

SWOT Assessment for Village of Chester Comprehensive Plan Team

This document contains the following information: 1) the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats identified by the Village residents Monday night (the 18th); 2) all comments on the co-Urbanize website for the Orange County Comprehensive Plan that are related to Chester; and 3) the draft map of potential historic districts, mentioned at the meeting and created with guidance from Leslie Smith

Strengths

- Water System
- Historic Integrity of the Building Stock
- Rich Black Dirt Area
- Agricultural Land
- Balance and Diversity of Land Uses
- Diverse and Talented Population
- Convenient Public Transportation and Road Network
- Heritage Trail and Recreational Opportunities
- Active Community Groups
- Large Arts Community
- Location Assets—Proximity to New York City, Location at Geographic Center of County
- Important Prehistoric and Archaeological Discoveries
- Mix of Individual Businesses and Chain Businesses
- Beautification

Weaknesses

- Pedestrian Unfriendly
- Traffic
- Zone Change Criteria Need to Be Strengthened
- Shortage of Commuter Parking
- High Density Housing Proposed in Problematic Areas
- Infrastructure, Specifically Flood Control Measures
- Insufficient Parking in Uptown Area
- Connections
- Recreation
- Narrow Main Street
- Fragmented Business District
- Aesthetics
- Housing Balance
- “McDonaldization” of Routes 17 & 17M Corridor
- Intrusive Road Signage, Specifically Billboards
- Noise Ordinance Insufficient

Opportunities

- Traffic Realignment in Downtown
- Business District Connection
- Diversity of Housing Options for All Income Levels, Including Subsidized Housing
- Resiliency and Sustainability/Green Initiative
- Zoning District Changes As Necessary
- Control Over Growth Potential
- Intermunicipal Growth Management Discussions
- Public Outreach and Transparency
- Technology and Communication Between Village and Residents
- Architectural Review Board
- Public Input Early in Development Review Process, Particularly for Village-Sponsored Projects or Large-Scale Development
- Public Art Installations
- Broaden Public Events (Fairs and Festivals)
- Large-Scale Projects—Legoland, Camp LaGuardia, etc—OPPORTUNITY to affect project design to minimize negative impacts and accentuate positive impacts
- Economic Development Coordination—Both Intermunicipal and Countywide
- Increased Communication Between Town and Village of Chester

Threats

- Lack of Intra-City Transit/No Regular Public Transit System Serving the Village and Town
- Aquifer Protection
- Water Supply Protection; Village Wells Located in Town
- Development Pressure on Infrastructure
- Traffic and Safety on Local Roads
- Flooding Risks and Hazards
- Natural Gas Access
- Unsustainable Overdevelopment
- Impacts of Freight and Shipping on Microclimates (Air Quality Around Industrial Park)
- Large-Scale Projects—Legoland, Camp LaGuardia, etc—THREAT to infrastructure, traffic, and general quality of life for Village residents

Co-Urbanize Comments Directly or Indirectly Related to Village of Chester

Comments Pinned in the Village of Chester:

- “Great!” Category—The Green Onion, Art Gallery, organic farm market and events center (Leslie Smith)
- “Great!” Category—1915 Erie Station, Chester’s Local History Museum, Chester Historical Society on the Heritage Trail (Clifton Patrick)

- “Great!” Category—Chester Historical Society office and Archive, a treasure trove of local history (Clifton Patrick)
- “Could be better” Category—Roundabout would work well here *intersection of Main St and High St pinned* and at the same time, slow traffic entering Main Street (Leslie Smith)
- “Could be better” Category—Large roundabout needed at this badly designed intersection! *Intersection of 17M and 94 pinned* It would also eliminate those ugly wires and traffic lights! (Leslie Smith)
- “What’s missing” Category—Before Chester lumber burned many years ago, there was a blinking light here. *Intersection of Main Street and 17M pinned*. A small roundabout would work here. (Leslie Smith)
- “What’s missing” Category—Intersection of Rt 17M, Lehigh Ave and Cty Rt 13. A great location for a traffic roundabout. Traffic really stacks up here and drivers are passing stopped cars etc. A roundabout would also eliminate the traffic light! (Leslie Smith)

Comments Pinned in the Town of Chester:

- “What’s missing” Category—Goosepond State Parkland is great but I’d also like to see open space funds/efforts be expanded to connect this park to other protected lands (Schunne-munk and Harriman) for a greenway corridor in the protection of our natural resources as well as for recreational uses. (Tracy Schuh)

Comments Not Pinned to the Map but Relevant to the Village of Chester:

- General Orange County idea: Encourage new businesses and the creative economy and get out of the way. Zoning code should allow AIR (artist in residence) whereby an artist can do their work in their own building without special (and very expensive) commercial and factory zoning requirements. Orange County benefits enormously by the high cost of NYC. Be smart . . . encourage, make it easy, require safety but don’t over tax it or that will kill the proverbial golden goose. Allow individuals to run electrics and plumbing in their own building. Inspect it, require high standards, but allow individuals who know the drill to do it themselves . . . this is a big way to attract talented creative types to the county. Instruct codes officers to work with artists and arts organizations to temporarily use and occupy safe but unfinished spaces. Set reasonable requirements for say fire extinguishers, and active fire guards for temporary shows. Collaboration between codes and artists and arts producers improves safety and instigates economic activity. (Stuart Sachs)
- Sustainability & resiliency idea—Harvey is a warning to use all: that we must not build residences and most types of businesses in flood-prone locations. We are experiencing more severe weather more often. We have had ‘100-year’ storms with increasing frequency locally in recent years! These severe storms which historically had a 1% chance of impacting us in a particular year are now more like 50% occurrence storms – a 50% chance every year! These storms were not only hitting us more frequently, building in those flood susceptible areas are worsening the consequences. Greater development restrictions are called for minimize future disasters in areas prone to flooding. (Clifton Patrick)

- General Orange County idea—All public meetings, both at the county and municipal level should be video recorded and made available for viewing on public access television channels and on the internet. There have been meetings that I wanted to attend but could not. (Clifton Patrick)
- Sustainability & resiliency idea—muni and county offices including schools, libraries, dpw, water, etc should all be required to incorporate green technology en every project. Every project should be analyzed to decide if they would be good candidates for Solar/PV, Wind, geo-therm, etc. Fleets should be required to use high percentage of low or zero emission vehicles. Construction and mechanicals should be required to be of the highest energy standards every time a building is updated. The county should have a goal of 50% co-generation, zero emission energy by 2020. Waste runoff water should be separated from sanitary and returned to the ground water BEFORE the runoff is connected to the sanitary system. These standards must be enforced by Planning and Zoning Boards as projects get designed and built. Enforcing this would prevent massive sewage discharge into the Hudson. (Stuart Sachs)
- Transportation & transit idea—There are 4 places in the village of Chester where roundabouts would work well and ease traffic flow and confusion. 2 of them on Rt 17M (Brookside Av.) With bumper to bumper, stop and go for hours upon hours on summer weekends and whenever a problem arises on Rt 17, As Legoland is anticipated to be approved, they would improve safety and keep traffic flowing. (Leslie Smith)
- Parks & recreation idea—Use more government owned parcels to create public spaces. A mowed area with a bench or walking paths on otherwise unused portions of government owned parcels could be a wonderfully inexpensive way for the public to utilize otherwise wasted government assets (Clifton Patrick)
- General Orange County idea—more protection of farmland and open space more mindful development and no development on important soils or important water, habitat or other areas of significance (Marlena Lange)
- Jobs & economy idea—Small farms. So many of our farms can be much more creative in order to stay in business & grow! Affiliations of local produce farmers with local restaurants is terrific. Take it further. Give cooking classes together to residents! I signed up for this on a trip to SC. It was AMAZING! Great cooking techniques/tips & we ate what we prepared & took recipes home! As more people move into this area, more medical services. We still have too many residents leaving Orange County for quality medical care. . More public transportation available to residents. Improving rail service to Orange County would be so helpful. Let's utilize Stewart International Airport! I'm sick of driving to NYC every time I need to fly! (Lynn Thompson)
- General comment—Orange County, with its wonderful cultural assets, history, and environment should become a "Certified Local Government" (CLG) to guide, support and shape the future of our community and help protect it from insensitive overdevelopment. CLG does not stop or hinder the process, but helps guide it to reduce and mitigate the damage. It also reduces unnecessary project expense and delay by addressing public issues and concerns early in the process, when they are most effectively and economically addressed. (Clifton Patrick)