

Project Name: NY Forward: Farmingdale
Subject: Local Planning Committee Meeting #1

Meeting Location: Farmingdale Village Hall (361 Main Street)
Meeting Date: May 14th, 2025
Meeting Time: 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Participants: **Local Planning Committee**

Mayor Ralph Ekstrand, Co-Chair
Peter Elkowitz, Co-Chair
Eric Anderson
Anthony Bartone
Paul Defendini
Nick DeVito
Adrienne Esposito
George Graf
Debbie Podolski
Joseph Staudt
William "Bill" Sklar
Chris Werle

New York State

Pape Cisse, Department of State (DOS)
Rachel Bruce, Department of State (DOS)
Brandon Gimpelman, Empire State Development (ESD)

Consultant Team

Noah Levine, Associate Principal, BFJ Planning
Suzanne Goldberg, Senior Planner, BFJ Planning
Eshti Sookram, Planner, BFJ Planning

The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the Local Planning Committee (LPC) and project team members, the New York Forward (NYF) process and timeline, introduce strategies for public outreach, and begin discussing goals and priorities for the Farmingdale NYF. No members of the public joined the meeting as attendees. The presentation is posted on the [Farmingdale NYF website](#) and can be referred to for additional details.

Welcome and Introductions

- Mayor and LPC Co-Chair, Ralph Ekstrand welcomed attendees, thanked them for participating, and introduced Pape Cisse, representative from the New York Department of State (DOS) NY Forward Program.
- Pape Cisse introduced additional State representatives and the Consultant Team, BFJ Planning. BFJ Planning will be supported by subconsultants specializing in economic development, urban design, sustainability, and engineering. Together, the team will develop the content for the Strategic Investment Plan.
- LPC members then introduced themselves and shared their connections to the Village.

NYF Code of Conduct

- Mr. Cisse gave an overview of the NYF Code of Conduct, which all LPC members must sign, and explained that any potential conflict of interest must be disclosed at the earliest possible time. If a potential conflict is identified, members must complete and submit a formal Recusal Form.
- LPC Co-Chair Peter Elkowitz then read the preamble aloud, reminding members of their obligation to act in the public interest and to recuse themselves when necessary.

The following is a summary of questions raised regarding recusals:

- If I am working with a group providing pro bono services to the Village, is disclosure required?
 - Yes. Disclosure is required. The Department of State's ethics officer will review the information once submitted.

NYF Program Overview

- Mr. Cisse described the overarching goal of the NYF program: To revitalize downtown areas; Encourage the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; Grow the local property tax base; Create diverse housing options for all income levels; Create an active downtown with a mix of uses; Provide diverse employment opportunities for a variety of skill sets and salary levels; Provide enhanced public spaces that serve those of all ages and abilities; Enhance downtown living and quality of life.
- An LPC member asked if projects will be ranked in the SIP.
 - Mr. Cisse responded that projects will not be ranked. The LPC will vote on the entire slate of projects to be included in the SIP. The State will then evaluate these projects and award funding.

NYF Planning Process

- Noah Levine (BFJ Planning) gave a summary of the timeline and deliverables, highlighting an 8–9-month timeframe.
- Additionally, Mr. Levine gave an overview of the eligible project types (public improvement projects, new development and/or rehabilitation of existing downtown buildings, small project grant funds, branding and marketing) and ineligible project types/activities (planning activities, operations and maintenance, pre-award costs, property acquisition, training and other program expenses, expenses related to existing projects).
- He also reviewed project match requirements, including sponsor contributions, project size expectations, and details on the small project fund.
- Projects are evaluated based on their alignment with local and State goals, catalytic effect on downtown revitalization, project readiness, eligibility, cost-effectiveness, and the co-benefits they provide to the community, such as additional economic activity and improved quality of life.
- The planning process will culminate in a consensus on priority projects, the development and submission of the Strategic Investment Plan, and a roadmap for downtown revitalization.
- The final slate of recommended projects, finalized by the LPC, incorporates public feedback and includes requested NYF funds exceeding the awarded amount.
- Following the planning phase, State agencies will review the recommended projects, announce funding decisions, execute contracts with project sponsors, and initiate implementation and reporting.
- Implementation involves reimbursement-based grants, meaning sponsors must complete work before receiving funds.
- He then explained the Open Call for Projects, noting that private, non-profit, and public entities will have the opportunity to submit project applications.

The following is a summary of questions asked about the NYF process:

- Is a project to bury utility poles and upgrade the electrical grid on Main Street eligible for NYF funding?
 - Generally, the State is moving away from funding large-scale infrastructure projects due to their high cost. Burying power lines may be eligible in some cases, but other infrastructure improvements may not qualify.
 - It was noted that NYF funding priorities have shifted over time.
 - Expenses that have already been allocated are not eligible – until the SIP is complete and the list of awardees is official.

Your Role as the LPC

- Suzanne Goldberg (BFJ Planning) explained the responsibilities of the Local Planning Committee (LPC). LPC members, nominated by the municipality and confirmed by NY State, serve as ambassadors of the NYF program. Led by co-chairs, the LPC helps ensure the community vision is achieved and the public interest is upheld.
- Key LPC responsibilities include identifying effective communication and community engagement methods, recommending stakeholders, providing input on draft materials, identifying potential projects for funding, and assisting with project evaluation and selection.

