



Village of Lancaster

NY Forward

Public Engagement Plan



NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

NY Forward



VILLAGE OF LANCASTER NY FORWARD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Local Planning Committee Meetings 4

Project Identification7

Engaging Hard-to-Reach Populations.....7

Public Workshops..... 8

Stakeholder Meetings.....9

Online Engagement11

Local Outreach Activities.....12



Introduction

New York State's NY Forward (NYF) program, a pillar of the State's economic revitalization agenda, aims to breathe new life into downtown areas, making them thriving hubs that attract business growth, job creation, diverse housing options, arts and culture, recreational opportunities, and urban redevelopment. In Round 1 of NYF, the Village of Lancaster was selected to receive \$4.5 million in funding for revitalization.

By November 2023, the NYF Local Planning Committee (LPC) is set to devise a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) for the Village of Lancaster. This plan will comprehensively evaluate local resources and potential, and propose economic growth, transportation, housing, and community development initiatives. These projects will resonate with the community's envisioned blueprint for downtown revitalization and be ready for implementation.

Public engagement is a crucial element of the NYF planning phase. An open, transparent planning process is the bedrock of the success of the NYF initiative. As the planning evolves, community stakeholders — which include local government, key employers, institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups, organizations, and the general public — are encouraged to attend LPC meetings and public workshops. These forums provide an opportunity to understand the NYF process and the anticipated results; ask questions; share feedback on the findings, goals, and recommendations; and propose project ideas. The aim is to foster an environment of inclusive participation and shared responsibility in shaping the Village of Lancaster's future.

This Public Engagement Plan presents a comprehensive and inclusive approach to engaging the Lancaster community in the NYF process. With an emphasis on ensuring that no community group is left out of the conversation, this plan serves as a roadmap towards a shared vision of a vibrant downtown area by providing numerous engagement opportunities throughout the planning process.

The LPC is a representative cross-section of the community. It includes community members such as residents; leaders from business, education, human services, health care, religion, arts, and culture; and local and New York State agency representatives.

Lancaster's NYF will be administered by the New York State Department of State (DOS) in close coordination with Empire State Development (ESD), New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and other State partners, with support from a Consultant Team led by LaBella Associates. The State agencies, consultants, and LPC collectively represent the project team. The LPC will be responsible for meeting regularly with the Consultant Team and representing the public throughout the NYF process. The LPC will comment on the Consultant Team's work that guides the plan's formation. The LPC will also be responsible for sharing information about the NYF with their networks and communities. Members of the LPC will



play an important role in ensuring that the NYF plan is grounded in the values and aspirations of the Lancaster community. LPC meetings will be open to the public, and these meetings will be publicly announced.

Members of the Lancaster NYF LPC include:

- Hon. Lynne Ruda, Mayor of the Village of Lancaster (Co-Chair);
- Mr. Paul Brown, Western New York Regional Economic Development Council representative (Co-Chair);
- Ms. Kimberly Beaty, a resident of Lancaster;
- Mr. Luke Borkowski, a resident of Lancaster;
- Mr. Joseph Crumlish, President of the WNY Mountain Biking Association;
- Ms. Jennifer Eichenseer, a resident of Lancaster;
- Mr. Matthew Fischione, Code Enforcement Officer for the Village of Lancaster Building Department;
- Ms. Deborah Glowny, Vice President & Community Office Manager of Bank on Buffalo (Lancaster Branch);
- Mr. Alan Kurtzman, Owner of The New York Store;
- Mr. Paul Leone, Chief Executive Officer of the Lancaster Industrial Development Agency;
- Mr. Michael Meyer, Chair of the Village of Lancaster Historic Preservation Commission;
- Ms. Kirsten Shelly, Member of the Village of Lancaster Climate Smart Task Force;
- Mr. Daniel Sundell, Owner of Dark Forest Chocolate; and
- Mr. Thomas Van Nortwick, a resident of Lancaster.

The Local Planning Committee will meet a minimum of five times beginning in May 2023. The Consultant Team will organize, facilitate, and summarize these meetings.

Local Planning Committee Meetings

The LPC, acting as the steering committee of the process, will hold regular meetings to brainstorm ideas, provide direction to the Consultant Team, review planning materials, discuss potential projects, and prioritize actions. Alongside the Consultant Team and State agency team, the LPC will determine an appropriate meeting schedule to accomplish these goals and deliver an on-time Strategic Investment Plan (SIP).

