

Appendix B – Public and Stakeholder Engagement Process and Outcomes

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OVERVIEW

Public and stakeholder engagement was a vitally important component of the Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan. From the beginning to the end of the planning effort, different partners and stakeholders were asked for their feedback on various aspects of the plan, ranging from identifying challenges and barriers to recommending solutions for the County and others to undertake. In addition, direct public input via an open house and online survey provided approximately 1,000 community members to share their experiences and opinions about outdoor recreation opportunities, amenities, and locations in Warren County. This collective feedback was critical to the development of a vision, goals, actions, and specific strategies included in this plan.

This appendix serves as documentation of the broad stakeholder, partner, and public engagement that took place between October 2023 and **END MONTH YEAR** from the following four general categories:

- 1) Project Advisory Committee
- 2) Site Tour Discussions
- 3) Focus Groups: Stakeholders and Industry Professionals
- 4) General Public and Community Input

This process was facilitated by Common Ground Consulting and SE Group.

1) Project Advisory Committee (PAC)

Who participated:

1. Heather Bagshaw, Tourism Director, Warren County
2. Peter Burns & Cassandra Burns, Owners, Beaver Brook Outfitters
3. Drew Cappabianca, Owner, The Hub
4. Matt Fuller & Nancy Fuller, Owners, Fountain Square Outfitters
5. Eric Lendrum, Owner, Rick's Bike Shop
6. Steve Magee, Group Sales Manager, Lake George Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau
7. Clint McCarthy, Associate Professor of Outdoor education, SUNY Adirondack
8. Dean Moore, Director, Warren County Parks, Recreation & Railroad
9. Tricia Rogers, President & CEO, Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce

When: 7 meetings between October 2023 and January 2025; PAC members were also invited to and occasionally attended various other meetings throughout the process. 90' – two-hour meetings, mostly on Zoom.

Why their input was important: The members of the PAC represent a wide and well-connected network of outdoor recreation economy professionals. Many of the PAC members officially

represented the organization they work for, but also brought deep knowledge of other areas and issues. The PAC members introduced and connected the planning team to many other individuals and groups. Their areas of expertise and understanding range from what education and training needs are important for young professionals to what other counties are doing to attract tourists to how to support long-term residents and their needs.

What we heard from the PAC: The PAC asked important questions and reiterated themes that the planning team heard throughout the process, including a need for better information sources for users; a need for better understanding and support for workers; an acknowledgement of the current wide range of high-quality opportunities, and need to better connect the benefits of the outdoor recreation economy to residents.

How the PAC's ideas shaped the WC ORE Strategic Plan:

The PAC had a unique role in this planning effort because they guided the overall direction of the plan while also providing specific ideas and details. The PAC's vision for the future of outdoor recreation economy in Warren County set the tone and content for the entire planning effort. They also provided critical feedback on stakeholders to interview, sites to visit, and goals and actions. Additionally, the PAC shared important guidance on the role of the Warren County government in the overall outdoor recreation economy, helped identify key capital projects, and relationships between private entities, nonprofits, and visitors, residents, and users can thrive.

2) Warren County Site Tour Discussions

Who participated:

1. Rick's Bike Shop Outpost at Gurney Lane
2. Up Yonda Farm
3. West Mountain
4. Revolution Rail Company
5. Beaver Brook Outfitters
6. The Hub
7. Gore Mountain

When: September 29 & 30, 2023, with follow-ups

Why their input was important: Early in the project, the planning team visited over two dozen locations across Warren County, including businesses, ski areas, county facilities, state park lands, and lake and river access points. At a number of these locations, team members spoke with business owners and amenity managers to understand current conditions, learn about their concerns and the trends they are seeing, and ask what would be most helpful to them in the Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan.

What we heard from site hosts:

- Finding employees who commit to season/job
- Affordable housing and transportation for workers

- High/increasing cost of insurance
- Advertising, marketing, and social media presence
- Competition with other destinations in the Northeast
- Ongoing trends for different outdoor activities
- Continued expansion into 4-season recreation

How ideas from the site tour shaped the WC ORE Strategic Plan:

- Knowledge of conditions and amenities across the county, whether privately owned or state or county owned or managed
- Knowledge of distances, roads and transit, viewsheds, and connections between outdoor recreation sites, amenities, communities, and population centers
- Understanding managers’ and owners’ on-site concerns, limitations, and opportunities

3) Focus Groups: Stakeholders and Industry Professionals

Who participated: The planning team hosted twelve separate focus group and industry stakeholder Zoom meetings - more than 70 stakeholders were invited and more than 50 attended, totaling approximately 18 hours of discussions. For stakeholders who couldn’t attend one of the focus group calls, the planning team held one-on-one interviews when possible.

