

# Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter



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## Municipal Consolidation and Shared Services “2.0”

### *Ring in the New Year with a Fresh Approach*

By Anne Saylor, Community Development Administrator

In 2013, Dutchess County created the Municipal Consolidation and Shared Services Grant Program to incentivize municipalities to increase efficiencies and lower costs. Through a competitive process, this program has awarded over \$4.6 million dollars to 38 projects involving 27 of our 30 Dutchess County communities, as well as 4 fire districts and 2 school districts. Funded projects have included the consolidation of services, sharing of services, elimination of an entire government entity, establishment of regional delivery of services, and other efficiency improvements.

### What We’ve Accomplished So Far

Projects have run the gamut and reflect the wide range of opportunities our communities have to improve existing service delivery:

- **Efficiency improvements** within a single municipality saw the highest number of applications, and ranged from the Town of Pine Plains codifying and putting its codes online to the implementation of a state-of-the-art electronic document and meeting management system in the City of Beacon.
- **Consolidation applications** were also popular and included efforts to consolidate fire districts, 911 services, water systems, highway departments, and police departments. For example, the City of Poughkeepsie is looking to consolidate 911 services with Dutchess County, and the Town of Poughkeepsie is consolidating its dispatch system with the County.
- **Shared services** rounded out the most popular project types. Examples of funded projects include two shared fuel farms and a 12-municipality collaboration to purchase cloud-based software for standardizing and streamlining their building, permitting, code enforcement, planning and zoning functions.



*View of the aeration basins at the Tri-Municipal Wastewater Treatment plant. This system upgrade project was submitted collaboratively by the Village of Wappingers Falls and towns of Poughkeepsie and Wappinger, and was funded in part through the MCSSG program. This new system will increase the plant’s capacity by up to 50% which will allow for future economic development in the vicinity.*

*Photo credit: KC Engineering and Land Surveying, P.C.*

It's easy to talk about consolidation and efficiency but it's much harder to actually implement and achieve it. We've learned that beyond the money to do it, the most important component in any consolidation and efficiency effort is a genuine interest in achieving the goal. Without that, any group working on one of these projects will be unable to overcome the impediments that inevitably arise.

## We Heard You

As the program enters its fifth year, we decided to step back for a moment to think about how the program should evolve. We've looked broadly at the types of projects communities have been interested in, and taken a look at the kind of projects that have been successful (and those that have not been successful, because often we learn a lot from those, too). We've listened to you at the annual summits and solicited input on your current priorities.

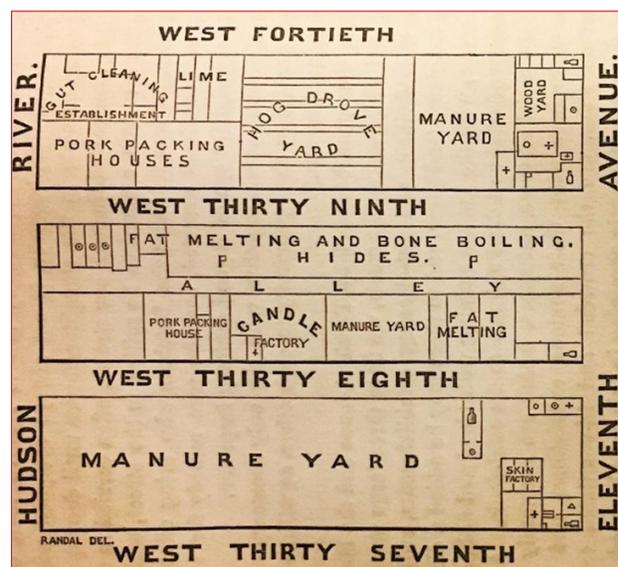
Based on your input we've decided to refocus the program, starting with a name change to the *Municipal Innovation Grant Program*. The program will continue to support a variety of general innovation activities that will increase operational efficiencies to optimize municipal resources. There will also be three very specific focus areas:

- Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement
- Land Use/Economic Development
- General Innovation

## Land Use and Economic Development Focus Area

Since this is a planning newsletter, let's take a closer look at the Land Use and Economic Development focus area. There's a lot of talk about regulation these days. Some people think there is too much regulation while others want to add more. We hear a lot about business regulation, environmental regulation, and financial regulation. We don't hear as much about land use, even though it is an area of regulation that impacts many facets of our everyday lives and is one of the most highly regulated assets in our community.

As a society, our basis for regulating land uses was well intentioned. We wanted to protect the "public welfare," to get slaughterhouses and belching smokestacks away from where people lived. We wanted to stop the extinction of important species and habitats. And we wanted to provide some basic protections for property values. But many professional planners feel that land use regulation has become too cumbersome over the past 100 years and that it's time for us to take a step back and acknowledge some of the negative consequences of our often well-intentioned policies. The separation of uses has decreased walkability and contributed to the rise in obesity. The need to drive everywhere contributes to pollution and climate change. The long process and high costs associated with development make it difficult to build modestly priced housing and create new jobs at a time when both are desperately needed.



*This 1865 "Bone Boiling and Swill-Milk Nuisances" use map of a now-unassuming section of New York City's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood illustrates why the practice of zoning for certain uses took hold. Read more about it in [this recent CityLab article](#).*

*Photo Credit: Republished by NY Public Library's Map Division*

The purpose of the land use and economic development focus within Dutchess County's Municipal Innovation Grant Program is to provide communities with resources to help them modernize and streamline their land use regulation and review processes. Funds may be used to hire an expert or invest in technology. Here's a short list of ideas:

- Modernize your comprehensive plan and zoning code. Create a form-based code. Update awkward and confusing formats and simplify language.
- Complete a comprehensive review of your land use review process to identify the major bottlenecks, and develop a plan based on best practices to update the process.
- Implement an online application and permitting system that creates better access and accountability for all parties involved or interested in development.
- Streamline applications and forms to make sure you are only asking for information your community truly needs, and create checklists to help applicants submit all the information needed for a comprehensive review in their first submission.
- Improve your website so all regulations, applications, forms and checklists are readily available.
- Create an expedited review and permitting process for certain project types (e.g. minor projects, infill development, affordable housing, sustainable buildings...).
- Complete a Generic Environmental Impact Statement for a particular area or site to make it shovel-ready for the development your community wants.
- Educate board members about what their roles are (and aren't) so they can have more productive meetings.
- Revise your public participation process to create a streamlined but more productive process for the public, board members and developers.

Hopefully one or two of these ideas have sparked your interest, or you have an idea of your own that you've been wanting to try. Maybe you'd like to get together with a neighboring community to work on one or more ideas. The next round of Municipal Innovation Grant applications will be released in late spring 2017 and we look forward to working with you over the next few months to identify projects that can help transform a process that is generally frustrating for all involved into a process which enables quality development of all kinds while at the same time preserving or enhancing the quality of life in our communities.

## More Information

Keep an eye on our [webpage](#) for updates on the release of the next round of grant applications, expected in late spring 2017.

[Click here to view past issues of Plan On It.](#)

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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