

Phelps NY Forward Local Planning Committee Meeting 1

Phelps Village Offices
May 12, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Attendees

LPC:

- Jim Cheney (Co-Chair), Village of Phelps Mayor
- Ryan Davis (Co-Chair), Finger Lakes REDC, Ontario County Economic Development
- Terri Brown, Village of Phelps Planning Board
- Keith Childs, Phelps-Clifton Springs Community Theatre
- Mary DePorter, Rotary Club
- Fred Gaylord, American Legion
- Nicole Keebler, Village of Phelps Historic Commission and Beautification Committee
- Sarah Landschoot, Phelps Community Historical Society
- Amy McNicholas, Town of Phelps Planning Board
- Loryn Payne, Phelps Library
- Joseph Scibona, M&T Bank
- Diane Sheckler, Mary Hicks Preston Foundation
- Hannah Williams, Phelps Business Development & Tourism Council (BDTC)
- Chris Wright, Village Resident

LPC Members Not in Attendance:

- Nick Ganster, Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District

Project Team:

- Melissa Keller, Department of State (DOS) Project Manager
- Greg Parker, Empire State Development (ESD)
- Tirzah Peters, NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR)
- Kimberly Baptiste, Colliers Engineering & Design Project Manager
- Jeanette Petti, Colliers Engineering & Design

Other Attendees:

- Six community members



Welcome and Introductions

Jim Cheney, Mayor of the Village of Phelps, welcomed attendees and expressed the Village's excitement to begin the NY Forward process. Local Planning Committee (LPC) members and the Project Team introduced themselves and their affiliations.

Code of Conduct

Melissa Keller, Project Manager with the New York State Department of State (DOS), explained the "Code of Conduct" which sets the standards and procedures for the NY Forward planning process. The Code requires LPC members to: (1) disclose any conflicts of interest; (2) act in the public interest; and (3) disqualify themselves as necessary if they have a conflict of interest. She also reviewed the process for documenting a conflict and recusing from decision-making.

All LPC members are required to sign and attest that they understand and will adhere to the Code of Conduct. Melissa requested LPC members sign the code and return to her prior to leaving the meeting.

All LPC meetings will open with a reading of the "Preamble" by one of the LPC Co-chairs. The Preamble reminds LPC members of their obligation to disclose potential conflicts of interest and gives members an opportunity to do so at the beginning of the meeting.

Overview of the NY Forward Program

Roles and Responsibilities

Melissa outlined the roles and responsibilities of the different groups involved in the NY Forward planning process.

Several State agencies will oversee the planning process and provide guidance in specific areas. Involved agencies will include the Department of State (DOS), Empire State Development (ESD), and NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). These entities will engage with other State agencies when needed to facilitate the process.

The Consultant Team will work under the oversight of the State Team to lead the planning process, facilitate meetings, and produce deliverables. The Consultant Team is made up of subject matter experts in planning, economic development, architecture, engineering, and other areas. The Consultant Team lead is Colliers Engineering & Design – a multidisciplinary planning, architecture, and engineering firm that has been involved in several previous rounds of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) as well as the first two rounds of the NY Forward program (2023 and 2024).



Other project partners include:

- Sustainable Planning Design, to develop the Downtown Profile assessment
- Camoin Associates, to prepare the market and feasibility analysis for the Downtown Profile
- STC Design, to develop project profiles
- 4Ward Planning, to develop project profiles

The Local Planning Committee (LPC) is a group of community members nominated by the municipality and confirmed by DOS to lead Phelps' NY Forward planning process and determine which projects have the most potential to bring transformative change to downtown Phelps. LPC members represent a diverse segment of the Phelps community, including business owners, residents, local officials, and community non-profit organizations. LPC members volunteer their time. The LPC is led by co-chairs Jim Cheney, Village Mayor, and Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) designee, Ryan Davis. The LPC is responsible for ensuring the community's vision is met and the public interest is served.

Program Goals and Timeline

Melissa explained that the NY Forward program is a New York State program designed to invigorate and enliven downtowns in New York's small towns and hamlets. This round, the program is infusing a total of \$200 million in communities across New York State between the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) and NY Forward programs. The Village of Phelps has been awarded \$4.5 million as part of the NY Forward program to plan and implement transformative projects downtown.

