. An example would involve a clock tower, in an area with benches or gazebo, with bricks and/or pavers to decorate.	Medium	Medium	Long	No	0
Architectural Review Board	This advisory board would review new (construction) projects, renovations and could potentially entice buildings. It could incorporate both a “carrot and stick” approach. It may involve the entire Town, but also could be an overlay zoning district just for Rock Hill. It could also research possible grants designed for “Main Street façade improvements.”	Low	Hard	Long	High	19

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COMMUNITY APPEARANCE & AESTHETICS						
Project Title	Project Description	Cost?	Difficulty?	Timeframe?	Controversy?	Votes
Clock Tower	A clock tower could create a strong focal point within the downtown area. This tower could honor special people with plaques.	Medium	Medium	Long	Medium	3
Trees on Rock Hill Drive	This project would involve planting trees and vegetation on the “black top” side of Rock Hill Drive.	Medium	Hard	Long	High	5
Do something with land across from The Lodge	The area that is visible from the highway is where this project is looking to “develop”, possibly making the land public with a park or a memorial area. The area could involve a gazebo. Permission could potentially be obtained from the current land owners for some uses.	Medium	Medium	Long	No	2
Stop Sunday AM Garbage Pick-up	On Lakeshore Drive East and around the underpass, garbage is being dumped illegally. This project would like to find and fine the offenders and would then establish a way to prevent this from happening.	Low	Medium	Short	No	1
Beautify Businesses	The project recognizes that a clean-up is needed. This project requires work with local businesses, for them to clean up their buildings and lots. If necessary, the company headquarters could be contacted. It would also involve developing an increased revenue presentation to present to business owners.	Low	Medium	Medium	Shouldn't Be	4
Contact All Businesses	This is a simple project which involves writing letters to the local businesses with suggestions of what the town's people would like done with their buildings/lots and also possibly what they would like to see the business become in the years to come.	High	Medium	Short	Shouldn't Be	3

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MOBILIZING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

THE FINAL STEP IN THE VISIONING PROCESS is to begin preparing for implementation. As of this writing, this final step is currently underway in Rock Hill.

The **Rock Hill Business and Community Association**, working in partnership with the Town of Thompson, will be taking the lead role in implementing some of the project ideas generated through this process. The organization will act as a clearinghouse for reviewing the project ideas, prioritizing them, and assigning responsibility for implementation. While the project ideas generated through this visioning process will form a starting point for implementation, additional ideas and/or input from other groups and agencies will also play a significant role and new ideas may develop over time.

Implementation should, of course, be an on-going and evolving process to further the beautification and development of Rock Hill in the years to come. As conditions and circumstances in Rock Hill change over time, and as project ideas are implemented, it is suggested that some or all of the steps in the workshop series be repeated, so that new ideas can be generated and so the public can continue to be involved in the planning process.

**The future is not
completely beyond our
control... it is the work
of our own hands.
- Robert Kennedy**