All LPC meetings will be held in person and open to the public. The process will maintain consistency by holding LPC meetings at the same location. This approach will help regular attendees familiarize themselves with the venue, thus facilitating their continued participation. Time will be allocated for public comment.



The following meetings have been scheduled, covering the critical topics as outlined below:

LPC Meeting #1 - Tuesday May 30, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building

Topics to include:

- Team introductions;
- Overview of the NYF program;
- Familiarization with the community's application;
- Overview of the planning process scope and timeline;
- Confirmation of the NYF boundary as compact, walkable, and well-defined;
- Input on the Public Engagement Plan and Open Call for Projects;
- Input on stakeholders, various constituent groups, and hard-to-reach populations to engage;
- Identification of opportunities and challenges; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

LPC Meeting #2 - Thursday, June 22, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building

Topics to include:

- Planning process and engagement updates;
- Downtown profile and assessment highlights;
- Visioning exercises; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

LPC Meeting #3 - Tuesday, July 18, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building

Topics to include:

- Planning process and engagement updates;
- Finalizing community vision, goals, and revitalization strategies;
- Review project evaluation criteria;
- Review and discuss proposed projects;
- Identify projects to remove from funding consideration as appropriate;
- Review any proposed boundary amendments that may be needed to incorporate potentially transformative projects; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

LPC Meeting #4 - Tuesday, August 15, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building



Topics to include:

- Planning process & engagement updates;
- Review project evaluation criteria;
- Review and discuss proposed projects;
- Identify additional project information needed to support decision-making;
- Identify projects to remove from funding consideration; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

LPC Meeting #5 - Tuesday, September 19, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building

Topics to include:

- Review project evaluation criteria;
- Planning process and engagement updates;
- Review and discuss proposed projects;
- Identify additional project information needed to support decision-making;
- Identify projects to remove from funding consideration; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

LPC Meeting #6 (as needed; alternately, the below topics would be covered in LPC Meeting #5) - Tuesday, October 17, 2023 | 6:00pm | Lancaster Municipal Building

Topics to include:

- Review of project evaluation criteria;
- Review and discuss proposed projects;
- Identify projects to remove from funding consideration;
- LPC vote on the final slate of proposed projects; and
- Public comment (three minutes per speaker and comment cards).

The LPC's dedication to an open, inclusive, and community-focused approach underpins the success of the NYF planning process.

All LPC meetings will be advertised at least two weeks in advance, including posting information on the project website, Village website, and Village social media, and sharing information with the local Merchants Association, Chamber of Commerce, and local media.

Meeting materials will be available on the www.LancasterNYForward.com website the day after the meeting. The public can comment or ask questions at the meeting during the public comment period or by using comment cards that will be available at each meeting.

All meetings will be documented, and summaries will be prepared as part of the SIP record. Meeting summaries will be posted on the project website.



Project Identification

The NYF initiative in Lancaster is dedicated to empowering the community's revitalization. All community members will be invited to propose project ideas for consideration by the LPC.

Community's needs and interests will be solicited through public engagement events that could inform potential projects. Projects will also be identified through the Open Call for Projects process, as outlined below.

The Open Call for Projects process will be reviewed with the LPC and the public at LPC Meeting 1, including a discussion of the purpose, process and timelines of the Open Call, review of the Open Call for Projects Form, discussion of the available technical assistance, and review of the forms of advertising and promotion to be utilized.

The Open Call for Projects process will launch on May 31, 2023 and will be open until July 14, 2023 (over six weeks). This extended timeframe will provide greater opportunity for property owners, developers, and businesses to develop their project ideas and submit the form for LPC consideration.

The form will be available digitally on the project website, with hard copies available at Village Hall. Forms will be able to be submitted electronically or as hard copies, minimizing the potential for exclusion due to internet access or digital savvy.

The Open Call for Projects process will be shared on the project website, Village website, and Village social media, in addition to local media outlets, the Village Merchants Association, and the local Chamber of Commerce. These local partners will be encouraged to share the Open Call for Projects form with local businesses. The Village will post regular reminders about the Open Call for Projects, technical assistance opportunities, and deadlines.

The consultant Team will hold a virtual Public Information Session and will offer one-on-one technical assistance to project sponsors, either in-person or virtually. They will maintain a log of all session attendees and provide a list of outside Technical Assistance and Financing Resources as needed. The Consultant Team will be available to assist project sponsors in completing the NYF Open Call for Projects Form and other project development activities as needed.

