

APPENDIX A

**PUBLIC  
PARTICIPATION  
SUMMARY**

PREPARED FOR THE  
LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

JANUARY 29, 2016

**GrowSMART**

Appendix A: Public Participation Summary



## INTRODUCTION

This document provides a summary of the different public and stakeholder engagement activities held as part of the GrowSMART Regional Economic Growth Strategy. Its purpose is to present the findings from each activity, which informed the development of key findings and recommendations. The activities are presented in chronological order.

### Economic Development Commission Briefing Sessions Spring and Summer 2015

RiverCOG staff met with representatives from all existing municipal Economic Development Commissions (EDCs) including: Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland and Westbrook. The sessions aimed to engage EDCs early in the process and solicit initial questions and perceptions of the effort.

**Results:** Top issues included:

- Questions about the purpose of GrowSMART and its relationship to a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.
- Interest in thinking regionally on some issues but also acknowledgment that some towns compete with each other for businesses.
- Concern of the state of infrastructure like sewer and transportation systems.
- Focus on town specific issues like the redevelopment of specific brownfields.

### Regional Summit #1 September 22, 2015

RiverCOG, Ninigret Partners and FHI staff facilitated an open house style summit at the Riverhouse in Haddam. The summit aimed to introduce the project to the region and solicit participant's thoughts on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the region. Over 50 people attended the event.

**Results:** The results of participant input were captured in a series of word clouds. Raw data is also captured below as part of a combined Pop Up Workshop and Summit 1 data collection.

### Pop Up Workshops September and October 2015

RiverCOG staff set up 9 Pop Up Workshops throughout the region with about 100 participants. Consisting of a series of informational boards and prompting questions the workshops aimed to complement data collected at Regional Summit #1. The workshops were held at the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce Business-to-Business Expo in Cromwell, RiverCOG Regional Planning Commission Meeting in Essex, East Haddam Farmer's Market, Durham Town Meeting, East Hampton Harvest Festival, Old Saybrook Farmer's Market, Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce Business Connections Hour, the Valley-Shore YMCA, and the Middletown North End Farmer's Market.

## GrowSMART

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**Results:** Here is the raw data from the prompting questions asked at both the Summit and Pop Up Workshops:

### WHAT ARE YOUR REGION'S GREATEST STRENGTHS?

- Parks
- Really Beautiful
- Local Personality
- Strong Community
- Educated Workforce
- River
- Parks
- Businesses
- The mom & pop small businesses (e.g. Downtown Middletown)
- Natural Beauty
- Rich History
- The forests
- CT River Views
- Emphasis on the arts
- community based events
- Unique Small Towns
- Open Space
- Distinctive Landscape (CT River)
- Well Educated population (Ex. Compared to Bridgeport)
- Good Schools
- Plenty of Open Space
- Unique concentration and variety of natural and cultural resources
- Volunteers and professionals dedicated to improving economic situation while preserving quality of life and assets
- Natural beauty
- Safety
- Multiple cultural events
- Good school systems
- The lake
- Woodsy, Beauty
- Close enough but not too close to cities
- CT River & Beauty
- High quality small town living
- Community
- Restaurants
- Culture
- Nautical Stuff
- Large workforce that is trained and educated within a 30 mile radius
- Sense of community
- Natural Beauty
- The beauty of our surroundings
- The River
- Wildlife
- Our People: Smart, Loyal, Friendly
- Our Place: River, Lakes, Beaches, Ponds, Woods, Hills
- Community
- The River
- Natural Beauty
- Recreation
- New England Small Towns
- Industrial History
- CT River
- Outdoor Recreation
- Culture & History
- History
- Tourism
- History
- CT River Valley
- Beauty
- The River
- Community
- The CT River Valley
- Educated Workforce
- Quality of Life
- Neighbors who know each other
- Natural Beauty
- Small Town Community
- Quality of Life
- History
- River
- Open Space
- Sense of belonging to a community
- Cultural opportunities
- Wesleyan
- Goodspeed
- Outdoor Recreation
- Valley Railroad
- Rural Feel
- Scenery
- Access to Cities
- Small Town quality of life
- Education
- Location
- Roots & Heritage
- Sense of Community
- The CT River
- Highly Educated Workforce
- Quality of Life
- Small towns with unique cultures
- Recreation
- Beauty & History
- Character
- Health Care
- Land Preservation
- Location
- CT River
- Natural Resources
- History

