



MEETING SUMMARY

Village of Lancaster NY Forward Public Workshop #1

Thursday, June 15, 2023
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Lancaster Opera House
21 Central Avenue
Lancaster, NY

The first Lancaster NY Forward (NYF) Public Workshop was held on June 15, 2023, from 6-8 pm at the Lancaster Opera House. The workshop was open to the public and was attended by 48 members of the community, who signed in upon arrival.

Each attendee was given a handout version of the station boards, post-its, and a pen upon entry. This allowed them to jot down their thoughts and place them on the respective station boards. This arrangement facilitated a free flow of ideas as attendees were able to circulate freely between the stations.

The welcoming music provided by Lancaster High School students echoed throughout the Opera House's foyer, creating a vibrant atmosphere that encouraged interaction and open discussion.

The workshop featured five stations, each offering different types of engagement:

Station 1 - NY Forward 101: This station provided information about the NY Forward program, showcasing a fact sheet and copies of the Village's NYF application and the public guidebook. A LaBella staff person was available for any questions or clarifications.

Station 2 - Vision, Goals, and Strategies: This station focused on the future direction of Lancaster and the strategies required to achieve the goals. **Attendees reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed vision statement for the Village of Lancaster.** Most participants appreciated the historical character of the vision statement, with some noting the statement's clear and strong stance. They expressed nostalgia for the village's look and feel from the 1950s and 1960s before the fire of 1961 and Urban Renewal gutted downtown. Attendees emphasized the vision as welcoming and felt it unifies the community.



However, there were varying opinions on including affordable housing within the vision statement. Some participants were supportive, seeing it as part of an equitable approach. Conversely, others expressed concerns, fearing that it could impact the elegance and historical character of the village. A few participants suggested the vision statement was too lengthy, while others mentioned the need for more parks or playgrounds for children.

Despite differing viewpoints, the overall sentiment was positive, with many expressing hope and excitement for what the vision could bring to Lancaster. The feedback indicated the vision is ambitious yet achievable, provided strong leadership and public investment exist. Participants also highlighted the importance of bridging and celebrating history while accommodating a modern lifestyle. Words used to describe the vision statement included economical, friendly, inclusive, direct, and hopeful.

Attendees were asked to describe downtown Lancaster today in one word. The responses were varied, encapsulating a broad range of perceptions. Many described the area as 'quaint,' 'lively,' 'enchanting,' 'pretty,' 'memorable,' and 'cozy,' highlighting the positive and inviting atmosphere.

Several participants identified the downtown area as 'evolving' and undergoing a 'rebirth,' recognizing recent improvements and potential for growth. Some words, such as 'growing,' 'on the verge of full bloom,' and 'about time,' reflected a sense of anticipation and optimism for what downtown Lancaster could become.

However, others described the downtown as 'small,' 'empty,' 'limited,' and 'inaccessible,' suggesting a need for more variety, accessibility, and fuller utilization of the area. A few attendees mentioned 'over-political' and 'cars,' indicating possible concerns over local politics and transportation.

Overall, these one-word descriptions capture the diverse viewpoints and expectations of the community for the future of downtown Lancaster.

Attendees were asked to envision downtown Lancaster in five to ten years. There was a consensus on wanting to see a vibrant, inclusive, and active community. The term 'quaint' was recurrent, underlining the desire to maintain the historic charm while fostering development.

Many participants envisioned a lively downtown area bustling with shops, restaurants, unique opportunities, and events. Some likened their vision to a more compact version of East Aurora' and a place that's 'economically vibrant, the place to be,' expressing the desire for Lancaster to be a destination for locals and visitors. The need for the downtown to provide all the goods and services that residents need was also emphasized.

Community and inclusivity were strong themes. Attendees saw the downtown area as a 'community-based,' 'friendly,' and 'exciting' hub, accessible to all and as a meeting point for



social activities. Some suggested further developing green spaces, paths, and bike rental stations to foster an active, environmentally conscious community.

There were also suggestions to expand walkability beyond current areas and introduce affordable housing. The vision of a 'historically enchanting,' 'elegant,' and 'inspirational' downtown was also shared, capturing a desire to bridge Lancaster's past with its future. Some also wished for 'more open-mindedness,' indicating a desire for a progressive and forward-thinking community.

In summary, attendees visualized a future downtown Lancaster that balances its historic character with modern vibrancy, inclusivity, and community-oriented growth.

Station 3 - How to Improve Lancaster: Attendees were encouraged to share their ideas and suggestions on what could be done to enhance the quality of life in Lancaster.

Attendees were asked to share ideas about what would make downtown Lancaster more equitable, resilient, and sustainable. Several themes emerged from the suggestions shared by the participants.

One prevalent theme was community engagement and cultural activities. This included local farmers' markets, art and music festivals, family events, and additional programming at the opera house. Some suggested a small stage or patio area for local performances and monthly craft shows featuring local contributors, showcasing a desire for more creative and community-driven events. A marketing plan was also suggested to promote the downtown area better.