- LPC members should expect monthly meetings, regular correspondence with the State and consultants, assistance and participation in public engagement, and input on materials prepared by consultants.

The following is a summary of questions raised regarding LPC involvement in project development:

- If a potential project is discussed, and I don't have direct expertise in that area, can I include someone from my organization with greater expertise to provide input?
 - Yes. LPC members are encouraged to connect relevant individuals or organizations with the consultant team. These contacts can help strengthen project proposals or submit their own ideas.
 - The consultant team noted that part of their role is to work with stakeholders to help shape and strengthen projects by involving relevant agencies and ensuring necessary details are included.
 - Throughout the process, the consultant team will meet with project sponsors separately and provide the LPC with summarized information to support decision-making.
 - It was also suggested that inviting these individuals to participate in public engagement activities would be a valuable way to gather input.

Public Engagement

- Public engagement is a critical component of NYF. It is led by the consultant team and occurs throughout the process. Activities should encourage participation from broad and diverse populations.
- The public helps refine the goals, vision and strategies, provides input, and offers feedback on proposed projects.
- The public will be engaged through LPC meetings, the Open Call for Projects, public workshops, local outreach activities, and online engagement.

The consultant team asked LPC members for suggestions on potential locations for upcoming outreach events, including the first public workshop, as well as any upcoming community events, key groups, or stakeholders to consider for engagement. The following is a summary of the feedback provided:

- First Public Workshop:
 - The consultant team (BFJ) will follow up with proposed dates that work for the library.
 - A 7:00 PM start time is standard for the area and allows people time to get home from work.
 - Advertising methods will include the Village's Constant Contact list, Facebook page, and website.
 - The school district can also help promote the event, with a potential reach of up to 15,000 people.
 - Estimated attendance for workshops is around 100 people, with a maximum capacity of about 200.
- Additional Community Events to consider for pop-ups:
 - Farmers Market

- Spring Fire Department event
- Art in the Park
- Music on Main
- Kiwanis Craft Fair
- Pops Concert Series

Farmingdale's NYF Application

- Ms. Goldberg went into further detail about the Village's NYF application, focusing on the boundary of the study area and refining the vision statement initially submitted.
- Ms. Goldberg discussed downtown assets and opportunities, highlighting the proximity to the LIRR station, mixed-use transit-oriented development, historic assets, community events and festivals, and downtown's abundance of restaurants and bars.
- Previous planning efforts include the Village's Downtown Master Plan and Update, façade improvement program, the establishment of Downtown Mixed Use (DMU) zoning, and enhancements to parking infrastructure.
- Initial project ideas include creating a community cultural arts center, preserving the Thomas Powell House and installing historic markers and trails, developing branding and marketing strategies, expanding downtown workforce housing, and establishing a small project fund to support local businesses.

The group discussed various options for the NYF boundary, with particular attention to the inclusion of the Thomas Powell House. The following themes emerged:

Thomas Powell House: Significance and Vision

- The Thomas Powell House, built around 1700, predates the founding of the United States and once served as a Quaker meetinghouse. There is a vision to restore the property and transform it into a museum and community space—potentially housing local historical societies, the Chamber of Commerce, and other civic groups that lack a permanent home.
- The house is structurally sound but in need of major repairs; it also includes a deteriorated Civil War-era carriage house and has historic significance as a stop on the Underground Railroad.
- There is interest in integrating the site into local school curriculum, offering students a tangible way to connect with local history.

Support for Including the House in the NYF Boundary

- LPC members expressed strong support for including the Thomas Powell House within the NYF boundary, noting its historical value and potential for educational, cultural, and community use.
- There was a desire to avoid the fate of other underutilized historic sites and instead elevate the house as a community focal point or gateway.
- Some suggested using branding and marketing strategies to communicate Farmingdale's history. Ideas included developing walking trails from Downtown to the site, possibly incorporating other historic elements like local cemeteries, to form a historical experience.

Boundary Considerations

- Mr. Cisse confirmed that the NYF boundary must be contiguous.
- Suggestions included using the railroad as a natural boundary to pull in the Thomas Powell House.
- There was concern about excluding residential areas like Conklin Street, which isn't zoned for commercial uses, but the LPC concluded that offices in this area may still benefit from NYF investment and visibility.
- The consultant team agreed to revise the boundary for the next LPC meeting

Next Steps

- The LPC should review the following documents: NYF Guidance Document, the NYF application, and sign the Code of Conduct.
- Visit project website: www.FarmingdaleNYF.com
- LPC Meeting #2 will be held on June 11, 2025 at 11 AM.

Visioning Exercise

The meeting ended with a final visioning exercise to understand LPC priorities for the Farmingdale NYF. The following is a summary of their responses.

- The LPC members expressed enthusiasm about the idea of establishing a community gathering space, such as a theater, that offers an alternative to bars and restaurants.
- Another LPC member expressed concern for the feasibility of running a theater given the ongoing operation costs and management necessary to ensure success in the long-term.
- An LPC member suggested incorporating green infrastructure and stormwater management systems into municipal parking lots.
- Another member discussed the possibility of creating partnerships between the Village and organizations such as, the School District.
- Support was voiced for the enhancement of historic sites within Farmingdale.
- An LPC member suggested expanding housing options such as, the development of micro-apartments.