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**Cahill, Suzanne**

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**From:** Anezka C. Sebek <anezka.sebek@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 3:25 PM  
**To:** Cahill, Suzanne  
**Subject:** Further Comprehensive Plan Comments: Anezka Sebek  
**Attachments:** Anezka Sebek\_Kingston\_Comprehensive\_Plan\_2025.pdf

Hello Suzanne--

Here are the rest of my comments.

Thank you for the committees and your steadfast work. Kingston citizens really appreciate that the many voices of the city are being heard. I know that there are still many people who are just now finding out about the Plan but I hope that the process stays fluid as we go forward so that their input can be incorporated in the future.

Best,

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Anezka

March 25, 2015

Comprehensive Plan Notes from Anezka Sebek

## **How do we get there from here?**

### ***Introduction:***

I am a citizen of Rondout and I attended the March 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting at City Hall as both a citizen of the city and a member of the Midtown Rising volunteer group. What follows is a list personal comments that I hope will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan (the Plan from here on out). I am often not able to come to meetings in Kingston because, like so many Ulster County residents, I have to go to New York City to earn a decent wage at least 3 or 4 days a week. I do love this city and hope to assist with any efforts to make it the greatest city to live, work, and enjoy for everyone who chooses to make the city their home.

### ***1. Critique***

Having a vibrant city means that the words “poverty and crime” cannot be left out of Kingston’s future planning. The words “social equity” cannot be uttered as one in a litany of other comments. Social *inequity* has to be defined and brought forward as one Kingston’s most expensive long-term burdens. Nevertheless, the city belongs to everyone and room has to be made for everyone to lead a productive life in Kingston. However, as one of the commenters on March 19<sup>th</sup> asked: how do we get there from here?

### ***2. Economic Development***

The Plan needs to have a solid foundation of a diverse economic development plan. The heaviest focus of the comments was on the economic development one of its many resources: historic preservation. Kingston city dwellers, business owners, and homeowners all take pride in their little chunk of early American History. Responsible preservation, indeed, should not be pushed to the back of the Plan. Historic preservation means that there are people living, working, and using the preserved buildings. It should not come at an irresponsible cost that robs the city and county’s budget from funds to build affordable housing. A more global look needs to be taken for historic preservation and maintenance. After all, it is the maintenance of a historic building for the long term that is the costliest part of the equation.

The emphasis of development needs to be on the attraction of New Economy industries but primarily: networked technologies of the Internet, medical education, training, research, innovation and technologies, sustainable energy in smart micro-grids, education, arts and cultural production (music, dance, film, theater-- from suppliers to sellers). The Plan should study the conditions artists from Brooklyn are seeking to provide affordable space in Kingston. These city dwellers have other cities as options along the Hudson River. How are we going to be the best city for them? How can we **prioritize the needed infrastructure** such as fiber optic broadband and **free wireless Internet service**? How can we afford to

catch up the 150 years of neglect of living quality infrastructure under the streets (sewage and water) as well as well-kept roads and bridges? Will the Empire Development Fund be enough of a start? How can we attract the right amount of capital investment? We know that \$150M will get the Plan off the ground, but tallying up the cost of all the goals in the Plan takes us more to the \$1Billion mark. How will we make the city “cool” and attractive for the kind of capital investment we truly need?

### ***3. Absentee landlords should be held accountable***

Unfortunately, the housing stock throughout the city that is most in need of renovation, demolishing or preservation, especially in Midtown, is not owned by people who live in Kingston but by people who have abandoned the city and prey on the poor. The poor, in turn, are happy to have a roof over their head. They don't complain much because if they do, they will find themselves in housing court. Lack of adequate public defenders eventually causes them to be homeless. This has been my personal experience with homelessness in Kingston. The negative perception of Midtown is largely due to absentee landlords who allow their buildings to decay. There should be much more strict building code reinforcement to make sure landlords regularly paint and maintain exteriors and the general appearance and functionality of the dwelling.

### ***4. Midtown as the heart of Kingston***

One of the main foci of the Plan is the revitalization of Midtown as the heart of the city. This is a welcome shift from previous Kingston economic development plans because it will make a difference to the people of Midtown who, by the way, know very little about the Plan because the poor are rarely consulted in the planning of the city. Mayor Gallo's BEAT plan (although it has an unfortunate name) is a promising step in the right direction but it still needs to be fully implemented.

