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CEDC LEADS THIRD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROUNDTABLE

Local leaders begin discussions of a countywide plan

HUDSON, NY – Discussions on how a countywide economic development business strategy might be developed, took place at the most recent Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) roundtable as representatives from participating towns and the City of Hudson agreed to share individual plans and begin work on a comprehensive survey.

On December 4th, a dozen representatives from local community economic development groups met at Columbia-Greene Community College to share their progress and continue discussions on how best to improve community and economic development around the county. Facilitated by CEDC, roundtable participants included John Lee of Claverack, Roy Brown of Germantown, Tom Curran, Barbara Henry and Tom Chulak of Chatham, Sarah Sterling and Sheena Salvino of Hudson, Max Gitter of New Lebanon, John Porreca of Greenport and Ken Flood and Carol Wilber of CEDC.

“While grants, tax incentives, and other hard factors will always play a critical role in a business location decision, quality of life is playing an ever-growing role in attracting the types of businesses Columbia County wants most,” stated Ken Flood. “Consequently, there has never been a better time to engage in local economic revitalization efforts. Small towns and cities across the country are investing in projects to revitalize downtown areas and improve livability for all residents – and Columbia County is no exception.”

Tom Chulak reported on the recent incorporation of a new organization, the Chatham Area Economic Development Team. Members include Chulak, Curran, the supervisors of the surrounding towns of Chatham, Austerlitz, Canaan, Chatham Central School District Superintendent Cheryl Nuciforo, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce President David Colby, CEDC Executive Director Ken Flood and Marketing Director Carol Wilber.

Salvino said that the Hudson Development Corporation (HDC) recently began its business survey in the City of Hudson and offered to share it with other communities.

“Successful economic development on all levels needs to be sustainable in that it works with existing businesses and is welcoming to new ones,” said Curran, Chatham Village mayor. He noted that the village is booming and attracting overflow from Hudson.

Increased business means a burden on infrastructure which Claverack and Greenport are both addressing on the local levels, said Lee and Porreca.

This past summer was the best business season New Lebanon has seen, according to Gitter, whose local economic development committee continues to strive to promote agriculture, recreation, tourism and small manufacturing efforts. “We have stopped the decline of New Lebanon’s economy,” said Gitter.

In addition to implementing a business survey, the group discussed the issue of a lack of affordable housing in the county. Flood noted that Columbia County has one of the highest percentage of seniors in New York State and housing for elderly and young people is needed. “We need to make it affordable, interesting and available,” said Flood.” Offering alternative housing for seniors frees up real estate for younger buyers.”

Housing is needed in northern Columbia County to attract people moving into the Capital District, said Gitter. High rents, as much as \$1,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment in Hudson, is a deterrent for young people flooding to the city, said Salvino. The high number of artists coming to the county also needs to be addressed, said Chulak who noted there are nearly a

dozen arts organizations in the Chatham area meeting regularly to support each other. “We are so rich in arts organizations,” agreed Salvino. Art space is also needed, said Brown of Germantown, where that community has taken several vacant buildings and used them as galleries for artists’ works. “The reality of it is our quality of life and attractiveness,” said Chulak.

Flood stated, “Our ultimate goal whether at the city, town or county level, is to meld community development and economic development to create a seamless cooperative effort that results in a thriving, county-wide economy. This is an exciting time for Columbia County as new opportunities for growth continue to surface.”

“The December meeting is the third in a series of meetings hosted by the CEDC to get input and share expertise with local economic groups around the county,” said Wilber. “Sharing ideas about activities that have worked on the local level and receiving guidance and feedback from CEDC is all part of the process. CEDC is committed to this integrated approach.”

The next economic development roundtable to follow up on the survey project is planned for early March.

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PHOTOS



(l to r) Roy Brown, Supervisor John Porecca, Supervisor Sarah Sterling, Tom Chulak, Carol Wilber, Ken Flood, Max Gitter and Sheena Salvino. Missing from the photo: Tom Curran, Barbara Henry and John Lee.



(l to r) Tom Curran, Barbara Henry and Roy Brown

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