## WHAT ARE THE REGION'S GREATEST WEAKNESSES?

- Leadership
- Lack of plan
- Lack of community mediation services
- “We’ve always done it this way”
- Public Transit New haven to Middletown
- The lake
- Bridges – Crossing the river from east Haddam
- The public transportation system should be improved so that you can get around without a car
- The waterfront in downtown Middletown
- Green lawns around the lake
- Shopping within city of Middletown
- Controlling costs for businesses (energy)
- Limited Public Transportation
- Lack of effective regional communication
- Few incentives to collaborate/participate with regional efforts
- Lots of poor land (glacial till)
- Poor utilities and industrial services
- Resistance to change
- Highly fractured land ownership
- Lack of workforce training
- Abandoned properties
- Attracting businesses & talent
- Affordable housing
- Less accessible public transport
- Too many individuals looking out for themselves
- Transportation
- Attractions to bring people to live and visit
- Lack of jobs
- Lack of affordable housing (apartments)
- General population does not understand that the world has changed and business and industry do not lower property taxes
- Age demographics
- Lack of strong internet access across the region
- Lack of river-based activities
- Lack of infrastructure in many of the communities
- Lack of infrastructure
- Affordable housing
- Preponderance of single family homes
- Infrastructure
- High cost of living
- Lack of coordinated plan to leverage each town’s strengths
- Lack of opportunity for young people
- Jobs
- Lack of smaller more affordable homes
- Lack of public transportation
- High taxes with low tax base
- Desire for local control even when it threatens opportunities
- Lack of a long term plan to generate more healthy businesses
- High cost of living
- Lack of diverse jobs
- Lack of job training for mechanics and technicians
- High cost of living
- Lack of restaurants with outdoor seating
- Lack of centralized population makes brick and mortar retail difficult
- Failure to think beyond town boundaries
- Lack of a cohesive common vision
- Too many state and town employees
- Lack of working as a region
- Lack of willingness to share assets and resources
- Lack of trust
- Jobs for people under 45 are few and far between in the region
- Lack of nightlife
- Lack of infrastructure
- Transportation
- State budgets are out of control
- Unfunded mandates on municipalities are un reasonable
- Employees (other than the State of CT) are leaving in droves, due to out of control state spending and regulations
- Inept local government (East Haddam)
- Lack of planning as a region
- Lack of education in personal finance

- Not enough attention in Hartford (legislative)
- Politicians
- Lack of rental housing – housing costs

#### WHAT ARE THE REGION'S GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES?

- Natural Beauty attracting tourists and residents
- Educated workforce
- Idea generators
- Mecca for “green” (building, tourism, etc.)
- Preservation of natural resources
- Great place to live and bring up a family if you can tolerate the commute and taxes
- Tourism
- Smart, well-educated entrepreneurs
- To grow small business
- Tourism
- Accentuating & building upon the region’s rich history
- “All these small towns want to be big. Together they can be big enough to stay small.” – Bernie Noonan
- Business Development (workshops, workforce, energy education)
- Boat landing north of Haddam with handicap accessibility
- Outdoors & Tourism
- CT River and maybe a high-speed ferry boat to connect towns
- Outdoors, trees
- Wildlife
- CT River
- Quality of life
- Money to buy your products and services
- “I think that the industry that could come to our region and my town could be done so that is attractive and protects the view of the river too”
- Open Space
- Outdoor activities
- Outdoor recreational tourism
- Open spaces
- Natural environment
- Develop but keep small town feel
- Support small business through granting spaces, workshops, small loans. Ex. Free shared space in mixed use development
- Location
- Tourism
- Promote the region or sub-regions within the tourism contacts at state and national level
- Full or part time facilitators, project coordinators, within the region can help make things happen
- Small business opportunities
- 900,000+ jobs within a 30 mile radius
- Large workforce
- Outdoor recreation industry
- Job creation
- Location, 2 hrs. to NY and Boston
- Greenways kept and increased
- State parks maintained for a longer season
- Increase 9 town transit up Rt81 to Middletown
- Tourism
- Tourism
- Small business growth
- Enhance economic development
- Access to the I-95 + 84 corridor
- Agriculture, food sources
- People
- Recreation and tourism
- Green energy
- Make it easier for people to work at home
- Regionalism of services
- Country get away for city people
- Support small businesses through creating free shared spaces with desks and meeting spaces in mixed use development. This would attract people with home based businesses to come out, spend money in shops, collaborate, live in the complex, etc. Facilitate small loans, give banks incentives to do so
- Place-centric economic development
- Environment
- The River
- Recreation & Tourism
- Tourism
- Quality of life
- Tourism
- Riverfront property
- More/better recreational use of CT River
- Conservation of historical & Public property

