

# Jamaica, Queens | Downtown Revitalization Initiative

## Local Planning Committee Meeting #3

Friday, January 13 | 11:00 AM –2:00 PM

### Meeting Overview

#### Introduction

The meeting began with a welcome address from LPC Co-Chair, Queens Borough President Melinda R. Katz. She thanked all Committee members for their continued involvement in this effort and was eager to hear the results of this meeting's discussion about project concepts.

#### Presentation

Kate Collignon of HR&A described the progress that has been made on the project's work plan and timeline since the previous LPC meeting, including ongoing stakeholder outreach. She also reminded the Committee about the upcoming Public Open House that was to take place on Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup> at the Queens Central Library. Meeting attendees were encouraged to come any time between 12:00 PM and 8:00 PM, and spend as much time as they would like at the event. She encouraged Committee members to share the meeting flyer with their networks through their mailing lists, social media, and websites. She also asked the Committee to take copies of the printed-out flyers, which were provided at this meeting in both English and Spanish, to distribute throughout the community.

Kate reminded attendees that previous plans and stakeholder outreach for the Jamaica area will provide the foundation for this planning effort. She explained that the project team used this information to identify over 50 projects. After additional conversations with stakeholders and a review of the projects for commonalities, this list was refined and consolidated to 16 projects. She noted that the \$10 million awarded to the area could fund numerous small projects or a smaller number of large efforts. These projects have been organized into three categories based on the goals they are directed towards.

Celeste Frye of Public Works Partners *presented the first set of proposed projects:*

#### *Goal #1: Expand career opportunities and strengthen career pathways*

- Co-working space
- York College Public/ Private Development
- Broadband Access
- Healthcare Workforce Strategy
- Hospitality Opportunity Program
- Prime Skills Program
- STEAM Academy

Bret Collazzi of HR&A presented the second set of proposed projects:

#### *Goal #2: Enhance local programming through capacity and marketing*

- Arts & Culture Fund
- Downtown Marketing and Branding
- Jamaica Cultural District
- Valencia Theater
- Restaurant Startup Fund

Neil Kittredge of BBB presented the third set of proposed projects.

*Goal #3: Connect Downtown Jamaica's major centers of activity*

- Archer Archways
- Downtown Jamaica Streetscape Implementation Plan
- Jamaica Center-Parsons Archer Station Improvements
- Bus Circulator

After the presentation, members from the Steering Committee and Advisory Committee were organized into three groups to participate in small group discussions about projects under two of the three categories. Member of the public were invited to observe these discussions. The following provides a summary of that breakout group input.

### Discussion | Breakout Group 1

Group 1 reviewed projects within two categories: 1) Expand Career Opportunities and Strengthen Career Pathways, and 2) Enhance Programming Through Capacity and Marketing. Notes on each project are summarized below:

**Project Name: Co-Working Space**

- Access to the space for local entrepreneurs and businesses is an important consideration, especially with respect to the price of leasing space.
- Linking businesses to technical business support and start-up capital is critical to the success and viability of the project.

**Project Name: York College Campus Expansion**

- York College leadership clarified the purpose of this project. Funds would be used to:
  - Assess public-private partnership opportunities;
  - Determine organizational and governance structure of a potential partnership; and
  - Assess the physical and legal requirements of any potential public private partnership.
- Once the partnership strategy is clarified, an RFEI would be prepared and issued.

**Project Name: Broadband Access**

- Question on why broadband isn't already available in Jamaica, and what barriers exist toward its installation.
- Project needs additional definition. NYCEDC may be a resource for helping to define how DRI funds could achieve the goals of the project and to navigate the regulatory issues that may impede implementation.
- Broadband access is important not only for tech companies, but also for all small businesses.

**Project Name: Healthcare Workforce Strategy**

- Building a solid pipeline of applicants who reside in Jamaica is a major challenge towards executing any strategy.
- Recruitment, training, and job placement services are necessary, and finding the right partners to assist with each component is needed.
  - There are multiple organizations, employers, and unions who will need to be engaged to develop the strategy.
- Lack of transportation access within Jamaica to educational services may be a barrier.
- Direct requests to elected officials for training services from their constituents indicates there is a demand, but perhaps a lack of awareness, about existing resources.

**Project Name: Downtown Marketing and Branding, Arts and Cultural Events Fund**

- Emphasis that any marketing strategy needs to have an on-line component, possibly with a mobile app.

- Multiple actors are positioned to own this project including:
  - York College, who expressed an appetite to be involved;
  - Jamaica NOW leadership, who have already undertaken part of this work; and
  - The Jamaica area BIDs.
- Agreement that there needed to be a physical component but some disagreement on exact location.
  - Look to other citywide examples of tourism office or kiosk location.
  - A kiosk inside the subway station is a potential location, but agreement that location could not be exclusively inside the station.
- Marketing plan should be expanded to include restaurants in the downtown.
- For the marketing plan to work, public art needs to be sustained.
  - Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, York College, and the hotels developing in the area could support public art.