Improving accessibility and inclusivity was another key theme. Ideas here included more ADA-friendly areas, housing accessibility for all income levels, more parking access, and updating historic buildings to accommodate everyone. The need for more diversity was underlined, with suggestions to encourage women and minority-owned businesses. Sustainability and the preservation of historic character were also featured in the responses. Suggestions included investing in historical sites, updating and using historic structures to promote community health, and keeping the downtown area historic and elegant. The introduction of more electric charging stations was proposed to foster environmental sustainability.

More variety in commerce and services was also recommended. This covered a broad range of suggestions, such as more restaurants, reasonably priced retail stores, and a wider range of shops and activities for residents, including affordable options for seniors.

Overall, the responses highlighted the desire for a downtown that is community-oriented, diverse, accessible, and environmentally conscious while preserving its historic charm.

Several ideas were proposed for improving Lancaster's residents' and visitors' health and wellness. The suggestions generally focused on several key themes: improving infrastructure



for pedestrian and bicycle mobility, promoting mental and physical health services, increasing recreational opportunities, and offering healthy food options. The suggestions illustrated the community's recognition of health and wellness as a holistic concept, intertwining physical movement, mental health, recreation, and nutrition.

Many participants saw a need for enhanced pedestrian and bicycle connections. Proposals included more walking and biking paths, bike rental stations, better pedestrian safety measures like flashing lights at street crossings, and reduced traffic on Broadway to make walking downtown easier. A suggestion was also made for walking or bike paths from Como Park to the Village, possibly along the creek, and the idea of introducing scooter infrastructure was also proposed.

There was a strong focus on the availability of health services. Participants suggested increased accessibility to mental health specialists, the development of a community health center, and a wellness center equipped with physical therapy, occupational therapy, and gym services. Learning support for individuals needing help walking again or regaining personal hygiene skills was also proposed.

Proposals for recreational opportunities varied widely. Some called for more sports courts, pickleball courts, playgrounds for kids, outdoor fitness classes, and a park. There was also mention of a Boys & Girls Club pickleball and a recreation facility.

Lastly, healthy food options were a common theme. Many participants expressed a desire for a farmers' market and diverse, healthy food options, indicating a desire for better access to fresh, locally sourced foods.

Participants voiced various suggestions for encouraging them to walk, bike, or use alternative transportation in Lancaster. The most commonly mentioned improvements were infrastructure, safety, community events, and incentives.

Many attendees were eager to see the development of more walkable and bikeable paths. Notably, there were repeated calls for establishing a trail or bike path to connect the village to Como Park and to expand the heritage trail. Some participants also mentioned the need for improved sidewalks in residential areas, normal bike racks, and additional bike racks to encourage more people to cycle.

Safety considerations were prevalent, with suggestions for safer street crossings and better separation between sidewalks and the road, especially on Central and Broadway. There was also a suggestion for parking lots outside the village to encourage more walking.

Community events also emerged as a major theme. Participants expressed that more events during the year, such as music, sidewalk sales, walking tours, and religious events, would encourage them to walk or bike to their destinations. Restaurants, cafes, shopping, and park and ride options were also mentioned.



A novel suggestion was for incentives promoting healthy living. The participant was still determining the specifics but suggested it could be a coupon or award for being green or signs that promote the health and environmental benefits of walking and biking.

A handful of participants reported that they already walk and bike, reflecting a certain degree of existing momentum that can be leveraged to promote alternative transportation in Lancaster.

Attendees shared a wide range of desired activities they'd like to see in Downtown Lancaster, reflecting diverse interests within the community.

Music was a highly popular suggestion, with participants expressing interest in concerts, music festivals, and live music nights, including events with local bands. Specific venues, such as an expanded or bigger opera house, were also proposed. These suggestions indicate a strong desire for music-related activities in the downtown area.

Outdoor activities were also a common theme. Attendees proposed bike rental stations and more paved paths around the park and village. They also suggested outdoor exercise stations and classes, yard games like corn hole and tennis, and park concerts.

Community events involving local artists, small businesses, and the Lancaster Central School District (LCSD) also received notable mentions. Participants suggested art shows, craft shows, local small business shows, murals, and partnerships with the LCSD.

Festivals and markets were another popular suggestion, with attendees calling for more festivals, particularly those that promote health and wellness, along with expanded farmers' markets. Specific events such as a pickleball tournament, Taste of Lancaster, wine and beer tastings, and a seed exchange were also proposed.

Finally, there were some more unique suggestions, like a self-guided tour as part of an app, more involvement with local artists through signs and murals, and the development of a playground. These varied suggestions demonstrate the range of activities that could contribute to a vibrant and engaging downtown Lancaster.

Station 4 - What Would You Do With \$4.5 Million and Example Project Feedback: This station posed a thought-provoking question about the best use of the \$4.5 million in funding award to the Village and offered a platform for feedback on example projects.

The public workshop participants' responses regarding how they would allocate \$4.5 million in Lancaster reveal a focus on infrastructure development, preservation of historic structures, enhancement of accessibility, and a strong interest in community amenities. Many attendees proposed restoring and repairing historic buildings and landmarks, including the Opera House and Masonic Temple, indicating the value placed on Lancaster's historical heritage. Extending this, there were several suggestions to add more brick buildings while also making sure they match the historic aesthetics of the town.