### WHAT ARE THE GREATEST THREATS TO THE REGION?

- Aging population
- Over development – too many homes
- Lack of coordinated planning that is followed
- Aging population
- High cost of living
- Taxes
- Housing
- Over-development
- Difficulty working together/stepping outside of town's interests
- Lack of resources dedicated to implanting action steps
- CT River Pollution
- Potholes/roads are not as solid as they could be
- Large wage gap
- Lack of affordable housing
- Water quality lake problems
- Crime
- Taxes
- Taxes, taxes, taxes
- Drinking water in East Hampton (maybe other towns too)
- Disconnected
- Republicans
- (To the republican comment) That comment about republicans seems unkind and unnecessary. People from any party that small-minded are a threat to the region
- Lack of convenient public transit
- Taxes on aging population
- Impairment of scenic beauty of CT River
- Mix of housing that drives young people out of the region and yields an aging population
- Loss of manufacturing jobs
- Lack of affordable housing
- Cost of living
- Sprawl
- Climate change
- Good jobs
- Tax restructure
- Taxes
- Not controlling development
- Taxes – decline of small business
- Not a lot of jobs
- Expensive housing
- Failure to retain young people
- Tax burden at state level
- High state taxes
- Cost of living
- Taxes
- Limited job opportunities
- Lack of public transportation
- Parochialism
- Leadership
- Lack of affordable housing
- Thinking too small
- Taxes
- Property taxes and the aging population
- Aging population
- Unplanned growth
- High cost of living
- Over building
- High cost of living
- Not preserving the Connecticut river
- Too high cost of living
- Over building
- High cost of living
- Restructuring of property tax system
- Too few jobs
- High cost of living
- Taxes
- Not enough children
- High cost of living
- That a rails to trails doesn't happen
- Taxes
- Housing
- Old people
- 100 year floods

### WILL THEY EVER BE ABLE TO MOVE OUT OF YOUR BASEMENT?

- Good Paying Jobs & Affordable Housing
- Affordable new housing
- Someplace to live, work, play
- A job with high enough salary to be self-supportive
- Good education
- Creating more opportunities through less restrictions for startups
- Inspiring Entrepreneurship in our schools
- Yea, if they get a job!
- If there is a will, there is a way
- Finding an affordable place to live
- That # of 42% with bachelor's degrees needs to grow. Also,

- more tech Ed need for trades
- Only if, banks give them a mortgage and they feel more confident in real estate being a good investment
- Yes, if we stop coddling. I am guilty
- A living wage
- Yes, but they will not stay in the area
- Yes, but will they be able to stay nearby and will they want to?
- If they move to NYC or Boston
- Not for a long time
- Public Transit
- Affordable housing with a living wage
- Affordable housing
- Legalize marijuana and start a brand new industry
- Yes, people want to. They need jobs that pay a wage that allows for rent, car, student loans, phone, etc. If is MORE of a % of income than in previous generations. Also, the boomers need to retire so younger workers can move up and out
- Kick in the pants. Tactfully of course
- Need more nightlife and culture for younger people

- No- not enough affordable housing in the area
- Yes, they will need help from parents more so than the help their parents received
- Yes, but they will be a little older than we were – need jobs and cost of necessities is higher
- Financial Planning
- Taxi Service Past midnight!

#### WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THAT OLD FACTORY?

- Art Gallery & restaurant
- Apartments
- Business suites
- Micro-breweries
- Rental housing
- Retail space with a restaurant or micro-breweries
- Small business space
- Adaptive multi-use apartments
- Apartments
- Business start ups
- Restaurants
- Museum
- Clean it, make it a live-work place
- Arts music co-working space
- Multi-use like West Hartford's blue back square except affordable apartments too (but nice ones, people WANT to live in)

- restaurants, shops, gym, business space, dog park, library, etc.
- Housing
- Creative art-related spaces
- Regional artists' market/cluster (Pike Place Market)
- Condos
- Affordable housing
- Business center for home based businesses & telecommuters
- Mixed use retail, restaurants, housing
- Brewery
- Retail
- Restaurants, brewery, artisanal shops, community center
- New manufacturing
- Brewery
- Brewery
- Art studio show space
- Apartments
- Multiuse apartments, retail, restaurants, art space
- Industrial arts manufacturing, museum
- Affordable housing! ... And why can't "affordable housing" requirements be regional; instead of by towns!
- The CT trusts' mills program
- Small business development condos

