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March 26, 2015

Dear Comprehensive Planning Committee,

Let me first open by saying that it is my sincerest hope that the Comprehensive Plan has the potential to build up and support the existing community living in Midtown. As a Kingston resident who lives in Uptown and works primarily in Midtown, I am excited about the potential that the Comprehensive Plan has to brighten the prospects of my neighbors. It is a truly lovely opportunity to demonstrate to the Midtown community that the City of Kingston wants to invest in their well-being in a way empowers residents.

The greatest complication here is that a plan with such lofty goals with respect to maintaining socio-economic and cultural diversity requires engaging a number of difficult issues that do not necessarily fall into the purview of the plan itself. Involving the population of Midtown in the process of revitalization – which is the only way to prevent gentrification during this process – requires that we deal not only with existing politics and practices, but also that we confront with honesty with our country's history of racialized discrimination and marginalization of the impoverished. Appropriately addressing these realities as they have manifested themselves in Kingston requires investment from all levels of the community – not only of the Comprehensive Planning Committee and of Midtown citizens, but also of City Officials and other leaders. It demands a high level of intentionality, patience, generosity of spirit and hard work on the part of everyone.

Below, I would like to make some modest suggestions with respect to projects related to the Comprehensive Plan that I believe could be used to begin to build trust within the Midtown community with the goal of deepening the engagement of the local populace in the overall process of revitalization. These suggestions have grown out of my work with the folks who live in Midtown Kingston, and from the surveys I have conducted with members of Midtown Rising, a coalition of Kingston citizens who live in, work in, and/or care about the future of Midtown. In doing so I recognize my own position as someone who lives outside of the Midtown area, while also hoping that my community involvement might offer some insight into about how we can move forward together as a healthier, more unified community.

Economic Opportunities

Job creation is, of course, one of the most pressing needs in Ulster County. In addition to the business incubator project, I would encourage the Comprehensive Planning Committee to consider how alternative business models might be of benefit in Kingston. For example, Midtown Rising is currently engaged in a fact-finding period regarding worker-owned grocery cooperatives. In our surveys, Midtown residents have expressed great interest in the possibility of a local co-op, which could be combined with a small café utilizing local products to provide lunch items and wireless connectivity for guests. For more information about recent developments with worker co-ops in NYC, see

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/commonomics/worker-owned-co-ops-get-one-million-dollars-in-new-york-budget>.

Recreational Space

A second item that has been raised repeatedly in our surveying of Midtown residents is the desire for open green space that can be used for recreation and community gatherings. We are aware that in the past there were plans to convert the former site of King's Inn into such a recreational space, but planning was halted because of funding issues. Ensuring that this need is met will go a long way in demonstrating to the Midtown community that the City of Kingston cares about their needs and interests. Such a recreational space could also dovetail with the Plan's prescriptions for encouraging urban agriculture in Midtown.

Affordable Housing

As stated by Lesleigh Miller at the public review of the Comprehensive Plan last Thursday, there is a severe shortage of affordable housing in Midtown Kingston. I would echo Jennifer Berky's suggestion at the public forum that any efforts to preserve the historicity of buildings and properties within the community combine resources with affordable housing grants to maximize both historical preservation and increase affordable housing opportunities. Historical preservation, while certainly a desirable outcome of the plan, will mean very little if the buildings it preserves do not serve the local populace. Such a move will be particularly alienating to the Midtown community if it is perceived that properties and buildings are of more value than the people who live in and utilize them. This is also, incidentally, while I would disagree in the strongest of terms with the persons at the community forum who argued that preservation of historical assets should be the *primary* emphasis of the final draft of the plan.

Thank you, once again, for your willingness to receive feedback from the community before finalizing the Comprehensive Plan. If I can be of service to you in anyway, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

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