

BALDWIN

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

DRI Baldwin – Local Planning Committee (LPC) Meeting #2

December 18, 2019 Baldwin High School, 6:30pm

Meeting Notes

Marwa Fawaz (VHB) opened the meeting with introductory remarks, welcomed the LPC and public and introduced Nassau County Executive Laura Curran. Nassau County Executive Curran provided opening remarks which highlighted what she hopes to see come from this process for downtown Baldwin. She then asked the LPC how can we make the most out of this investment from the State and emphasized the need to get Baldwin back on the map as a destination within Nassau County.

Following Nassau County Executive's opening remarks, Ms. Fawaz introduced the goals for the meeting which included working discussions for the LPC and to get project ideas into formation. Ms. Fawaz then introduced Honorable Laura Gillen to also provide introductory remarks. As this meeting was the last that Honorable Laura Gillen would sit on as the Town of Hempstead Supervisor, she thanked everyone who has worked on this process thus far and expressed enthusiasm for the future of downtown Baldwin through the outcome of the DRI Process.

Ms. Fawaz then continued the presentation by explaining to the LPC that the State has extended the Baldwin DRI Process deadline from March 30, 2020 to April 24, 2020. Ms. Fawaz then proceeded to introduce the extension of the Call for Projects submission to January 17, 2020. Ms. Fawaz identified that the extension in the Call for Projects would allow for input from the new Town of Hempstead Administration.

Ms. Fawaz presented the DRI Boundary which has been approved and deemed the final boundary by the LPC. The DRI Boundary is to be centered around the Long Island Rail Road within the downtown of Baldwin. Ms. Fawaz then presented the DRI Vision which was previously reviewed by the LPC and highlighted a specific change raised by the LPC members.

Ms. Fawaz read the draft vision statement out loud.

The Baldwin community envisions its downtown as a thriving, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly mixed-use corridor along Grand Avenue and Merrick Road, ~~centered around~~ anchored by the Baldwin Long Island Railroad Station. Baldwin residents are diverse and engaged and have long recognized the potential for Downtown Baldwin to become a place where residents, commuters, and visitors want to live, work, shop, dine, and recreate.

Through investments in public infrastructure, strategic leveraging of private development opportunities, and building on a foundation of its existing assets, Downtown Baldwin will thrive as a center of activity with a unique identity and local economic driver that the community needs and has long been working toward.

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The LPC members had no additional comments on the vision, agreeing on the change to the vision to be the final vision.

Ms. Fawaz continued the presentation by introducing project submissions received through the Call for Projects. Ms. Fawaz explained that all projects submitted thus far have been categorized under three categories; fully formed projects, projects in formation and project ideas. The remaining time in the meeting was used for the LPC to hold open discussions on each of the project ideas that were compiled based on Call for Projects submissions. The project ideas are projects in their primarily stages that need to be fleshed out and ultimately brought up into the projects in formation category. Ms. Fawaz directed the LPC to a packet of materials prepared for each member which included project profiles for all project ideas to be discussed.

Before getting into the project idea profiles, Ms. Fawaz introduced one fully formed project that has been submitted through the Call for Projects: Malkin Appliances Site Renovations. Then, Ms. Fawaz introduced five projects in formation: Baldwin Library Interior Renovations, Baldwin Library Exterior Renovations, Historical Society Property Upgrades, Green Infrastructure and Baldwin High School Placemaking. These projects were briefly introduced to the LPC as the main goal for the evening was to discuss the project ideas.

Ms. Fawaz and Abi Rudow (VHB) then proceeded to go through the nine project idea profiles.

1. Transit-Oriented Development

Support and complement proposed transit-oriented development around the Baldwin LIRR Station. Mixed-use development around the station will meet the increasing demand for housing alternatives, drive foot traffic and increase demand for retail uses. Development along Grand Avenue and within the surrounding area of the LIRR Station would fully leverage the overlay district by introducing higher density and mixed-use development in proximity to the LIRR Station.

The LPC agreed that this project idea is important for downtown Baldwin and should be thought through more carefully. LPC members agreed that the idea of a TOD fund through the DRI funding and an RFP to be put out by the Town of Hempstead would help achieve the goals of what a TOD should be in downtown Baldwin.

2. Improve Connectivity Across Sunrise Highway

Implement roadway improvements and pedestrian amenities to facilitate increased connectivity and safer movement across Sunrise Highway. Coordinate with NYS Department of Transportation to complement the Nassau County Complete Streets project along Grand Avenue.

The LPC agreed that this project idea is important as crossing over Sunrise Highway is unsafe for pedestrians as it is currently configured.

3. Local Business Incubation and Target Loan or Grant Program

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Support the development of small businesses and local businesses desired by the Baldwin community through targeted public-private partnerships and grant funding. Local residents and stakeholders have expressed support for a variety of retail options, including restaurants, music shops, clothing stores, and grocery stores, as well as interest in specialty commercial pursuits, such as tech companies, small business incubators, and food halls. Funding could be applied for targeted recruitment of desired businesses to downtown.

This project idea is important to the LPC and should be further discussed. Loan and grant programs, can we be well utilized to attract specialized commercial uses such as tech incubators, vibrant retail, food halls and restaurants.

