

# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## City of Utica

UTICA, NY



Revised: July 1, 2015



Homes and  
Community Renewal



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Oneida County



[This Page Intentionally Left Blank]



## THE CITY OF UTICA

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

1 KENNEDY PLAZA • UTICA, NEW YORK 13502

ROBERT M. PALMIERI  
Mayor

June 29, 2015

Phone: 315-792-0100  
Fax: 315-734-9250  
e-mail: [mayor@cityofutica.com](mailto:mayor@cityofutica.com)

Dear Residents,

I am proud to share with you the results of the City of Utica Community Needs Assessment (CNA) initiative and our 2-year Action Plan that will guide our City moving forward.

We have documented input from residents, community based organizations, local businesses, and students in a collaborative effort to continue to revitalize the high need areas of the City and to capitalize on the emerging opportunities before us.

Our City is experiencing significant economic and community development transformation, and the CNA process is helping us to continue this transformation and reach our full potential.

I would like to thank Ray Durso from the Genesis Group for leading this effort.

The participation from our committee chairpersons, City staff, the Rust 2 Green Urban Studio, the CNY Veteran's Outreach Center, as well as, input from our community leaders, residents and survey completed by Proctor High School students, made this process a tremendous success.

It is the results of these conversations, roundtable discussions and surveys that serve as the foundation for our 2-year Action Plan.

In addition to the Action Plan, the attached documents include demographic data, information about local government, economic and community development, neighborhood needs, and local initiatives.

Thank you, Utica! Because of your continued dedication and support there is a sense of optimism in our community for the first time in years and we look forward to continued growth and prosperity.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Palmieri  
Mayor  
City of Utica



**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

Albany Field Office  
52 Corporate Circle  
Albany, New York 12203-5121

June 29, 2015

Dear Community Partners:

Through the Utica, Community Needs Assessment (CNA) process, new alliances, partnerships and collaborations were formed; unique needs were recognized; innovative opportunities to leverage both public and private resources were identified; and the foundation for building capacity were established. The CNA and the subsequent action plan are already providing opportunities for increased collaboration between Federal and State agencies and local partners to attract expertise in the areas of: research; financial resources; and human capital – all by capitalizing on Utica’s historic strengths, diversity and mix of mature and youth populations. All of this is supporting the already significant progress ongoing in your city.

The Community Needs Assessment is collaboration between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other federal, state, and local partners. It serves as the basis for a strategic local operating plan and will assist HUD in better understanding the unique needs of the City of Utica. This will help the Albany Field Office and the Office of Field Policy and Management in prioritizing our “place based activities” as part of our long-term engagement with your community.

The 2-year action plan provides a broad roadmap that will guide the City of Utica's activities to effectively advance the roundtable goals to transform and evolve as a resilient, vibrant and sustainable community:

- Facilitate Employment
- Increase Economic Activity
- Improve Educational Opportunities
- Enhance Public Safety
- Improve Health and Wellness and
- Provide Enhanced Housing Opportunities

We look forward to working with the City of Utica to achieve the full potential of this plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaime E. Forero". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "F".

Jaime E. Forero  
Field Office Director

## **Table of Contents**

### **Acknowledgements**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **A. Introduction and Intended Outcomes**

#### **B. Methodology - Why, When and How - The CNA “4-Step” Process**

Step 1: Drafting a Community Profile

Step 2: Organizing and Facilitating Community Roundtables  
(Assessment Questions & Recommendations)

Step 3: Gathering Additional Community Input – Surveys  
Key Questions & Findings

Step 4: Developing a 2-year City Action Plan  
Action Plan Outline

#### **C. Conclusion**

### **Appendix**

Attachment 1 - City of Utica Overview

Attachment 2 - Utica Target Area Map

Attachment 3 - 2015 HUD Community Profile

Attachment 4 - 2-Year Action Plan 2015

Attachment 5 - Synchronization Matrix

Attachment 6 - Roundtable Responses

Attachment 7 - Survey Summary

Attachment 8 - Survey Results

Attachment 9 - Long-term Neighborhood Renewal

### **CNA Online Toolbox**

<https://cornell.box.com/CNA-Toolbox>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the important contributions by so many that made this City of Utica Community Needs Assessment (CNA) possible. Roundtable Chairs and Participants, Agencies and Organizations that serve the City of Utica, the Utica Public School District and Local Residents for providing input without which the CNA would not be relevant.

The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) process was coordinated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), NYS Housing and Community Renewal (HCR), City of Utica Mayor's Office and the Department of Urban and Economic Development (UED), Cornell Cooperative Extension Rust to Green (R2G) Utica Urban Studio, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center, and The Genesis Group.