- Space for mix of makers; techs, tinkerers, artists, artisans
- Condos
- Artisan living and working
- Retail
- Rental space
- Rental housing
- Mixed use development
- Business incubator
- Micro-breweries
- Retail and residential combined
- Flexibility in work schedule
- Would I get paid??
- No, tried that. Cost of operations in CT are FAR too high
- I'm retired and don't want to work anymore
- Need more tourism and job opportunities
- Costs are too high. Time to retire
- No I just would like to work and semi-retire
- Professional weeding
- Home care for the elderly
- Personal coach and project support. People are too busy for their own good and need support. I love freedom, flexibility, and the power to structure my day around helping people. Word of mouth, social media. Internet
- Builder
- Increased online training and entrepreneurs needed
- Bookstore and coffee shop
- Landscape and food
- Yes! Lower income tax on recent college grads to inspire them to create jobs for themselves in our region
- Farmer
- IT from home
- Catering business
- An intimidating thought with all the costs/rules imposed by the state
- Travel & tourist guide for region (historical sites and good restaurants)
- Would love to start a business I could do from home and harness the power of the internet
- Marketing director GrowSMART

#### IS IT TIME TO CREATE YOUR OWN JOB?

- Create an efficient public transit system
- Care for the land and pay people a living wage to clean up the environment
- Entry level development / finance positions
- Consultant to communities

## Survey

September 21 through November 15, 2015

RiverCOG staff hosted an online survey to complement Regional Summit #1 and the Pop Up Workshops. Different tools were used to spread the word about the survey including Textizen. The survey had about 50 responses.

**Results:** Results by question:

### What should be the #1 priority of this economic growth plan?

Attract & retain young adults	20%
Create more jobs	12%
Improve quality of life	29%
Increase property tax revenue	27%
Other	12%

Other includes: Attracting new businesses and creating jobs, lowering taxes, sustainability and using existing spaces for new businesses

### What is the region's biggest SINGLE strength?

Lifestyle	11%
Location	41%
Natural resources & amenities	43%
Workforce	5%

### What is the region's biggest SINGLE challenge?

Aging population	17%
Cost of housing	31%
CT business climate	23%
NIMBYism (not in my backyard)	9%
Other	20%

Other includes: Taxes, development pattern, commuting challenges, apathy, budget, public ownership of community future

### In the past 10 years, do you think your town's economy has,

Stayed the same	46%
Strengthened	8%
Weakened	46%

## CT River Valley Gateway Commission Briefing Session October 22, 2015

RiverCOG and Ninigret Partners staff met with the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to introduce and elicit feedback on the GrowSMART project.

**Results:** Members of the Gateway Commission made the following suggestions:

- Reach out to local land trusts and conservation commissions for input on regional economic development strategies.
- Review the *Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* that was recently completed in August 2015. A large portion of this plan impacts the lower Connecticut River valley and surrounding communities.

## Steering Committee & Employer Interviews October and November 2015

Ninigret Partners staff conducted phone interviews with all twenty members of the RiverCOG Economic Growth Strategy Committee (REGSC). In addition, several local employers of varying sizes were interviewed. The interviews solicited input on a variety of issues including regional concerns and opportunities, perspectives on key issues including employer recruitment and existing initiatives and big picture questions like how to balance growth and conservation in the region.

**Results:** Members of the Gateway Commission made the following suggestions:

- **Changing Demographics:** Demographic shifts are front and center in people's mind. Cost of living, particularly housing, was cited as a key factor and interviewees noted the need to look at how state investment, local infrastructure (or lack thereof) and local land use policies affect where future development can go.
- **Small Business Potential:** While it's possible to attract or grow bigger employers, the potential for job growth is more in helping small businesses (particularly cottage industries) get to the next level or in helping suppliers make connections to larger firms outside the region. The smaller businesses are likely a better fit with the existing character and infrastructure of many of the region's communities.
- **Workforce Development:** Ensuring a skilled workforce for existing jobs is a challenge. Small business growth is hampered by the challenges related to recruiting, training and retaining workers. There is a need to connect workers and employers to existing training programs and to fill in any training gaps in order to help overcome this barrier for firms and employees.
- **Tourism Potential:** Tourism is seen as having great potential but there is an open question about just how much and what type. While many interviewees cited the potential to grow the number of day

trips and short stays to the region they were also concerned about the impacts additional tourism traffic would have on communities. In the short term, there is a need to better connect and market existing assets.