Melissa noted that the program has multiple goals, including:

1. Enhancing downtown living and quality of life
2. Creating an active downtown with a mix of uses
3. Providing diverse employment opportunities for a variety of skillsets and salary levels
4. Creating diverse housing options for all incomes
5. Providing public spaces that serve all ages and abilities
6. Encouraging the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
7. Growing the local property tax base

Melissa noted that projects will be identified through a 9-month planning process, led by the LPC with guidance from NYS and the Project Team. The planning process began in April with the establishment of the LPC and will conclude in December with the completion of the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), which is the report that documents the planning process and recommends to New York State which projects the LPC and the community believe have the most potential to positively impact downtown Phelps. The State will review the SIP and determine which projects will receive funding from the \$4.5 million allocation. NY Forward grant awards will be announced in the months after the completion of the SIP, with project implementation to follow thereafter.



NY Forward Planning Process

Melissa reviewed the steps involved in the NY Forward planning process, which begins with visioning and a baseline analysis of the community's characteristics, opportunities, and challenges, then moves into project development and evaluation, and concludes with the development of the SIP.

Visioning

The first step in the planning process is to establish a community vision for Phelps' NY Forward program and to create a set of goals and strategies to achieve this vision. LPC and community members will participate in visioning exercises to help refine the vision established in Phelps' NY Forward application.

Downtown Profile

Melissa noted that the Project Team will perform a baseline analysis of Phelps' demographics, economic activity, physical setting, recent plans and ongoing efforts, and other topic areas. This analysis will identify Phelps' opportunities and challenges and help the LPC understand existing conditions as they stand today in Phelps.

Project Development

Project development is a critical step in identifying projects that might be potential candidates for NY Forward funding. Potential projects are identified through two streams: (1) through the projects proposed by the Village of Phelps in its application for NY Forward funding; and (2) through the Open Call for Project Proposals, which gives community members the opportunity to submit project proposals for the LPC to consider. All projects, including those submitted in the original application, will need to resubmit a project application as part of the Open Call for Project Proposals. This creates a "clean slate" for all projects to be evaluated equally by the LPC.

Melissa explained the difference between eligible and ineligible project types. Four types of projects are eligible for NY Forward funding:

- Public improvement projects
- New development and/or rehabilitation of existing downtown buildings
- Branding and marketing for the Village
- Small Project Grant Fund

There are also several activities that are *not eligible* for NY Forward funding. These include:

- Planning activities (with the exception of zoning amendments)
- Operations and maintenance
- Pre-award costs
- Property acquisition
- Training and other program expenses
- Expenses related to existing programs



All projects except for those potentially included in the Small Project Grant Fund must meet a minimum of \$75,000 in total project costs. While public and non-profit projects have no minimum match requirement, privately-sponsored projects are required to match at least 25% of total project costs.

Strategic Investment Plan (SIP)

Melissa noted the Strategic Investment Plan is the final deliverable of the NY Forward process. It documents the planning process and recommends projects to NYS for potential funding. Not all proposed projects will be included in the SIP. Similarly, not all projects included in the SIP will receive NY Forward funding. The State will review the SIP, which will include about \$6-8 million worth of projects, and make the final determination on which projects to fund from the \$4.5 million award.

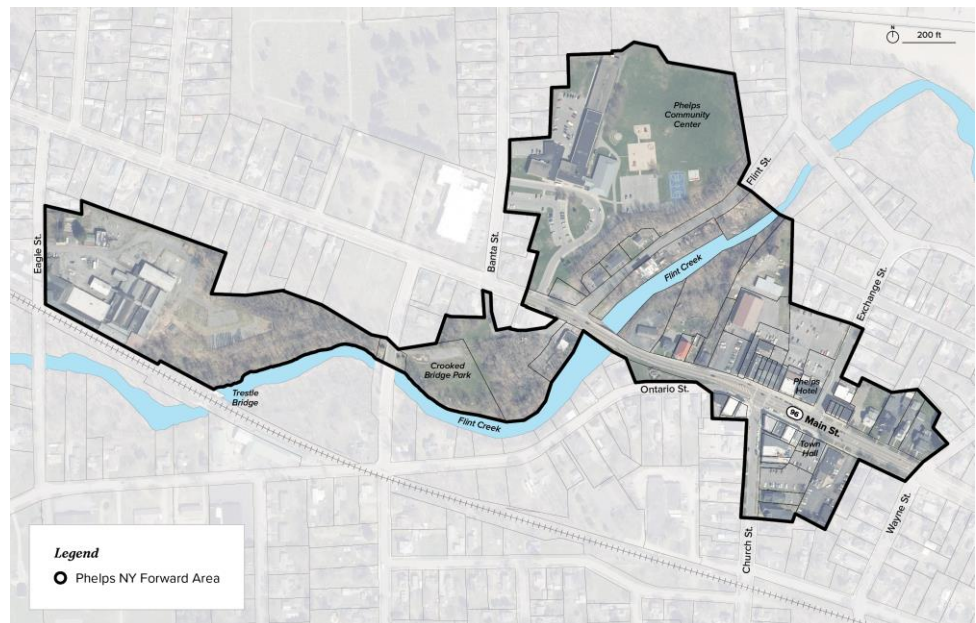
Once project funding announcements are made, projects are expected to break ground within two years. Awards are provided as reimbursements, meaning that project sponsors must secure financing and complete the project before they receive grant funds. All awards are subject to State requirements such as MWBE goals and competitive procurement.

