

Dunkirk Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Local Planning Committee Meeting #5 Summary

September 26, 2023. 4:00-5:30 PM | American Legion Post 62 | 211 Central Ave, Dunkirk, NY 14048

Attendees

Local Planning Committee

- Honorable Wilfred Rosas, Mayor
- Mike Metzger, WNY Regional Economic Development Council
- Liz Cardona, Dunkirk Housing Authority
- Rebecca Ruiz, Chautauqua Center
- Nathan Aldrich, Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth
- Gina Paradis, Chautauqua County Land Bank
- Dan Beckley, Advanced Production Group, LLC
- Rebecca Wurster, Chautauqua County Dept. of Planning & Development
- Miriam Lugo-Alfaro, Dunkirk High School
- Virginia Harper, Resident
- Ellen Luczkowiak, Dunkirk Community Chamber of Commerce
- Beth Starks, Jamestown Community College

City of Dunkirk

- Vince DeJoy, Planning and Development
- EJ Hayes, Planning and Development

State Partners

- Ben Bidell, NYS Department of State (DOS)
- Lenny Skrill, NYS Homes & Community Renewal (HCR)
- Erin Corrado, Empire State Development (ESD)
- Mo Sumbundu, Governor's Office

Consultant Team

- Katie, O'Sullivan, WSP
- Stephanie Camay, WSP

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Introductions

- Mayor Rosas (LPC Co-chair) called the meeting to order and thanked the LPC for their continued time and dedication to the DRI process. Mike Metzger, LPC Co-chair, read the code of conduct and reminded LPC members to recuse themselves from any votes or discussions on projects that they may have a real or perceived interest in to prevent any potential conflicts of interest. The following recusals are on record:

- Liz Cardona recused herself from the Dunkirk Housing Authority (DHA)-sponsored project.
- Beth Starks recused herself from the Jamestown Community College (JCC)-sponsored project.
- Gina Paradis recused herself from the Ehlers Building project and the Coburn Block project.
- Miriam Lugo-Alfaro recused herself from the JCC-sponsored project.
- Mike Metzger recused himself from the Fredonia Technology Incubator Wet Labs project.
- LPC members, representatives of the City of Dunkirk, representatives of the State, and members of the consultant team introduced themselves.

2. LPC Meetings and Planning Process

- Stephanie Camay (WSP/DRI Consultant) reminded attendees that the meeting is a working committee meeting and that members of the public will be able to make comments at the end of the meeting.
- Stephanie provided an update on the status of the six-month DRI process to develop a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) that will be submitted to the State. She then recapped the agenda and decision points from the previous meeting (LPC Meeting #4) and summarized the agenda for today's meeting (LPC Meeting #5) and the final LPC Meeting #6 scheduled for October 24. The focus of today's meeting is to develop a draft or preliminary slate of projects to be recommended to the State for DRI funding.

3. Engagement Updates

- Katie O'Sullivan (WSP/DRI Consultant) presented outcomes of recent engagement efforts to collect public feedback on the proposed DRI projects. These efforts included tabling at the Back to School Bash on August 28, an event with the Dunkirk High School senior class on September 14, Public Workshop #2 on September 14, and an online public project feedback form that was open from August 22 to September 19.
- For each proposed project, the public provided feedback on the following questions: does the project align with the DRI vision, goals, and strategies (yes or no); will the project transform Downtown Dunkirk (yes or no); what is your level of support for the project (low, medium, or high); and any additional comments.
- There were 47 attendees and 22 feedback forms received at Public Workshop #2. There were 136 responses to the online public feedback form and 83 responses from Dunkirk High School students. In total, 241 public project feedback forms were received.

