

Long Island Regional Planning Council

LIRPC Meeting – May 12, 2021

Zoom Virtual Meeting Summary Minutes

LIPRC Members Present

John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair
Michael White, Vice Co-Chair
Jeffrey Kraut, Treasurer
Theresa Sanders, Secretary
Supervisor Don Clavin
Elizabeth Custodio
Mayor Barbara Donno
Nancy Engelhardt
Jeff Guillot
Mayor Robert Kennedy
Supervisor Edward Wehrheim

Staff and Guests Present

Richard V. Guardino, Jr., Executive Director
Elizabeth Cole, Deputy Executive Director
Missy Leder, Executive Assistant
Alan Belniak
Dave Kapell
Mark Smith
Sulin Carling
Jennifer Solomon
Shuprotim Bhaumik
Legislator Sarah Anker
Gwen O'Shea
Angie Apolinaris
Kristen Reynolds
Steven Flotteron
Mary Byrne
Jeanmarie Buffett
Mitch Pally
P. Petriccione
Dorian Dale
Chad Sandler
Kyle Strober
Jonathan Prevost
A. Thomas Levin
Nada Anid
Carl MacGowan
Paul Pontieri
Dave Schubmehl
Holly Byrne
David Sabatino

Rebecca Sanin
Constance Vavilis
Jenny Kate Schlagel
Jim McCaffrey
D. Calone
Neil
Patrick McHeffey
Maureen Early
Chris
Jim Kelly
Deidre Wyman
Tony Borelli
Jacqueline Routh
Amy Waldman
Ellen Birnbaum
Jean Baker
Ann Golob
Robert Rocco
Clare Secrist
Kevin Brady
Jenny Kate Schlagel
Larry Levy

Meeting Commenced:

John D. Cameron, Jr., opened the meeting at approximately 10AM.

John Cameron:

Good morning and welcome to the May meeting of the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

Pledge of Allegiance – Supervisor Edward Wehrheim

John Cameron:

Thank you, Supervisor. Our Executive Director, Rich Guardino, will now conduct a roll call.

Rich Guardino:

Welcome, everyone. Thank you all for being with us this morning.

Roll Call

John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair
Michael White, Vice Co-Chair
Jeffrey Kraut, Treasurer
Don Clavin
Barbara Donno
Nancy Engelhardt
Jeff Guillot
Robert Kennedy
Ed Wehrheim

Rich Guardino:

John, we do not have a quorum yet. Some of our Council members will be joining shortly. What we would like to do is have Alan Belniak of VHB, who's been assisting us the last few months with regard to our virtual meetings, explain how the technology will work for our audience. Thank you.

Alan Belniak:

Thank you for the opportunity to assist this meeting. Shortly we are going to move into a presentation. We encourage you to think about the thoughtful questions to ask and we will be taking those in two ways. If you are joining us through the Zoom platform on your mobile phone or your computer, there should be a q&a button down below where you can type in your question. When we get to the end of the presentation to take q&a, will read those out loud and a member of the panel will respond. Another way is to use the raise hand feature, which is below and looks like someone is giving you a high five. That sends a command to me to let me know that you would like to raise your hand and speak. When the time is right, I will call out your name, take you off mute and you can then either ask your question or share your comment. This meeting is being recorded for archival purposes. With that, I'd like to hand it back to John to continue the meeting.

John Cameron:

This morning's presentation by the Rauch Foundation and HR&A, their consultants, is extremely important. In light of the reality that we are still not out of the throws of the pandemic, we continue to deal with how it has impacted our businesses and our downtowns on Long Island. I think this is a very important presentation which will be very informative for our audience. Rich, maybe you could introduce our speakers.

Rich Guardino:

It's a privilege for me to introduce Dave Kapell. Many of us know him as the former Mayor of Greenport who led the revitalization there. You may also know him as one of the leaders of the Right Track Coalition, which led to the development of LIRR Third Track. Dave is currently working as a consultant for the Rauch Foundation. It's great to have you with us.

PRESENTATION

Dave Kapell:

Thank you, Rich, John, and the entire Council for giving us this opportunity to present our research findings. I'm joined today by Shuprotim Bhaumik, who's a partner at HR&A Advisors and his colleague Sulin Carling, who is a principal of HR&A Advisors. They were the consultants that assisted the foundation in the conduct of this research study.

When the pandemic hit, we found ourselves talking about how we could make a difference and how we could contribute to responding to the pandemic. Thinking about all the various subjects that we might delve into, we decided on Long Island downtowns which we thought were facing an imminent threat.

They are the heart and soul of our culture and identity on Long Island. They provide a unique opportunity for economic activity and for important civic engagement. At the pandemic onset, Rauch recognized the imminent threat to the health of our downtowns and undertook the research that we are about to share with you in response to the pandemic and its anticipated impact.

I think it's important to point out that retail was changing before the pandemic hit and it's going to continue to evolve in its aftermath. We just hope that the findings and recommendations you're about to view will help our downtowns adapt to the changing landscape introduced by the pandemic and contribute to the long-term success and vitality of Long Island's downtowns going forward. At this point, I will turn it over to Sulin Carling to present the report.

