

Twin County biz owners share thoughts for URI plan

By Katie Kocijanski Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Friday, August 21, 2015 12:00 am

GREENPORT— The race for Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s Upstate Revitalization Initiative came to Columbia-Greene Community College on Thursday.

The local business community gathered to discuss what they think should be a part of the Capital Region’s economic development plan to be submitted for their share of the \$1.5 billion up for grabs.

Organized by the Columbia and Greene County Chambers of Commerce, 88 people came out for the event. Members of the Capital Region Economic Development Council have been holding town hall meetings in the seven other counties in the region to solicit similar feedback.

“We’ve brought you together today to have a dialogue about what you want to be included in the plan,” said F. Michael Tucker, interim Columbia Economic Development Corporation executive director.

Local members of the council were present at the meeting. This included Tucker, Todd Erling, executive director of the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp, Matthew Nelson, vice president and mortgage officer of The Community Preservation Corporation, Inc. Announced in January by Cuomo, seven state regions will compete for a share of \$1.5 billion in funding. The top three regions will be awarded \$500 million in funding, given in \$100 million increments over five years.

The other six regions are the central New York, Finger Lakes, Mid-Hudson Valley, Mohawk Valley, North Country and the Southern Tier. New York City, Buffalo and Long Island regions of the state are not participating in the competition for the funding.

An open discussion with the audience was led by Erling and Tucker. The audience was asked to consider what they think the region’s most important assets were and how they could be leveraged with economic growth.

“We want to know what the biggest changes you want to see in the Capital Region are,” Erling said. “How would you transform the region into a world class destination to live, work and play?”



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The local business community gathered at Columbia-Greene Community College Thursday to discuss what they think should be a part of the Capital Region's economic development plan to be submitted for a share of the 1.5 billion up for grabs. More than 80 people came out for the event.

Several key themes among twin county residents were talked about. This includes the need for public transportation, improved Internet and broadband services and improved infrastructure. The idea of cross collaboration among the different Capital Region counties was also mentioned. Columbia County Economic Development Chair John Reilly, R-Gallatin used the example of building rail trails throughout the region. Efforts have been made to have rail trails be in not only Columbia and Greene, but also in Rensselaer and Albany.

The idea of interconnectivity and cross collaboration was well received. Stewardship Farms founder Tim Lundquist suggested the region embrace the idea of being the “food basket of New York State.”

Lundquist said for hundreds of years the state was an agrarian based economy, there’s no reason why the state couldn’t go back to focusing more on that. At the farm, they are focused on the idea of sustainable farming techniques.

Karl Heck, a community development specialist for Greene County’s office of economic development and planning said he saw a need for more manufacturing in the area. Especially in Greene, there is a need for more manufacturing space to operate in.

“We need to look hard at the cultural economy here and heritage tourism,” Laurie Hickok of Canaan said.

Hudson Opera House Co-Director Tandra Dillon said she believed the future for the region is in its history.

Bringing back the idea of the small town quality from Warren County to Warren Street in Hudson appealed to her. By building on the infrastructure we currently have, she said the region could also build on the past.

Nelson spoke about the idea of utilizing two of the region’s most important assets- the Hudson and Mohawk rivers. He said this was the backbone of what connects the region together. Anyone who is interested in sharing their ideas for the economic development plan are encouraged to visit www.capital2020.biz to submit their ideas.

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