1. local governments: municipal and county staff and town managers
2. nonprofit environmental organizations: conservation, watershed, and land trusts
3. recreation-oriented businesses: retail shops, outfitters, and guides
4. chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus, and economic development agencies (EDAs)
5. trail user groups: snowmobile clubs, cycling, hiking, and media/events promoters
6. private and developed recreation: recreational vehicle (RV parks, campgrounds, marinas, stables, and YMCA camps
7. lodging partners
8. ski areas and developed snow/four-season resorts
9. business development and chamber of commerce leaders

When: Between November 2023 and November 2024

Why their input was important: As business owners, nonprofit and government leaders, and industry professionals, the focus group attendees spanned a wide array of Warren County employees, outdoor recreation experience providers, and community decision-makers. The planning team asked the attendees about the availability and quality of outdoor recreation activities in Warren County, and what trends and obstacles they are seeing or facing. The planning team also asked them for feedback on how the county government could best support them, and their recommendations for the Warren County Outdoor Economy Strategic Plan.

What we heard from stakeholders and industry professionals:

Challenges and barriers to success

- no updated and consolidated information source about outdoor recreation
- lack of housing for employees

- concerns about the "bed tax" usage
- poor cell coverage/broadband coverage
- gloomy weather reports affecting visitor decisions
- high cost of insurance for rental equipment, ski resorts, and events
- lack of public transit for visitors and employees
- lack of accurate resource and visitor data
- challenge of marketing to different sectors
- high cost of visiting Lake George region
- lack of lodging across Warren County for guests
- lack of water access at many lakes including Lake George
- unaware of current resources such as the Warren County recreation mapper

What stakeholders and industry professionals recommended:

Trends and opportunities

- need for consolidated and updated information source about outdoor recreation
- need for both print and online marketing and information
- need for a "unified brand" across Warren County outdoor recreation economy
- desire for Warren County government to support collaboration and communication
- need for more beginner/entry/accessible options
- desire for more weekend-long events
- desire for clear short-term rental policies
- desire for revisiting of "bed tax"
- plan for and welcoming more diverse visitors
- be ready for shorter, less planned stays

The [Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Research Report](#) contains detailed notes and recommendations from the focus groups.

How stakeholders' and industry professionals' ideas shaped the WC ORE Strategic Plan:

- core areas for Warren County government to focus on
- specific ideas for their industries/areas
- technical assistance needs for marketing and information sharing

4) General Public and Community Input

Who participated: 40+ comments collected at the Comprehensive Plan open house (1/22/2024); 907 members of the public took the [Outdoor Recreation Economy Survey](#), including 776 full-time residents, 56 seasonal/weekend residents, and 70 non-residents. While this was not a scientific survey sampling exercise, the 4 months of open survey and repeat/broad posting brought in a large range of ages and types of OR users. A summary of the feedback collected in the survey can be found in the Outdoor Recreation Economy Research Report.

When: January 22, 2024, public meeting; online survey October 2023 through February 2024

Why their input was important: Direct feedback from the public via the open house and survey was critically important because it represents the unfiltered opinions of many regular users of outdoor amenities across Warren County in all seasons. The planning team, PAC, Comprehensive Plan team, and partners made a concerted effort to advertise the public engagement opportunities as broadly as possible.

What we heard from the public: Public comments during the Comprehensive Plan Open House included how important outdoor recreation is to both seasonal and year-round residents, and a strong appreciation for the current variety of opportunities in Warren County. Some attendees shared concerns about amenity maintenance and about supporting those who work in the economy (transportation, wages, job stability, housing for workers, etc. Many comments included suggestions for safety and ease of access/use.

In the Outdoor Recreation Economy Survey, the planning team asked the public their agreement with the following statements.

- a) To grow the local economy, Warren County should focus on attracting more visitors to outdoor recreation (60% agreed or strongly agreed)
- b) It is easy for me to find information about outdoor recreation activities in the County (66% agreed or strongly agreed)
- c) I am satisfied with the availability and quality of outdoor recreation activities in the County (77% agreed or strongly agreed)

What the public recommended:

- well-maintained and safe trails of all kinds – on-road, separated/off-road, for winter and summer uses
- more access to lakes and rivers
- continue to engage young people in the outdoors and the outdoor recreation economy
- continue investing in relationship/partnership with NYS DEC
- continue to support a range of ability levels

How public input shaped the WC ORE Strategic Plan:

- core areas for Warren County government to focus on
- feedback on what kinds of amenities and experiences are desired by the public
- specific locations where outdoor recreation amenities could be improved