Shuprotim Bhaumik:

Thank you Dave, and thank you to the to the Planning Council for this opportunity to present some of our findings and recommendations about recovery strategies for downtowns. As a quick introduction, my name is Shuprotim Bhaumik. I'm a partner at HR&A and I'm joined by Sulin Carling, who's a Principal at HR&A and the principal author for this report. For those of you who don't know, HR&A is an economic development consulting firm. We have been in business for over 40 years with offices throughout the country. Sulin and I both work in our New York office and as some of you know, I'm a proud resident of Long Island. When we started to talk with Dave and the Rauch Foundation about this engagement it was very near and dear to my heart. The downtowns where I live and visit on Long Island, are, as Dave said, not just places of economic activity, but opportunities for entrepreneurship. Mom and Pop operations are places where our communities gather to celebrate events throughout the year. They are places where Long Islanders go to relax and have a good time. This was something that we took on, not just focusing through analytical and economic lens, but also to examine some of the underlying qualitative issues that we need to think about if we want to come up with new strategies for our downtowns in a post COVID world.

Let's start with the first slide. Our downtowns have undergone a lot of transformation over the last 50 years. Downtowns first came about as Long Island's economy was transforming itself from a primarily agricultural economy to more of an industrial office-based economy. The introduction of the LIRR resulted in the development of our new downtowns, but over the last 50 years there have been some serious challenges. First and foremost, the network of highways and freeways which helped support strip malls and regional malls has had a serious impact on downtowns. As we were thinking about the COVID pandemic and what downtowns would look like going forward, we thought it was important to set some context. Our downtowns have had a lot of challenges and some of them have done well by being nimble and creative. Some of them have come up with interesting ways to address and blunt some of the challenges of auto oriented development, strip malls, and regional malls. More recently, they have had to overcome or deal with the challenge of ecommerce and online training, which was exasperated by the pandemic. So, we start by thinking about the trajectory of downtowns and how these downtowns have been able to address some of the challenges.

We started this project by breaking it down into a few fundamental questions that Sulin will take you through. The first question we asked ourselves was, what was the trajectory of our downturns even

before the COVID pandemic. It is very important to understand the underlying strengths and weaknesses. Second, we know the pandemic has impacted the Long Island economy overall, but it has impacted our downtowns in different ways. Understanding at a very granular level, how the pandemic has impacted different downtowns and especially focusing on downtowns in lower income communities, as well as businesses of color, was important to explore and interrogate. The third question we asked ourselves was what is the new normal? Understanding what the new normal is going to be and what it might mean for the growth and vitality of downtowns was another question. Finally, what does this all mean in terms of interventions?

We defined three broad principles for these interventions. Based on those principles, we proposed 11 specific interventions. These interventions must be accepted by the entirety of the ecosystem on the Island starting with counties, towns, villages, and hamlets. A big part of implementing these interventions would require the help of the Planning Council, for example, or nonprofits or chambers of commerce or business groups. Next, a quick analysis of those interventions was executed. We looked at what the results might be in terms of economic and fiscal impacts to the communities.

Because we live and work here, we know that Long Island is not a monolith. There are a variety of different towns and villages and different downtowns. Frankly, these downtowns have different characters, different topologies, and different drivers. For example, Port Washington is driven significantly by the commuters who take the train every day to get into the city versus Greenport which is not. Greenport is an incredible example for us to get into more detail. The town is dependent on seasonal visitors who enjoy the water, boating and great food. If you can see the image over here, this is an incredible park that was built under Dave's guidance and direction. There are places like Northport, for example, which is a food and beverage destination for people from Nassau and Suffolk. Patchogue, which has undergone a significant amount of redevelopment over the past decade, has a lot of multifamily housing. It was important for us as we thought about these larger trends, to dig into each of these various types of downtown topologies and understand what their drivers are and customize our thinking around these interventions. We wanted to determine what would make sense for each of these different types of downtowns. We went through an extensive and intensive process looking at a lot of data (real estate, economic, demographic). We did a lot of surveys, both online surveys of downtown businesses, as well as in person surveys, to understand storefront vacancy in across the selection of downtowns. Finally, the thing, which I think was probably the most important for us, was conducting one on one interviews and stakeholder roundtables. We reached out to economic development folks, nonprofit leaders, business leaders, risk professionals to understand at a granular street level what is happening and what the challenges and opportunities are.

So, after all this analysis, understanding the challenges and opportunities, I think what we found was Long Island is unique and our downtowns are unique, but we are obviously not alone thinking about some of these issues. Looking at national and local examples of things that have been done in other places and potentially might be interesting ideas for some of our downtowns was important to us. I will now hand this over to Sulin to take us through the rest of the presentation.