## **Community Needs Assessment Operational Coordination**

### **The Genesis Group**

Raymond Durso, Jr.

### **City of Utica**

Mayor Robert Palmieri, Chief of Staff Charles Greco

### **NYS Housing and Community Renewal**

Lorraine Collins

### **US Department of Housing and Urban Development Region II, Albany Field Office**

Jaime Forero, Jenny Harbert, Jacob Dale

## **Community Needs Assessment Facilitation & Compilation**

### **Department of Urban and Economic Development**

Brian Thomas, Laura Champion, Derek Crossman, Patti DeCarr, Chris Lawrence

### **Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County – Rust to Green Utica**

Caroline Williams, Diane Shoemaker, Kevin Alexander

### **Roundtable Facilitators**

John Calabrese, Shelly Callahan, Steve Darman, Dave Manzelmann, Alice Savino,  
Debra Richardson, Jan Squadrito, Brian Thomas, Eve Van de Wal



Photo Credit: Matthew Ossowski

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Community Needs Assessment

*“The City of Utica is committed to strengthening and stabilizing its neighborhoods to ensure that all residents, regardless of economic status, age, race, ethnicity or physical ability have equitable opportunities to be happy, healthy and successful in the place we call home.”*

Mayor Robert Palmieri

With this in mind, during fall 2014, the City collaborated with Federal, State and other local partners to complete a Community Needs Assessment (CNA). The objective was to fully engage the residential, commercial and non-profit community to help identify priority needs and a framework for a 2-year Action Plan focused on long-term goals, short-term activities and demonstrated deliverables.



The CNA and planning project couldn't have happened at a better time. After years of economic stagnation and planning fatigue, Utica has been experiencing a social, physical, and financial resurgence. Three years ago, amid business closings, budget deficits, financial instability, and a public demand to provide more for less, the City was plagued with a “negative” outlook from three financial rating institutions. However, by June, 2015, all three rating agencies had officially removed their negative outlooks, indicating that key elements of the City's recovery plan are working. Utica's comeback story is being written by government, businesses and universities who are providing shared research and resources. Progressive thinkers, innovative ideas and unprecedented collaborations are also setting the stage for new growth and a renewed sense of pride, promise and prosperity . . .

**NANO UTICA** - Six leading global technology companies are investing \$1.5 billion and New York State has committed over \$200 million to create NANO Utica, the State's second major hub of nanotechnology research and development. The call for new employees at Utica's Quad C, located at SUNY Polytechnic Institute, has begun and thousands of new jobs, along with new spin-off businesses, are expected for the area.

**HARBOR POINT** - National Grid is completing the final steps of a \$100 million Harbor Point cleanup and redevelopment, paving the way for Utica's waterfront revitalization plan which will transform the historic harbor into a recreation complex supported by new mixed-use residential, commercial and professional development. The project has already attracted two new chain hotels and a number of popular restaurants to the area which sits at Utica's NYS thruway entrance.

**THE AUD** - Since 2014, Utica Memorial Auditorium has received over \$3 million in improvements. The AUD's entertainment venue includes the Utica College Pioneers Hockey Team and Utica Comets championship AHL Hockey league which have generated increases in revenue and sales tax as well as the development of new surrounding retail and housing.

**DOWNTOWN** - Utica's four downtown commercial districts, home to the Stanley Theater, Munson Williams Art Institute and Pratt University, Mohawk Valley Community College ThINCubator, FX Matt Brewery, and over 85 restaurants including the nationally-renowned Tailor and the Cook, are being rebranded and revitalized by new entrepreneurs, streetscapes, housing and retail.

**TRANSPORTATION** – Over \$1 million in renovations in and around Union Station are improving rail and bus experiences. The \$62 million Utica North-South Arterial Project is nearing the halfway mark and to date over 50 unsightly derelict buildings were removed, walkability has been enhanced and neighborhoods are connected via a pedestrian bridge. More access and mobility improvements in and around Utica are soon to be realized. And, the NYS DOT Oriskany Boulevard Greenway Plan, a \$9 million reconstruction of Route 5S in Bagg's Square, is also in the works for 2017 construction.