**Project Name: Jamaica Cultural District Plan**

- Main point of discussion was that the project is more about strategy, with key questions around:
  - Who will shape and execute the strategy?
  - What will the strategy be?
  - Where will the district be physically and programmatically located?
  - How will the strategy be executed?
- Group agreed that several projects could be incorporated this one including:
  - Downtown marketing and branding;
  - Arts and culture events fund;
  - A programming strategy for the downtown; and
  - Creation of a physical identity and improvement of wayfinding.

**Project Name: Valencia Theater**

- Project needs better definition before it can be considered a candidate for funding.
- Uncertainty over the business plan, and who would be responsible for purchasing and redeveloping the theater.

**Project Name: Restaurant Startup Fund**

- What kinds of restaurants would be funded through the project, and how would it tie into Jamaica branding?
  - Agreement that fund should not be focused on fast food or fast casual.
  - Determining what kind of “white table cloth” restaurant to fund is more difficult, but important in defining the fund.
- Questions on how many storefronts are available for restaurant use, where they are, and what the actual vacancy of space in the Jamaica core is.
- Need to explore if residents have been surveyed on what kind of restaurants are of interest.

[Discussion | Breakout Group 2](#)

Group 2 reviewed projects within two categories: 2) Enhance Programming Through Capacity and Marketing, and 3) Connect Major Centers of Activity. Notes on each project are summarized below:

**Project Name: Arts and Culture Events Fund**

- Two major thrusts of discussion.
  - Recognition that other sources of this type of funding are scarce:
    - Support from other organizations, especially from corporate sources, is limited. Eventually, this fund would need to be significantly supported by corporate institutions.
    - \$50K annually is too small; needs to be at \$200K annually.
    - Fund new or expanded events – don’t act as a substitute for existing funding.
  - Some uncertainty about the relevancy of this Fund to downtown revitalization:

- Need to ensure that these funds will really help Downtown flourish, primarily from an economic development standpoint.
- Need to establish whether there are enough institutions that are technically and administratively ready to use this money.
- Need to target the market; Good idea to show map of existing cultural institutions.
- If implemented it will be crucial to develop strong guidelines in the Summer—Fall 2017 period.

**Project Name: Downtown Marketing and Branding**

- Needs to be coordinated with Arts and Culture Events Fund.
- In fact, temporary urban art installations should come under the Arts & Culture Events Fund.
  - Initial urban art installation needs to be a “big deal” – Christo Gates in Central Park was noted as an attention grabber example; you just had to go see it.
- Visitor Center: Great idea: More information is always very good:
  - “Did you know?” concerning Jamaica is important.
  - Focus initially on residents.
  - Example location (Shops at Sutphin Place) not a good location – too far from the action. Archer at Sutphin and Parsons are better choices.
  - Could possibly be kiosks (including even in subway stations).

**Project Name: Jamaica Cultural District Plan**

- Possibly combine this project with Arts and Culture Events Fund and Downtown Marketing and Branding.
- Ongoing Build Community Capacity study will be completed in Spring 2017 and may have good guidance.
- Wayfinding important:
  - NYCDOT has a long-postponed project to install wayfinding in Downtown Jamaica.
  - Perhaps wayfinding concepts should be redesigned to fit in with this entire downtown revitalization initiative.
    - Get local cultural groups involved.
    - Local artists could design, especially using digital concepts.
- Any vacant site should have multiple uses. Example: restored warehouses used as stages and flea market sites.
- GJDC is exploring finding workspaces for artists.

**Project Name: Valencia Theatre**

- Group agreed this is a great idea.
  - If this is the only project accomplished from this initiative, the entire program will be a success.
  - Could be a great concert venue – believed to be 3,500 seats.
  - Would be a great location for an MLK Day celebration (like what BAM does).
- GJDC and Borough President should lead outreach to Tabernacle of Prayer.
  - Question: how much outreach needs to be done before this project is selected in February (to understand what a reasonable offer may end up being)?
  - Helping the church develop a continuity plan for the church will be very important.
- Concern raised that renovation needs may be extensive, given that the current church membership has fallen off, perhaps leading to deferred maintenance.

**Project Name: Restaurant Startup Fund**

- This fund is a critical need:
  - Need restaurants in the core of Jamaica (most sit-down places of note are on Hillside Avenue).
  - Need restaurants to meet future demand from hotels, cultural events, and new housing.
  - It will take real incentive for restaurateurs to come early to a redeveloping Jamaica.

- Many existing landlords do not want to go the expense of installing restaurant spaces in ground floor space;
    - Biggest single expense: Venting.
- There are lessons learned from efforts to get restaurants on Farmers Blvd. and near JPAC. (Near JPAC, the going rent for ground floor commercial space is between \$80—120 sq. ft.)
- Other comparisons include Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone and Meatpacking District.

**Project Name: Archer Archways**

- Favorable comparison to DUMBO space (re: lighting, design, and use of local artists).
- Opportunities:
  - Outdoor gallery space.
  - Start cultural- and historical-themed walking tours at archways.
  - Citi-bike facilities.
  - Local artists could help.
  - Private companies could help (with permission for them to advertise).
  - However, would theatrical or musical performances be drowned out by LIRR train noise?
- Costs:
  - \$1—1.5 million seems like too much.
  - On the other hand, likely to be structural issues that need to be addressed. This could add a lot more to the cost.