4. Update on Downtown Profile & Assessment

- Katie presented updated content from the Downtown Profile & Assessment, including an economic analysis and synthesis of trends, opportunities, and challenges. The Downtown Profile & Assessment is now complete, and LPC members were provided with an electronic and printed copy of the document.
- The economic analysis included data on housing characteristics, real estate (multifamily, office, industrial, and retail buildings), retail demand, and hospitality.
- Findings from the synthesis of trends, opportunities, and challenges include: the DRI Area has a diverse and younger population; investments are needed in infrastructure and transportation; there is a strong foundation of strategic planning within the community; there is historic building stock and vacancy issues; there is declining housing supply and rising costs; and the DRI Area is uniquely positioned for economic development due to its proximity and public access to the waterfront.

5. Presentation of Previously Tabled Projects

- The LPC heard three-minute presentations from applicants for projects that had previously been tabled.

- Redevelop Lake Shore National Bank Building to House Three Market-Rate Loft Apartments, presentation by Lee Crewson, Peak Development Partners
- Renovate the Macaroni Building to House 13 Affordable Apartments and Medical Offices, presentation by Dr. Troy Sasse

6. Project Evaluations

- Katie presented the results of the project evaluations, including evaluations by the LPC, the consultant team, and the public.
 - The LPC project evaluations were based on the percentage of affirmative responses to 13 criteria including:
 - Alignment with DRI vision and goals;
 - Alignment with State DRI goals;
 - Alignment with WNY Regional Economic Development Council Strategies;
 - Project readiness;
 - Catalytic effect;
 - Co-benefits;
 - Cost effectiveness;
 - Sustainability;
 - Capacity;
 - Matching funds;
 - Market demand and economic feasibility;
 - Transformational; and
 - Synergy.
 - The LPC was given 12 days to evaluate the projects (September 8 to September 19), and evaluations were received from 10 LPC members. The LPC evaluations were informed by draft project profiles, consultant evaluations, the public survey results, and a synthesis of trends, opportunities, and challenges from the Downtown Profile & Assessment.
 - The consultant project evaluations were based on the percentage of affirmative responses to the same 13 criteria as the LPC evaluations. The consultant evaluations were provided to the LPC for reference prior to their own evaluations.
 - Public feedback for each project was evaluated based on level of support reported among the 241 respondents. Responses of “high” support were tallied with two points, “medium” with one point, and “low” with zero points. Because many respondents did not complete the feedback form for every project, scores were standardized by the number of responses for each project.
 - The results of the project evaluations were presented in three groups of low, medium, and high-consistency with evaluation criteria or, in the case of public feedback, low, medium, and high-support.

7. Preliminary Slate of Projects

- Review Projects / Project Updates
 - Stephanie noted that the LPC individual evaluation results are the primary guide for the selection of projects for the preliminary slate. Public feedback and consultant evaluations are provided to inform the LPC’s decision-making.
 - Ben Bidell emphasized that the project selection process is iterative, and the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to identify a preliminary slate of projects. Between tonight and the next meeting, there may be need for more project information from applicants. The recommended slate of projects

does not become final until the LPC votes on the slate at the next meeting. The slate of projects in the SIP should total between \$12 million and \$15 million in requested DRI funding.

