

Ford City Build Session and Workshop Summary

Over July and August, the Ford City Comprehensive Planning Process transitioned from asking for opinions to asking for possible solutions. Through the process of four events, we engaged the Steering Committee and Borough leadership and citizens around the most pressing issues facing Ford City. Those events are detailed in this memo and include:

- Preliminary Visioning and Riverfront Development Build Session, July 18
- Infill/Housing Build Session, July 19
- Three Topic Build Session: Economic Vitality, Safety, Talent, Aug 1
- Planning Workshop with Leslie Oberholtzer and Jim Kumon, Aug 20 and 21

Preliminary Vision, July 18

The first session that was undertaken was a review of all collected information to the Steering Committee. Included in this presentation was the results of the survey, the Vision Boards exercise, the data analysis, and the interviews. During that session, we asked the Steering Committee to come up with a preliminary set of priorities to guide further engagement.

Population/Housing

- Increase number of renters converting to homeowners
- Fill vacancies and/or upgrade housing products

Jobs/Small Business

- Destination
- Talent attraction and development programs

Amenities/Recreation

- Improved river access
- Signature events

Build Sessions

Next, the five Build Sessions were held, in which diverse groups of stakeholders brainstormed different ways to address a problem, and, if time allowed, built out one solution to that problem.

The five Build Session topics are:

- Riverfront Development
- Infill/Housing
- Economic Vitality
- Talent
- Safety

Riverfront Development

During this Build Session, we asked participants, many of whom owned property or worked for a business in the area, to share their vision for the riverfront. Those visions are shared below:

- 5 acre borough property as a green space
- Foxburg + industry + greenspace
- Condos and office with tech companies, highrises and restaurants (+barge and boats and attractions)
- People who live here spend \$ here; area benefits residents
- Increased housing, especially for retirees
- Jobs- light industry; everything else flows
- Inland marina by Ford City Bridge (gravel out the river, although this is precluded by regulations)
- Brownfields/industrial on the south end, townhomes and dog park on north end - move trail?
- People first - jobs follow - Mixed Use Development. Concentrate on most accessible place for river.

Then, we brainstormed around the three different uses that could occur along the riverfront, recreational uses, residential uses, and business uses. These ideas were written on post-it notes, and, when there was overlapping ideas, they were combined. The top ideas were then rated on a matrix of impact vs. enthusiasm, keeping in mind that the enthusiasm was related to the community members' reactions and impact related to growth in Ford City.

The results of the Riverfront Development Build Session returned very similar results to what we heard the community say, and what the Steering Committee prioritized; the most popular use of the riverfront would be to gain river access, followed by adding more dining options, jobs, and housing. Other ideas that the group felt would be met with less enthusiasm include a theater and re-routing the trails, while it was recognized that smaller investments like a dog park or coffee shop would be popular but less impactful.

Riverfront Development Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theater/Administration Building - Re-route trails | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - River Access - Restaurants - Jobs and Business - Housing |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dog Park - Coffee Shop |

Other ideas that didn't make it on the matrix include:

Amenities/Recreation:

- Barge
- Marina
- Winery

Population/Housing

- Condos
- Townhomes

Jobs/Small Business

- Tech Jobs
- Industry Jobs
- Business Incubator

Infill/Housing Build Sessions

The second Build Session that was held dealt with Infill and Housing Development, and took into consideration what to do with the site that formerly was home to Ford City High School. Three different topics arose out of the research we had performed prior to the Build Session, which are presented below. Each of these topics had an informative White Paper associated with it, which are summarized beside the topic.

Converting Renters to Homeowners - The percentage of renters in Ford City is about 40%, which is about ten percent higher than the percentage of rental households in PA (31%). There is interest in converting renters to homeowners due to the belief that homeowners are more likely to engage in the upkeep of their community. Homeownership also can assist in financial stability.

Addressing Single Person Households - Households made up of one person are increasing throughout the nation due to the aging population and the trends in young people partnering

later. Ensuring that there are units suitable for single-person households will keep older people in Ford City longer and will ensure that young people find housing they can afford.

