

Cold Spring SWOT Analysis
Economic Development Working Group
(Revised Wednesday, November 5, 2008)

The following is a brief, and necessarily incomplete, examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the village from an economic perspective. What this list attempts to do is to look at the major forces affecting the village, quality of life for its residents, and the economic health of the businesses and government which serves them. However, as with any such analysis, the items listed below—and the larger picture which they reveal—should not be viewed in isolation; any examination of this nature inherently reflects certain priorities and goals. In the case of this analysis, those priorities and goals are those of the residents as expressed in the recent survey and through numerous meetings.

Strengths

- Village character (friendliness, safety, Main Street, small-town, 19th century, etc)
- Small geographical footprint, all locations accessible on foot, sidewalks (bringing real estate value and quality of life benefits)
- Location, bucolic environs
- River: beauty, tourist attraction, outdoor activity (bringing both real estate value and quality of life benefits)
- Moderate population density and minimal sprawl (due in part to mountains providing a natural boundary to village)
- Train stop/Access to NYC
- Main Street (one of the last of its kind and therefore both an attraction and a benefit for the residents)
- Events (triathlon, harvest fest, etc)
- Tourists (tourist revenue makes services available residents might not otherwise have, supports Main Street businesses and, ultimately, supports property values)
- Parks, hiking trails
- Strong property values (which benefits people of retirement age who are using house as a fixed income investment)
- Farmer's market, high number of farms in the region (vital market, service to residents)
- Educated population

Weaknesses

- Shortage of businesses relevant to residents' needs, lack of resident support for local businesses
- Cyclical tourist revenues lead to a yearly recurring boom-bust cycle, high vacancy rates, high turnover and stresses for existing businesses.
- Low weekday foot traffic discourages the opening of businesses which might serve residents and investments by those who finance such efforts.
- High number of closed businesses during the off-season and during the quiet mid-weeks
- High vacancy rate on Main Street, high business turnover rate

- Limited amount of available office space
- Limited number of studio or one bedroom apartments
- Lack of fiscal discipline of county government, which lowers the discretionary income of residents and negatively impacts village economy
- Taxes paid to the county (in the form of property and sales taxes) far exceed the value of services received.
- Sales tax revenues generated in village are not shared by the county, which negatively impacts the village's financial health.
- Low spending rates by tourists (high number of gawkers who visit village but spend little money, insufficient number of affluent customers in shops)
- A failure by many to see the benefits of a small town or to see how those benefits are imperiled by policies and initiatives forged by a suburban mindset.
- Lack of transparency of historic review board discourages investments and repair (which can be viewed as a forgone opportunity to bolster the local economy).
- Low density buildings mar village character and impair local economy
- Lack of coherent environmental effort, game plan
- Village almost solely dependent on property tax for revenue as opposed to other sources of revenue
- Priority given to drivers as opposed to walkers or people on bicycles (i.e., no bike paths, few crosswalks, occasionally belligerent drivers)
- Absence of business outreach by village or county government to bring in business to village or county in order to build the tax base and create job opportunities
- Excessive land development in the town and county may stress existing infrastructure and lead to increased taxes due to increased school attendance, etc.
- Too few businesses to generate adequate tax base for village, town and county.
- Main Street and residents structurally at odds with one another due to tax situation and influx of tourists on weekends that inconveniences residents.
- 2 ½ story building code restriction discourages mixed use and decreases number of apartments in village.
- Long distance to nearest hospital.
- Property values dependent on the success of Main Street
- A shortage of initiatives from Chamber of Commerce.
- Inadequate signage restrictions, laws prohibiting or regulating franchises, or law prohibiting sale of pornography (Research this further).
- Unilateralism and lack of transparency commonly practiced by village political apparatus
- Resistance to alternative energy initiatives that may provide long term benefits to property values and disposable income of residents
- The frequent use "historic" to obstruct the full discussion and consideration of what may be good ideas (geothermal, energy efficiency, solar)
- Shortage of overnight accommodations
- Budget and tax increases at the village and county levels far exceed the income increases of residents
- Traffic congestion on the weekends, limited parking on Main Street, an absence of metered parking

- Lack of participation by commuters in village government, limited efforts by village to accommodate the schedules of commuters or seek their input
- Absence of a coherent response to economic issues facing residents and village, absence of three to five year financial outlook for village
- Inadequate financial management: ad hoc financial oversight by village board and residents, lack of efforts to anticipate future challenges, inaccurate budget estimates, budget shortfalls, unpaid debt, failure to recognize the full extent of the economic challenges confronting the village.
- Lack of plan to address long term economic issues facing village, lack of a planning process
- Insufficient use of innovative business models adapted to economic conditions
- Lack of efforts to fully utilize existing assets (buildings, parks, other village resources)
- Too few moderate to high paying job opportunities in area
- Shortage of services, facilities for residents operating a home office or home business, lowering weekday foot traffic and discouraging local economic activity.
- Lack of consistent effort by local government to increase non-property tax revenues in order to lower tax burden of residents and improve financial health of village government.
- Tendency of residents to look at possible uses for individual properties without considering the overall economic ecosystem of the village.

Threats

- The virtues and characteristics of a small town can be lost to a suburban mentality (sprawl, large set backs, large cookie cutter houses, two car garages, few sidewalks to connect the community, insufficient mixed use)
- Growth calculated by resource use as opposed to return on asset allows the town and county to be swallowed by sprawl. (Development can swallow the undeveloped land of the town and county, which will destroy natural beauty and lead to increased taxes as increased population strains existing infrastructure.)
- Inadequate sales and income tax revues in the county make it overly dependent on property taxes, which may continue to escalate unless fiscal discipline is exerted or alternative sources of revenue are found.
- Property taxes may increase until Haldane, Philipstown and Putnam county taxes resemble those in Westchester county.
- Main Street is vulnerable to a downturn which would lower property values throughout the village.
- A boom and bust tourist cycle can alter the face of Main Street so that it no longer serves the local population
- Franchises, if not tightly regulated, may enter the village and alter its character.
- Poor asset utilization can result in mindless, bad and unnecessary growth—as well as poor use of resources.
- High oil prices may decrease discretionary income and negatively impact local economy (visits to restaurants and shops, ability to pay property taxes, etc.).

- Depressed real estate market may lower property values and erode equity of homeowners of retirement age using their home as a fixed income investment vehicle
- Village debt burden may increase, budget problems may persist
- Pension costs may increase at a rate which exceeds the village's estimates, resulting in a serious financial liability for the village

Opportunities

The first undertaking of the EDWG is to inventory the current assets and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the village through an economic lens. That process is still underway. For that reason a full discussion, or list, of the many opportunities available to the village is not yet available. It will be available as the group discusses potential remedies to the identified weaknesses and forms its final recommendations.