The Midtown neighborhood is made up of several types of residential citizens. 1) Those who have lived there for decades through the ups and downs of the city's condition; 2) those who are the working poor and on permanent disability welfare who rent from predatory landlords; 3) those who are returning from incarceration and find the cheapest apartments in Midtown; 4) and those who are the new homesteaders of the neighborhood. Midtowners who are just moving into the neighborhood and tending with pride to their historic property would like to see improvement in the pockets of crime that remain. This is also true for the people who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time. Older residents who are often on a fixed income need to be considered as the property taxes, cost of living, and condition of the neighborhood improves.

### ***4. The goal of ending homelessness by the USICH***

As a point of information, it is critical for Kingston to understand the larger US government decisions that are putting pressure on organizations that serve the poor. In the same time frame as the plans for Kingston's Renaissance in 2025, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness has put forth the goal to end individual

homelessness by 2015/16 and family homelessness by 2020, a full five years before the Kingston Plan time frame. Keeping this goal in mind, the *City of Kingston needs to aggressively create affordable mixed income housing to give every citizen a place to live*. This does not mean the piecemeal current solution of temporary shelter and motels. It means foregrounding the incorporation of low-income apartments for families in the Plan when we build new housing that is mixed in with other levels of income. Ostracizing the poor to the kind of apartments that were built after the Rondout was demolished with urban renewal is wrong and unproductive. This is one of the many missing pieces of the comments meeting (3/19/2015) although Leslie expressed her frustration with living in hotels very eloquently at the end of the meeting.

#### ***5. The erroneous image of Midtown as a crime ridden neighborhood***

Interspersed in the ethnically and racially diverse population is the same criminal element that we also have in the other neighborhoods in Kingston. *Midtown is not any different than the other neighborhoods*. According to the Police Chief, most of the nuisance and noise calls come from Midtown but not necessarily the most serious crime. The crime map of Kingston shows an even distribution of crime throughout the city. This is largely due to the heavy policing and the erroneous suspicion that crime lives in Midtown. What is true is that many lowest income citizens of Kingston live in Midtown but there are other pockets of poverty throughout the city. These are people who work in the low-wage retail stores of gas stations and the Regional Mall. They work and make ends meet with Food Stamps and Earned Income Tax Credits. They work hard and long except for the very few who are too depressed and emotionally exhausted to continue in their lives as the working poor. They have suffered through generational poverty that is largely due to structural economic changes in the city and lack of Kingston's investment in better education (where students should not be allowed to leave high school without a GED!) Once they don't complete high school, the temptation of the informal economy such as drug running and other forms of criminal activity seems more lucrative. Out of desperation, they seek a life of living on the edge and a life of crime. Soon thereafter, the cycle of incarceration and recidivism ensues. Once someone has committed a crime, work is impossible to obtain. However, if we are to reduce the cost of incarceration, the safety net, homelessness, and subsidized housing, it makes more financial sense to give someone training and a living wage job so that they can make a new start.

#### ***6. Physical and Mental Health Services***

Many of the poor are also in need of physical and mental health services, which are currently very close by at Kingston Hospital. And yet, just as the people returning from incarceration, a full recovery from economic, physical, and emotional setbacks means being employed in a living wage job. The working poor of Midtown could be retrained and re-educated to take advantage of the New Economy employment opportunities that the city will hopefully attract. They could also be educated to be innovators and entrepreneurs. The Sophie Finn SUNY Ulster

Campus will make a huge difference here. The new campus should be considered as a business incubation space for innovators of every age and income level.

***Conclusion***

My personal impression from walking around the Midtown neighborhood is that it is a promising neighborhood where ethnic, racial, economic, social and cultural diversity is represented in its people. Indeed, it could be the true heart of Kingston with a lot of unique features for both residential and business opportunities.

Kingston has too long been a city without a heart. Planning for better gathering and recreational space in Midtown would make our city whole and would direct the attention in Kingston not only to a world class cultural center like the Ulster County Performing Arts Center but also to the people and businesses of the Midtown neighborhood as an example of the power of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity.

Best,

Anezka Sebek  
Rondout homeowner  
Midtown Rising participant and volunteer