

Looking to a new county economic development plan

By Katie Kocijanski Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Saturday, February 27, 2016 12:15 am

GREENPORT — Columbia County is on its way toward a new strategic economic development plan for the future.

The Columbia Economic Development Corporation hosted a strategic planning public session Friday at Columbia-Greene Community College where more than 100 people attended.

As part of the strategic planning process to develop an economic vision for the county, the session brought together various members of the community.

“This is a workshop to help create an action plan for the immediate future in the county,” said Tony Jones, the corporation's chairman. “All of the people here confirms the readiness of Columbia County to focus on this plan.”

Mary Ellen O’Loughlin, an independent management consultant, led the discussion. O’Loughlin was part of the strategic management team behind the Capital Region's creative economy study.

Four pillars of focus for the plan include entrepreneurship and innovation, infrastructure, quality of life and sustainability, and workforce and education.

Among the demographic information reviewed was that county residents are slightly older than the United States and state average. A majority of county residents are 45 years of age and older.

The unemployment rate for the county is at 5.1 percent and 62 percent of residents living in the county commute out of it to get to their jobs with 38 percent of county residents working within the county boundaries.



CEDC plan

Residents from around Columbia County gathered for a community conversation on the future of the county's economic development Friday at Columbia-Greene Community College.

In Hudson, 23.2 percent of the population is in poverty, while 31.8 percent are children living in poverty. The national average is 15.1 for the population living in poverty and 21.1 percent of children living in poverty.

“Hudson has the highest concentration of individual artists living compared to other counties in the country,” O’Loughlin said. “Kings County in Brooklyn and Taos County in New Mexico rank first and second. Columbia County is third, the creative economy is huge here.”

A number of hot-button issues were raised by audience members at Friday’s event. Among the top issues included the lack of broadband access, affordable housing and the desire to attract more young people to the county.

Columbia County Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Adams said she feels the need for affordable housing will help attract more people to the area.

Several audience members voiced their concerns over new businesses encountering problems with municipal officials and the fees associated with starting a new organization in the state.

Hudson Opera House co-Director Tambra Dillon said the opera house is encountering numerous issues with state and federal contracting regulations in its current renovation projects.

“There is a lack of training for young people,” said Elena Mosley, Operation Unite’s founder. “I’m concerned about taking them from their education into the workforce.”

Copake resident Roberta Roll said she has seen issues with updating infrastructure in the county, including updating gas, electric and sewer components in buildings.

Columbia Land Conservancy Executive Director Peter Paden said there should be a focus on developing a robust outdoor trail system.

The corporation’s final strategic plan will be presented to county officials April 19.

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