Engaging Hard-to-Reach Populations

The NYF process works best when all community members are engaged. The LPC, State team, stakeholders, and municipal officials will work to identify hard-to-reach populations. Identification will be based on existing demographic data, State resources, and local knowledge. This includes but is not limited to youth, seniors, people with disabilities, and racial minorities.



Potential barriers to engagement, such as timing, the format of meetings, facility accessibility, and language barriers will be anticipated, and the process will be adapted whenever possible to make it more inclusive. All meetings will be held in ADA-accessible spaces.

The process will leverage the relationships that LPC members, municipal officials, and other community stakeholders already have with diverse populations to extend outreach. This strategy helps in reaching people who need to be noticed.

The process will tailor its outreach efforts to each community group, considering their needs, interests, and communication styles. This will include:

- Targeted outreach to students and youth in the community through developing a youth-specific survey and materials to send home with students.
- Targeted outreach to residents of the Lancaster Towers, a large affordable senior housing complex located in the NYF area.
- Providing hard copies of the public survey at the Senior Center to ensure access for those who may not feel comfortable completing the survey on a computer.
- Translation services and translated documents will be provided upon request or if a substantial population speaks a language other than English.

This personalized approach helps ensure that everyone feels seen, heard, and valued in this process.

Public Workshops

Public Workshops are devised to actively involve the community in the planning process, enabling the project team to gather ideas, feedback, and insights to shape the SIP.

The workshops will include a blend of presentations, open houses, charrettes, and online components to facilitate maximum public involvement. Each workshop will have an engaging, interactive feature, using diverse planning exercises to stimulate public engagement. The public workshops will be located at various community centers within the study area. This is to ensure that different parts of the community have a chance to host a workshop, fostering greater engagement and inclusivity.

A minimum of two public workshops will be held, as outlined below:

1. Public Workshop #1 (to be held between the first and second LPC meetings, on June 15th at the Lancaster Opera House):
 - Topics: Overview of the NYF program, identifying community needs, challenges, and opportunities impacting revitalization, soliciting project ideas, and interactive feedback sessions.



- Activities: NY Forward 101 (to answer general queries); vision, goals, and strategies discussion; example projects discussion; and a mapping exercise for identifying issues, opportunities, and project ideas.
2. Public Workshop #2 (Around the third or fourth LPC meeting):
- Topics: Update on the NYF process; key findings from the downtown profile and assessment; overview of community vision statement, goals, and proposed projects; and interactive public feedback sessions.
 - Activities: Interactive planning exercises, avoiding ranking or prioritization of individual projects, soliciting feedback for improvements.

At the LPC's discretion, a third public workshop may be held after the LPC has voted on the final slate of proposed projects. If held, the meeting would consist of an overview of the NYF process, a review of the final list of proposed projects, and next steps regarding project awards and implementation.

All public workshops will be advertised at least two weeks in advance, including posting information on the project website, Village website, and Village social media, and sharing information with the Village Merchants Association, Chamber of Commerce, and local media.

An interactive, online version of the public workshop materials will be posted to the NYF website after each workshop to provide another opportunity for feedback and participation for anyone that is unable to attend in-person.

Through these workshops, to the project will ensure the community is heard, involved, and informed about the NYF initiative in Lancaster.

Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder meetings will deepen the project team's understanding of the community's needs, uncover local opportunities, and guide the development of potential NYF projects. The following section outlines how stakeholders will be identified, the schedule for outreach, the meeting format, and the preliminary stakeholder list.

The LPC and municipal representatives will recommend stakeholders and community leaders to interview, with a focus on identifying representatives of hard-to-reach populations early in the planning process to ensure their perspectives are included. A preliminary list of stakeholder organizations is provided below:

- Lancaster VOICE (Lancaster Village Merchants Association);
- Depew-Lancaster Boys and Girl's Club;
- Lancaster Beautification Committee;
- Lancaster Central School District;



- Lancaster Opera House;
- Lancaster Area Chamber of Commerce;
- Village staff;
- Lancaster Senior Center;
- Lancaster Youth Bureau;
- Local social clubs (e.g., Elks);
- Emergency Response (e.g., Police, Fire, EMS);
- Local VFW;
- Lancaster Library; and
- Belmont Housing Resources for WNY

The stakeholder meetings will be conducted through a blend of in-person and virtual meetings, ensuring everyone can participate. The meetings will begin at the onset of the planning process and may require follow-up discussions as the process unfolds. Coordinating with the LPC and municipal officials early in the planning process will be essential to building connections with various stakeholders.