Fixing the Issue of Vacancy - Data show that the vacancy rate in Ford City is 17% or 286 units. Vacant and abandoned houses increase blight and can drive down property values. They can also be a strain on a municipal budget. Fixing vacancy can improve the tax rolls of Ford City and be a part of a housing strategy.

Converting Renters to Homeowners Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

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|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incentive programs such as LERTA - Rent control programs - Senior apartments | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young renters accessing USDA funding and first time homeowner loans - Property code enforcement - Blight to life - tackle vacant properties by using code enforcement - First time homeowner program |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> |

Other discussion points:

- Utilize state/federal programs for “worker housing”
- Veteran housing assistance
- Seniors to rentals, which frees up housing for new owners

Addressing Single Person Households Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fix FEMA issue - Fix property tax issue so that housing can be build to meet demand | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage industry/jobs to keep young people here - Make town appealing to young people - Seniors - new single story housing for those who want to be independent - Build stores and restaurants near senior housing - Develop continuing care or aging in place facility |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rehab older building for lofts and small apartments - Develop older small houses for young people that don't want an apartment | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearinghouse for housing stock and funding sources |

Fix Vacancy Issue Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

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|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Land bank (note: PA requires a municipality have more than 5,000 to have a landbank) - Consistent codes throughout county and code enforcement - Pre-qualify buyers - exclude known slum landlords | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sweat equity - Training programs for tech school - Contractor group available to assist new owners with rehab |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> |

Build Sessions August 1

On August 1, three Build Sessions were held concurrently on the topics of Economic Vitality, Safety, and Talent. These Build Sessions each progressed to the point of building out one potential solution, which is included below as the “Priority Action.” Each of the Build Session groups had an informative “White Paper” sent to them prior to the event; a short summary of each white paper is included with the results below.

Economic Vitality

Residents of Ford City do not have a lot of discretionary income. Median Household Income is \$13,000 below the county median and poverty is about 10% higher. Additionally, four out of every ten households in Ford City earns less than \$25,000 per year. Most survey respondents spend between \$15 and \$20 on a night out.

Overall, Ford City added a total of 41 jobs from 2010 to 2015. Manufacturing had the largest increase. Retail trade had the largest decrease. There is an opportunity to develop the tourism sector, especially with the river and the beginning of the Armstrong Trail so close by.

Economic Vitality Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

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|---|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing Businesses | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tech Jobs - Manufacturing Jobs - Energy Jobs - Resident Serving Businesses |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entertainment Destination - River Infrastructure |

Additional Discussion Points:

- Tax Structure of Armstrong Co

Other Ideas:

- Entertainment on Riverfront
- Hotel on Riverfront
- Capitalize on Ford City History
- Bike/Canoe/Pontoon Rentals
- Marina
- Concentrate on downtown; businesses on Ford St are mostly healthcare
- AirBnB/VRBO

Priority Action: Jobs

Who should be engaged: Existing businesses, including Belleflex and Klingensmith’s

What is already happening: VoTech, Farmer’s Building Model, IDA has an inventory of vacant buildings, barbershop, Northpointe

How: Link to talent - Develop skills/talent apprenticeships, rehab buildings for business, LERTA/KOZ, maintenance and marketing of spaces, rezone the riverfront, connect large and small, new and existing businesses

Barriers: Flood Zones, taxes, businesses close at 5pm, people don’t want to leave but have to for jobs; no jobs for young people to do

Information Needed: Environmental Studies

Safety

In answer to the question, “Do you feel safe in Ford City?” 307, or 70%, of respondents answered “Yes,” while approximately 30% or 129 of respondents answered “No.”

If survey respondents answered “no” to the above question, they were prompted to write in their safety concerns. Overwhelmingly, drugs was the concern, followed by concerns regarding absence or part-time status of police.