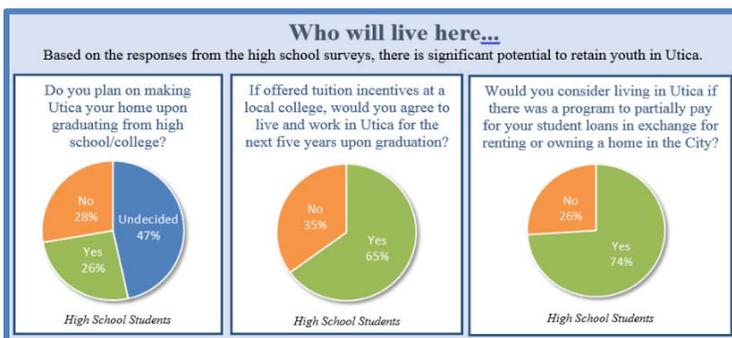
**DEMOGRAPHICS & DIVERSITY** - Reversing a long trend of population decline, the City has been growing in population, along with racial and ethnic composition changes. Over the past 10 years, Utica’s white population has dropped from 80% to 69%; the Asian population has grown from 2% to 8%; the African American population has seen a slight increase to 15%; and the Latino population has increased from 6% to 10%. Furthermore, the under 35 population in Utica has increased by 9.1 % since 2000 and is now more than 50% of the total City population. The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR) has resettled over 15,000 refugees from more than 31 nations in Utica and over 40 languages are spoken in the local high school.

**HOUSING** - Local developers and entrepreneurs are reinvesting in downtown with plans and projects that will add hundreds of market-rate and affordable housing units. Housing Visions has rehabilitated blocks of decrepit substandard housing into well-designed, energy-efficient, quality affordable housing; Johnson Park is reconstructing vacant housing using LEED-Certified practices and materials to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless women and families; a local family-owned construction firm is adaptively reusing an abandoned bank building for high-end lofts, ground-floor commercial spaces and a rooftop restaurant; and the Rescue Mission of Utica, Central NY Veterans Outreach Center and other developers are planning additional units of supportive housing for formerly homeless veterans and other homeless populations.

While the community is reveling at Utica’s new economic development potential, the administration also acknowledges that effective “growth” management requires new housing, employment, education and quality of life opportunities for all income levels. Along with a new young, skilled workforce, Utica is focusing on existing and new lower-wage workers, the struggling middle class, a vulnerable new refugee population, and the City’s seniors. The community development Target Area, which was identified as part of a Promise Zone designation application, includes twelve contiguous US Census Tracts that collectively have an estimated population of 28,305; poverty level of 44.4%; 17.67% unemployment rate; and a housing vacancy rate of 16.49%.

According to Steve Darman, chair of the local HUD Continuum of Care for homeless persons and families, *“The changes in Utica are both challenging and exciting. Utica is different and better in many key ways but the pace of change poses a significant challenge to our collective ability to understand the shifting ground we stand on and to both adapt and thrive. This is foundational for crafting a collective vision and a solid plan for becoming the 21<sup>st</sup> Century City we are in the process of envisioning.”*

Darman, along with City staff, The Genesis Group, and the Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Rust to Green (R2G) Utica Urban Studio team, helped lead local organizers who enlisted community leaders to chair and moderate nine CNA roundtable discussions with their peers to discuss community and economic development topics.



Hard copy and online CNA surveys were developed and distributed for resident input. 1454 Proctor High School students and area youth under age 25 completed priority needs surveys, 1024 adult participants accessed an online survey and a myriad of individuals, groups, and community members helped build the CNA process and plan to re-shape Utica’s future.

What we learned is that people want to be heard . . . and have lots to say. They told us that: neighborhood streets need to be cleaned; vocational and soft skills training is a necessity; brownfields need to be remediated; housing with support services is a priority; quality childcare is unaffordable and hard to find; language and cultural differences are barriers to employment and healthcare; walkability is a must; entertainment and WI-FI are lacking; public safety is a concern in urban neighborhoods; etc., etc., etc. We compiled pages and pages of observations, issues and proposed solutions and the community priorities are reflected in the resulting 2-year Action Plan. Many if not most of the roundtable participants asked ‘When will the next meeting be?’ making it clear that they were ready, willing, and able to participate in conversations about our city and its future.

Roundtable Responses and Survey Results can be found in the Appendix

While the CNA process tested Utica's abilities to collaborate, coordinate and listen, almost a year later, we recognize that the project also provided us with:



- a designated target area for enhanced impact
- a model for community engagement and honest dialogue
- pages of quantitative and qualitative community input for future analysis
- recommendations from 1454 potential future taxpayers (high school students)
- the foundation for future grant applications (i.e. Promise Zone, LEAD, Choice Neighborhoods, NYS CFAs)
- an Anti-Poverty Strategy for the City and a model the Mohawk Valley Region
- pertinent community information and current demographic data
- an opportunity to synchronize goals, objectives and actions across multiple plans
- the tools and expertise to build a strong basis for sustainable community development

In conclusion, the CNA process has been invaluable to the City of Utica and we look forward to continuing our renewed relationship with HUD and our CNA partners.

