

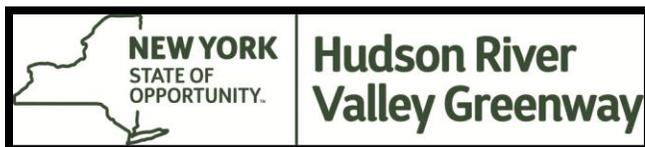
Pattern for Progress Fellows Program



Review of Downtown

Port Jervis, NY

June 21, 2016



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Scope and purpose

Throughout our eight months in the Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress Fellows Program, we discussed Pattern's "Urban Action Agenda," a regional plan for urban centers – discussing and researching both what makes an urban center successful and, just as importantly, what does not. The UAA planning process works with 25 initial urban centers across the nine-county region to strengthen their urban fabric, reduce sprawl, and preserve the green space that is one of the region's strongest qualities.

The region, as a whole, is made from the local fabric of our communities. The UAA analyzes the region, from local perspectives, up to a fuller picture of the region. Urban centers include cities, villages and other areas where social, cultural, civic and economic activity, exhibit the qualities of urban areas.

Throughout this year's Fellows program, a variety of topics – affordable housing, business improvement districts, innovation centers and the like – have been discussed in depth, giving the Fellows, who come to the program from diverse backgrounds, a better sense of how to evaluate the myriad communities in which we live and work.

This group was tasked with evaluating the City of Port Jervis: to visit the city, meet its leaders and people, research its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, see how it compares with similar communities around the region and across the country, and present our findings, suggestion and recommendations for the City of Port Jervis, all with the hope of helping the city thrive, moving forward.

Characteristics of Main Street

During several site visits during the winter and spring of 2016, the Fellows toured the City of Port Jervis, not limiting ourselves to just Main Street, but rather several streets throughout the city (Pike Street, Front Street, Sussex Street, etc.) to get a better sense of the community, its strengths and its weaknesses – all with the aim of providing the most accurate portrait of the city, on which we could present our findings and recommendations.

The City of Port Jervis boasts many amenities and features that would attract both additional businesses and residents to its community. The city offers a stock of attractive, historic buildings; numerous outdoor recreational opportunities that capitalize on the natural features of the region; a low cost for both commercial property and housing; access to New York City's Penn Station via commuter train; Bon Secours Community Hospital, which offers both quality health care and good-paying jobs for skilled employees; seasonal festivals to both attract visitors and establish a sense of community for local residents; several chic shops and the pending opening of the Fox N Hare Brewing Co.; and the distinction of being included in *National Geographic's* Upper Delaware River geotourism program.

Still, however, the city faces several challenges that hinder its hopes of revitalization. These include, among others: aging infrastructure and a high vacancy rate (both residential and commercial); a high crime rate; a lack of lodging; a negative image in the press; a tax disadvantage, as compared with neighboring communities in New Jersey and Pennsylvania; lack of a community “brand;” past downtown revitalization design decisions that did not come to fruition.

Past Revitalization Efforts

The City of Port Jervis is not alone in its revitalization ambition. The Fellows looked for (and found) other communities in the U.S. with a similar situation as Port Jervis: river towns, located in a tri-state area and at major transportation crossroads. We found some of similar size (Williamstown, Mass., and Mount Vernon, Ind.) and some that are considerably larger (Chattanooga, Tenn., Dubuque, Iowa; Paducah, Ky.). While their particular differed considerably, all of them seemed to share some community aspects:

- They stake a claim to be at the heart of their respective region - not only geographically and historically, but also emotionally.
- They exhibit strong civic and community spirit - be it through volunteer engagement, the number of active civic organizations. Paducah even has its own corps of red-coated ambassadors who welcome and guide visitors and help out at civic functions and events.
- They strive for a diversified economic base, take pride in place and history, and are proactive in pursuing the future. Attractive downtowns and accessible and inviting waterfronts are common features.
- These communities are physical expression of a region's quality of life; they aim to deliver the services and recreational value(s) their residents and visitors need and seek; and they establish strong connections to the recreational offerings in the region (e.g. Williamstown and the Berkshires, Chattanooga and the Civil War history, Paducah and Mount Vernon and the "River & Rail" history). These communities market themselves within and to the wider world through integrated websites and on-going social media activities, offering one-stop shopping for residents and visitors alike. They either have or are working toward a clearly defined "brand" that represents who they are or want to be.

