



VILLAGE OF PORT CHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Nonprofits and Community Organizations Focus Group September 8, 2026, 12:00-1:00 PM

The Village Planning Department and BFJ Planning hosted a virtual focus group to hear from local nonprofit and community organization leaders on September 8. The team, including Greg Cutler from the Village and Michelle Gilman and Nick Cerdera from BFJ Planning, spoke with representatives from the Carver Center, the Sharing Shelf, the Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library, 5 Steps to Five, Clay Arts Center, and the Historical Society. The following is a summary of key themes discussed during the focus group session.

Community Needs and Challenges

Affordability was identified as one of the most pressing issues facing Port Chester residents. Participants referenced rising housing costs and increasing economic pressures on working families. Several attendees emphasized the importance of ensuring that future growth and investment benefit existing residents and that the Village pursue strategies that promote equitable opportunities for all community members.

Traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and parking concerns were also frequently discussed. Participants expressed concerns about increasing traffic volumes, e-bike safety, limited pedestrian crossings along Westchester Avenue, and the perception that parking is either unavailable, difficult to access, or too costly.

Participants also identified a need for additional public gathering and recreation spaces, particularly family-oriented play areas within or near downtown. Improving access to open space and creating opportunities for residents to gather in central locations were viewed as important quality-of-life enhancements.

Several attendees emphasized the importance of preserving and celebrating Port Chester's history and cultural identity as redevelopment occurs. Participants expressed interest in incorporating historical resources, interpretation, and preservation efforts into future development while balancing broader community goals such as affordability and economic growth.

Community Strengths and Assets

Participants described Port Chester's small businesses as one of the community's greatest assets. Locally owned businesses were viewed as critical contributors to the Village's character, economy, and sense of place. Participants noted that many business owners are deeply invested in the community, support local nonprofits, and help foster connections among residents. The Village's nonprofit sector and cultural and historical organizations and resources were also identified as major strengths. Participants highlighted the wide range of organizations providing educational, cultural, social service, and recreational opportunities for residents.

Additional assets discussed included the Village's walkability, transit access, and proximity to the Metro-North station. Participants noted that these characteristics contribute to Port Chester's accessibility and enhance its appeal as a place to live and work.

Several attendees described Port Chester's strong sense of community as one of its defining characteristics. Community events, such as Port Chester Day, were cited as examples of residents' pride and connection to the Village. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that future development enhances rather than diminishes the Village's unique identity, character, and small-town atmosphere.

Issues Facing the Hispanic/Latino Community

Participants identified affordability as a major concern for Hispanic and Latino residents, particularly as housing and living costs continue to increase.

Participants also discussed concerns related to immigration enforcement and the need for residents to have access to reliable information and community resources. While participants recognized that the Village cannot affect federal policy, several attendees suggested that the Village could play a stronger role in connecting residents to service providers and organizations that assist individuals facing immigration, housing, and economic challenges.

Representatives emphasized the importance of building stronger partnerships between the Village and nonprofit organizations to ensure vulnerable residents can access the assistance they need. Participants expressed support for the Comprehensive Plan's stated goal of helping all residents thrive and encouraged continued efforts to translate that aspiration into tangible programs and actions.

Communication and Access to Information and Services

Participants consistently identified communication as a significant challenge within the Village. Several attendees noted difficulties obtaining timely information regarding road closures, construction activities, detours, and other municipal projects. While participants generally supported ongoing infrastructure improvements, they expressed frustration with the lack of advance notice and coordinated communication.

Participants also discussed the need for stronger coordination among nonprofit organizations. Several attendees suggested creating a centralized clearinghouse or communications platform where residents could easily access information about available services and community resources. Participants noted that communication among organizations has become more challenging as traditional information-sharing networks have diminished and the media landscape has changed.

Participants indicated that information is often distributed through fragmented channels, making it difficult for some residents to stay informed about services, programs, and community events. Several attendees emphasized the importance of maintaining bilingual communications and ensuring that information is accessible in both English and Spanish.

Community Services and Programs

Participating organizations described a wide range of services that support Port Chester residents.

Clay Art Center highlighted its free and reduced-cost after-school programs, partnerships with Port Chester Recreation, in-school educational programming, senior and veteran programs, and collaboration with community organizations and the Village on public art initiatives.

5 Steps to Five discussed its parent education programs and efforts to create supportive networks for families with young children. The organization emphasized fostering community among parents while providing engaging opportunities for children.

The Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library described its broad range of free programs and services available to residents. Staff highlighted partnerships with schools and community agencies and noted the library's role as a safe and welcoming space for youth, including middle school students seeking constructive after-school activities.

The Sharing Shelf discussed its work providing clothing assistance to families in need while also helping address textile waste and affordability challenges.

The Carver Center summarized its mission as "Nourish, Educate, Empower," reflecting its comprehensive approach to serving residents through programs and services that address basic needs, education, and community development.

Organizational Capacity, Volunteers, and Funding

Participants generally reported that volunteer recruitment is less challenging than securing sustainable funding. Representatives from both the Carver Center and The Sharing Shelf noted that financial support remains a persistent concern despite strong volunteer engagement.

Several attendees observed that while nonprofit organizations provide essential services to Village residents, local funding opportunities are limited, and organizations often rely on county-level or external funding sources. Participants suggested that as new investment and wealth enter the Village, there may be opportunities to strengthen local philanthropy and encourage a "give where you live" culture to better support community-serving organizations.