### **The 2-Year Action Plan and Long-term Goals**

The City's CNA 2-year Action plan includes six (6) goals, eighteen (18) subgoals and fifty-four (54) activities relating to employment, economic activity, education, public safety, health and wellness and housing. All of the CNA roundtable and survey recommendations were taken into consideration and the identified top priorities were addressed in the Plan's goals, subgoals and/or activities and were incorporated in the City's 2015-2020 HUD Consolidated Plan. During the CNA process, the City also identified the following three HUD programs that can enable Utica to focus on neighborhood renewal in the long-term:

#### **Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Program**

While Oneida County has reduced its number of children with the highest levels of lead poisoning by 72% since 2006, according to Department of Health (DOH) statistics, the area still has the worst lead poisoning problem in the state, including New York City - with an incidence rate of 29 children per 1,000 tested. This is a major concern in Utica's poorest neighborhoods where over 95% of the housing was built before 1978 when lead-based paints were banned from residential use. The City is partnering with the NYS DOH and Cornell Cooperative Extension's Childhood Lead Primary Prevention Program to continue efforts to reduce the effects of lead poisoning and will be submitting a Lead Based Paint Hazard Control Program application in June. The local Community Foundation Board has committed \$300,000 as the local match for the project.

#### **Promise Zone Designation**

During the CNA process, the City identified a target area and applied for designation as a HUD Round 2 Promise Zone, to acquire potential tax credits and technical assistance. An application exit interview helped strengthen the City's plan of action by stressing the need for: a clear understanding of potential resources from existing organizations and their commitment to help identify gaps, provide solutions and measure success; financial support from the City administration for a project manager and the R2G Urban Studio for the duration of the Promise Zone designation (10 years); and ongoing channels of communications and engagement with residents in the target area. Armed with Promise Zone staff feedback, strong input from the CNA, and a solid 2-Year Action Plan (which follows the Promise Zone project matrix), the City plans to submit a Round 3 application.

#### **Choice Neighborhoods**

JCTOD Outreach, Inc. dba Johnson Park Center (JPC) has invested over \$9 million dollars in public and private funding for capital projects to create a total of 31 safe and supportive low-income permanent housing units for homeless mothers, children and single females, as well as emergency housing services for traditional and non-traditional families and women. The Center submitted applications in the last two rounds of the Choice Neighborhood Grant Program. The most recent application, submitted earlier this year, along with Section 8 Tenant-Based Assistance Rental Certificate Program and Rental Voucher Program applications, proposes \$13,192,244 in funding for housing rehabilitation and LEED certified green energy construction related to 16 contiguous buildings, including 42 housing units with 74 bedrooms. Demolition of six buildings beyond repair and expansions to the existing community center in preparation for new construction of a LEED certified Multi-Purpose Childcare and Family Center are also included. The City fully supports JPC's proposed projects and stands ready to assist as necessary.

## A. Introduction and Intended Outcomes

The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) was completed by the City of Utica to enhance their capacity to respond to change and grow as a resilient, vibrant and sustainable community. City representatives engaged community stakeholders to help:

- assess existing conditions
- assess existing resources
- identify priority needs
- identify barriers
- identify goals
- develop an action plan



Through the CNA process, new alliances, partnerships and collaborations were formed; staff training needs were recognized; opportunities to leverage resources (public and private) were identified; and foundations for local and outside funding were established. The CNA and resulting action plan are already providing avenues for increased collaboration with Federal and State agencies and local partners to attract enhanced expertise, research, financial resources, and human capital – all leading to positive change.

## B. Methodology

### *Who, Why, When and How - The CNA “four-step” process*

The CNA process was a collaborative effort involving the City staff, including Cornell University’s Cooperative Extension Rust to Green (R2G) Utica Urban Studio, New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other Federal, State, and local partners.

### *Step 1: Drafting a Community Profile*

A Community Profile was created which assembled pertinent information about local government, community and economic development conditions, federal investment highlights, and demographic data.

