

Tonawanda Tomorrow Strategizing Workshop
May 17, 2017, 6:30-8:30 PM
Phillip Sheridan Building



About the Meeting

The third public workshop for Tonawanda Tomorrow provided an opportunity for the community to review and evaluate the draft economic action plan and rank priorities for implementation.

About Tonawanda Tomorrow

Tonawanda Tomorrow is an economic action planning effort led by the Town of Tonawanda and several community partners. The goal is to create good-paying jobs, prepare people for those jobs, and reinvest in what makes the town a great place to live, work, and play. The result is a plan that is grounded in data, was shaped by the community, and is capable of deepening the Town's role in the regional economy.

Overview

Town Councilman William Conrad welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Town Supervisor. He reflected briefly on how far this process has come thanks to everyone's contributions. Rebecca Newberry, from the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York (CACWNY), explained the goals for the workshop and established the ground rules for discussion. Bart Roberts, from the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI), followed with an overview of the economic action plan and the type of feedback the project team was seeking from the community. After the presentation, people skimmed through the plan and ranked strategies and actions individually and then discussed in thematic groups (economy, workforce, and placemaking) their first impressions of the plan and how to improve it. Volunteer facilitators guided the thematic discussions and captured the key points on flipcharts. Participants also had the opportunity to leave individual comments on sticky notes and comment cards. At the end of the evening, the three lead facilitators described the common themes raised in their groups. Rebecca and Bart closed the meeting by outlining the next steps in the project, thanking everyone for coming, and reminding people to submit their meeting evaluation cards.

Who Participated?

56 people attended the workshop, including: Ken Berlinski, Mary Lynn Bieron, George K. Boger, Bob Bostwick, Timothy Callan, Chris Cavarello, William Conrad, Michael Fiels, Nancy Fisher, Edward Gray, Susan Gregg, Evan Haeick, Jim Hartz, Tom Hersey, Sandra Hoehn, Jim Jones, Greg Kuhaneck, Richard Lipsitz, Kevin Long, John Lutz, Teresa Maciocha, Joel Maerten, Ron Malec, Carol Mancuso, Brian McGowan, Pieter Metz, Fred Mikulec, Anita Mitchell, Bill Nolan, Sean O'Neil, Sharon Orshal, Richard Orshal, Thomas O'Shai, Joanna Panasiewicz, Jerry Ptak, Nick Reed, Bart Roberts, Barbara Rohrer, Katie Sacco, Gary Schulenberg, Rose Sickler, Craig E. Speers, David Stinner, Les Stoklosa, Diana Strablow, Peter Stuhlmiller, Maria Tisby, Denis Uminski, Kailee Van Brunt, Dave Wasiura, Lori Wende, Martin Wende, Sharon White, Philip Wilcox, Joseph Winter, and Amy Zeller. Note: Not all attendees are accounted for here as not everyone signed in upon arrival.

They came from 16 different ZIP Codes: 14223 (23), 14217 (21), 14150 (19), 14221 (3), 14214 (3), 14032 (2), 14213 (2), 14094 (2), 14216 (2), 14120 (1), 14304 (1), 14301 (1), 14108 (1), 14702 (1), 14020 (1), and 14226 (1). Note: Some attendees are not accounted for here as not everyone provided a ZIP Code.

What did they say...

Ranking Exercise

Strategies

At each thematic station, attendees reviewed the plan's strategies and indicated which strategy was their top priority by placing a red dot next to it. The result of this exercise was a ranking of strategies from higher to lower importance, namely:

1. Revamp zoning code to emphasize walkability, diverse transportation options, mixed-use development, and other design principles attractive to young people and families.
2. Strengthen the career pipeline for students to access jobs in Tonawanda.
3. Position the town of Tonawanda as a regional center for sustainable manufacturing and trade.
4. Connect businesses and entrepreneurs to our region's growing innovation ecosystem.
5. Extend support services to Tonawanda's small and medium sized businesses to export and expand.
6. Cultivate tools, programs, and ownership solutions that can pave the way for increased public access to the water.
7. Create a local workforce network for the needs of Tonawanda workers and businesses and bring together resources to increase access to opportunities.
8. Help businesses with aging workforces cultivate talent and attract new workers.
9. Connect Tonawanda's recreation and tourism attractions and niches to regional destinations and initiatives.

Please refer to the Appendix for the number of "votes" given to each strategy.

Priority Actions

Attendees also stated which actions were most important to pursue to carry out the strategies. They did so by placing a small blue dot next to their preferred actions. The three most important actions for each thematic group of strategies were:

Economy:

1. Foster partnerships between universities, local business, and the Kenmore Tonawanda Union Free School District.
2. Promote the Town's re-established Low-Interest Small Business Loan Program.
3. Work with the WNY Regional Economic Development Council to ensure Tonawanda's industrial and trade assets receive support and investment.