Infrastructure improvements were another common suggestion, including road widening, parking lot redevelopment, streetscape improvements, and clearly defined walking and bike paths. Some proposed safer sidewalks, with others suggesting bike lanes and landscaping. Several responses highlighted the need for better parking, including handicap-accessible spots. Some participants suggested expanding the town by annexing land and connecting downtown to other areas.

Accessibility upgrades were frequently mentioned. Suggestions included making buildings more wheelchair accessible, establishing clearer walking and biking paths, and offering more transportation options.

Community amenities were a key theme. This included establishing new parks, creating green "islands" throughout the village, initiating a monthly concert series, building a performance venue, adding EV charging stations, and developing indoor shopping centers where small vendors can sell. There were also recommendations to invest in a community garden, public green spaces with seating, and designated public music and art spaces.

Participants also focused on the need for diversity in retail and food options, proposing an expansion of retail stores and restaurants, and more varied food options, including halal and vegan spaces.

There were specific suggestions for location-based development, such as connecting the Village Center to Como Park via Cayuga Creek and redeveloping Palmer Place. Some also suggested expanding recreational spaces along Cayuga Creek.

Finally, some participants mentioned affordable housing. Suggestions ranged from creating more affordable housing to improving the current housing stock. There were also suggestions for assisted/independent living facilities.

The responses indicate a desire for a well-preserved, accessible, and community-oriented village that maintains its historical charm while embracing modern needs and sustainable development.

Example Project Feedback

The feedback provided by workshop participants identified in Lancaster's NY Forward application reveals great enthusiasm for each idea and constructive suggestions for improvement.

- **Mobility Hub:** This would transform a parking lot into a mobility hub with EV charging stations, bicycle facilities, and a centralized rideshare location. Participants widely appreciated the concept, citing it as a boon for walkability and the potential attraction of young adults. They suggested additions such as bike and scooter rentals, EV charging stations, and benches.
- **Lancaster Boys & Girls Club:** this project is to complete interior and exterior improvements to this historic building to restore its safety and integrity and to retrofit



an existing storage area into a dedicated Teen Center. The club was considered a crucial community space and historic structure worthy of saving. Suggestions for improvement included exterior repairs and the addition of green spaces and sports options.

- **Extend Central Ave Streetscape Improvements:** Enhancing the Central Ave public right-of-way to expand the business district northward, create a more desirable gateway into the downtown, and create an atmosphere encouraging people to walk, bike, and explore the public realm. This project was vital for improving accessibility and safety for walkers and cyclists. Participants felt it would promote growth and extend downtown. Improvement suggestions focused on beautification through more flowers and greenery and grants to improve building exteriors along the improvements.
- **Lancaster Historical Society:** Complete interior and exterior building renovations necessary to continue preserving our past and educating people in the future. Attendees appreciated the society for its educational potential. They suggested removing mold from the attic and patching holes to prevent animal entry as necessary improvements.
- **Update Town Hall and Opera House:** Complete major structural and cosmetic repairs to improve performance and audience safety and increase the ability of the Opera House to fulfill its mission and serve visitors a vibrant arts experience. There was strong support for this project, with attendees expressing it as an excellent way to promote the arts and restore village history. Proposed improvements included historic front doors, a better lobby, more accessible parking, touchless doors, and exterior repairs.
- **Transform Masonic Temple to Wellness Center:** This will update and repair the former Masonic Temple into a full-service wellness facility. Participants loved reusing a historic building and improving health services availability. Improvement suggestions focused on ensuring community safety, exterior cleanup, improved accessibility, Wi-Fi availability, and incorporating the building's history into renovations.
- **Install a Comprehensive Wayfinding System:** This would create a system of pedestrian signs, interpretive signs, map kiosks, vehicular signs, and a Smart City Digital Sign to make the Village accessible to everyone. The proposed system was praised mainly for its potential to facilitate movement and exploration. Suggestions for improvement included more consistent design, better maps, and ensuring the system is clear.
- **Implement Gateway Treatments:** This would be to work with the local arts community to complete transformative enhancements to the overpass at the northern entrance into the Village. The project was generally well-received, with attendees appreciating creating a more welcoming environment. They proposed more public art, murals, historic branding, and possible collaboration with local artists and students.

These responses showcase participants' eagerness to see improvements in Lancaster that foster community, accessibility, and the preservation and celebration of local history.

Station 5 - Map Exercise: Large-format study area maps were laid out with markers, post-its, stickers, etc. Attendees were encouraged to draw or write on the maps, indicating areas of



interest, concern, or potential improvement. An LPC member facilitated this session. Participants expressed interest in safer sidewalks and better pedestrian and bike connections from the sidewalks into the Village's parks and schools, adding bus routes to connect to adjacent communities such as Depew, reducing vehicular speed along Broadway, land development opportunities along Palmer Place, and in general, building more housing and a welcome center.