**General Profile:** Historic Overview, Major Planning Efforts, Governance

**Demographic Profile:** Population Trends, Poverty, Crime

**Economic Profile:** Economic Summary, Regional Economic Development Programs, Current City Economic Development Initiatives, Employment – Income

**Housing Profile:** Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, Market-Rate Housing, Public Housing

**Community Profile:** Housing and Neighborhood Development Initiatives, Current Community Initiatives, Community Development Challenges and Opportunities, Federal Government and HUD Investments in the Community, Community Based Organizations (CBO), Transportation

**Education Profile:** Utica City School District, Colleges and Universities, Other Educational Institutions and Programs

**Data Sources:** Local, Regional, State and Federal

The complete Community Profile can be found in the Appendix of this document.

## Step 2: Organizing and Facilitating Community Roundtables

City Representatives worked with regional HUD representatives to identify local assessment priorities, as well as community leaders and appropriate stakeholders related to each. The community leaders moderated nine (9) stakeholder groups which convened, over a two-month period (September - October 2014 at the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center) to discuss specific issues and to recommend solutions and action steps relating to three main topics:

- **Economic Development**
- **Community Development**
- **Health, Education and Changing Demographics**



The moderators engaged the stakeholders in discussions regarding the community's priority needs and recommendations to meet the community's unique challenges. A community Needs Assessment Capstone was held on November 6, at the Utica Radisson Hotel to summarize the project for the public. Each of the moderators reported on their Roundtable events – providing the following recommendations.

The complete Roundtable Results can be found in the Appendix of this document.

### Roundtable 1 (September 18, 2014)

#### **Topic #1: EMPLOYMENT**

##### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Establish Internship and Mentorship Programs
- Provide Soft-Skills Pre-Employment Training
- Develop Solutions to Meet Subsidized Childcare and Transportation Needs
- Develop a Public/Private Sector Employment Advisory Council
- Develop Broader ESL/Cultural Job Training Initiatives
- Promote an Awareness and Understanding of Employment Barriers & Restrictions
- Implement a Community Marketing Campaign for Vocational Training Programs

#### **Topic # 2: AGING INFRASTRUCTURE & BROWNFIELD**

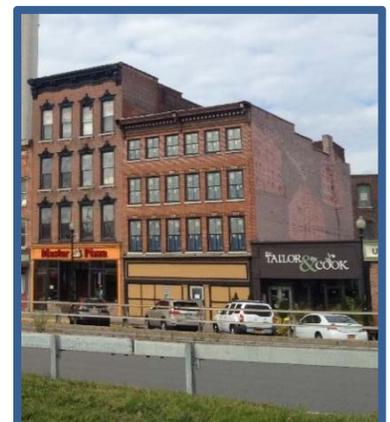
##### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Campaign NYS State to Bring Back Successful Programs (i.e. NYS BOA, RESTORE)
- Prioritize and Implement Improvements in Critical Areas (i.e. Harbor, Downtown Districts)
- Provide Incentive Programs for Adaptive Reuse and Brownfield Redevelopment
- Update the City's GIS Program and Provide Staff Training
- Invest in Street Reconstructions
- Coordinate and Provide Building Procedures & Zoning Code Technical Assistance
- Update Utica's Zoning Code

#### **Topic # 3: DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT**

##### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Develop, Provide & Promote Urban Living Opportunities (Downtown Housing)
- Implement a Parking Strategy for Utica's Commercial Districts
- Focus on District Development Planning – Bagg's Square, Varick West, Bleecker East, Downtown and Uptown
- Connect the Districts through Signage and Multi-modal Opportunities
- Focus on "LOCAL" Business Development (vs. Big Box - Corporate)
- Provide Technical Assistance to Developers (Funding Solutions, Building Profomas, Code Compliance, Design Assistance, etc.)
- Fill Vacant Buildings and Improve the Aesthetics in Downtown



## **Roundtable #2** (October 2, 2014)

### **Topic # 4: HEALTH & HEALTHCARE**

#### ***Roundtable Recommendations***

- Market Regional Quality of Life – Emphasize a Positive Image and Reassess Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Efforts to Include Spousal/Family Interests
- Re-assess “Behavioral” Health Programs – Improve Access and Education
- Provide Transportation Improvements and Improve Walkability for Access to Healthcare Services and Employment
- Collaborate and Consolidate Healthcare Services
- Facilitate Communications between the Healthcare Industry, the Utica Community and the Region’s Economic Development Organizations
- Enhance and Coordinate Substance Abuse Screening, Assessment, and Training
- Help Residents Navigate the Healthcare System and Benefits – including Seniors, Individuals with Disabilities and Language and Cultural Barriers, and the Working Poor



