

A Public Engagement Summary



As arguably the birthplace of the US environmental movement, the Mid-Hudson Region is home to an engaged, enthusiastic, and highly knowledgeable public around issues of sustainable development. To capture the latent knowledge and expertise – as well as the views and opinions – of the Mid-Hudson Region’s residents, the sustainability planning process included an extensive public engagement effort. This effort was designed to maximize the opportunity for input, taking into consideration the considerable constraints imposed by the aggressive project schedule.

This Appendix describes the approach and outcomes of the public engagement process, and includes a timeline of events and key activities.

A.1 Engagement Approach

The public engagement process sought important insights and information on the Region. As such, the people targeted as part of the engagement effort included:

- Elected officials/government employees at the local, state, and federal level
- Business owners/employees
- Representatives of non-profit organizations
- Local experts and university researchers
- Members of the general public
- Regional Economic Development Council members

To reach these different constituencies, a Consortium and six Working Groups were formed. Additionally, a series of strategies were implemented to facilitate participation, including:

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Operation of the Engage MidHudson site
- Operation of the Basecamp site
- The Use of Press Releases
- Public Meetings
- A Public Review Process
- Briefings on the Project to the REDC

Note that many of these components are described in detail in the Project Execution Plan and in associated guidance memoranda.



A.2 Key Participant Groups

A.2.1 The Consortium

The governing body of the planning effort, known as the Consortium, is made up of members from local governmental and nongovernmental organizations from around the Region. The goal in forming the Consortium was to ensure representation from all seven counties, with a balance of northern and southern and urban and rural constituencies.

The planning process sought to ensure participation from stakeholders who would likely be involved in the implementation of the Plan. In order to be a part of the Consortium, member organizations had to agree to volunteer at least the equivalent of a senior planner to take part in the monthly meetings. Many Consortium members had direct participation by Commissioner/management level staff. Consortium members are as follows:

- Dutchess County
- Orange County
- Putnam County
- Sullivan County
- Ulster County
- Town of Greenburgh
- Center for Research, Regional Education, and Outreach (CRREO)
- Pace Land Use Law Center - Mayors' Redevelopment Roundtable
- Northern Westchester Energy Action Consortium (NWEAC)
- Southern Westchester Energy Action Consortium (SWEAC)
- Also, the following governmental and non-governmental partners contributed to the work of the Consortium.
- Rockland County
- Westchester County
- Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council
- New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON)

Additionally, the Consortium hired a team of consultants to act as coordinators and technical subject matter experts. The Consultant Team worked with a subgroup of the Consortium known as the Project Coordination Team in order to manage the logistics of the project while also working with Working Groups as the subject matter experts. Together, the Consultant Team helped link the Consortium to the Working Groups and ensure that information was shared broadly yet appropriately.



The Consortium met monthly during the planning process, starting in April 2012 and continuing into 2013.

A.2.2 Working Groups

The six Working Groups convened as part of the planning process constituted one of the central participant groups intended to engage the public in creating the Plan. Working Groups were created in alignment with the main focus areas of the Plan. The goal in assembling the Working Groups was to ensure that each focus area would have input from stakeholders in the Region with intimate knowledge of the issues at hand, as well as a stake in seeing real, positive change. The intent was to target individuals or organizations that are positioned to have a real impact in implementing any recommendations to come out of the Working Groups.

Each Working Group was made up of members of local government, non-profit organizations, businesses, universities, and other organizations or Consortia. The Working Groups were intended to be inclusive, open to all willing to contribute, and seeking representation from all parts of the Region (north/south, rural/urban, private/public, etc.). Each group was led by at least one governmental and non-governmental co-chair, as well as a representative of the Consortium. Consulting and Project Coordination Team liaisons were also assigned to each Working Group.

The Working Groups were populated through a widely-advertised volunteer process where people could either nominate someone for membership or self-nominate. Multiple calls were made for members; new members were allowed to join even partway into the planning process. Co-chairs for each Working Group were selected in much the same way, although they were required to agree to a larger commitment and demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter, as they were placed into a leadership position.

The Working Groups convened in person a minimum of four times during the planning process. Additionally, many Working Groups chose to meet on other occasions, or as distinct sub-groups. Multiple strategies were devised to facilitate participation and Working Group engagement outside of the formal meetings.



A.3 Engagement Strategies

A.3.1 Stakeholder Interviews

Goal

The Consulting Team conducted at least three stakeholder interviews per Working Group in order to rapidly identify the most pressing issues within each focus area. Specifically, the interviews sought to determine the following:

- Trends and priority issues as they relate to sustainable development in the Region
- Existing plans and data to inform the Baseline Assessment
- Current initiatives contributing to the Region's sustainable development
- Potential concepts or projects that could further the Region's sustainable development objectives
- A secondary goal of the interviews – conducted in the first months of the planning process – was to raise awareness of the Plan and process.