Phelps NY Forward Program

Kimberly Baptiste, Project Manager from Colliers Engineering & Design, provided an overview of Phelps’ successful application for NY Forward funding.

NY Forward Area

In its application, the Village identified a preliminary boundary within which NY Forward investment would be concentrated. The boundary includes Phelps’ historic downtown core, as well as the Phelps Community Center and areas along Flint Creek including Crooked Bridge Park.



Vision for Downtown Phelps

In its application for funding, the Village of Phelps provided a vision for the future of downtown. Kimberly reviewed the vision as stated below:

“Looking to the future, while honoring the past. Where community and tradition thrive.

For over twenty years, the Village, its organizations and its businesses have been living this theme methodically to make it a reality. Our community is compact, friendly to foot traffic and has developed beautiful parks and other venues for the community to gather. Taking advantage of our central location, and proximity to state highways and nearby cities, we will become that “third place” where ideas are exchanged and relationships built.

We envision a lively downtown where residents and visitors can find a diverse mix of businesses; a vibrant hub where charming boutiques, inviting cafes, and cultural venues offering art, music, and theater, foster a sense of place and community pride. In this future vision, Phelps becomes more than just a destination: it becomes a social center where people can gather, celebrate, and enjoy life together, all within the welcoming embrace of the reimagined downtown core.

We will cultivate a space where residents and visitors of all generations and backgrounds can work, live, socialize and play together and where we will provide such a superlative quality of life the local residents and businesses will always want to call Phelps home and visitors will always want to come, spend time and enjoy life.”

Refined Vision Statement

Kimberly provided a condensed version of the vision for committee members to react to, as follows:

“Phelps is where community comes together. With a lively downtown, scenic backdrop, vibrant events, and inviting community spaces, Phelps has something for everyone. This unique blend of history, nature, and location makes Phelps the ideal gateway to the Finger Lakes. Main Street is active, businesses thrive, and quality of life is exceptional. Our buildings are revitalized, parks upgraded, and streetscapes safe and walkable. Here, the perfect balance of small-town charm and big-time appeal come together to make Phelps more than a destination – it’s where residents are proud to call home and where visitors keep coming back.”

LPC Feedback on Vision

- Include language about being “welcoming” and “inclusive.”
- Want to encourage new and old residents to stay in Phelps.
- “Phelps is the place where you want to be.”



Key Themes for Goal Development

To support the community vision statement, a series of goals and strategies will be developed by the LPC to guide decision-making throughout the NY Forward planning process. Kimberly provided several key themes to begin the process of goal development, as listed below:

- Tourism development
- Historic renovation and preservation
- Enhanced community spaces
- Connectivity improvements
- Business support and development
- Supporting arts and culture

These themes were informed by the Village’s application for NY Forward funding as well as the recent Visioning Document produced by the Village in collaboration with a marketing consultant. The Visioning Document was informed by many interviews with community members, including senior citizens and school children, and through a survey on Facebook.

Proposed Projects

Mayor Cheney provided an overview of the proposed projects included in the Village’s application for NY Forward funding. These projects are not guaranteed funding through the NY Forward program, but the State did see enough value in these projects to select the Village of Phelps as the recipient of \$4.5 million in NY Forward funding.

The projects proposed in the Village’s application included:

- Streetscape Projects
 - Main Street Streetscape
 - Exchange Street Enhancements
 - Church Street Enhancements
- Community Spaces
 - Library Storywalk
 - Exchange Street Parking Lot
 - PCC Main Entry Improvements
 - PCC Multi-Purpose Space
 - PCC “Main Street” Hallway
- Park Projects
 - Crooked Bridge Park Improvements
 - Memorial Park Improvements
- Renovation Projects
 - Phelps Hotel Adaptive Reuse
 - Phelps Arts Center Improvements
- Connectivity Projects
 - “Scary Alley” Improvements
 - Town Hall East-side Walkway
 - Wayfinding Program
- Funds & Programs
 - Small Project Grant Fund
 - Public Arts Program
 - Branding Program



Public Engagement

Kimberly provided an overview of public outreach activities conducted during the NY Forward program, emphasizing that community feedback is integral to the planning process. A number of opportunities for public engagement are provided, including:

- **Public Workshops:** Interactive sessions designed to gather feedback from community members.
- **Open Call for Projects:** Opportunity for community members to propose projects to be considered for NY Forward funding.
- **NY Forward Website:** Online resource (villageofphelpsny.gov/phelps-forward) for all things NY Forward, including event notifications, meeting materials, and more.
- **Pop-up Events:** Informational tabling at existing community events.
- **LPC Meetings:** Always open to the public, with time reserved at the end for public comment.