Sulin Carling:

As we launch into this presentation, we thought it was very important first to look at downtowns pre-COVID because we know that downtowns and retail were rapidly evolving. Taking a step back, we looked at retail and food and beverage sector jobs which are the jobs that are concentrated in downtowns and we found that just about one in five jobs on Long Island are in these sectors. So, downtowns provide important employment opportunities. We know that these sectors provide accessible job opportunities, particularly for workers with college degrees, without college degrees, and including lower income workers. These are important economic and employment assets. Using the business survey mentioned, we surveyed downtown businesses across Long Island and asked them prior to COVID, how they were faring. We found that 57% said that they had been growing over the past two to five years. Overall, downtown businesses were faring well, but we also found that there were challenges. Twenty percent of downtown businesses were experiencing challenges. They noted that competition was with online businesses and chains which were disrupting the retail environment. Hiring qualified workers was a challenge. Increasingly unaffordable rents were a challenge, especially for these businesses with tight margins. There were underlying stresses prior to COVID. We also found through our interviews and through a great deal of outreach to local businesses and local community organizations, that small businesses and lower income communities and businesses of color, were facing even greater hurdles that included a wide range of things like difficulty adopting technology and social media. These things are increasingly important to being competitive, obtaining permits, but add a lot of cost. They also experienced difficulties negotiating leases. A major issue on Long Island and nationally is that businesses of color are experiencing greater obstacles accessing capital, making it harder to open and grow a business. In fact, Black and Hispanic owned businesses start with about half as much capital as non-minority owned across the US. We also found that while there are many, very valuable Business Improvement Districts and Chambers of Commerce on Long Island, many businesses noted that businesses didn't have strong connections to those organizations and weren't able to benefit from their support. These communities and the businesses in these communities were starting at a disadvantage even prior to COVID.

As you all know, ecommerce has been growing rapidly across the country, disrupting retail and disrupting downtowns. This chart shows online retail sales over time which have rapidly increased between 2016 and 2020. They've more than doubled. We can also see the huge leap between 2019 and 2020 when online sales increased by almost 50% as many of us locked down, stayed at home and did more and more of our shopping online. It can be seen as an acceleration of an existing trend and something that we are going to have to think seriously about and plan around. It's also worth noting that in prior to COVID, the increase in online shopping was having a real effect on downtowns and commercial corridors which were seeing a shift more towards experiential uses that can't be substituted for online, whether that's food and beverage or salons or fitness or cultural uses. We have also seen an oversupply of retail space because of this impact of ecommerce. So again, there was a destabilization of this whole arena even before COVID due to shifting technology. We also saw that before COVID, retail rents had been rising over time constraining businesses. Our vacancy survey (we observed and counted the number of vacant storefronts in 30 different downtowns) showed vacancy increases in almost all the downtowns in both Nassau and Suffolk that we explored. The average vacancy and the industry

standard for a healthy vacancy rate is between 5 to 10%. As of 2020-2021, the vacancy rates on average across Nassau and Suffolk exceeded that 10% reflecting the destabilization due to ecommerce, constraints on retail and oversupply of space.

With all that said, how has the pandemic impacted downtowns and particularly small business and those in lower income communities and communities of color? Our business survey showed that small downtown businesses have been devastated. Thirty-eight percent of downtown businesses projected over 50% loss of revenue in 2020 compared to 2019. This was a dramatic blow to many businesses that were faring well. While we know the broad impacts on small businesses across Long Island, we also wanted to understand how COVID has impacted businesses and we saw a range. Some downtowns are struggling, and others are managing to stay afloat. To understand how businesses work, how downtowns were faring, we looked at a tech driven data source. We examined cell phone data that allowed us to look at usage and foot traffic over time. In the dark teal, this chart shows that in April 2020 (the depths of the lockdowns) foot traffic compared to November 2019 and October 2020. We can see that there has a wide range and some downtowns rebounded fairly quickly. Greenport had a lot of people moving out to secondary homes. They also opened their streets to outdoor dining. Some of the more low-income communities like Central Islip suffered. Places like Riverhead saw a lot of destinations that were closed (like the aquarium). Places like Port Washington that would depend on LIRR commuters also suffered. There was a wide variety of impacts.

We also looked at more specifically, how did different types of businesses fare and who was visiting these businesses during COVID? We looked specifically at downtown Northport and can see the foot traffic to different types of businesses. The visitation to food and beverage plummeted during the height of the lockdowns and then had the greatest impact on attracting visitors back as things started to open. Again, prior to COVID, we saw the strength of food and beverage and the strength of experiential retail brewing downtowns and now we see that food and beverage continues to be important to downtown recovery.

We looked at the innovative uses of streets and public spaces that many downtowns were able to embrace during COVID. This chart shows visitation to Seventh Street in Garden City, which was open to pedestrians during the weekends over the summer. It was remarkable that we saw there was a 20% increase, on average, in foot traffic to Seventh Street in 2020 compared to 2019. We think about the future and lessons learned. There may be a real opportunity to rethink how we use our streets to bring people downtown to support businesses and keep them vital as we recover from COVID.

We looked at how the pandemic impacted lower income communities and businesses of color. This shows the vacancy rates for the lowest income downtowns that we that we studied. Specifically, these five downtowns among the thirty that we did a vacancy survey for. The left has the permanently closed storefronts and the right chart shows temporarily closed. Across most of these low-income downtowns, we see that they exceed the average. Across the 30 downtowns studied, just 1% of storefronts were permanently closed. These downtowns almost all exceed that on the right. On average 2% of storefronts had temporarily closed businesses. All the low-income downtowns exceed that rate. So, we know that

businesses were more vulnerable in these communities before COVID, and we know that now they have been suffering more. They have had more difficulty accessing federal aid. The local communities have been hit harder economically. In terms of health, we know that they had more difficulty pivoting to online sales. We should be concerned not only seeing these permanently closed storefronts but concerned that these temporarily closed storefronts could become permanently closed. We have seen stresses across the board, but need to keep in mind, the specific challenges of these communities.