Process

Interviewees were chosen via discussion between the Working Group Co-Chairs and Consultant Team with the goal of speaking to individuals with deep local knowledge within each focus area. Interview questions were developed by the Co-Chairs and the Consultant Team. An example of the interview questions asked can be found in Attachment 4. Each interview was roughly 30 minutes in length.

Outcomes

The interviews informed the Baseline Assessment of current initiatives contributing to the Region's sustainable development. They also helped identify potential concepts or projects that could further the Region's sustainable development objectives. Most interviewees subsequently participated in Working Groups during the remainder of the planning process.

A.3.2 Engage MidHudson

Goal

Designed by the company MindMixer, *Engage MidHudson* is a website that was set up in order to provide the general public with the opportunity to engage in discussions about issues relevant to the Plan. Specifically, the site allowed for people who were otherwise unable to participate in the Working Groups to share their ideas and for members of the Consulting Team to solicit feedback from the general public on certain topics.



Process

An Engage MidHudson Web announcement flyer was designed and circulated to begin spreading the word about the site throughout the general public and Working Group members. This was circulated widely by the planning Consortium and other participants.

Once the site was launched, the Consultant Team and the Working Groups developed discussion topics which were then posted to Engage MidHudson. The general public was then free to comment and debate in a “town hall” atmosphere on the website. Discussion topics came in various formats that allowed for different information to be gathered, including but not limited to polls, surveys, idea submission, and open-ended discussion. The homepage and an example discussion page can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1 and Figure 2

Outcomes

Engage MidHudson now has over 400 members of varying demographic backgrounds from all over the Region – Figures 3, 4, and 5 provide some background on the user community as of Dec. 13th, 2012. Members have submitted more than 200 ideas and hundreds of comments which have helped spark discussions within the Working Groups. An example of a question and its responses can be seen in Figure 6.