Early meetings will focus on downtown assets, challenges, opportunities, and establishing vision and goals for downtown. Once projects are identified, conversations will shift towards obtaining specific feedback and identifying gaps or missing projects in the list. Some sample questions for these stakeholder calls are identified below:

- What are Lancaster's greatest assets and challenges?
- What new trends and opportunities have you experienced in Lancaster, and how do you imagine that the Village could build on these opportunities?
- What unique needs and opportunities do you see for Lancaster, given your organization's role and experience?
- What unique perspective does your organization bring to the NYF planning process?
- What role do you see your organization having in the Village's revitalization?

Stakeholders will receive takeaway materials about the NYF planning process, links to the project website, and information about upcoming public events. We will proactively invite stakeholders and their networks to public engagement events.

After each stakeholder meeting, the Consultant Team will summarize the feedback and provide meeting summaries to the LPC for review.

Stakeholder meetings are crucial in making the NYF initiative a community-driven project, ensuring all perspectives are included and acknowledged. This structured, inclusive stakeholder meeting process aims to foster a sense of ownership and collaboration among all involved in the NYF planning process.



Online Engagement

A dedicated project website has been established as the main hub for all online information and interaction related to Lancaster's NYF process. The website will be active and updated regularly throughout the planning process. The domain name for the project website is www.lancasterNYForward.com/. Regular updates will occur weekly or more frequently, if required, depending on the project stages and upcoming events.

The website includes the following key components:

- Overview of the NYF program, process, and timeline
- Information on the role and membership of the LPC;
- Link to the NYS NYF website and to other local planning resources;
- Map of the NYF boundary;
- Notices for upcoming public engagement events, including LPC meetings and public workshops;
- A link to the public survey and the Open Call for Projects Form;
- A forum for the public to submit comments or questions;
- Presentation materials from LPC meetings and public workshops;
- Summaries of LPC meetings and public workshops; and
- Online public comment opportunities mirroring those offered at in-person public workshops.

The Consultant Team will regularly monitor the website for comments and questions, ensuring responses are provided promptly.

In addition to the project website, information, including project updates and meeting announcements, will also be posted on the Village website and social media. The LPC and Municipal Representatives will share social media posts and other online materials within their networks and through municipal outlets.

An online visioning survey will also be administered to collect input from the public on opportunities and challenges for downtown Lancaster. The survey will consist of targeted questions for adult residents, youth, and visitors. This will ensure feedback from a diverse range of perspectives. Surveys will be available online via SurveyMonkey (accessible via the project website) and in a paper format. The survey findings will be summarized and presented to the public. They will also be included in the record of the SIP.

Overall, the online engagement strategy will seek to complement and enhance the in-person engagement efforts, reaching as many community members as possible and providing diverse opportunities for public participation.



Local Outreach Activities

The local outreach plan for the Village of Lancaster's NYF process is designed to engage a broad range of constituents through various unique community-focused activities. The Consultant Team, LPC members, and Village staff (collectively, the "outreach team") will engage the community in non-traditional community engagement formats.

The outreach team will attend standing community meetings, such as local civic organizations (e.g., Elks), Merchants Association, and Chamber of Commerce meetings, to share information about the NYF program and gather community input. LPC members, who are already involved in these organizations, will spearhead this effort.

Local events, such as Sip & Shop on Friday, June 16th and the Village's 4th of July weekend festival will be utilized as venues for raising awareness about the NYF process, offering another touchpoint for community members. Consultant Team members will be present at the event, distributing flyers promoting the NYF process and the survey.

To garner visitor feedback, promotion of the NYF process and visioning survey will be placed as inserts in Opera House programs, and surveys will be available for completion outside/before a show. This targets local attendees and visitors to the Opera House.

To engage the local youth, the Mayor will make presentations about Lancaster NYF to high school classes and will share the visioning survey directly with this group. In addition, flyers outlining the NYF process with QR links to the survey will be available to elementary students. To engage other hard-to-reach populations, the Mayor will make presentations and place standing boards and survey materials at the Lancaster Senior Center, library, and Lancaster Towers.

This diverse, locally tailored outreach plan ensures that all constituents of Lancaster can engage with and contribute to the NYF process, making it a truly community-driven initiative. The project team will continue to evaluate other potential opportunities for community engagement throughout the planning process.