What will the future be for downtowns after COVID? What will the new normal be now seeing the prior trends and the impact of COVID? First, without support, there is a risk of broad loss of downtown businesses and lower income communities and communities of color. This could result in loss of jobs and an increased storefront vacancy. This could mean a reduced tax base. Local communities will lose places to shop and gather. Communities will lose entrepreneurship opportunities. If we lose those businesses, it could take many years to replace them, especially given how hard it is to access capital for some of these local business owners. It will be challenging to fill vacant storefronts. We risk long term damage to the vitality of these downtowns. We will need a robust and immediate support for these downtowns.

If we want our downtowns to come back in what is the new normal, we are going to have to think bigger. We are going to have to have more types of uses and activities downtown to activate the areas and make them 24/7 type places. We are going to need more multifamily housing. Long Island is already falling behind in its production of multifamily housing. We need more to remain competitive and affordable to attract a young workforce. It is now more important than ever to build housing in downtowns because then we have a captive consumer base to support small businesses. There may also be interesting new opportunities that didn't exist before such as new flexible office space. We have seen that there has been a widespread shift to remote work. We have heard that in many cases, employers and employees don't expect everyone to be back in the office five days a week. There may be opportunities for flexible co-working spaces closer to home for folks who are not commuting into New York City every day. In Greenport, an antique store was converted into a co-working space. There may be new opportunities for shared co-working spaces in storefront. And again, diversifying that consumer base is a way to make downtowns more resilient.

We will also need to be innovative in thinking about how we use downtown storefronts. Even more than before, we are going to need to embrace experiential retail. We need to look at new ideas like hybrid uses like bookstore, cafes, pop-ups that can activate vacant storefronts and allow businesses to test their brand. Maybe farmers markets can go into storefronts part of the week. Across many areas of the country, we are seeing manufacturing and retail hybrids, particularly breweries. You cannot experience culture online nor can you take advantage of personal care. Fitness in person is also an experience which brings people downtown and fills those vacant storefronts. We are going to have to be creative.

Looking at how public spaces are being used is also important. The public sector was able to turn on a dime and be very innovative in a way that maybe only happens during a crisis. We have seen this ability to close streets to create outdoor dining and open streets and cut red tape and let restaurants quickly

pivot. Now people appreciate those open-air socializing spaces, and more people and businesses are probably going to continue to expect to be able to use public space in these new ways. As we think forward, we should embrace this new paradigm of flexible and innovative uses of sidewalks and parking lots in the streets as another way to make our downtowns vibrant and bring people to them.

With all of that, what will the new normal look like? We developed a series of interventions that we thought could help Long Island downtowns survive a pandemic and thrive in the future as the hearts of their communities. We established three overarching principles for these for these recovery strategies.

The first one is short term, just act quickly to stabilize downtown businesses. We need to stop the bleeding. We need to support those businesses, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color as soon as possible. Second, in the medium term, create flexibility for the new normal. We don't know how downtowns are going to evolve so we need to create more flexibility around regulations and use of space to allow downtowns to evolve over time in ways that we probably can't imagine today. Third, in the longer term, we need to make long term investments to support downtown growth. We need to make investments like multifamily housing, green infrastructure, transit-oriented development, sewers. These are key things that we have long discussed and are even more important now to make downtowns inclusive, vibrant, and able to accommodate long term growth.

With those three principles, we developed three categories of interventions. We identified four immediate actions to stabilize downtown businesses in the next six months, three medium term interventions to create flexibility for the new normal over the next six to 12 months and long-term investments to support downtown growth over the coming years. While we have many, many interventions that we propose in our report, which you will be able to access online, we will just talk about a few of them here. At a high level, I will describe what all 11 of the interventions are and then I will focus more on those first three that are highlighted.

For interventions to stabilize downtown businesses, doubling down on financial support for businesses on lower income neighborhoods and communities of color is the first intervention. Second, we recommend creating a small and downtown Business Support Divisions at the County Economic Development Departments for each county. Third, helping small businesses adopt new technologies will be important. We saw the importance of being able to pivot during COVID to provide resources for small businesses to increase revenues and reduce costs to keep thin margin businesses viable in the long term.

In the second group of interventions, creating flexibility for the new normal is crucial. First, we are repositioning vacant storefronts for flexible, creative new uses that I described by removing prescriptive zoning and regulatory barriers to allow a wide variety of uses, making outdoor dining permanent and cutting red tape for food and beverage businesses. Creating year-round open streets again, leveraging those successes we experienced during Covid, to make those interventions that people have enjoyed accessible, long term.

In the third bucket, we suggest supporting long term downtrend growth, engaging in comprehensive and inclusive development, mixed use, mixed income, walkable development in lower income downtowns to make sure that the development meets the needs of those communities. More broadly, all downtowns can accommodate the growth of building transit oriented multifamily housing. We also recommend investing in green infrastructure, sewers, and high-tech septic systems as we need to think about long term growth, not just to recover from COVID but because of its broader importance for the future of Long Island.

