

NY Forward – Capital Region - Athens

Subject	MINUTES LPC Meeting #3	Date	Monday, August 18, 2025
Place	Volunteer Firehouse 39 Third St.	Time	6:00-8:00pm
Distribution	<u>Local Planning Committee</u> Amy Serrago, Mayor (co-chair) <i>James Hannahs (co-chair) (absent)</i> Tim Albright Todd Bernard Stephan Bradicich Sarah Grinberg Mike Lee <i>Jim Martino (absent)</i> <i>Paul Petramale (absent)</i> Carol Pfister Merrill Roth Andrea Smallwood Jeff Strockbine	<u>State Team</u> Matthew Smith, DOS Mary Barthelme, HCR <u>Consultant Team</u> Ian Nicholson, Buro Happold Isabel Mulay, Buro Happold Dan D'Oca, Interboro <u>Public</u> ~22 individuals	

Meeting Summary:

Please see 'AT_LPC Meeting 3_Slides_record' for the presentation shared during the meeting which parallels the discussion summarized below.

Action items are called out in **bold-italic highlight**

Welcome and Agenda

Matt (DOS) welcomes the group to the third NY Forward LPC meeting. He briefly overviews the meeting agenda and reminds the room that these meetings are open to the public, but not intended to be public interactive workshops.

He then briefly overviews the meeting agenda.

Opening Remarks

Mayor Serrago (LPC Co-Chair) highlights her excitement about the submitted projects.

Code of Conduct

Matt (DOS) reads the Code of Conduct preamble, and reviews key points from the Code of Conduct that LPC members are expected to abide by.

LPC is invited to submit any further necessary recusal forms. Paper copies are offered, and digital versions are to be shared following the meeting.

Updates: Planning Process & Engagement

Ian (BH) review of what's been done so far and what is on the horizon (see slides).

Dan (Interboro) provides synopsis of the engagement done to date, including an update on responses to the digital survey regarding vision, goals, and assessment of downtown. Concludes by reviewing the upcoming engagement activities planned.

Vision, Goals, & Strategies

Ian (BH) reviews the NYF area boundary and the vision and goals for downtown that were finalized at the prior LPC meeting. Proposed draft "revitalization strategies" are presented that will attempt to provide more fine-grained, actionable recommendations for the Village of Athens that will anchor the "Community Roadmap" section of the SIP. Ian explains that this roadmap will provide a place to tie the vision, goals, and strategies to prior and ongoing planning work happening in and around the Village, as well as elaborate on findings uncovered throughout the NYF process that may not directly relate to projects recommended for funding in the SIP. The LPC will have the opportunity to review and provide comment on the Revitalization Strategies via digital feedback.

Project Evaluation Criteria

Ian (BH) reviews the process and timing of evaluating the projects that have been submitted through the Open Call. LPC will provide their assessment of each project against all Evaluation Criteria via an online form that will be distributed by the consultant team. The results of the evaluation will then be reviewed at the 4th LPC meeting.

Submitted Projects

Ian (BH) provides summary of the projects received: 22 primary projects total, from 19 distinct sponsors, with \$10.7 million requested of NY Forward funds, leveraging over \$22.2 million in total investment.

Isabel (BH) and Ian (BH) present each of the submitted projects in turn, with discussion among the LPC for each. The intent here was to broadly familiarize the LPC with the Projects submitted. LPC members have access to the full project application and supporting materials submitted by the Sponsors in order to make their full evaluation.

A. Create a Riverfront Access Hub

- Discussion about location of ADA kayak dock – prior proposals had kept it in its current isolated location, while the initial NYF submission shows it moved to a more-central location near the park and ferry slip. Concern about safety, with conflicts between kayaks and the volume of motorized boats maneuvering around the expanded docks.
 - Ian (BH) helps to clarify that this doesn't have to be decided at this point – it would be a similar cost item, and actual design would have to go thru the standard public process which would necessarily happen *after* NYF is completed.
 - The existing dock had received a grant ca. 15 years ago, but not future money is identified.
 - Also concern about parking and kayak storage – preference to keep that away from the core of the park and the terminus of the 2nd St view over the river.

B. Implement Complete Streets for 2nd St.

- Mayor confirms that the \$700k grant should be flexible and compatible with the proposed NYF project, and will be going towards the replacement of street trees and related planting areas.

C. Improve the Waterfront Intersection

- Discussion about what the proposed budget would actually be paying for.
 - While actual design won't be decided thru the NYF process, the costs are anticipated to cover a series of various complete streets measures, including new/improved sidewalks, 2nd St Square improvements, street surface treatments from kayak launch to Marden garden, and other items.

D. Develop a Retreat on Water Street

- Multiple members make positive comments about the progress already being made onsite.

E. Revive the Athens Cultural Center

- Multiple comments supportive of the Sponsor and how well organized their efforts have been.

F. Improve Mount Hope Cemetery

- Confirmed that Sponsor is a non-profit.
- Multiple comments supportive of the role the Cemetery plays in the Village and the programming that they do.
- Ian (BH) cautions that this project may be challenging due to a small project budget, some ineligible cost items in their current budget, location firmly outside the current NYF boundary – all items to be discussed with Sponsor. Nevertheless, project will remain in contention and be evaluated by LPC and included in the Workshop materials.

G. Renovate the Mixed-Use Opera House

- Comment observing that the building is the centerpiece of the Village.