Safety Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

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|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lights on - Needle Disposals - Reduce Speeding - Improve 5th Ave - Sidewalk Improvements | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Landlord Tenant Ordinance - Fix Empty Houses or Buildings - Health and Wellness Opportunities - Improve Communication Between Police and Community |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signal for Bikes/Walkers - Better Pedestrian Infrastructure |

Priority Action: Improved Communication Between Community and Police

Who should be engaged: Leadertimes, police, Kittanning Paper, Valley Dispatch, Ford City Focus, Armstrong/Indiana/Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission

What is already happening: Police officers interacting with kids - new program and back to school program, police reports to council

How:

- Police reports, system for police reporting to council (e.g. 1 per month summary, incidents and funding)
- Media Alerts
 - Police Force Facebook Page
 - Kiosks on Trail and in Borough
 - Quarterly Town Meetings
 - Borough Website
 - Branding with other Emergency Services
 - Dispatch with EMS/Fire?
 - Public Relations Person

Talent

The continued loss of young adults aged 25-44 is the biggest concern for future population and workforce. This is particularly important because young adults provide future workforce, leadership, and families.

Talent Impact vs Enthusiasm Matrix

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|--|--|
| <p>High Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversify - Cultural Activities | <p>High Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing the area's assets - Recreational activities - Mitigate flood zone - Jobs - Education K - 12 - Quality of Place/Nice Environment - Education Post Graduation - Thriving Business District |
| <p>Low Impact - Low Enthusiasm</p> | <p>Low Impact - High Enthusiasm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lodging |

Other ideas:

- Health Care Facility
- Encourage support for local businesses
- Parks, Trails, Outdoor Rec
- Skateboard Park
- Evening and Weekend Options
- Need to attract young people
- Metalworking tech and small electronic goods on third ave
- Look at employment taxes locally
- Zoning for AirBnB or hotels

Priority Action: Marketing Ford City and Assets

Who should be engaged: Young residents, borough manager/secretary, businesses in town (Ford City Business Association), Events centers and clubs, elderly, volunteers, parks and rec, 10th st station

What is already happening:

Towns and trails along the Allegheny - get people off the trail

- Kiosk with trail maps and food off trail
- Business signs - downtown and by bridge
- First Fridays
- Ford City Parks and Rec Facebook
- Festivals
- Water bills for residents
- Ford City Website
- Word of Mouth
- 10th St Station

How:

- Central location for information

- Utilize stop light for digital marketing
- Marketing outside Ford City - e.g. Pittsburgh bike shops
- Leverage existing channels
- Facebook paid ads
- Signs and kiosks
- Info available at the park

Workshops with Leslie Oberholtzer and Jim Kumon, August 21

On August 20th, Ford City held an Opportunity Tour, as well as a presentation from Jim Kumon, Executive Director of the Incremental Development Alliance, and Leslie Oberholtzer of Codametrics. The next day, both Jim and Leslie provided a workshop.

Morning Session with Leslie Oberholtzer

Leslie led the group through a master planning exercise for the riverfront. Two groups were engaged to cut out different uses and paste them on a large map of the area. One of those maps is shown here, and the other will be sent subsequently.



Afternoon Session with Jim Kumon

Jim gave an overview of successful, incrementally developed places such as Duncanville, Texas, which used markets to revitalize their downtowns. We then chose three areas and brainstormed how they could be redeveloped, by taking the next smallest step. Those steps are collected below:

High School Site

Years 1 - 3

- Farmers' Market or Craft Market
- Exercise
- Dance
- Childcare Camps
- Flea Market
- Bocce
- Pop Up Park

Years 4 - 6

- Subdivide site with alleyway
- Master plan for site

Years 7 - 9

- Cottage Court
- Retail

Year 10: ?

Downtown

Years 1 - 3

- East Brady - Rotating Art
- Murals
 - Marsha's Garden
 - Glassworks beside former bank site
 - Murals in Sections/On Panels (who would we need to coordinate with to do this?)
 - Ford Street - sidewalk sales on the street
 - Shut down the entire street
 - Paint windows, or use cloth
 - Planters near Farmers Building (since trees gone)

Years 4 - 6

- Facade improvement program
- Increase number of downtown stores serving residents
- Urban sculpture
- Concentrate on improving apartments in downtown
- Rent vacant spaces to artist

Years 7 - 9

- Focus redevelopment on downtown
 - Ford St and 9th St

Year 10: ?

Riverfront

Years 1 - 3

- Clear Borough Property
 - Move recycling (?)
- Access to River
- Boat Kayak Strip

Years 4 - 6

Years 7 - 9

- Marina

Year 10: ?