

RENSSELAER RISING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PLAN:

A Community Participation Plan was developed to ensure that the public and all interested stakeholders had opportunities to provide their input and feedback throughout the planning process in a variety of ways. The plan outlines the types of forums and outreach mechanisms that were used to engage the public and community stakeholders and served as a guide throughout the process.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The City of Rensselaer established an Advisory Committee at the beginning of the process to be representative of the community and the interests of the study area. The Committee included representatives from local City staff, local business owners, residents, and local organizations.

Kick-Off Meeting - May 03, 2023

The introductory meeting to introduce the Advisory Committee, included an overview of the NYSDOS BOA Program, the benefits the program can provide to the City, past BOA planning efforts completed by the City, and the general timeline and scope of the project.

Meeting 1 - May 23, 2023

The first Advisory Committee meeting included a walking tour of the proposed study area. The tour focused on key properties and areas, and the Committee worked to identify key issues and opportunities in the study area.

Meeting 2 - November 28, 2023

At the second meeting, the Advisory Committee discussed the findings of the draft Inventory and Analysis, reviewed the public engagement plan, discussed outreach materials and strategic sites in the study area, and finalized the study area boundary.

Meeting 3 - January 29, 2024

The third Advisory Committee meeting was focused on reviewing preliminary results from the public engagement survey, identifying the survey feedback's contribution to plan issues and opportunities, reviewing a list of stakeholders and property owners to engage with through focus groups and interviews, and planning for the first public workshop.

Meeting 4 - April 25, 2024

During the fourth meeting, the Advisory Committee reviewed the final results of the public engagement survey, the first public workshop, and the results of an initial round of stakeholder outreach. The Committee also discussed a draft Vision and Goals for the project based on feedback to date and identified strategic sites.

Meeting 5 - September 5, 2024

The fifth meeting was focused on reviewing the results of property owner discussions and remaining public engagement activities, drafting the plan recommendations, and reviewing the draft Master Plan.

Meeting 6 - November 18, 2024

During the sixth meeting, the Advisory Committee refined strategic sites recommendations, and feedback from the public on the draft plan recommendations and master plan, and made plans for the final public workshop.

VISIONING SURVEY

The Rensselaer Rising visioning survey was developed in collaboration by the Committee, the project consultant team, and City staff and was launched in January of 2024. The survey was intended to gather feedback from residents on a range of topics, including the City's defining characteristics, priorities for the future, overall vision for the City, and other topics. The survey was posted to the City's website (where updates on the project were posted throughout the process) and was distributed to the public across multiple communication channels, including news media, public events, posters, and person-to-person outreach. Over the two months the survey was open, 239 survey responses were collected. Of those who responded, approximately 70 percent were residents of the City of Rensselaer, 21 percent were from Rensselaer County, and just nine percent lived outside of Rensselaer County. The survey asked respondents what makes the City special, and responses included its great location in proximity to larger metropolitan centers, its waterfront access, and its small-town feel. Many respondents throughout the survey spoke to their desire to see more restaurants, cafes, shops, and places to go, as well as the significant need for a grocery store and access to fresh foods and groceries. Others focused on the need of the City to have a more identifiable downtown area that visitors and residents will want to visit.

PUBLIC EVENTS

Public Events

Rensselaer Rising planning and community engagement took place at several community events and Rensselaer Rising-specific workshops, along with more targeted outreach to specific groups within the community.

Public Visioning Workshop

A public visioning workshop was held on Thursday, March 7th, 2024 from 6:00-7:30 PM at the Rensselaer City School. The workshop began with a presentation from the consultant team that provided background on the plan and its purpose, and summarized key findings to-date. Attendees were then able to circulate among a series of boards that sought input on issues and opportunities.

Presentation to Spinney at Pond View Senior Living Community

A presentation about Rensselaer Rising was made to residents of the Spinney at Pond View on March 5th, 2024 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Ten residents attended, many of whom had grown up or lived in Rensselaer at one time. A presentation about the project was made, and residents provided feedback on ideas for the City, what might attract more people to the area, and the City's greatest strengths.

Albany Riverfront Collaborative Joint Meeting

On April 26th, 2024 the Rensselaer Rising project team participated in a joint meeting alongside the Albany Waterfront Collaborative and the NYS Department of Transportation to discuss the Rensselaer Rising project and the potential changes being considered regarding I-787 in the future. Because changes to the highway, bridges, and ramps of I-787 would directly impact the residents of Rensselaer and the BOA study area, the conversation revolved around these intersections and the need to plan for all scenarios. Residents of Rensselaer and Albany attended to learn about the projects and ask questions.

Survey of OCFS Staff

On May 29th, 2024, during the lunch hour between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) staff were surveyed. The State OCFS building is a major employer in the City, and is located centrally within the study area. With about 500 staff working there, many staff members walk on their lunch break, and/or visit local Rensselaer businesses and frequent restaurants in the City. 78 staff members completed the survey, 66 percent of whom indicated that they go out to eat for lunch in Rensselaer, and 80 percent of whom walk during their lunch breaks. Feedback from staff focused on the need for more designated walking paths for lunch breaks and

the desire to see more restaurants and lunch options surrounding the office.

Fort Crailo State Historic Site Centennial Celebration

The Ft. Crailo State Historic Site celebrated 100 years with a centennial celebration on June 1st, 2024. Rensselaer Rising had a presence at the event and parade with project information and handouts about the plan.

Rensselaer Night Out

Rensselaer National Night Out, hosted by the Rensselaer Police Department, was held on August 6th, 2024. The project team had a booth at the event where families were engaged to discuss Rensselaer Rising. Young children were asked to draw pictures of what they wish to see in the City, with responses ranging from planting more flowers, to a public pool and a roller skating rink. Feedback was also gathered from parents and other attendees to help inform the Plan. The overall goals of the project were discussed with several residents.

Riverfront Park Farmers Market

Once the Committee developed a set of goals and recommendations, as well as a draft Master Plan to achieve the plan's vision, project team members had a booth a Rensselaer Riverfront Park Farmers Market on September 19th, 2024. Attendees were asked to stop by the booth during their farmers market shopping and provide feedback through visual preference surveys to help further inform the concept plan development, and draft during their farmers market shopping and provide feedback through visual preference surveys to help further inform the Master Plan development, and draft recommendations. Participants were asked to rank the draft recommendations in terms of high and low priorities. Several people stopped by throughout the three-hour market to provide their input, learn more about the project, and discuss what types of improvements they would like to see in the park and the study area generally.

Rensselaer Library Public Input Session

On October 2nd, 2024, the Rensselaer Rising team presented at a public event held at the Rensselaer Central Library about the BOA planning process, the public engagement held to-date, and the draft vision, goals, recommendations, and Master Plan. Participants were then asked to provide their feedback on the recommendations, their priorities, and their views on the draft Master Plan.

PROPERTY OWNER & STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Working with the Committee, the consultant team identified stakeholders in the community. This outreach was largely focused on study area property owners, businesses, and community organizations. One-on-one in- person and virtual interviews were conducted with stakeholders, along with focus group meetings, to dive deeper into topics to further understand current uses and potential future uses of properties throughout the study area, and to provide updates on development concepts.