H. Renovate Athens Studio

- Observed that there is no Sponsor match identified. Consultant team will discuss this with Sponsor, as they are required to provide at least 25%.

I. Restore the Barn on N Warren Street

- Discussion about the relatively obscure location on a dead-end alley.

J. Enhance Night School Brewpub

- Question about ownership of the equipment, since Night School does not own the building. Consultant team will discuss this issue with the Sponsor, and also with the building owner, who is the Sponsor for Project G.

K. Repair the Marina Bulkhead

- Clarified that the project intends to replace the portion of bulkhead that is currently concrete with new steel sheet piling, to match the other section on the property.
- Clarified that there is no new boat docking proposed as part of this project – would think of it more as “preserving” boat docking, since the current bulkhead is failing and does not protect the property from regular flooding.

L. Rehabilitate 9 N Franklin Street

- No specific comments noted.

M. Renovate 13-17 Second Street

- Some discussion about whether the building contains 2 or 3 rental apartments.
 - *[Post-meeting note: Consultant has confirmed that building contains 2 rental apartments, and 1 commercial space.]*
- Discussion about whether the ground floor on the right half of the building could be converted to commercial use, while maintaining the historic façade configuration.

N. Revive 6&8 South Franklin Street

- Request to confirm with Sponsor that the proposed units will be rentals.

O. Modernize 18 Second Street

- No specific comments noted.

P. Create the Esperanza Media Arts Center

- Discussed the Project's significant distance from the current NYF boundary, which creates additional onus on the Project to be truly transformative to be competitive for final funding award. No decision on NYF boundary is necessary at this meeting – the results of LPC evaluation and public workshop comments will be taken into consideration for a decision to be made at LPC-4.

Q. Restore 40 Second Street

- Question about why filling the retail space was not part of the proposed project. Some speculation included that a tenant would not want to pay rent while a major façade renovation was taking place, so the Sponsor may just be prioritizing one ahead of the other. In any case, **the consultant team will discuss this with the Sponsor to clarify.**

R. Upgrade Stewart House and River Garden

- Observed that some of the proposed scope may be duplicative with the Village projects. **Consultant team will facilitate coordination to ensure alignment by the next meeting.**
- Bulkhead portion is being coordinated with Sponsor of Project K – intent is to establish a consistent aesthetic along the shoreline with a continuous bulkhead – also provides additional flood protection.

S. Improve the Tenth House Healing Center

- No specific comments noted.

T. Redevelop the Trinity Church Building

- No specific comments noted.

U. Enhance 62 Second Street

- Some interest expressed in converting the ground floor back to commercial/retail use. Consultant will discuss with Sponsor.

V. Restore the Façade at 46 Second Street

- Request to confirm Sponsor's intent with residential units (confirm they will be rental) as well as the commercial space (confirm whether it will be a tenant, or the Sponsor's business).

Small Projects

Ian (BH) presents an overview of the small project interest letters received and mentions if the LPC decides to pursue the Small Project Fund, it will be part of the \$4.5M in grant funding. He also clarifies that the final decision of NYF boundary will apply to the SPF as well, so if the LPC wants to accommodate any potential SPF projects or areas, we'd need to ensure the boundary includes them.

Discussed that the interest demonstrated here would likely not be sufficient to support funding an SPF. Multiple LPC members expressed that there are potential small projects that they do not see on this list and that actual interest is much higher. Discussed possibility of organizing a 2nd Open Call just for Small Project Interest Letters.

Mary (HCR) clarified that as of last year (NYF Round 2), single-family properties are now eligible projects for the SPF, subject to a strict cap to be set by the grant administrator in consultation with HCR – likely in the vicinity of 10% of the total \$300k potential SPF allocation. Consultant team will correct the slide to show 10 N Church St as eligible and counting towards demonstration of interest in an SPF.

LPC Q&A

Some discussion regarding ground floor use on 2nd St – there is a new ordinance that requires commercial use, with exception for pre-existing residential use. In general, LPC expressed strong preference to see commercial uses supported and expanded as much as possible, and requested consultant team have that conversation with relevant Sponsors to clarify intent and see if any shifts might be possible.

Discussion about the clawback provision – “what happens if an awarded Sponsor decides to turn around and sell their property right after receiving the NYF reimbursement?” While the provision varies slightly depending on contracting agency, Matt (DOS) and Mary (HCR) both confirm that there is typically a 5-year, vesting clawback schedule – in other words, a Sponsor would be expected to hold their property for at least 5 years after receiving their final NYF reimbursement.

General request from LPC members to ask any Sponsor of a Project that includes rental housing about their approach to affordability.

Public Comment

Concern expressed that the foundation sponsoring the memorial garden (Project D) has significant capital resources and does not need State funding to make the project happen. Ian (BH) pulls up the Evaluation Criteria slide and points out that a Sponsor’s need for the funds can be considered by the LPC as part of some of the evaluation criteria (most directly, the Cost Effectiveness criteria, ie “the project would represent an effective and efficient use of public resources). However, Ian also points out the goal of the NYF program is downtown revitalization, so there is not a strict bias towards needy sponsors at the expense of affluent ones. LPC is directed to consider each project according to the evaluation criteria.

Next steps

LPC evaluations are due by September 5th. This gives the Consultant team 1 week to incorporate the results into the presentation materials for the LPC-4 meeting on 9/15.

END OF SUMMARY