### **Topic # 5: EDUCATION & VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

#### ***Roundtable Recommendations***

- Support Mentorship, Internship, and Job Shadowing Programs that Provide Access to Experiences and Engagement with the Business Community
- Increase Literacy Programs that Include Reading Skills and Financial Literacy
- Support Soft Skills Development for Recent Graduates and Young Adults
- Support Education, Access, and Achievements Relating to High-tech Fields (STEM)
- Rebrand Utica’s Public Education System and Work with Real Estate Professionals to Attract New and Returning Residents
- Enhance Technology Infrastructure to Support Public Education
- Increase Employment Program Participation via Multi-media Community Outreach

### **Topic #6: CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS & DIVERSITY**

#### ***Roundtable Recommendations***

- Develop a Public-Private Diversity Committee
- Develop Effective Mechanisms to Address and Encourage Access and Inclusion
- Create an International /Bilingual Charter or Magnet School
- Open a Welcome Center to Connect New Arrivals to Area Resources and Information (Residential Assistance - Beyond Tourism)
- Promote Racial and Ethnic Minority Representation in Local Government, Law Enforcement and Other Organizations
- Enhance Multilingual and Interpretation Services and Programs - for All Ages
- Support Faith-Based Organizations to Help Reach Targeted Demographics



## **Roundtable #3** (October 16, 2014)

### **Topic # 7: HOUSING**

#### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Develop Market-rate Urban Housing Units/Rentals
- Increase the Number of Transitional and Emergency Housing Units and “Quality” Energy Efficient Affordable Housing Units
- Target Funding on “Neighborhood” Renewal for Real Impact
- Develop and Convene a Public/Private Housing Working Group – Real Estate Professionals, Affordable Housing and Neighborhood & District Organizations
- Evaluate Code Compliance Barriers and Provide Tools to Solve Issues - Focus on Multi- Family and Absentee Landlord Units
- Support Neighborhood Social Enterprises – Construction Trade Employment Training Programs for Youth, Underemployed and Unemployed Residents
- Enhance Housing Support Services – Focus on “PEOPLE” Needs

### **Topic # 8: PUBLIC SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN**

#### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Improve Transportation Accessibility and Wayfinding Signage – (Not Language Dependent)
- Revive and Invest in Utica’s Community Policing Unit via Innovative Methods
- Support Development of Neighborhood-Based Solutions for Address Race and Poverty Issues - Truly Inclusive Representation
- Improve Outreach and Promotion of Programs and Services - Show the Positive
- Support Mixed-use Authentic Neighborhoods - Connect People
- Support the Utica School District as a Community HUB – Expand Education Programs
- Invest in Cultural Assets (Ask Me App, Stanley, MWPAI, Historical Society, etc.)



### **Topic # 9: CAPACITY BUILDING**

#### *Roundtable Recommendations*

- Increase Funding for Capacity Building Training and Promote Membership Participation in Board Training
- Market Existing Programs - Create a Web-based “Bulletin Board” for Not-for-Profit Events, Programs, and Resources
- Provide Resources to “Archive” Webinars and Training for Future Use
- Provide Wi-Fi Access to All – Increase Public Computer Access
- Support Collaborative Partnerships to Acquire and Use Grant Funding
- Develop a Web-based Database of Services for Not-for-Profit Collaboration and for Families and Individuals in Need (\*211)
- Outreach through the Council of Non-Profit Leaders (NYCON)



### Step 3: Gathering Additional Community Input – Surveys

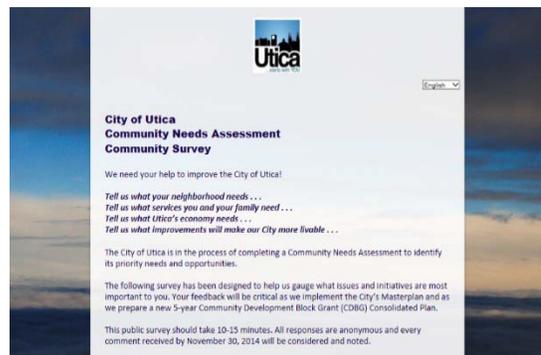
In addition to the Community Needs Assessment Roundtable process, survey tools were designed to help gauge the issues and initiatives that are most important to other groups of community members. In partnership with Utica’s Proctor High School Superintendent, Principal, teachers and students hardcopy elective surveys were completed during English classes, reaching a growing millennial audience and strengthening school districts the participation in community engagement. Hardcopy surveys were also available at the Utica Public Library, all Senior Centers, and Utica City Hall. Links to the online youth and public surveys were provided in the media and on the City of Utica homepage.