- The LPC can recommend projects for less DRI funding than requested, but the consultants should first confirm that the project can move forward with the lower amount by conferring with the project sponsor.
- If a project falls through during the implementation phase, the state will go back to the recommended slate of projects in the SIP to identify the next project in line for funding.
- Stephanie asked the LPC whether they would change their initial evaluations of projects based on updated information presented tonight for the Lake Shore National Bank building and Dunkirk Macaroni Building projects.
 - Ellen Luczkowiak noted that she supported the initial proposal for the Lake Shore National Bank building, which included a retail component, but does not support the updated proposal of three residential units and feels that there are enough housing projects already.
 - There was discussion about the Dunkirk Macaroni Building project, which has received a \$1 million grant through the Restore NY program. There were questions about the capacity of the project sponsor and whether they are working with a new developer.
- Develop Preliminary Slate
 - Stephanie asked the LPC whether there were any surprises in the evaluation results, any projects in the “Highly Aligned with Evaluation Criteria” group that the LPC disagrees with, or any projects that were not highly aligned that the LPC feels should be recommended for DRI funding.
 - Mike Metzger noted that the 78 affordable apartments project and the Graf building project scored highly across all three evaluations: the public feedback, the consultants evaluations, and the LPC’s evaluations.
 - There was discussion about the Stearns Court and Central Station projects. Vince DeJoy noted that the Central Station restaurant will lease Stearns Court from the City and make the space open to the public. The space will not be limited to restaurant patrons. Vince noted that the Stearns Court project is synergistic with the Central Station project.
 - There was discussion about the project to construct 45+ market-rate apartments by Nostra Development. The LPC agreed that at almost half of the DRI award, the requested funding of \$4.5 million is not feasible. The LPC asked the consultant to see if the project could move forward with \$2.5 million in potential DRI funding. The consultant team will follow up with the applicant.
 - There was much discussion about the Clarion Hotel renovation and indoor waterpark projects. The LPC agreed that it would not be feasible to award both projects as the requested DRI amount totals \$4.2 million. Other comments were as follows. The Clarion Hotel is losing business because companies would prefer to send visiting employees to more upscale hotels closer to Buffalo. The hotel renovation is synergistic with the marina project, as visitors using the marina may need a nearby place to stay. The waterpark would provide activities for kids, but it is not clear that it would be sustainable or affordable for residents. There are other highly-aligned projects that serve children through education and daycare services.
 - In addition to the projects that the LPC evaluated as “Highly Aligns with Evaluation Criteria,” the LPC agreed to recommend the following projects for DRI funding:
 - a. Reinvigorate the Dunkirk Marina’s East Side with Expanded Boating Facilities and a Security System
 - b. Redevelop the Ehlers Building to House a Restaurant, Retail and Event Space, and Two Market-Rate Apartments

- c. Renovate Central Station Building to Expand Restaurant and Add One Apartment
 - o The LPC agreed to recommend the following projects for the Small Projects Fund:
 - a. Restore the Historic Public Library with Improvements to Interior and Exterior Features
 - b. Improve Exterior of 200-202 Central Avenue and Activate Vacant Storefront to House a Café
 - c. Revitalize the Coburn Block through Façade Improvements and New Outdoor Patio Space
- o Ben Bidell asked the LPC whether any projects in the “Moderately Aligned” and “Slightly Aligned” groups should be removed from NYF funding consideration, but included in the plan as a community priority recommended for other funding; recommended for the Small Projects Fund; or removed from the plan entirely because it’s not a priority.
 - o The LPC agreed to recommend the following projects for other funding:
 - a. Redevelop Lake Shore National Bank Building to House Three Market-Rate Loft Apartments
 - b. Create an Indoor Waterpark Attached to the Existing Clarion Hotel with a Wave Pool, Kids’ Waterplay Structure, and a Surf Facility
 - c. Renovate 314 Central Avenue to House a Homeownership Center and 5+ Affordable Apartments
 - d. Renovate 310 Central Avenue to House Golf Simulator Sports Bar
 - e. Fit Out New Wet Laboratory Facilities at the Fredonia Technology Incubator
 - f. Reinvigorate the Dunkirk Marina’s West Side with Boating Facilities, Over Water Patio, Restaurant, Two Apartments, and Seasonal Cabana Bar.
 - o There was discussion about implementation of the Small Projects Fund and how quickly it can be set up to allow small projects to move forward. Ben Bidell stated the Small Projects Fund is typically the first element of the DRI award that is operationalized and 10% of the Small Projects Fund must be set aside for administration of the fund.
 - o The LPC requested that the consultant team reach out to applicants for the following projects to determine whether the projects can move forward with reduced scope and DRI funding requests:
 - a. Construct 45+ Market-Rate Apartments and Commercial Space at 323-325 Central Ave
 - b. Renovate Demetri’s on the Lake with Interior and Exterior Improvements and 4-6 Market-Rate Apartments
 - c. Rehabilitate the ADAMS Building to House an Events Space, Work Suite with Full Kitchen, and One Market-Rate Apartment
 - d. Rehabilitate the Vacant Building at 21 East Third Street to House a Life Skills Youth Center Including Classrooms and Childcare
 - i. In addition, ask applicant if another location could be used for the project in partnership with another organization.
- o The LPC recommended to include the following projects in the preliminary slate for DRI funding:
 - o Refurbish the Graf Building to House a Workforce Development Training Center
 - o Modernize the Clarion Hotel Building and Exterior Grounds
 - o Redevelop the Ehlers Building to House a Restaurant, Retail and Event Space, and Two Market-Rate Apartments
 - o Reinvigorate the Dunkirk Marina’s East Side with Expanded Boating Facilities and a Security System

