

Jamaica, Queens | Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Local Planning Committee Meeting #5

Wednesday, February 22, 2017 | 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Meeting Overview

Introduction

The meeting began with a welcome address from Deputy Queens Borough President Melva M. Miller, representing LPC Co-Chair and Queens Borough President Melinda Katz, and LPC Co-Chair Carol Conslato. They explained that this is the final Local Planning Committee (LPC) meeting and thanked all those who have been involved in this effort for their contributions in making it a success. Melva described the major milestones that occurred throughout the project, including all the LPC meetings and engagement activities. She also reminded attendees that all meeting summaries and project documents can be found on the Jamaica DRI website:

<https://www.ny.gov/downtown-revitalization-initiative/new-york-city-jamaica>

(Please note that the full presentation for this meeting can be found on the DRI website.)

Presentation

Bret Collazzi of HR&A Advisors, Inc. thanked the LPC and all meeting attendees for the time and effort they have contributed to this project. He reviewed the four main implementation strategies that have been defined for Jamaica DRI as well as the project criteria.

Bret also thanked all LPC members who participated in the online Project Feedback Survey that was distributed after the previous LPC Meeting on February 15th, 2017. The survey allowed members to share feedback on the 11 potential priority projects described during the February 15th LPC Meeting #4. For each project, participants were asked to indicate the priority level (high/medium/low) as well as any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Bret illustrated the results of the survey with a graph that indicated those projects with the highest levels of consensus and priority at the top right corner of the graph. He noted that none of the projects were considered low priority by participants and that a few projects, such as the GJDC Co-Working Space and the Downtown Gateway, stood out for the high level of support they received.

Discussion | Potential Priority Project List

The LPC engaged in a discussion following the review of the survey results. The following bullets summarize that discussion:

- An attendee stated that while the survey results effectively reflect the LPC's priorities, they do not reflect how implementable the projects would be and this needs to be taken into account.
- Bret clarified that upon the submission of the Strategic Action Plan, New York Department of State (DOS) will consider the defined DRI Project Criteria, which includes a project's feasibility.
 - Bret also clarified that regardless of which projects are selected for the DRI funding, \$10 million has been committed to Downtown Jamaica and there is no risk of losing this funding.
- Bret stated that it will be important that the DRI investment has a near term and visible impact on Downtown Jamaica. Since the public is aware of the process, there is an expectation to see something happen.
- Melva stated that the LPC has contributed significant time and consideration to develop the list of Priority Projects.

- Carol stated that the hope is that the DRI investments are going to be a catalyst to spark additional investment into Downtown Jamaica and that the improvements they focus on will set the stage for additional improvements in the future.
- Carol and Melva emphasized that the DRI funding also does not preclude Downtown Jamaica from any additional future funding. So while some projects were not included in the list of Priority Projects because they were not ready for such funding, Downtown Jamaica is not precluded from applying for additional funding opportunities in the future for things such as training for hospitality jobs.
- An attendee stated that the projects that impact the highest number of people should be prioritized.
- An attendee stated that the project STEAM should be reconsidered because of the significant positive impact it could have for a large number of people. He also stated that projects should be considered that support the community.
- Bret clarified that the funding amount defined for each project is the funding amount being recommended on behalf of DOS. DOS will review each project thoroughly upon submission to determine eligibility.

Potential Priority Project List and Discussion

Melva explained that following a discussion of the potential Priority Projects, Committee members would be asked to vote on the slate of projects, not the individual projects.

Bret provided a brief description of each potential priority project and then invited members from the Steering Committee, Advisory Committee, and the public to participate in the discussion or submit comments. The following provides a summary of that input.

1. Develop GJDC Co-Working Space

- Bret noted that the funding would allow for the full build-out of the space, including lighting, plumbing, HVAC, floors, ceilings, and interior walls.
- Justin Rodgers from Greater Jamaica Development Corp. (GJDC), the project sponsor, noted that, while there is currently a deed restriction on the building that requires below-market rent for community space, the property owner may increase the rental price at a future date. GJDC is therefore seeking to purchase the coworking space.
- An attendee asked whether the identified location was the best option since growth will likely occur at locations closer to the subway entrance. The comment was noted while recognizing that there is not sufficient time to consider an alternate location. Attendees were encouraged to consider all projects as they are presented.

2. Deliver High-Speed Broadband to Downtown Jamaica

- Bret highlighted that this project has been updated since the LPC Meeting #4 in that the funding amount had been increased to ensure that funding is sufficient to result in a beneficial impact. This was done after the consideration of comparable projects in other locations. Bret also highlighted the two components to this project, which are further described in the project profiles that were supplied during the meeting.
- No attendees made any comments on this project.

3. Expand Prime Skills Program

- Bret highlighted that this project has been updated since the LPC Meeting #4 to expand its impact. He also confirmed that it had high levels of public support during the Open House.
- No attendees made any comments on this project.

4. Enhance Targeted Career Prep at Edison High School

- No attendees made any comments on this project.