The surveys were developed to take approximately 25-30 minutes. All responses were anonymous and every comment received between from November 6 - November 30 was recorded.

Hard-copy survey results were entered online by the R2G Urban Studio. The online survey tools were built and distributed using Qualtrics software and quantitative answers to multiple choice questions were calculated automatically. Open ended text response questions were recorded individually and a “qualitative” analysis of the responses is in progress.

#### **Objectives**

- provide an opportunity for input that was open to the entire community
- confirm and/or enhance the needs and priorities identified in the community roundtables
- identify any issues that were not ascertained through the CNA process
- provide the City of Utica, organizations and the public with data directly collected from community members



#### **Methods**

There were specific topics that directly affect to two different demographic groups within the community - youth (under age 25) and the general public (over age 25). Survey tools, with 6 common questions, were developed to evaluate and compare the needs and issues as they relate to these groups.

The survey was created with a methodology designed to achieve the following goals:

- Include as many individuals as possible;
- Employ a systematic opportunity for public participation;
- Employ survey tools that allows data collected between youth and the general public to be compared; and
- Capture a diverse sample by age; income; ethnicity; and household size

#### **Responses:**

- 1,454 Youth participants (under age 25)
- 1,024 Adult participants (over age 25) accessed the survey

Once all of the survey data was collected, it was reorganized and consolidated for easier analysis. Redundancy was eliminated by collapsing the data into more logical and streamlined categories.

“Quantitative” results for multiple choice questions were determined. The “qualitative” results related to text response questions were broadly analyzed based on the six main areas of interest from the roundtables: Facilitate Employment; Increase Economic Activity; Improve Educational Opportunities; Enhance Public Safety; Improve Health and Wellness; Healthy Housing. From a cursory analysis, the top responses identified in the surveys aligned with the roundtable responses. However, the data is being further analyzed to identify any significant or unique responses that were not identified during the roundtables that the City should address in the 2-year action plan and beyond.

The Survey Summary and the complete Survey Results can be found in the Appendix of this document.

#### **Step 4: Developing a 2-year City Action Plan**

In collaboration with HUD, and in conjunction with the development of their new CDBG Consolidated Plan, the Department of Urban And Economic Development and the R2G Urban Studio team used the community input data to update the Public Participation Plan and to develop an Anti-Poverty Strategy and 2-year Action Plan relating to the needs and priorities identified during the CNA community engagement process.

#### ***Utica Community Needs Assessment 2-Year Action Plan Goals – An Overview***

Using the information gathered from the community profile and the community roundtables, participating stakeholders and City Staff collaborated to identify key findings and to develop recommendations (goals and subgoals) for the community. These recommendations, outlined below, are the basis of the 2-year action plan which has been incorporated in the City’s HUD Consolidated plan. Further analysis of the CNA data will be completed and the plan will be adjusted as the City moves forward. The 2-year Action Plan based with Promise Zone Matrix can be found in the Appendix of this document. The Promise Zone matrix was and will continue to be used as the plan is further developed and organizational capacity building recommendations will be considered throughout the plan’s implementation.

#### **Goal #1 – Facilitate Employment**

Provide training opportunities, financial assistance, and the support network required to raise the level of earning and employment for individuals, families and new entrepreneurs – leading to self-sufficiency.

##### ***Subgoals***

- Create a “community employment services” program to remove barriers to employment including basic soft skills education, coordination of childcare and transportation services and referrals to other agencies.
- Provide financial and technical assistance for career development opportunities that align with private employment sector needs to include relevant and paid internships, apprenticeships and mentorships.
- Develop incubators and support social enterprise development to create new avenues and accessible opportunities for unemployed and underemployed individuals and new entrepreneurs.



#### **Goal #2 – Increase Economic Activity**

Upgrade aging infrastructure, fill vacancies, provide incentives for the adaptive reuse of buildings, and enhance and promote quality of life amenities across all demographics and neighborhoods.

##### ***Subgoals***

- Develop a comprehensive brand for the City and Target Area commercial districts to maximize current assets and amenities, including marketing strategies.
- Upgrade road, water, sewer, technology, broadband, green and architectural infrastructure to address public safety and meet the needs of modern businesses and new urban residents.
- Organize commercial district neighborhood associations to re-engage and empower existing stakeholders and new developers to invest in their community.

### **Goal #3 – Improve Educational Opportunities**

Improve literacy rates, support afterschool programs, increase the number of adults with college degrees, and provide work training and certificate programs for skilled trades and professionals - with a focus on emerging career fields.