I'm going to walk through the first three interventions in more detail. First, I will talk about designing new grant and low-cost loan programs. We know that historically, small businesses have faced challenges accessing capital. We also know that during COVID, a lot of lower income businesses and businesses of color, were not able to access the initial PDP loans. We have a real opportunity with the American rescue plan to create new direct assistance programs with grants and foreign forgivable loan programs. We'll be able to provide important aid, especially if we can make sure that the grant programs are inclusive, and don't have some of the limitations of prior programs in terms of more cumbersome application requirements and documentation requirements. As we develop these programs, it's not just enough to create those pots of money, we need to make sure that low-income businesses and businesses of color can actually access them. We will need to provide technical assistance to businesses that may need help filing applications. We need to partner with community organizations that can make businesses aware of these resources and can help fill out applications and help businesses establish documentation.

Another recommendation that we wanted to flag was this idea of new downtown business support divisions. There is no centralized place focused on brainstorming how do we support our downtowns? How do we support our small businesses? These would be small, agile departments of several people within the economic development departments of each county, and they could serve as conveners coordinating resources, programming, and best practices. These new divisions can serve to ensure that it's not just the downtowns that are able to benefit from those local organizations that can get that support. We looked to New York City's department of small business services as a precedent for this. It helps create and coordinate bids that connect small businesses to resources. It's a centralized repository for resources which goes out to hundreds of commercial corridors across the city. We think it can be a great inspiration for what might be able to happen at the county level on Long Island.

On the technology side, we have a lot of recommendations, but one that we would like to discuss is creating an online shopping portal to help small retail businesses compete against online retailers. Basically, we suggest creating a small business version of Amazon. This idea was inspired by a website created in New York City called shopIN.nyc, which was set up to allow small businesses to collectively sell online and a single platform. New York City residents can go on the website, order from multiple different stores and if the order is over \$59, it will be delivered on the same day free of shipping. We thought this was an interesting example of what could happen if there has a central coordinator between multiple municipalities and downtowns. It is a way for businesses to come together and compete with companies like Amazon. Similarly, maybe there is an opportunity to create a direct vendor

online food ordering system. There are ways to help small businesses leverage technology to benefit their business rather than have technology be a threat.

Next, we will look at how these recommendations might impact Long Island in a quantitative and economic way. Particularly thinking about the development of multifamily housing, the creation of some office space, and reducing storefront vacancy. Hypothetically in a prototypical downtown, we added 100 multifamily units and 10,000 square feet of office space and reduced storefront vacancy by 2.5%. We see these changes have an overall fiscal impact of \$1.1 million in property and sales tax revenues. We also have construction impacts of \$65 million in spending for 60 employees and ongoing annual input impacts that are also significant. Hypothetically, we can think about if we were to multiply this scenario across the 30 downtowns, we would have a total annual fiscal impact of \$32.5 million, which is significant and meaningful for many communities, \$1.9 billion just in construction spending, and on an ongoing basis another \$600 million of spending going to local communities because of this new housing, these new businesses and these new off office spaces. We think quantifiable new jobs and taxes could come out of this. These interventions will help reimagine Long Island downtowns for the 21st century. We will be able to adapt to new ways of living, working, spending, creating a larger consumer base, creating more entrepreneurship opportunities, increasing access to goods and housing, and creating downtowns that are more resilient because they have more uses and businesses and activities within them.

With that said, I think we can open it up.

Dave Kapell:

I would like to talk for a moment about the Greenport experience. We had quite a success with our intervention. It started very early in the in the pandemic. Back in April, a small group of us got together and recognized that unless we did something dramatic and something very fast that our tourist dependent economy and our downtown would be severely threatened by the pandemic. This was coming right at the start of the tourist season, when 80% of our merchants' business is generated. If we didn't act, we were fearful that we would end up with a ghost town come September. In that context, the business improvement district, which turned out to be an extremely valuable resource for the village, successfully argued with the village board for the leveraging of 51 prime parking spaces in our downtown to be converted into, essentially, retail space. You can see an example of that in the image behind me in the background. This is what we call a parklet, which was created in the parking strip in that example on lower Main Street. We created 9000 square feet of retail area that was largely used by restaurant establishments for outdoor dining. The result was dramatic. Several of our restaurants reported their best years ever last year and you saw the graph earlier in the presentation that showed the impact that it had on visitation in general to the village.

The reason I wanted to elaborate on this is I think this whole question of how we view parking, how we view the assets we have in our public streets, sidewalks, and parks has undergone a major change. As a result of the pandemic, people realize that we don't need all the parking that we provide. The Greenpoint experience was very successful, and nobody ever complained about not being able to park

as the result of losing these parking spaces. We didn't need them, and the village is reinstalling this system this year. I hope that it becomes a permanent feature, because it livens up the village and created a festive atmosphere that everybody has embraced. This whole emphasis that we place on parking and cars and the relationship that has to people is something that I think needs to be looked at to promote success going forward and leverage for the future. It can have ramifications not just for the retail sector, but for housing construction. Many arguments against housing is where the cars will go. This whole paradigm of emphasizing cars over people and commerce has been re-examined and needs to continue to be re-examined and leveraged going forward for further development of downtowns.

Alan Belniak:

Excellent. Thank you for the great presentation from the team here. This is Alan Belniak. From VHB. If you joined late, just a quick couple quick points of order to ask a question or to submit a comment you can do so two ways. First, if you look down below for the q&a button, you can go ahead and enter your question or share your comment and I'll read it aloud and the project team will address it. You can also use the raise hand feature, which is also down below. Let's start with questions from the LIRPC first.

