

Public Workshop #2 Event Summary

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Peekskill, NY

January 23, 2020, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Peekskill Central Fire Station, 1141 Main St, Peekskill, NY 10566



Introduction

The second Public Workshop for the Peekskill Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) was held on January 23, 2020 at the Peekskill Central Fire Station located at 1141 Main Street in Peekskill. The workshop was attended by over 100 members of the public in addition to members of the Local Planning Committee (LPC), Common Council, City Staff, and Mayor Andre Rainey. Seven members of the consultant team from BFJ Planning, Thread Collective, and KB Engineering facilitated the workshop.

The Workshop started with a brief presentation by Susan Favate and Simon Kates of BFJ Planning that covered the DRI program and process, the project timeline, the public outreach process and community events. The presentation closed with an outline of the two work sessions that took place at the workshop: interactive design stations and open house project stations. After the presentation, the attendees broke off into two groups for the two work sessions. Each group spent approximately 40 minutes at the interactive design stations and the open house stations and then switched stations so everyone could take part in the workshop activities.

The interactive design stations were focused on three subjects:

1. Pugsley Park and Monument Park,
2. The Gazebo Area and Peekskill Plaza, and
3. Streetscape Improvements from the Train Station to Downtown.

Attendees were asked to comment on preliminary designs that were created by the consultant team, and give their opinions on the trade-offs that come with each aspect of the designs.

The open house stations were facilitated by members of the consultant team, who described the potential DRI projects and solicited feedback from meeting attendees. In addition to the interactive design and open house stations, the consultant team provided a large-scale map of the DRI area showing the locations of each of the proposed projects. The presentation and workshop materials are available at www.PEEKSKILLDRI.com.

The open house and interactive design stations concluded with a “report back” presentation by BFJ Planning and the consultant team who summarized the comments at each station. This summary allowed members of the public to hear a comprehensive accounting of other attendees’ ideas and comments. Services were available for Spanish-speaking attendees, including copies of the presentation in Spanish and translations provided by the consultant team and Peekskill High School student volunteers.

Workshop Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Presentation
3. Interactive Design Stations
 - Gazebo Area and Peekskill Plaza
 - Streetscape Improvements from the Train Station to Downtown.
 - Pugsley Park and Monument Park
4. Open House Stations
 - Vision Station
 - Goal 1: Job Opportunities for Existing and Future Residents
 - Goal 2: Inviting and Walkable Connections
 - Goal 3: Arts, Culture, and Dining Destination
 - Goal 4: Attractive Downtown Environment
 - Goal 5: Healthy Balance of Downtown Uses
5. Report Back and Next Steps



Presentation

Susan Favate and Simon Kates lead a presentation that lasted approximately 10 minutes at the beginning of the meeting. The presentation included an overview of the DRI program, the DRI planning process and timeline, and recent public engagement events, and ended with instructions for the workshop exercises.

Overview of DRI Program and Schedule

Ms. Favate gave an overview of the DRI Program, including its history, implementation strategy, and the goals of the program. Ms. Favate discussed the overall project timeline and recent public engagement and LPC meetings.

DRI Strategic Investment Plan

Mr. Kates reviewed the types of public and private projects that are eligible for DRI funding, and the types of projects that are not eligible for funding. Mr. Kates also described the criteria that the State uses when selecting projects for funding.

Public Engagement

Mr. Kates and Ms. Favate reviewed public engagement and outreach that has occurred throughout the DRI process. Public engagement has included public workshops, pop-up events, a public meeting in Spanish, the open call for projects, LPC meetings, and stakeholder interviews. Future public engagement opportunities includes a business owner’s roundtable, public survey, and future LPC meetings and a final public workshop.

Workshop Exercises

Mr. Kates concluded the presentation with directions of the two exercises which were the focus of the workshop. Approximately half of attendees started at the three interactive design work stations, and the other half of attendees reviewed and commented on potential projects at the open house stations.

Summary of Interactive Design Station Comments

Attendees were asked to participate in three different design-focused work stations. The Gazebo Area and Peekskill Plaza and Streetscape Improvement workstations were led by a member of the consultant team, and the Pugsley Park and Monument Park workstation was self-guided. The design stations included drawings of the existing street designs, and drawings of the potential improvements and concepts created by the consultant team.

Gazebo Area and Peekskill Plaza

- Attendees liked that the proposed bump-outs created shorter crossing distances for people crossing the street. Attendees also noted that bump-outs and expanded pedestrian space would be great for downtown street fairs.
- Participants want safety and accessibility to be central tenets of redesigns, and want more seating in the gazebo area. Safety includes pedestrian safety and protecting portions of the sidewalk and plaza with bollards.
- Attendees were supportive of the idea to replace the gazebo and to redesign the plaza as a modern civic space. Another popular idea was to add more trees and native plants where possible in the area.

Streetscape Improvements from the Train Station to Downtown.