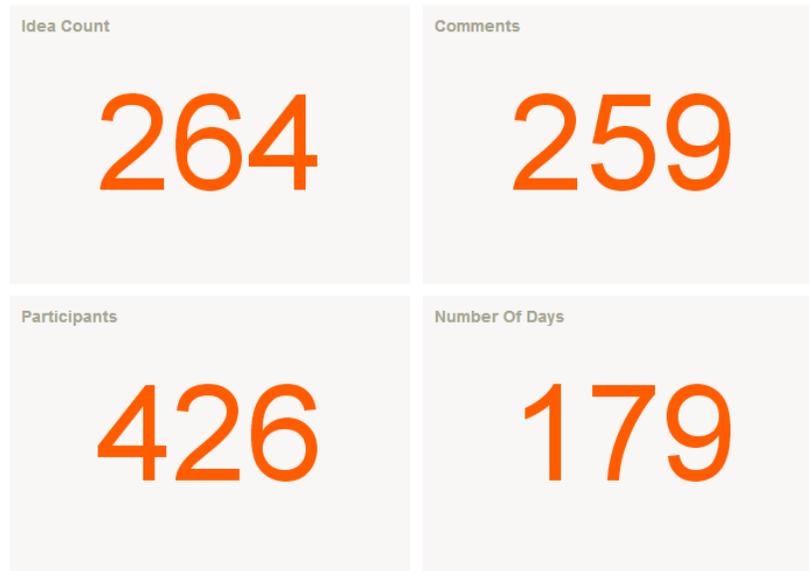


Figure 3

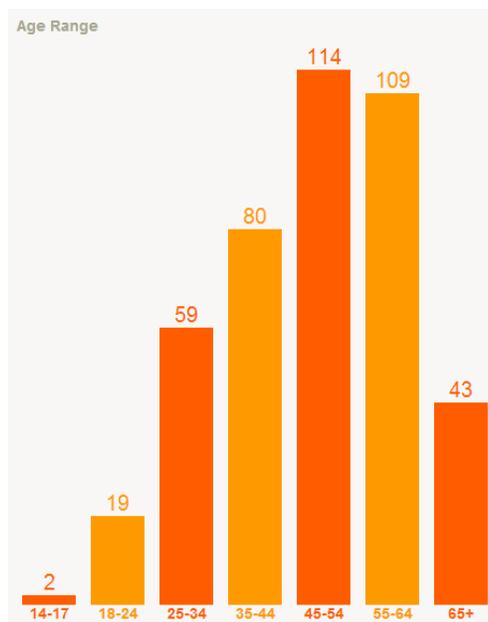


Figure 4



Figure 5

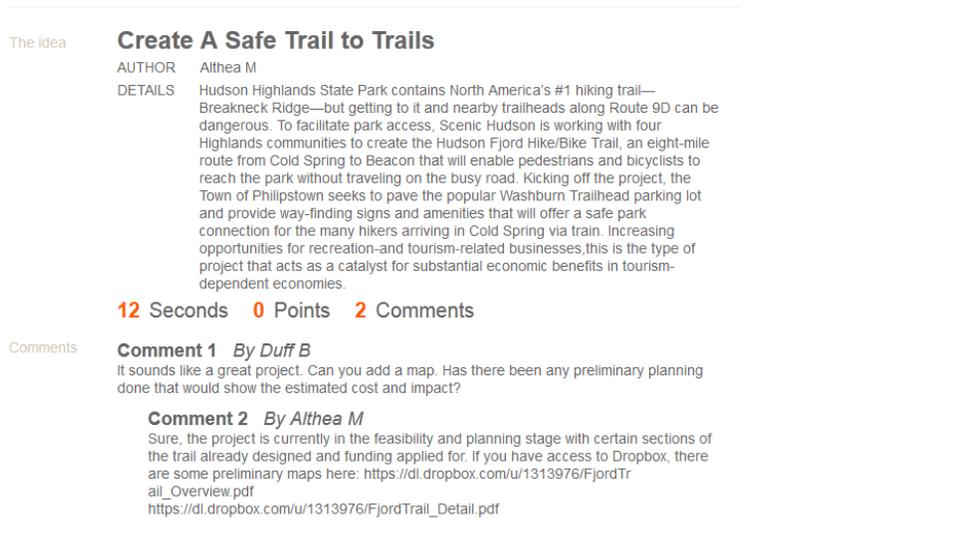


Figure 6



A.3.3 Basecamp

Goal

In order to better manage the contribution of the Working Groups and to provide a private forum for Working Group discussion, the web-based tool Basecamp was used. Basecamp allowed the Consortium, Project Coordination Team, Consultant Team, and Working Groups to communicate efficiently and effectively throughout the planning process.

Process

Basecamp acted as a platform where documents could be shared and discussions held. It provided a central area where the project managers could provide guidance and updates on overall progress. It allowed Working Group members to continue discussions between in-person meetings. Figure 7 shows a portion of the home screen for Basecamp and how information was grouped into individual discussion areas. Figure 8 shows an individual discussion area with a series of discussion threads.



Figure 7



Energy Working Group

Discussions Post a new message

	Economic Development Recommendations - From Melissa Everett: Here is polished version of economic development recommendations, which now include bringing industry/	Dec 10	
	NYS Climate Action Plan - Thanks Nina, I will delve and hope others will also. Wish we had even one more week before comment period ends. Melissa Melissa Everett, Ph.D. Executive	Dec 3	1
	Revised Draft Sustainability Plan - Please see the revised draft of the Plan. We've done our best to respond to early comments. We'll continue to revise the document to ensure we	Nov 30	
	Resource on potential of renewable energy: NREL... - Sorry if this has been posted here before (if so, I haven't seen it). On the charts, you can look up New York State's total	Nov 29	
	Energy Working Group Meeting to focus on Draft... - An Energy Working group meeting on Thurs., Nov. 29 at 3 p.m. at the Greenburgh Town Hall at 177 Hillside Ave, White Plains, NY	Nov 29	
	Tracking the Sun: An Historical Summary of the... - http://emp.lbl.gov/sites/all/files/LBNL-5919e-REPORT.pdf The latest edition of Lawrence	Nov 29	
	Solar Jobs - Growing Industry The growth of the solar industry may soon face the reality of not having enough skilled workers to satisfy demand, suggests a recent	Nov 27	5
	New York AREA comments on MHRP Draft Report - I completely agree we should include environmental justice in our plan, as we've discussed earlier. I also	Nov 27	3
	energy policy notes for drafting MHRP EN chapter - Nina - I am currently Construction Chair on a passive house project for Sullivan County Habitat for	Nov 20	5

Figure 8

Outcomes

Over the duration of the planning process, more than seven gigabytes of data were stored and distributed on Basecamp. Hundreds of discussions were initiated. Best practice case studies, implementation resources, and other useful material was shared. Basecamp also provided the means for the Plan to be distributed privately for comment by members of the Consortium, Working Groups, and Consultant Team once the document became too large to email effectively. As of December 13th, 2012, 296 people have created Basecamp accounts.

A.3.4 Press Releases

Goal

Throughout the planning process multiple press releases were distributed by the Consortium regarding different events and public meetings held throughout the Region. These press releases were designed to spread the word and help raise awareness of the public meetings so as to ensure good attendance. Press Releases were circulated to a diverse list of print, social and radio media sources; a list of media sources used is included as an attachment. The press releases also helped inform the public of opportunities to contribute and review the draft Plan.



Process

Press releases were sent out to the local news media as well as posted to Engage MidHudson and distributed virally via personal email. Press Releases created throughout this planning process are included as an attachment. Major press releases include:

- Public Meeting #1 July 30th, 2012
- Public Meeting #2 November 27th, 2012
- Public Meeting #3 November 29th, 2012

Outcomes

The press releases were a vital part of generating interest and participation in the planning process. Attendance at public meetings, participation in the Working Groups, and other activities directly benefited from the increased press. Hundreds of comments were also received on the public draft of the Plan.

