

Date: March 4, 2020

Project Name: Peekskill Downtown Revitalization Initiative
Subject: Business Owners Roundtable

Meeting Location: Neighborhood Center, Field Library, 4 Nelson Avenue
Meeting Date: February 6, 2020

Participants: **Local Planning Committee**
Brian Fassett, Peekskill BID

Consultant Team
Susan Favate, Principal, BFJ Planning
Christine Jimenez, Planner, BFJ Planning
Kevin Dwarka, Land use and Economic Consultant, Kevin Dwarka LLC

The purpose of this meeting was to have an open dialogue with Peekskill business owners to learn about the existing strengths and weaknesses in running a successful business in Peekskill. The public's comments were helpful to provide a better context of Peekskill's business environment, which will be included in the Peekskill DRI plan. This meeting included a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the Peekskill business environment, overview of the DRI program, summary of the potential DRI projects, and upcoming community engagement events. Approximately 30 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to City staff and consultant team. BFJ Planning and Peekskill High School students provided translation services for the meeting to be bilingual in English and Spanish. The meeting was located in Neighborhood Center (Field Library) from 6:00 pm and ended at approximately 8 pm.

Agenda

1. Peekskill Business Environment – Strengths

- Mr. Dwarka began the conversation with an example of characteristics that affect the success of a business from his experience as a business owner. Attendees were encouraged to share their unique experiences on what makes Peekskill a great place to do business.
- Attendees indicated the main reason for running a business in Peekskill is that the City is well-situated along the Hudson River with a Metro-North train station. Everyday amenities are in close proximity providing customers with the convenience of a walkable, one-stop shopping trip where business owners know their customers.
- Attendees mentioned that Peekskill is unique in that it is a welcoming and friendly community with racial and cultural diversity. Also, the City has a wealth of assets ranging from arts, cultural, and historic resources highlighting Peekskill as a great destination. Relative to White Plains and Yonkers, Peekskill has affordable rents for existing and new residents.

2. Peekskill Business Environment – Weaknesses

- Attendees were encouraged to express their opinions about what would make Peekskill an even better place to maintain and grow a business. One main concern is that Latino

businesses find it difficult to interact with the Peekskill BID, the Chamber of Commerce, and the City to grow their business because of the language barrier. One attendee indicated a potential solution to this issue could be to elect a designated advocate who could provide language assistance to improve communication between parties.

- Another concern is that some people associate certain areas of Peekskill with negative stigma, which affects business owners who have businesses in these areas (i.e. Bohlman Towers).
- A major theme that emerged was the need to provide job opportunities to existing residents. One attendee indicated the need for Peekskill to bring in a major employer; however, attendees warned this could be a positive or negative addition to Peekskill. There was great support to incentivize businesses to hire locally including the Peekskill youth. This could assist in eliminating crime that acts as a deterrent for businesses and customers alike.
- Some attendees mentioned that parking is difficult to find. In response to this, other attendees indicated that parking is readily available and could be improved with new wayfinding signage. A business owner reminded others that they should not park in front of their store to provide accessible parking for their customers. There was an idea for the City to create a parking management plan that could include daytime long-term parking. Traffic congestion near the train station area at rush hour was another concern for business owners.
- Other comments mentioned the necessity to improve the existing streetscape environment to help attract customers to Peekskill including frequent trash and recycling pickup. There was also a great concern to improve the sidewalk conditions, especially for the elderly.

3. DRI Update

- Ms. Favate provided an overview of the DRI program including the program goals and objectives, where we are in the DRI timeline, and a brief overview of the potential projects being considered for DRI funding by goal.
- One comment indicated the need for DRI projects to help women and minority businesses. There was also the idea to attract more businesses into Peekskill to assist with job creation.
- Attendees were in full support of the Downtown Revitalization Fund to assist small business owners with financial support for façade improvements. There was concern that the match requirement from business owners will eliminate mom & pop businesses, some of whom are running their business from savings. One attendee recommended exploring the use of in-kind contributions to constitute the business owner's required match. The consultant team indicated they will mention this concern to the LPC so they are aware when deciding on the match requirements of the fund. One attendee indicated that someone needs to monitor the use of the funds and make sure the projects are completed.
- One attendee was curious if all potential projects could receive an equal portion of the DRI funding so all projects receive funding. The consultant team indicated that all projects will be evaluated independently. The feasibility of the project may not be able to be completed with less funding than requested.

- When selecting the potential projects for funding, the LPC needs to prioritize projects that will benefit the local community and future sustainability of Peekskill.
- There was support to fund DRI projects that will help maintain and grow an existing Peekskill business.

4. Summary and Next Steps

- Mr. Dwarka provided a summary of the meeting and thanked the public for their insightful comments about the existing business environment in Peekskill. The Peekskill DRI plan will incorporate as much of the public's feedback within the plan. Beyond the DRI timeline, business owner comments could be an ongoing conversation with the City of Peekskill to identify strategies to continue improving the business environment.
- Ms. Favate reminded attendees that the deadline for final Open Call for Projects is February 14. Upcoming community engagement events will be the LPC meeting #5 on February 19, the final Public Workshop #3 on February 26, and the public survey (in English and Spanish) will be open from February 21 to March 13.