Jeff Guillot:

I was intrigued by the slides talking about doubling down on small business funding and you mentioned PPP loans. I know that was a lifeline for a lot of small businesses during the pandemic and rightfully so. Did you guys do you guys look at perhaps how many restaurants and retailers in these downtowns were successful in procuring PPP loans, as opposed to ones who weren't? And if so, was there any dichotomy between minority owned businesses and non-minority owned businesses? I don't know if this is part of the study, but it would be interesting to see if there was some dichotomy in PPP loan recipients between restaurants and retailers that are situated in downtowns as opposed to ones who are not. Dave indicated that there were restaurants in Greenport that had their best year ever last year, while I think a lot of folks who were not connected to transit modalities and walkable downtowns probably did not suffer the same fate. I'm wondering if there has any empirical data on PPP loans and other forms of federal assistance and what role they played in trying to revitalize these retailers during the pandemic?

Sulin Carling:

Thanks, Jeff, that's a great question. To be honest, we didn't look at the data on Long Island downtown business recipients of PPE loans and PPP loans. Many of us have heard about the national or statewide data that did show that businesses and immigrant owned businesses of color were less able to access them. We did tease this out in our outreach and our interviews. We heard that Muslim owned businesses can't take out a loan with interest and so that prevented them. We heard that a lot of the lower income businesses maybe didn't keep the most detailed records and that prevented them. We heard that many businesses just didn't hear about PPP. The importance of having a trusted messenger and using additional channels is crucial. One interviewee said, if we used whatsapp or similar messaging platforms that certain communities may have been more aware, and it might have made a difference. We didn't specifically look at that in terms of the data because we did hear that broadly.

Shuprotim Bhaumik:

I would just quickly add, Jeff, that this was wholly consistent with our experience working in the past one year on COVID related strategies. In other places in the country, like New Haven, New York City, and the DC suburbs, we heard the same kinds of things about both the lack of access to PPP loans. To some extent, in both Nassau and Suffolk, we saw programs for restaurants. Initially, there was a lot of enthusiasm around them, but it is my understanding that, certainly for Nassau County, there is still money left. I think there are some real issues with to whom we are reaching out to provide more proactive technical advice and guidance. The fact that a lot of our downtown businesses, our Mom and Pop businesses, don't have the best paperwork and most up to date information also makes it difficult to help and prove they are eligible and qualify for some of these programs. We need to think about it in different ways and potentially reach out to those businesses and help them survive and get out of this crisis.

Jeff Guillot:

If I may just to follow up on that. In the other localities that you guys have done research in, putting aside the issue of accessibility which I agree is critically important here, did you find that for retailers that were located within walkable downtown that the need for federal assistance was less than those who are not? I mean, this almost pivots back to a previous meeting we had about the decline of brick and mortar standalone retailers and restaurants as opposed to downtown ones. Perhaps the need versus the lack of a need for federal assistance for businesses is a good barometer of figuring out just how much more advantageous it is to have your retail location, or your restaurant located within a downtown as opposed to having it not located within downtown. I was wondering if any of the work you guys have done in this study or others tends to substantiate that at all?

Shuprotim Bhaumik:

I don't think so, but in our online survey and some of the other online surveys that we have conducted we have seen a differentiation between downtown versus non downtown locations. There is a way for us to go back and take a look at that by asking businesses if they are in downtowns or not through our online survey. My general sense is that the feeling of needing help was across the communities.

John Cameron:

One thing which intrigued me as a possible mechanism to thwart the Amazons, if you will, is the online platform shopIN.nyc. I'm curious if you've seen anything on Long Island where downtowns are employing something like this because I would think a lot of communities do want to shop their downtown. I'm curious if you've seen something on the Island or any other suburban communities other than the city employing something like that?

Shuprotim Bhaumik:

That's a great question, John. As part of our advisory committee, some of our members talked about some of the initiatives. I can't recall the specific towns, but I do know that David Sabatino, who some of you may know, did bring to the floor a discussion on some of the efforts in some of the towns and villages. I think if it was done, it was done at a very grassroots level and our sense is that it is a great idea

that might need some support at a higher level to get proximate downtowns to come together and provide the tools. I encourage all of you to look at the shopIN.nyc website. It is very cool and is an example of how the Council of Chambers in their respective counties could possibly provide some leadership. To me, it's a business opportunity for someone out there and I would think they would be successful.

Alan Belniak:

Next we have a question from Paul Pontieri.

Paul Pontieri:

Thank you. Dave brought up the issue of business improvement districts. Did you look at communities that had strong chambers and business improvement districts? How did they work with the administration of that developer? We have a business improvement district, and we work very closely together and most of the restaurants and businesses did take advantage of the PPP because it came through the Chamber. Was there any looking at those kinds of collaborations?