4. Façade Improvement Program

A façade improvement program would help to make the commercial corridor more attractive and appealing for visitors and new businesses. The program could be structured as a loan or grant program to beautify commercial facades, attract new businesses and diversify the retail and commercial offerings of downtown Baldwin. Grantees could be required to adhere to the B-MX Design Guidelines.

The LPC expressed some hesitation at the façade improvement program as they are aware that businesses are not interested façade programs. Additionally, the Town of Hempstead has a current façade fund through the CBCG.

5. Merrick Road Downtown Connectivity and Streetscape Improvements

Implement streetscape improvements and traffic calming for enhanced walkability and pedestrian safety to contribute to a walkable downtown along Merrick Road within the DRI Area. This project would complement the complete streets improvements along Grand Avenue through the provision of streetscaping elements and pedestrian amenities which may include hanging planters on street light poles, seasonal street decor, street furnishings, wayfinding signage, planters, bulb-outs and wider sidewalks. These upgrades would enhance vibrancy of the downtown to attract new retailers, welcome pedestrians and connect Merrick Road to the greater downtown.

This project idea is important to the LPC as Merrick Road is a dangerous corridor within the DRI boundary and is seen as a threat for pedestrians. The LPC wants to look further into ways to calm traffic and create a safer space for pedestrians along the roadway.

6. Downtown Branding or Marketing Program

Implement a branding and/or marketing program to attract new visitors and businesses and to establish a unique identity and character for downtown Baldwin.

The LPC is looking for an overall rebranding approach for the downtown to attract new businesses and fill vacant buildings.

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7. Baldwin LIRR Station Plaza

Baldwin LIRR Station plaza improvements complementing the MTA station upgrades would enhance the transit rider experience and ensure that the Baldwin LIRR Station, as an important asset in downtown Baldwin, is leveraged for the benefit of the community. Station plaza improvements could include gathering space for the community, decorative lighting, enhanced bus shelters to promote multi-modal transfers, electronic entrances, emergency call buttons, installation of bike storage lockers, trash and recycling receptacles, and the addition of parking garages for commuters to increase parking area and accessibility to the downtown.

The LPC is interested in this project idea as creating a station plaza would create a place for the community to gather in an open space and would act as a focal point for the community. This project idea would require communication with both the Town of Hempstead and the MTA.

8. Arts and Cultural Center

Several proposals have been submitted for an arts and cultural center to provide space for live performances and host various creative programs, classes, exhibitions, markets and fairs. An arts and cultural center could be paired with residential or loft-style apartment units above, or could be housed within an existing building in downtown Baldwin. The Kellogg House and rear carriage house on the Kellogg House property have been suggested as possible locations for a community center/art space after the upgrades undertaken by Nassau County.

The LPC does not prioritize this project idea as there are several arts and cultural institutions within downtown Baldwin that currently serve the community.

9. Recreation Center

The addition of a recreation center or community center within downtown Baldwin would provide opportunities for active living, leisure and recreational activities in a safe environment. Recreation centers provide a positive atmosphere that promote personal health and wellness, benefits to families through offered programs and a feeling of a safe place for all community members.

The LPC members agreed that a recreation center is important in the community as downtown Baldwin lacks green space or large areas for gathering. Certain LPC members expressed concern that a recreation or community center is sometimes not self-sustaining financially.

After all the project ideas were discussed, Ms. Fawaz concluded the presentation by discussing the next steps in the DRI process including the Call for Projects deadline extension, potential date changes for the upcoming LPC and Community Meetings, and strategies to be drafted to reach the DRI goals.

LPC Comments

The LPC members asked questions and provided input throughout the meeting. Below are specific comments:

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- Do we want our constituents to provide project submissions that fall within the overlay district, even though the zoning has not been accepted yet?
- Do the co-chairs need to approve all of the projects?
- Could struggling restaurants get a loan under the targeted loan or grant program?
- Is there a sponsor for a food hall?
- Would we need a design consultant to implement the downtown branding or marketing program?

The meeting was then opened to the public.

Public Comments

- Are the LPC members reaching out to the properties of interest, do they know developers? I don't think the developers know that there is a call for projects.
- Under what guidance should the interior library get funding?
- I have a big problem on moving the Historical Society building up towards the street as my father built that building.
- Who is the project sponsor for the Historical Society project? The land is county owned, has that been taken into consideration for the best use of the property? If we are using that property, we should meet the goals of a mixed-use facility or community center.
- Has the LPC taken into consider the Long Island workforce housing for potential housing and the funding that could come from that for additional affordable housing?
- For branding and marketing, we should take it a step further by utilizing tech ideas like radio station and television stations through the school district to get the students involved.
- Can a list of abbreviations be provided as I don't know what RFP and TOD means?
- If a project is accepted and the funds are accepted by the sponsor, are prevailing wages required?
- Will the preference be to developers in the Baldwin first or outside developers?
- Some nuisances on subsiding development, how do you choose that?
- Safety, security and lighting, all these ideas – who will pay for these ideas?
- Losing parking along Merrick Road because people are speeding there are efforts with the state and county, there are techniques and roadways to get the speeds lowered to get people to keep their parking on Merrick Road. We have found ways to do this through 40 traffic calming plans.
- Developers and property owners need to have conversations especially once the Town new administration comes in.