Best Practices

City of Port Jervis has been working for several years on a plan to become a regional leader in tourism, attracting young, active and affluent tourists to the city. Mayor Kelly B. Decker said, “The City of Port Jervis has a unique opportunity to (become a) three-to-five-day getaway destination by utilizing the natural resources found in and around the city. Economic development will come by creating an environment that attracts those that love the outdoors. They include hikers, bikers, rafters, those that kayak, history buffs, and more. By experiencing over 20 miles of hiking and biking trails in our Elks Brox Park and Watershed Park and Recreation area, utilizing the Delaware River and potentially new White Water Kayak Park, or visiting sites from the early native American areas as well as those from the Revolution, Civil War, and 19th Century Transportation in America, one can spend countless hours enjoying the outdoors. Those same people that are visiting will need a place to stay, shop, and dine thus ushering in growth. As businesses open and expand, employees are needed. As businesses build, growth of the city can continue as the city has the unique capability of providing clean fresh municipal water and sewer within the city limits...Whether it be simply brochures or posters in key locations that will see traffic they real push for advertisement needs to be done through mass media (commercials) and specialty magazines promoting the visit. Having a very active social media with immediate response to requests is imperative as well. An interactive website for the city that provides information on programs, activities, and venues is important. Lastly, proper signage throughout the city giving those that are visiting the ability to know how to get from one location to another...Increased visitors will provide our economic development for those that live and work in our city and create jobs. By visiting and spending money in our city, our

residents will begin to see a stable tax base that can allow for growth without any further significant burden put on the taxpayer.”

Recommendations

Sitting down with civic and community leaders on several occasions proved invaluable in our process. Speaking with and gaining input from City of Port Jervis stakeholders – residents, business owners, police officials, local historian – gave the Fellows a sense of not only the city’s history (where it’s been), but also its future (where the city hopes to see itself in the years to come.)

Through these interactions, the Fellows formed consensus on several ways the City of Port Jervis can achieve its goals of attracting business, rehabilitating its image, and growing its economy, among others. The following are several recommendations the Fellows have discussed and present for the revitalization of the City of Port Jervis:

- **Marketing** – Unfair as it may be, the City of Port Jervis has less-than-enviable image around Orange County, the Hudson Valley and the region. During our March 2016 meeting with local stakeholders, Tri-State Chamber of Commerce Executive Director and longtime Port Jervis resident Charlene Trotter mentioned several times, “There’s no place like Port,” a fact only those who live, work or are keenly familiar with the city would appreciate. And with that, a marketing campaign was born!

Who better to let the world know what the City of Port Jervis has to offer – that there really is no place like Port – than the people who hold it so dear? Traditional attempts to spread



that message and rehabilitate the city's image – relying on local media for positive stories, etc. – have proved unsuccessful. Hence, the Fellows have recommended a grass-roots marketing campaign – **There's No Place Like Port!** – to reach the target audiences the city covets. To that end, the Fellows have established several social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Canva) for city stakeholders to take command of the community's images, produce and share positive stories about the community, its people, its opportunities and its potential.

- **Economy** – The City of Port Jervis faces several fiscal challenges, making it more difficult to address many of the hurdles – infrastructure, crime, etc. – it must overcome to realize its full potential. The Fellows recommend finding and applying for county, state and federal funding, where available, to help alleviate the city's most pressing issues. These include New York State programs such as the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and the Consolidated Funding Application.
- **Business attraction** – Based on the city's desire to become a tourist destination for nature enthusiasts, the Fellows recommend looking to lure the appropriate specialized businesses to sustain the community as it grows into a kayaking and biking hub. These include: bike rentals and repairs, kayak rentals, upscale restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, and hotels (both boutique) and chains), among others. The aim is to establish a mix that will both attract visitors to the city but also augment and supplement the existing businesses to keep residents in town, not taking their business outside the City of Port Jervis.

- **Regional collaboration** – The Fellows suggest working with the neighboring municipalities of Matamoras, Pa., and Montague, N.J., to promote mutually beneficial programs for the three communities, playing off the strengths of each.

The research undertaken in this report was conducted by participants in the Pattern Fellows Program, a part-time education and learning experience available to mid-career professionals from government, agencies, organizations and corporations with the region. While Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress provides guidance and oversight of the training program, the body of work is solely that of the participants in the program.

Sources and resources

NoPlaceLikePort@gmail.com (Password: Pattern2016)

www.Twitter.com/NoPlaceLikePort

www.instagram.com/noplacelikeport

www.facebook.com/Theres-No-Place-Like-Port-1021018604601624/?fref=ts

www.youtube.com/channel/UC4deeWKxznFy0t90NsMC-cA

Acknowledgments

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