5. Revitalize the Downtown Jamaica Gateway

- Bret described the three components included in this project in detail: 1) expanded pedestrian space on Parsons Boulevard between Jamaica and Archer avenues; 2) refurbishment of the Jamaica Center-Parsons/Archer transit hub; 3) enhanced lighting around the Jamaica Gateway
- Attendees had the following comments in regards to component #1:
 - Bret clarified that that this component is connected to a project that is being done by NYCDOT. Phase I would not be funded by DRI funding and would create a temporary installation. If Phase I is successful, Phase 2 would allow for a full build-out and a permanent installation that would be partially funded through DRI.
 - Phase I would last one to two years. If Phase I began this summer, Phase II could be implemented during the summer of 2019.
 - An attendee stated that if NYCDOT intends to expand sidewalk space along Jamaica Avenue, consideration needs to be given to where the commuter vans would be relocated.
- Attendees had the following comments in regards to component #2:
 - Attendees inquired about MTA's priorities and whether there had been conversations with them about this component. Bret explained that the project team had a planned call with the MTA on the afternoon of 2/22/17 to further discuss the possibility of this component. NYC Transit has not allocated funding for improvements at this station since it prioritizes funding based on serious structural needs of stations and there are currently none at this location. However, these agencies have said that they would support the improvements described in this component.
 - An attendee asked whether there was also a need for shelters outside of the station at other transit locations in close proximity. Melva explained that there are no shelters at those locations but that they are outside the main focus area of the DRI effort.
 - An attendee stated that the MTA should be responsible for refurbishing the station. The priority of this component should be to provide transit riders with a sense of direction once they exit the station so they know how to orient themselves in Downtown Jamaica.
 - Another attendee expressed support for focusing improvements in this component on the experience immediately outside the station with things such as signage.
 - Another attendee agreed that the entrances at the transit station does not provide any indication that transit riders have arrived at a unique destination.
- There was general agreement among attendees that these components should be prioritized as follows:
 - Component 1: Pedestrian plaza
 - Component 3: Lighting
 - Component 2: MTA station improvements

6. Activate the Archer Archways (159th Street and Union Hall Street)

- An attendee clarified that the Union Hall Street archway had to be closed at one point due to safety issues.
- An attendee stated that the 159th Street archway should be prioritized due to its proximity to key resources such as the Chapel.

- An attendee stated that it would be better to significantly improve one archway to make a notable impact rather than improve both archways to a lesser degree.
- Bret clarified that LIRR is willing to approve improvements to the archways as long as they do not impact LIRR's ability to inspect and maintain the structures.

7. Establish the Jamaica Arts Corridor

- Bret clarified that five components of this project are intended to work together. He also explained that because there are various components, the ownership and potential partnerships of the projects are mixed.

8. Diversify Dining Options Downtown

- In response to a question, an attendee stated the only hotel development planned for Downtown Jamaica that will have a restaurant associated with it is the Hilton Garden Inn.
- An attendee asked for more information as to how the identified funding for this project (\$1,450,000) was determined and how it will be broken out.
 - Bret explained that there are three components for this project: 1) dedicating a Step-Up Space for graduates of the Jamaica FEASTS food business incubator at Jamaica Market, 2) dedicating a Destination Restaurant Space at The Crossing at Jamaica Station, and 3) establishing a Restaurant Startup Fund to support storefront improvements and other startup costs for new restaurants opening in Downtown Jamaica.
 - Bret explained that the assumption is that the Destination Restaurant Space would require approximately 3,000 square feet at a cost of \$150 to \$200 per square foot, and would require some additional private investment. A location next to the railroad has been identified at 153 Jamaica Avenue.
 - The Restaurant Startup Fund would be allotted the maximum amount permitted for funds under DRI's specifications: \$600,000. Additionally, the fund is specifically intended for restaurants that have identified a location.
 - Bret further explained that this project is predicated on the assumption that there will be a need for restaurant investment and a need to support the marketplace. If restaurants start opening in Downtown Jamaica, then the need to spark that investment would no longer be necessary.
- An attendee stated that he thinks restaurants should open where there is a need, usually where there is a high population density for purposes of potential customers. He thinks that restaurants should open organically and that it's risky to subsidize one that cannot support itself.

9. Create a Downtown Arts & Events Fund

- Bret emphasized that this fund would be integrated with all the other projects that have been described.
- No attendees had additional comments for this project.

LPC Priority Project Vote

Bret explained that all Committee members were being asked to participate in a vote to indicate approval (or not) of the slate of projects as they were presented during the meeting. If a committee member had a conflict of interest for any project, they were instructed to mark the "abstain" box for the project.

Next Steps

Bret thanked all attendees for their comments. He explained that the team will work to update the priority project profiles to reflect which project components garnered the most support. He emphasized that the projects will be prioritized upon their submission to DOS in the Strategic Investment Plan.

Bret stated that the Downtown Jamaica DRI Strategic Action Plan will be submitted on Tuesday, February 28, 2017. New York State will review the Plan during the spring of 2017 with project implementation to potentially begin by the summer of 2017.

There is an ongoing discussion about the possibility to continue the efforts of the LPC as the projects begin to be implemented to help facilitate coordination with local organizations. The Committee Co-Chairs, Melva and Carol, will reach out at a later date to inform Committee members how future potential meetings will be facilitated.

The Project Team and Carol thanked the LPC and meeting attendees for their commitment to this effort to make Downtown Jamaica a better place for the community.