- Attendees wanted to see Central Avenue redesigned with a protected bicycle lane, and that crosswalks should be added at the major intersections of Washington Street, Central Avenue, N. Water Street, and Railroad Avenue. Attendees agreed that Central Avenue is the connection between downtown Peekskill and the waterfront, and its successful redesign is a top priority.
- Safety and aesthetic comments included support for additional lighting along Central Avenue, additional trees and green space, and attractive garbage cans along the street.
- Ideas for parking in the area included building a parking garage across from the train station and constructing covered bicycle parking at the train station.
- Attendees also recommended a shuttle linking the waterfront to downtown Peekskill for people with mobility challenges.



Pugsley Park and Monument Park

- Attendees supported a redesign of Pugsley Park, but provided comments on how to balance desires for a passive park and uses that could include a community garden, raised platforms, and seating areas.
- Ideas for improving Monument Park include added lighting, a covered bus stop, and multilingual signage and a map of Peekskill.
- General design elements that received support include wooden textures, warm tones, and native plants. More trees and plantings were supported throughout all of the design work stations, but attendees were also concerned with the maintenance of the extra plantings.

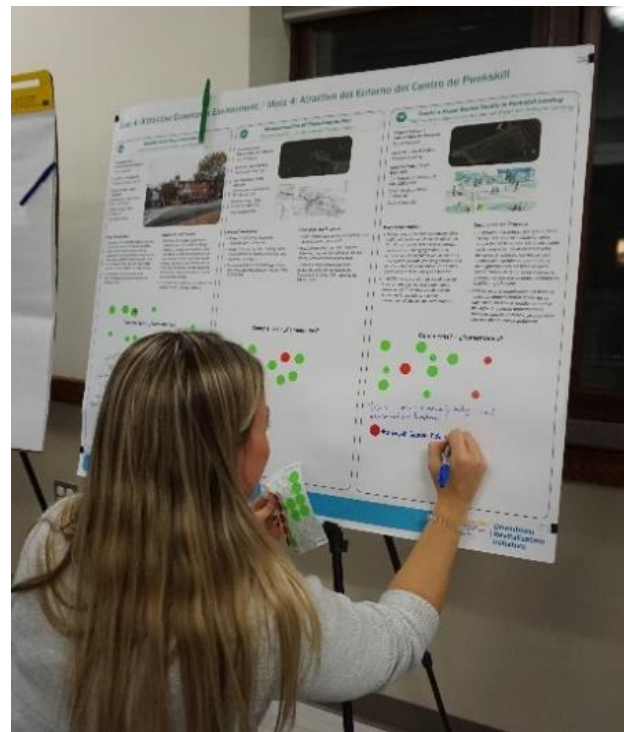


Summary of Open House Stations

The six open house stations presented proposed projects organized by each of the five DRI goals, and included a station on the draft vision and goals. Each of the projects included descriptions, total project costs, requested DRI funding, and maps, photos, or renderings. Attendees were asked to comment on what they liked and didn't like about projects, and what questions they had about the details. Each station also included blank paper where attendees could write general comments about the goals. In addition, attendees could respond to ideas with green stickers that represented support for an idea, and red stickers which represented disapproval.

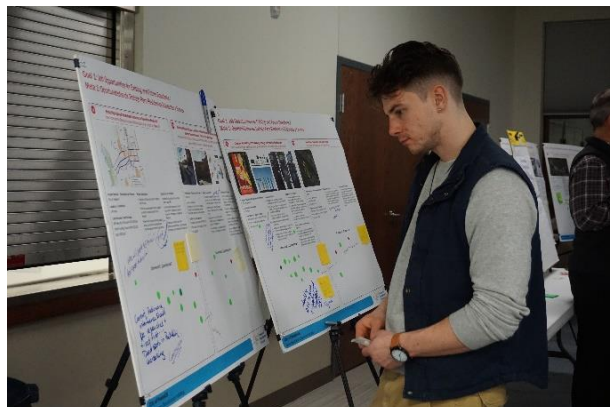
Station 1: Job Opportunities for Existing and Future Residents

- There is support for improving the internet infrastructure in Peekskill and for providing public Wi-Fi around the city. Attendees questioned if the high speed broadband project (Project 1A) and the public Wi-Fi and low-cost internet project (Project 1B) could somehow be combined. Other comments include addressing current issues with internet service.
- Attendees supported creating a marketing, branding, and wayfinding strategy for Peekskill (Project 1C). One idea included building on the existing "Peekskill" sign at the train station, and including historic markers in the wayfinding signage.
- Attendees also supported the solar power generation project on N. Water Street and wondered how other solar projects could benefit from DRI.
- Other comments included improving the lighting and signage in downtown Peekskill, improving communication within the Peekskill community, and creating a diner that caters to local seniors and the public as a way to serve food but also to provide a gathering space for residents.