- Improve Memorial Park with an Amphitheater, Welcome Center, and Pedestrian Walkways
- Construct 78 Affordable Apartments and Daycare Facility Across Two Sites on East 4th Street and Washington Ave
- Redevelop 31 Affordable Housing Units Across 7 Sites through a Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Conversion
- Renovate the Macaroni Building to House 13 Affordable Apartments and Medical Offices
- Rehabilitate Stearns Court Public Space with Outdoor Dining and Decorative Features
- Renovate Central Station Building to Expand Restaurant and Add One Apartment

8. Next Steps

- Stephanie reviewed next steps in the project evaluation process, upcoming deliverables, and remaining meetings.
 - The LPC will receive requested information on tabled projects and the final draft project profiles by October 10, two weeks prior to the final LPC meeting. The LPC will also receive the public project feedback summary to inform the final selection of the recommended slate of projects.
 - The LPC has received the complete Downtown Profile and Assessment, which will be included in the Draft SIP developed by November 17. The SIP will recommend the final slate of projects to the state for funding.
 - The final LPC Meeting #6 will be held on October 24. During that meeting, the LPC will review the final draft project profiles and project updates, discuss projects where decisions are still pending, develop and vote on the final slate of projects, and discuss the implementation phase of the DRI process.
 - Public Workshop #3 will be held in early November at a date to be determined. The workshop will include a review of the final slate of projects recommended for DRI funding and next steps for implementation.

9. Public Comment

- Stephanie opened the floor to public comment. The following comments were made:
 - The golf simulator sports bar project offers more than other projects relative to what the public is looking for: things to do. The technology is cutting-edge, and there are many avid golfers and golf courses in the surrounding area. However, there are no opportunities for golfing in the off-season. The proposed project is in an owner-occupied building.
 - The slate of projects that the LPC is recommending do not serve the community; they serve visitors. We need to think about amenities for residents. The ADAMS building will fall down without investment, and the organization can't apply for grants without having the building in sound condition. There are at least 20 community partners who want to do events and projects at the ADAMS. The project will offer an event center and community programming for families in a highly walkable area. The board brings experience and commitment to make the project a success.
 - Showing kids movies at the ADAMS building would provide great value to residents. It was difficult to hear the discussion and see the presentation during the LPC meeting. Future meetings should provide another projector and audio speakers for the public.
 - Returning to Dunkirk after living elsewhere for 18 years has shown there is nothing for young people to do, and many turn to alcohol or drugs. Projects must consider all social determinants of health. There is need for activities to entertain and engage kids, build skills, and build

- connections with each other and their families. Consider innovative ideas like a climbing wall where parents can enjoy a drink while kids play.
- Reverend Waller from Friendship Baptist Church stated that he was not aware of the DRI process or project proposals. He asked whether it is too late to submit an application for funding.
 - Stephanie responded that once the Small Projects Fund is established, applicants will be able to submit new projects for funding consideration under the terms of the Small Projects Fund.