**Project Name: Downtown Jamaica Streetscape Implementation Plan**

- North/South corridors are most critical:
  - Auto use is hampered.
  - Hard to get in or out of downtown due to congestion.
  - Guy Brewer Blvd. needs to remain as fluid as possible for buses, autos, and pedestrians.
- Bus stop canopies needed at bus stops along Archer that don't currently have them.
- GJDC manages streetscape improvements near LIRR and subway stations.
- Job 1: Remove existing pavers from previously streetscaped areas.
- The plan doesn't include parking improvements – and shouldn't.

**Project Name: Jamaica Center-Parsons/Archer Station Improvements**

- Major concern was not in the station, but area around the subway station.
  - Too much activity of all types around the station.
  - If Parsons Blvd. could be closed between Archer and Jamaica Avenues, could become a town square.
    - Issue of buses: eliminate or make it a space for just buses and pedestrians.
- To make subway station improvements at this station would cost far more and take much longer than fact sheet suggests.

**Project Name: Bus Circulator**

- Intersection problems (e.g., street widths, illegal truck, van, and livery vehicle parking) slow down buses a great deal in Jamaica. Smaller vehicle for circulator could help and so might improvements that could be made by NYCDOT.
- Real problem: This project cannot be afforded
  - Issue is operations/maintenance costs.
  - We would need a strong group of businesses to fund this in the long-term and that doesn't exist now in Jamaica.

[Discussion | Summary of Breakout Group 3](#)

Group 3 reviewed projects within two categories: 1) Expand Career Opportunities and Strengthen Career Pathways, and 3) Connect Major Centers of Activity. Notes on each project are summarized below:

**Project Name: Co-Working Space**

- Questions on if the program should include an incubator component, and who the target tenants for the space are.
- Development of space should be tied into York's START-UP NY program.

**Project Name: York College Campus Expansion**

- Question on if there is a possible link in campus expansion to the Health Care Workforce Strategy project.
  - Are there opportunities for expansion strategy to link with disconnected youth (16- to 24-year-olds) and address their educational needs?
  - Could the Child Center be a potential project partner?
- Any strategy needs to consider existing zoning in the area when exploring potential uses.

**Project Name: Broadband Access**

- Group believes that Link NYC wi-fi is slower than it should be.
- Questions on how to best address the broadband access gaps that exist in Jamaica.

**Project Name: Health Care Workforce Strategy**

- Key for project success will be better defining the various career pathways that are available to Jamaica residents.
  - Focus of the project should be on specific growing occupations instead of "health care" generally.
- Strategy development needs community involvement throughout.

**Project Name: Hospitality Opportunity Program**

- Redevelopment of JFK, and hotel development accompanying it provides opportunity for job growth.
- Focus of discussion centered around potential project partners including:
  - Y-Roads
  - Workforce One Center
  - Child Center
  - CUNY EOC

**Project Name: Archer Archways**

- Activation of underpasses is critical, potential methods include improved wayfinding, a seating area, food carts, or a vendor lot.
  - Another activation strategy could be public art installations such as sculptures or murals.
- Barriers to activation include York College security requirements on Union Street underpass, and conflicts between buses and pedestrian leading to the underpasses.

**Project Name: Downtown Jamaica Streetscape Implementation Plan & Jamaica Center-Parsons/Archer Station Improvements**

- Archer Avenue terraces are a zone of potential improvement, as well as the entrance points along Archer to the LIRR underpasses.
  - Improvements include making the area more pedestrian friendly or the development of a plaza.
- There needs to be some way to entice passengers to venture into Jamaica Avenue from the Jamaica Center station.
  - Pedestrian space or a plaza on the Parsons short block is one potential solution.

**Project Name: Bus Circulator**

- Questions on if there is actual demand for a jitney or circulator of this nature.
  - Potential solution to the identified circulation problem could be coordination with colleges that already operate shuttle in the area.

## LPC Discussion and Public Comment Period

When groups returned to the plenary session, there were brief report-backs about the discussions. Some common themes were:

- The potential to reframe three proposed projects -- Arts and Culture Events Fund, Downtown Marketing and Branding, and Jamaica Cultural District Plan – as one project.
- Valencia Theatre seen as a very attractive concept.
- The need for an enhanced pedestrian space near the Jamaica Center-Parsons/Archer Station was more important than the making changes within the station.
- A lot more information is needed about the Broadband project before moving ahead with this.
- Concern about the need and viability of the bus circulator.

A representative of the Build Community Capacity study noted that she had additional input that they would like to share with the project team.

## Next Steps

Kate Collignon of HR&A stated that the Planning Team will review comments from all LPC members and continue stakeholder outreach to refine project profiles and begin to identify which projects have the greatest potential to move forward for DRI funding. He stated that the next LPC meeting will focus on prioritization among potential projects in accordance with the evaluation criteria.

LPC Co-Chair Carol Conslato thanked all meeting attendees for their time and reminded them that the next LPC Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 9, 2017.