Public workshops are scheduled for:

- **June 19 at 7:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street):** Attendees will learn how the NY Forward program works and provide feedback on how NY Forward funds should be used.
- **June 25 at 5:45 PM (United Church of Phelps Fellowship Hall, 58 Main Street):** Attendees will learn how to submit a project application for potential NY Forward funding.
- **September 9 at 6:00 PM (Cafeteria, 8 Banta Street):** Attendees will participate in an interactive exercise where they get to “spend” \$4.5 million on the projects proposed for funding consideration.

LPC meetings are scheduled for:

- **June 19 at 5:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street):** Review of key findings of market and demographic analysis of downtown Phelps; finalize vision and goals.
- **August 19 at 6:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street):** Review project applications.
- **September 24 at 6:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street):** Review project applications.
- **October 14 at 6:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street t):** Complete evaluation.
- ***October 29 at 6:00 PM (Meeting Room, 8 Banta Street):** Complete evaluation.
 - **If necessary*

LPC Suggested Engagement Opportunities

- Strawberry Social, June 19 or 26
- Sauerkraut Weekend, July 31 to August 2
- Community Theatre Show (could include information in the pamphlets), end of July
- Fun Run, June 14



Open Call for Projects Application

Kimberly explained the Open Call for Project Proposals. The Open Call gives community members the opportunity to submit project proposals for review and consideration by the LPC. Submission is open to the public. Any private, not-for-profit, or public entity can submit a proposal. LPC members can also submit proposals but must recuse themselves from evaluating that project throughout the NY Forward planning process. Applicants must complete an application form and provide basic information about the proposed project including a description, cost estimate, and potential benefits.

Open Call Timeline

Kimberly outlined the tentative schedule for the Open Call. Project applications will be available in mid to late June, with submissions open for a minimum of four weeks, closing at the end of July. An informational session will be held on June 25 (as noted above) to walk through the application process and answer any questions.

Application Types

There are two types of Open Call applications:

- **Large Project Application:** For projects with a total cost of \$75,000 or more. Potential projects can include:
 - New development or new construction
 - Medium to large-scale construction, rehabilitation, or renovation projects
 - Public improvement projects
 - Downtown marketing and branding initiatives
- **Small Project Letter of Interest:** For projects less than \$75,000 in total cost. Potential projects can include:
 - Minor renovation projects
 - Business assistance (such as the acquisition of permanent commercial machinery or equipment)
 - Public art projects

Kimberly clarified that submitted Small Project Letters of Interest will be used to *demonstrate the need* for the establishment of a Small Project Grant Fund. There is no guarantee that a Small Project Grant Fund will be established. If a Small Project Grant Fund is established, applicants who submitted Small Project Letters of Interest will need to complete another application to be considered for funding from the Small Project Grant Fund. Submitting a Small Project Letter of Interest does not guarantee funding from the Small Project Grant Fund, if one is established.



Project Evaluation Criteria

Projects submitted through the Open Call will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- Alignment with local and state goals
- Catalytic effect
- Project readiness
- Eligibility
- Cost effectiveness
- Co-Benefits, or benefits that go beyond the project sponsor or developer

Match Requirements

New York State has established minimum match requirements as shown below:

- **Private Sponsor Projects:** 25% minimum match
- **Public Sponsor Projects:** no minimum match
- **Non-profit Sponsor Projects:** no minimum match
- **Small Projects (under \$75,000):** 25% minimum match

Kimberly explained that the LPC can modify match requirements, so long as they are at or above the minimum match requirements established by the State. The LPC can also choose to set match requirements on a project-by-project basis. Project sponsors can provide their required match through cash-on-hand, bank loans, or funding secured from other sources.