Station 2: Inviting and Walkable Connections

- Attendees support improving Central Avenue (Project 2A). Central Avenue is the key connection between downtown and the waterfront, and attendees want it to be safe and accessible.
- Improving the streetscape in downtown Peekskill and creating Peekskill Plaza (Project 2B) also received support from the public. Attendees thought the improved streets should provide modern public space, and should have multi-lingual signage. Some attendees were concerned by the potential loss of street space for motorists, and were worried about effects on larger vehicles like school buses.
- Meeting attendees supported redesigning Railroad Avenue and N. Water Street between the Train Station and Central Avenue (Project 2C).
- There was wide support for the Ride! Peekskill proposal (Project 2D). Attendees commented that a proposed trolley route should include Blue Mountain Park, and that the shuttle service should operate on the weekend. Some attendees questioned the concept of bicycle share, and are concerned about how and where they will be stored.
- Other comments included asking that the streetscape improvements and mobility proposal are sensitive to the needs of the elderly and young families, that the parking garages need improved access and signage, and that sidewalks need improvement. Another idea was to consider outdoor dining at restaurants, and to expand community gardens.



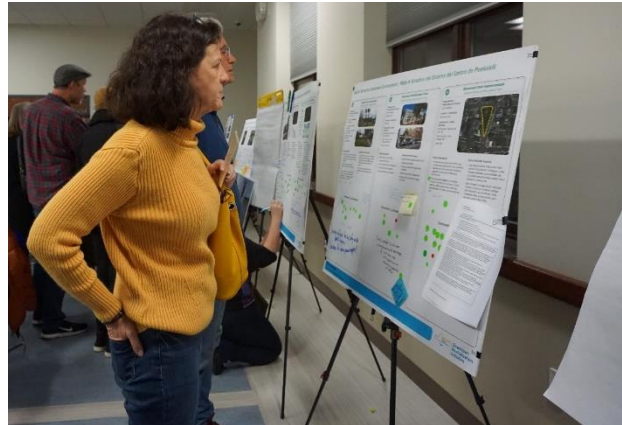
Station 3: Arts, Culture, and Dining Destination

- Improving the Paramount Theater was supported by the public (Project 3A). Ideas for improvements to the theater include showing independent movies, attracting more and diverse musical acts, and allowing the Peekskill community to use the space.
- The Peekskill Art Center (Project 3B) was also widely supported by the meeting attendees. Comments include supporting arts house films, storytelling and music, and community arts education.
- The Coordinated Public Arts installations (Project 3C) received supportive comments and stickers.
- The Peekskill Coffee House roaster (Project 3D) received support from attendees, but there were also questions of parking at the proposed location and a desire for job training.
- Workshop attendees support creating the Peekskill Pavilion Farmers Market Structure (Project 3E). Attendees commented that it would be an opportunity to host the farmers market year-round, and to bring other artisanal and flea markets to Peekskill.
- Attendees support the HRH Care Heritage Library (Project 3F), and think it could be similar to Story Corps, where people can record their personal and local history for future generations.
- An overall comment regarding the proposed projects was to think about the maintenance and operational costs and parking needs of the proposed businesses.



Station 4: Attractive Downtown Environment.

- Improving the gazebo area (Project 4A) was supported by attendees. Comments include planting more trees in the area, creating seating and benches, and designing the plaza so that it can be used for musical performances. Design comments include using poured concrete instead of brick, designing something new with historic influences, and creating a stepped plaza similar to downtown Ossining.
- Public attendees supported reconstruction of Fleischmann Pier (Project 4B) but also had questions about the cost of the project.
- The Kayak Rental Facility in Peekskill Landing (Project 4C) received support from attendees since it would include low-cost canoe/kayak storage, canoe/kayak rentals, and environmental education. Some attendees noted that there is kayak rental facility nearby at Annsville Creek.
- Attendees supported improving Pugsley Park (Project 4D), and suggested a community garden, seating, a raised area for a stage, and a meditation garden.
- The public commented that the Downtown Revitalization Fund (Project 4E) was badly needed, and it should be used to support minority- and women-owned businesses. Attendees had questions about who would manage the fund.
- Improvements to Monument Park (Project 4F) were widely supported by the attendees. Suggested improvements include adding lighting to Highland Avenue and N. Division Street, a covered bus stop, and improving park maintenance.
- Other general comments include expanding Peekskill's parking garages and decorating them with murals, and creating a space for a municipal art collection.



Station 5: Healthy Balance of Downtown Uses

- Meeting attendees see redeveloping 41 N. Division Street (Project 5A) as a big benefit to Peekskill. Some commented that moving HVMOCA to the center of town would create a central focus to the downtown arts district, and would make the building a destination for residents and local students.
- Renovating the Kiley Center for use as the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester (Project 5B) was called a vital project by one commenter and was widely supported by meeting attendees. Other comments expressed a desire for the Boys & Girls Club to coordinate with the local school district on programming.
- Restoring the 100 Steps (Project 5C) received mixed support from meeting attendees. Comments included wanting the developer to pay for the project, and asking if the steps would be ADA compliant.
- Revitalizing four sites along Division Street (Project 5D) also received mixed support. Meeting attendees expressed a desire for affordable housing, but stated that the development sites could be tough to build on.
- Other ideas include support for providing housing for all Peekskill residents.

Report Back and Next Steps

The Public Workshop concluded with a report back session where the consultant team summarized the discussions at each of the workshop stations. Meeting attendees were reminded of upcoming engagement opportunities include the Business Owners Roundtable and the public survey. The third Public Workshop has not been scheduled, but will likely be held in March 2020.