A.3.5 Public Meetings

Goal

Three public meetings were held over the course of the planning process. The first meeting was an introduction to the public of the project scope and process such that they could become familiar with the way the project was being run. The second and third meetings were presentations of the draft Plan that gave the public the opportunity to comment and receive direct feedback from the Consultant Team.

Process

For each public meeting, the format was similar, beginning with a presentation by the Consortium Co-Chairs and the Consultant Team Project Manager followed by a question and answer period providing members of the public with an opportunity to discuss the Plan and process. This gave the public a chance to directly question members of the Project Coordination Team and Consultant Team about the Plan.

Outcomes

More than 100 people attended each of the three public meetings held throughout the Region. Figures 9 and 10 are photos taken at two of the events. As a result of the public meetings, the Consultant Team was able to raise awareness of the existence of the planning effort, solicit ideas for inclusion in the Plan, and receive comments and feedback on the draft Plan. After all three public meetings, site traffic on *Engage MidHudson* increased and more people joined the



discussions. Additionally, each meeting was attended by local media which were able to further spread information on the Plan.



Figure 9



Figure 10

A.3.6 Public Review Process

Goal

The goal of the public review process was to ensure that the public had the opportunity to comment on a draft of the Plan prior to it being finalized and delivered to NYSERDA. While there was not enough time in the planning process to administer a formal period of public



comment and review according to governmental standards, the planning team sought to provide as much time for input as possible.

Process

Multiple rounds of review were undertaken. For the Baseline Assessment (which included the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and the draft Regional GHG Inventory), the Project Coordination Team completed an initial review. The Working Groups were then provided time to review and submit comments. The Baseline Assessment was then revised and submitted to NYSERDA for review and approval.

The draft Plan was first reviewed by the Project Coordination Team in late October. It was subsequently sent to the Consortium for review in early November. Because of the time pressure in the schedule, the draft was subjected to a parallel review/revision process.

In mid-November a revised draft was circulated to the Working Groups for review. On November 21st the first public draft was posted for review. This draft was updated on November 30th, and comments were accepted through December 10th. A final draft was submitted to NYSERDA on December 18th.

Comments were solicited using a spreadsheet posted as a Google Doc so that anyone with a computer and internet access could post their comments in a clearly defined rubric. By using this system, the Consultant Team was better able to keep track of comments received and ensure they were acknowledged and addressed.

Outcomes

More than 380 comments were received via the Google Doc and subsequently addressed by the Consultant Team. Several hundred additional comments were received via email or phone. A complete list of comments received in the Google Doc from both the general public and the Working Groups is included as an attachment. The public review has provided additional legitimacy to a planning document developed through a collaborative, inclusive process.

A.3.7 REDC Briefings

Goal

The REDC is a key Plan constituency as they are responsible for updating the Regional Economic Development Strategy and, in part, awarding project funds via the Consolidated Funding Application process. Aligning the Plan and its implementation efforts with the work of the REDC is critical. The REDC briefings were designed to educate the REDC on the



planning process and how it sought to address thematic issues like economic development in the Region.

Process

Members of the Consortium, including the Co-Chairs, were invited to speak at certain REDC meetings. At these meetings the Co-Chairs presented on the status of the planning effort. A presentation of the draft Plan is currently being scheduled.

Outcomes

Out of these meetings, the sustainability planning process was able to better coordinate its goals with those of the REDC. For example, as the REDC revised and updated its draft Economic Development Strategy, members of the Consortium and the Consultant Team were able to provide targeted input. Henceforth, the REDC has formally referenced the Plan in a section of the REDC's goals document. It is hopefully that this initial engagement will result in additional involvement with the REDC by members of the sustainability planning team.

A.3.8 Conclusions

The networking, discussion, and overall engagement that resulted from this planning process are unprecedented in the Region. Hundreds of people interacted on a regular basis to discuss issues of short- and long-term concern, in an effort to create a vision for a sustainable future. Relationships were built, partnerships established, and new dialogue initiated.

During the implementation stage, the cooperation and collaboration exhibited during the planning process may prove foundational to ensuring the ideals and goals of the Plan are realized. New partnerships and relationships have been formed, which provide a strong basis to begin implementing real change. This should, among other things, help ensure that Phase II of the Cleaner Greener Communities program is a success and results in lasting positive change.

Attachments

- Working Group Nomination Card
- Four Page CGC flyer
- Media Resources List
- Public Meeting Announcement for *Engage MidHudson*
- Public Meeting Press Releases
- Working Group Guidance Document
- Project Idea and Nomination Form
- Public Comment/Response