Shuprotim Bhaumik:

Without question, in our research, what we found is that communities and downtowns which had active business improvement districts experienced better outcomes. What we also found which I think was more pertinent in this case was that there were a lot of communities which either did not have business improvement districts or did not have chambers of commerce, and frankly, did not have the resources to support a BID or a chamber of commerce. In these situations, we felt there was a tremendous need to provide the kinds of services that BIDs and other communities are providing. One of our recommendations is based on the idea that we believe at the county level, the economic development department could help some of those communities that don't have BIDs and or chambers of commerce. The results from the business survey bore that out. We asked businesses, what were some of the most helpful things during this time? What would your priority interventions be for the future? One of the most popular answers was BIDs and chambers were the biggest help. Future funding and support for BIDs and chambers are one of the top priorities in terms of helping endure long term.

Dave Kapell:

I am going to jump in on this for a second. In addition to having my public position in Greenpoint, I've also been a merchant in the village for 40 years and as a result a paying member of the Greenport BID. To be candid with you, I've never felt all that benefited, in terms of my business, from the existence of the business and the financial contribution I make towards the groups through my taxes, but what came out of the pandemic was the incredible value of the advocacy that a BID can provide in an emergency like we were faced last year. Their focus was lasered on the business community when the village board was obviously preoccupied with public health and public safety. The ability of the BID to advocate successfully was important and I think showed the extraordinary value that an advocacy organization like that can have in an emergency. So, beyond the technical capacity that they offer to facilitate and provide access to programs and things like that, it was the advocacy and the leadership that they

provided in a pinch that made the difference in Greenport. I don't think we would have come through it the same way had it not been for the BID.

Alan Belniak:

I don't see any other hands raised or questions in the q&a so I'll call out to the attendees and the audience one more time. If you'd like to ask a question or share a comment, please use the q&a down below or the raise hand feature. It looks like we have Legislator Anker.

Sarah Anker:

I want to thank you for having this wonderful webinar. I've learned a lot. I'm one of many legislators and I'm looking forward to working with you. In fact, I just sent over a request to see if our Economic Development Group can create a small business downtown division. I'm looking forward to working with you and I'd love to hear more about what other counties are doing to support our small businesses. I'm glad there are folks looking out for those Mom and Pop shops that I have here in my district.

Alan Belniak:

Excellent. Thank you for that Legislator. Scanning the list once more. Ellen Birnbaum, you now have the floor once you unmute your microphone.

Ellen Birnbaum:

I'm a Nassau County Legislator and prior to this webinar, I was on a Zoom with my Great Neck Chamber of Commerce who is also experiencing its share of problems with its downtown area. There are many empty retail stores. They existed pre-pandemic and COVID has just made it worse. It is very hard for merchants, but we have a lot of restaurants, and we have a lot of service industries like hair salons and nail salons. I think everything is starting to come back now, but I've been listening to realtors with problems renting to people. There has just been a myriad of problems. I like the idea also of the shopIN.nyc. I'm definitely willing to try to see if maybe we could combine many downtown areas into a website like ShopNassauCounty.com. Maybe there will be strength in numbers. I know listening to the Chamber of Commerce, they're trying to brainstorm new ideas like having street festivals in order to bring people into the downtown area. Of course, parking has always been a problem, so I was listening intently when you were talking about not having cars going to a downtown area. If you want to attract people from outside of your immediate area, you need the parking. There has been so much to deal with. As a legislator for Nassau County, I know funds are starting to come in now and everybody wants to get their fair share of the money, but we must have plans for how we have unified downtown areas because right now, it's one by one. One store at a time and nobody is quite sure of the COVID rules with ribbon cuttings, with welcoming people, what to do, and what not to do. I am very hopeful, though, that going forth from this summer as the weather gets better, and people are starting to get out more that things will just start improving for businesses in general. Thank you for presenting the study. It was very helpful.

Alan Belniak:

I don't see any more hands raised at the moment. With that, I'll turn the floor and the meeting back over to you.

John Cameron:

Thank you, Alan. Rich, I am looking at the attendees. Do we have a quorum right now?

Rich Guardino:

I am delighted that Theresa Sanders has been able to join us, and we welcome you, Theresa. Thank you. We are one short from Suffolk County in terms of a quorum for now, John.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

John Cameron:

Thank you. I appreciate it. First, I would like to thank Dave Kapell and the Rauch Foundation for an excellent presentation. I think it was something very meaningful and timely as we attempt to evolve and come out of this pandemic. As we all know, this has been a very tough year for all of us and for many businesses. The Island continues to experience high unemployment with many businesses. Even if they survived this past year, it is still a struggle for many. Washington's efforts to assist those in need, may be having some unintended consequences, with many unemployed people likely to stay home and collect very generous unemployment checks, rather than returning to your work. The Federal Government's PPP loan program has certainly benefited many businesses impacted by the pandemic, but the Government has also buoyed the economy with federal grants. The administration's efforts to advance the American jobs plan and the American families plan are anticipated to encounter significant opposition in Congress on issues regarding the expansion of the definition of infrastructure and the programs which will cost taxpayers four plus trillion dollars. Other national issues including the vaccination program, the immigration issue at the southern border, social unrest, escalating conflicts in the Middle East, and climate change continued to be major challenges that the administration had to face in the first 6 months of office. Statewide, New York faces many challenges, some of which are national issues, and some of which, frankly, are self-inflicted. Albany's attempt to fill coffers with the aid of Senator Schumer were apparently insufficient, as the state legislature elected to determine that they needed to seize the mantle of being the highest tax state in the nation. Constituents continue to show their strong disapproval by voting with their feet and migrating to tax friendly states such as Florida, the Carolinas, and the Midwest. New York's loss of tax revenues continues to shrink as the region's, and state's tax base declines. New York City's unfortunate crisis was not just impacted by COVID, but also by public safety, which has resulted in increased migration to the suburbs, including Long Island. With the new normal of working remote or in hybrid work conditions, many are electing to move to the suburbs and work from home. That change is having an impact on transportation patterns as well as school enrollments. We are in a phase of creating a new normal and how we recover will be dependent upon our ability to make difficult decisions to grow our economies.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Rich Guardino:

Thank you. John Cameron and I served on a bi-county committee that submitted a request to the state's congressional delegation seeking \$5.5 billion for infrastructure proposals from the proposed \$2 Trillion American Jobs Plan. The request came from the two County Executives with support from the Council, The Long Island Association, The Long Island Federation of Labor, The Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, Long Island Contractors' Association, Long Island Builders Institute and The Association for a Better Long Island.

We also represented the Council in two Earth Day events. The first was a news conference held by County Executive Bellone in Lake Ronkonkoma to announce a \$100 million spending package for sewer expansion. At a separate press event, County Executive Curran announced a grant program in North Hempstead to replace failing septic systems with innovative alternative septic systems. The Council will provide \$100,000 in funding from the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan to assist in the implementation of the program.

I wanted to update you on the LIRPC STEAM Challenge. The LIRPC passed a resolution last month to provide \$5,000 grant awards to Accomsett Middle School and Cutchogue East Elementary School, the top two schools who participated in last year's STEAM challenge to implement their projects. At the Accomsett Middle School, students proposed a native plant and pollinator garden for the front entrance of the school. At Cutchogue East Elementary School, the students collaborated to research storm water treatments to minimize pollution into the Peconic Bays. They created a design and plan for implementation for a bioretention area on the campus which will treat stormwater before it is infiltrated or discharged. On Thursday April 22, the LIRPC held the first of two award ceremonies and groundbreakings at the Accomsett Middle School, and it was a fun day. We had all the students there in addition to the teachers and some of the administrators. John Cameron was the MC of the event and State Senator Mario Matterna, NYS Assemblyman Michael Fitzpatrick, the Commissioner of Economic Development for Suffolk County, Natalie Wright and Suffolk County Legislator Robert Trotta were all in attendance. We are making plans to have a second award ceremony at Cutchogue East Elementary School. The 2021 STEAM Challenge is currently underway with a total of 14 teams participating from Nassau and Suffolk County schools. A selection committee has been assembled and includes representatives from Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District, Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District, South Shore Estuary Reserve, the LIRPC and the Department of Environmental Conservation. Winners from the 2021 Long Island Water Quality Challenge will be announced in late May.

And finally, I wanted to bring you up to date with what we consider to be a very positive development in terms of the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan. Through our work on LINAP, the LIRPC partnered with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to develop fertilizer recommendations to help property owners reduce the environmental impact of their lawn and other grassed areas. These recommendations were developed with input from the LINAP Fertilizer Management Workgroup. Multiple workgroup meetings were held with attendance from various sectors, including landscapers,

fertilizer manufactures, golf courses, environmental groups, and state and county government. As a result of these efforts Scotts Miracle Gro, one of the largest fertilizer manufacturers in the United States, has debuted a Long Island branded fertilizer offered exclusively on Long Island. The product releases nitrogen more slowly than alternatives which ensures more of the nitrogen is absorbed by plants, rather than entering our waterways. This is a major step forward in our efforts to reduce nitrogen pollution from fertilizer and a major accomplishment of the LINAP initiative.

John, that completes my report. Thank you.

John Cameron:

Thank you for the work that you're doing, Rich. I just wanted to mention, again, the importance of bringing people into downtown areas and letting folks know that a huge effort has been made to create the North Shore Rail Trail Project. It should be completed by this fall coming up. While it was supposed to be \$10 million, we got it down to \$8.5 million and it crosses just about every town in the district outside Wading River. I just wanted to put it on your radars as an example of folks working across the federal government, the state, the county, the town, the communities. It's been a wonderful project and I learned a lot from a lot of people. Mayor Paul Pontieri has been great. I worked with Paul and learned from the best. I have to tell you, Patchogue is a spectacular place to visit. While there is a lot of work to do, I'm happy to see what this Council can accomplish. I appreciate the collaboration. We are seeing success and the creation of high goals. I'm looking forward to working towards the goals that have been set out in this presentation.

Thank you again.

Rich, I'm assuming this meeting is almost over and I'm looking to see if another member has joined us to establish a quorum.

Rich Guardino:

The next order of business will be the adoption of the minutes from the March 11 meeting. Theresa Sanders and Elizabeth Custodio did join us although it was after the roll call. We officially have a quorum.

Adoption of the March 11, 2021 minutes

Motion to Accept: John Cameron

Seconded: Nancy Engelhardt

All in Favor: So moved.

John Cameron:

Great. Glad you could all make it. Thanks so much. Any other issues any agenda now? Thanks again to Rauch Foundation. This was an excellent presentation. Let's continue to work together for downtowns.

Motion to adjourn. So moved. All in favor.