Workforce:

1. Raise awareness among high school students of higher-paying jobs and career pathways that do not require a four-year degree, particularly ones that exist in Tonawanda and are currently hard to fill.

2. Identify an organization that can lead this collaborative effort and recruit additional partners to regularly work together on unique workforce issues facing Tonawanda workers and businesses.
3. Invest in and grow partnerships across local employers, the Ken-Ton School District, and community-based youth organizations to expose students to local career opportunities through career fairs, summer career camps, job shadowing opportunities, and part-time and summer jobs.

Placemaking:

1. Building off the momentum of Tonawanda Tomorrow, launch a community-based, collaborative partnership focused on developing ownership solutions so that the Huntley property can be transformed from a liability to an asset.
2. In coordination with Erie County and nearby communities, invest in the Tonawanda portion of the Shoreline Trail to bring people to the Tonawanda waterfront from Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and other connected communities.
3. Work through the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) program to prepare strategic sites for sustainable manufacturing and trade activity.

Please refer to the Appendix for the number of “votes” given to each priority action.

Group Discussions

After voting for strategies and priority actions, attendees discussed their first impressions of the draft plan and identified what they liked, what they thought was missing, and what questions they had about the plan or the process. They did this for all three thematic areas of the plan (economy, workforce, and placemaking). Some of the issues brought up include:

- Collaboration between the educational systems and businesses in the community and region is essential, but it’s unclear if this already happens, particularly with respect to vocational education. People are aware that industry has a high need for skilled tradespeople, but they don’t see schools teaching related subjects or widespread awareness among high school students of skilled trades as good career options.
- No consensus on the type of companies the plan should target. Some were concerned that the plan seems to favor small businesses over large ones and that the two shouldn’t be put against one another. Others were strongly in favor of small business, while others thought attracting medium-sized businesses would be an easier task.
- Not everyone understands what will attract companies to town, though some are able to point to a variety of assets that could entice many companies, such as shovel ready sites and the waterfront.
- Housing issues were not adequately addressed in this plan. Some indicated that there is a shortage of four bedroom homes and a greater need for senior apartments in walkable areas near basic services. Others pointed to opportunities that should not be missed, including allowing more high-density housing along major transportation corridors in the upcoming zoning update, promoting the town’s low vacancy rate, and attracting new residents including immigrants. Some wondered what the environmental impact would be of attracting more people to the town.

- Many were interested in the future of the Huntley Power Plant and would like to know what NRG and the different levels of government plan to do with the site. Some want to make sure that the site is cleaned to the highest standard and that energy continues to be dependable and reasonably priced, especially for industry.
- Many were concerned with the fate of other dormant waterfront properties. They expect land ownership and environmental liability issues to be resolved and zoning to allow waterfront redevelopment to allow commercial activities that are compatible with waterfront recreation.

Please refer to the Appendix to see all the original comments received.

Appendix

This section contains a tally of all the stickers given to each strategy and priority action and the notes captured on flipcharts and sticky notes. Please note that the strategies and priority actions in the following tables have been paraphrased for brevity.

Economy

Vote Tally

Strategies & Actions	Votes
ECONOMY	
Sustainable manufacturing center	19
Get REDC to support investment in town	12
Invest in appropriate renewable energy	9
Get utility to make shovel ready sites	7
Market vacant properties for redevelopment	7
ID opps for tighter-knit supply chains	4
Connect businesses to regional innovation syst.	14
Partner w/ schools and universities	22
Market business incubator, accelerator servs.	12
Set new kinds of business spaces	10
Support small business export and expansion	12
Promote town low-int. small business loan	13
Educate small firms re. exporting	11
Promote bi-national trade	4
Increase trade association participation	3
Market the FTZ to small firms	1

Flipchart Notes

- Do schools ask employers what is needed in labor force?
- Future sustain green jobs high level education.
- Not value placed on trades. Economy-workforce are hand in hand.
 - Collaboration (education, labor).
- Connect business and entrepreneurs.
- New age economy.
- Easier to attract mid-range companies.
- Shovel ready sites.
- What will attract the companies?

- We have the waterfront.
- Bring in new residents – It’s not in plan.
 - Vacancy rate is low.
 - Immigrant population.
- Lack of four bedroom homes in town.
- Might need housing in this plan.
- Industry needs dependable and reasonable priced power.
 - What are you doing with Huntley?
 - Ask NRG, Town, County, State.
- Take a regional approach.
- What would incubator space look like?
 - Where would it be?
 - There are different types of incubator spaces.
- Repurpose of original buildings.
- What part of plan is the Town accessible to? Now. In the future.
- Felt forced to make decision between small business and manufacturing. We shouldn’t put these against one another. Incubators lend to all business.