#### *Subgoals*

- Raise the literacy rate to improve graduation rates, reduce the need for college remedial support, improve health, reduce healthcare costs, lower crime rates, and enable increased revenues associated with a well-trained workforce.
- Increase the percentage of adults with bachelor's degrees to 25% in an effort to produce higher income levels, lower poverty rates and create less reliance on local, County, State and Federal support.
- Expand workforce training for skilled trades and professionals, with a focus on high tech and nanotechnology to support State and private investments in the region

### **Goal #4 – Enhance Public Safety**

Address community perceptions regarding public safety through community policing and neighborhood-based renewal strategies, including environmental design and safety infrastructure.

#### *Subgoals*

- Incorporate community policing objectives in comprehensive neighborhood planning to connect people and places, change negative perceptions, create community awareness and provide all residents with a voice.
- Use innovative environmental design strategies in neighborhood streetscape plans to help increase accessibility and walkability, remove blight and deter crime.
- Provide measures to enhance inclusive representation in neighborhood meetings, hiring practices and decision-making related to community development and public safety.

### **Goal #5 – Improve Health and Wellness**

Improve access to healthcare and insurance, re-assess behavioral health and addiction programs and services, improve healthy food access through community gardens and innovative environmental design, and promote walkability and healthy lifestyles.

#### *Subgoals*

- Provide enhanced support services for persons facing addiction and behavioral health issues.
- Improve access to healthy food and eliminate food deserts by including innovative environmental designs in neighborhood renewal projects and by promoting community gardens, farmers markets and other healthy retail options.
- Evaluate and enhance neighborhood walkability and connectivity using graphic signage, streetscape and transportation amenities (lighting, bike lanes and bus shelters), and public transportation schedules, routes and rates meet employee and resident needs.

### **Goal #6 – Provide Enhanced Housing Opportunities**

Provide healthy housing without lead, asbestos, mold and pests; renovate aging housing stock and build new quality affordable housing units; and provide live/work, loft and rental housing to meet the needs of Utica's changing demographics

#### *Subgoals*

- Work with private housing developers and public agencies to provide healthy housing opportunities using training and technical assistance necessary to meet fair housing law, comply with environmental guidelines and assist cost-burdened individuals.
- Rehabilitate or build new units of quality, affordable housing in target neighborhoods, with a focus on quality, permanent supportive housing and emergency housing for homeless persons and families.
- Complete a downtown housing inventory and provide financial and technical assistance to meet the urban living needs of any person, regardless of their income level, age, race or physical ability with a focus on the renovation of upper floors.

The complete 2-year Action Plan and Synchronization Matrix can be found in the Appendix of this document.

## C. Conclusion

The CNA provided Utica with a data-driven participatory decision making process that enabled the staff to effectively identify programs, policies, and practices that are and will be relevant to the community.

The CNA process also provided us with:

- a designated target area for enhanced impact
- a model for community engagement and honest dialogue
- pages of quantitative and qualitative community input for future analysis
- recommendations from 1454 potential future taxpayers (high school students)
- the foundation for future grant applications (i.e. Promise Zone, LEAD, Choice Neighborhoods)
- an Anti-Poverty Strategy for the City and a model for the Mohawk Valley Region
- pertinent community information and current demographic data
- an opportunity to synchronize goals, objectives and actions across multiple plans
- the tools and expertise to build a strong foundation for sustainable community development

The implementation of projects is already underway and the City will continue to allocate and leverage funds for initiatives that are identified in the 2-year Action Plan, using it as the framework for future and long-term initiatives as needs change and opportunities are identified. The City's community development direction is finally clear, coordinated and action-oriented.

*For more information, please contact:*

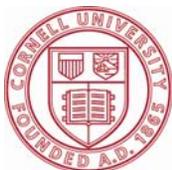
---



City of Utica  
Urban and Economic Development  
Utica City Hall  
1 Kennedy Plaza  
Utica, New York 13502  
Phone: 315-792-0181  
[www.cityofutica.com](http://www.cityofutica.com)



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Albany Field Office  
52 Corporate Circle  
Albany NY 12203  
Phone: 518-464-4200  
[UticaCNA@hud.gov](mailto:UticaCNA@hud.gov)  
[www.HUD.gov](http://www.HUD.gov)



Cornell University Cooperative Extension Oneida County  
Rust to Green (R2G) Utica Urban Studio  
121 Second Street,  
Oriskany, NY 13424  
Phone: 315.736.3394  
[www.cceoneida.com](http://www.cceoneida.com)