LPC Discussion on Match Requirements

- Differing opinions on match: Some would prefer to keep the match requirement lower to attract more applicants, especially because some applicants may not have the means to complete these projects otherwise. Others feel that the match requirement should be higher so that the \$4.5 million can be stretched further.
- Language in the application forms should be clear about what the minimum match is so that project sponsors know up front how much they will have to contribute. It should not feel like a “bait and switch” where the application has a low match, then the LPC asks the applicant to raise their match later on. Should include a statement in the application that emphasizes that projects that provide a higher match than the minimum are preferred.
- Tentative match amounts:
 - **Private Sponsor Projects:** 35% minimum match
 - **Public Sponsor Projects:** no minimum match
 - **Non-profit Sponsor Projects:** 5% minimum match
 - **Small Projects (under \$75,000):** 25% minimum match
- It was noted that if project sponsors are unable to meet the match requirement, they may be able to apply for assistance from the Preston Foundation or Ontario County Economic Development. Another option is to re-scope the project so that it is classified as a small project (under \$75,000) and therefore has a 25% match.



Next Steps

- **June 19, 5:00 PM:** LPC Meeting 2
- **June 19, 7:00 PM:** Public Workshop 1
- **June 25, 5:45 PM:** Open Call Informational Session

LPC Questions

- What happens if LPC members cannot attend a meeting? How do we get the information from that meeting?
 - **Answer:** LPC members are encouraged to attend all meetings to the best of their ability. If an LPC member cannot attend a meeting, the Project Team will provide that member with the materials for that meeting via email.
- Is the Small Project Grant Fund included in the \$4.5 million award or is it in addition to the \$4.5 million award?
 - **Answer:** The Small Project Grant Fund comes out of the \$4.5 million. For example, a \$300,000 Small Project Grant Fund would leave \$4.2 million in remaining grant funds available for other projects.
- Who can submit project applications through the Open Call? Is it limited to projects located within the NY Forward Area?
 - **Answer:** Projects submitted for potential NY Forward funding should be located in the NY Forward Area. However, projects located adjacent to the boundary may be submitted through the Open Call if the project sponsor justifies how the project would have a significant impact on downtown.
- Is it possible to change the boundary of the NY Forward Area?
 - **Answer:** Yes, the LPC can choose to modify the NY Forward Area boundary by majority vote. Generally, modification of the boundary results from a project being proposed outside the boundary that the LPC finds worthy of consideration for funding.
- How do private project sponsors prove that they have the funds available to provide their required match?
 - **Answer:** There are several ways private project sponsors can show proof of available funds, including providing a bank statement or a commitment letter for a bridge loan.
- If community members have ideas for public projects, who should they speak to?
 - **Answer:** All public projects must be sponsored by the Village, so community members with ideas for public projects should speak to Mayor Cheney.
- What happens if a project is unable to be completed for whatever reason?
 - **Answer:** The project sponsor does not get reimbursed, and that funding will be awarded to a different project instead.



- Have applications already been prepared for the projects originally proposed in the Village’s application for NY Forward funding?
 - **Answer:** No. Applications will be prepared for these projects and these applications will be evaluated by the LPC on a level playing field with any new applications submitted as part of the Open Call.
- What happens if a project is phased?
 - **Answer:** Generally, phased projects apply for funding for one phase of the project through NY Forward. However, the scope of all phases of the project will be provided to the LPC and the State to show the complete vision of the project.
- Who do project sponsors work with for decarbonization?
 - **Answer:** Project sponsors will work with NYSERDA and a sustainable architecture consultant to understand the decarbonization requirements for their project.
- How do we ensure that all environmental regulations are being met?
 - **Answer:** The Project Team will assess every proposed project and determine whether environmental regulations are applicable.
- What is the format of public workshops?
 - **Answer:** The public workshops will begin with a brief presentation followed by an interactive exercise.
- Are there good exemplar communities that show the impact NY Forward can have?
 - **Answer:** Because this is only the third year of NY Forward, project implementation is just beginning in the first and second round communities. However, the City of Oswego is an excellent example of the implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), which is the larger version of NY Forward that is targeted at cities and other large population centers.

Public Comments

All LPC meetings are open to the public. Time is reserved at the end of each meeting for a public comment period. All comments are recorded. The Project Team and the LPC do not respond directly to comments unless clarification is needed. The following comments were received at this meeting:

- **Resident:** Are awnings included as a project?
 - **Answer:** Awning replacement could be submitted as a Small Project Letter of Interest. Awning replacement could also be submitted as one scope element of a larger project through the Large Project Application form.
- **Lisa Casper (owner of Melt):** I ask the LPC to keep in mind when making decisions that building and property owners on Main Street already have a lot of skin in the game. Our buildings are old, they need a lot of renovation, they are not up to code, and we have been investing in them.