Sticky Notes

Note: Each bullet point corresponds to one sticky note.

- \$ for dormant waterfront properties. How connected is Voc Ed to local business and industry. Solve enviro. liability issues for dormant site.
- They’ve listened to everyone. They have a buzz from the community. Too broad. What type of workforce is necessary. What types of businesses. Where do we want \$ to go.
- It’s really a broad overview of everything we discussed and all our collective input. The devil is in the details. Land ownership issues. (1) Businesses/owners/who makes money/. (2) Place – type of community. (3) Workforce – type of jobs, accessibility. Red dots/big picture strategy.

Workforce

Vote Tally

Strategies & Actions	Votes
WORKFORCE	
Career pipeline	25
Raise student awareness of skilled trades	18
Grow school-community org. partnerships	13
Develop hands-on learning programs	6
Get companies to do school outreach	2
Workforce network	10
ID leading organization for network	14
Inventory potential training partners	11
Bring back WIB	4
Reform policies affecting workforce programs	1
One-stop center	0
Cultivate talented workforce	7

Sector-based, shared training w/ region orgs	12
Use retirees for training	11
ID small business workforce needs	8
Promote in-company career pathways	2
Educate local HR re. progs. for aging workers	1
Employer-facing training programs	0

Flipchart Notes

- 1st impressions:
 - Prioritize (mindful of time)
 - 1st create network.
 - 2. Bring people together, identify resources, retrain.
 - 3. Educate students.
- Outreach to corporations – what are needs, jobs, training?
- Transportation – to get to jobs. Need more public transportation for workers.
- Small businesses are important!
- Infrastructure.
- Supportive services.
- Complex.
- Too many choices.
- Too general – need specifics.
- Lots of information – need time to read and digest.
- Need links to employers – get industry to come to table.
- Need schools involved.
- Schools need to teach and promote trades.
- Retrain older workforce to do newer jobs.
- Lines up with industrial goals.
- Positive attitude for industrial workforce.
- Stronger connection between local industry and vocational ed.
- More awareness of training on vocation education -> educate educators.
- Student awareness of careers.
- Employers identify skill sets of tomorrow.
- Mentoring/adjunct profs/apprentices (retired/retiring workers)

Sticky Notes

Note: Each bullet point corresponds to one sticky note.

- More apartments for seniors – near small grocery store or drug store. Small retail stores done in a limited fashion. Stores to enhance the nearness to the water. I.e. Ikea, sandal shop, ice cream shop, tennis shop, raincoat/golashes/umbrellas. More transportation, ie buses, vans.
- Support higher density housing. Show numbers.
- Impressions: Needs to be narrowed considerably. “Immediate targets” are excellent jumping off points. Important for community input to continue on a consistent basis. Especially for waterfront access and dev’t.

- Want to know: Cost of implementing some of these plans. Any funding available. Possible to attract more private \$\$ investment?
- Like about plan: Has all necessary info available: demographics, mfg, jobs, etc. Good suggestions for job dev't, incl partnering w/ schools for trade/vocational education.
- Encouragement of high density housing multitenant 6 or 8 stories high along major corridors and in walkable neighborhood when doing zoning changes.
- What's missing? Suppo. Any concerns? What is good?

Placemaking

Vote Tally

Strategies & Actions	Votes
PLACEMAKING	
Revamp zoning	30
Funding to upgrade zoning	12
Continue complete streets	11
NFTA & business transit planning	10
Support TOD along Niagara Falls Blvd.	8
Re-imagine auto-oriented corridors	6
Waterfront access	11
Transform Huntley site	20
Prepare BOA sites for industrial use	14
Redevelop Cherry Farm	4
ID rec. activities compatible w/ industry	2
Connect local attractions to region	1
Invest in Shoreline Trail	18
Enhance rail-trail connections	8
Waterfront recreation amenities	3
Examine Huntley reuse for tourism	4
Tourism marketing	1

Flipchart Notes

- Reaction:
 - Aggressive DEC involvement – Huntley make cleanup to highest standard and other sites.
 - Metro rail expansion.
 - Community gardens.
 - More emphasis on parks.
- Missing
 - Focus on waterborn commerce.
 - Housing development – waterfront.
 - Need zoning to implement waterfront development – chart 1 & 2 go together.
 - Environmental impacts - if attracting more people.
 - Updating recreation facilities – skate park, winter outdoor hockey.
 - Housing – larger.
- Other ideas:
 - Higher density housing tall buildings for housing – lofts.

- Upscale apartments for seniors.
- Map showing available land.
- Clusters of small high end retail stores and bike lanes to attract young.

Sticky Notes

None were received.