- **Quality of Life:** Quality of life is central to the attractiveness of the region. It's been largely protected by land use policies and a lack of water and sewer infrastructure. However, without a change in the approach to growth, many communities won't be able to sustain themselves as they are now.

## Regional Summit #2

November 19, 2015

RiverCOG, Ninigret Partners and FHI staff facilitated a 2-hour summit at Camp Hazen YMCA in Chester. The summit aimed to present preliminary findings and solicit input on the vision and priorities for the region from participants. About 35 people attended the Summit.

**Results:** The results of participant activities are listed here:

**Priority Investment Areas.** Participants were asked to allocate \$50 towards what they think are the top priorities for investment in the region.

Water and Sewer Infrastructure	\$ 245.00
Infill Housing Development	\$ 235.00
Job Training & Apprentice System	\$ 200.00
21st Century Employment Spaces	\$ 195.00
Transit System	\$ 185.00
River Activities	\$ 145.00
Tourism Infrastructure	\$ 115.00
Outdoor Rec. Areas	\$ 85.00
Conservation	\$ 80.00
Marketing Campaign	\$ 65.00

**Future Headlines.** Participants were asked to write a newspaper headline that spoke to their future hopes for the region.

*Municipal Sewer System Operational in Town Center*

*CT River Valley is #1 Place to Live, Work, and Play in the United States*

*Young Creative Entrepreneurs are Setting Up Shop in the Lower River Valley*

*Middlesex County a Model for Balanced Growth*

*Lower CT River Valley's Network of Village Centers is Hot House of Next Economy*

*Middlesex County Leads State in Agro Tourism & Food Production*

*Voted Best in CT for Family Life - more family time than any other region.*

**Regional Typologies.** Participants were asked to assess the character of the RiverCOG communities based on a set of typologies developed as part of the GrowSMART effort:

	Conservation, Residential, No Growth		Rural Conservation, Agriculture, Village Centers		Waterfront, Urban, Suburban, or Rural		Suburban to Urban		Small Urban to Mid-Size Urban	
	A		B		C		D		E	
	Future	Existing	Future	Existing	Future	Existing	Future	Existing	Future	Existing
Chester	2	5	14	12	0	0	0	0	1	0
Clinton	0	1	0	0	7	13	6	2	2	1
Cromwell	0	1	2	0	0	1	7	7	6	6
Deep River	1	1	10	12	4	3	2	0	0	0
Durham	2	6	7	7	3	0	2	1	1	1
East Haddam	3	3	8	10	3	2	0	1	1	0
East Hampton	1	4	5	5	2	2	4	3	3	1
Essex	3	0	6	11	7	5	0	1	0	0
Haddam	1	6	9	7	3	1	1	1	1	0
Killingworth	3	13	9	1	1	2	1	0	1	0
Lyme	6	8	6	4	2	3	0	0	1	0
Middlefield	6	9	5	3	1	1	1	1	2	2
Middletown	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	11	11
Old Lyme	3	2	5	9	5	6	0	0	2	0
Old Saybrook	1	0	0	1	11	15	3	1	1	0
Portland	1	1	2	3	3	4	5	3	4	5
Westbrook	2	2	0	4	12	10	1	1	1	0

**Vision Statements.** Participants were asked to rate which statements were most important to them (add actual question). The statements were in order of preference are:

1. Development respectful of the distinctive character and natural beauty of our communities.
2. Cities, towns, and villages that are great places to live for all of our citizens.
3. Natural and historical assets that are celebrated and accessible, supportive of our region's lifestyle and economy.
4. Businesses and economic opportunities consistent with the nature of our communities.
5. Transportation options that link citizens to our region's job opportunities and amenities.

**Small Group Discussions.** Small group discussions were held to gather participants reactions to the project's preliminary findings. Notes from those discussions are summarized here:

#### What surprised you the most?

- Manufacturing. It's centered on Middletown, Pratt, & subcontractors
- This is NO brand yet.
- We slowed population and school growth (zoning out kids)
- Our definition of "tourist" is 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners
- How do you do tourism without tourists? What do we mean by "tourism"? What do we want?
  - We don't want traffic
  - This is nowhere to stay
  - Bulk of tourism is staying in 2<sup>nd</sup> homes, with friends & family
  - Infrastructure is lacking → we can't handle tourism, especially not pedestrians
  - Balance of day trippers
  - Folks visiting the VRR don't have any nearby amenities. (Restaurants and hotels than accommodate families)
  - Are WE the tourists? For example, Middletown-ers spending the day in Essex? Can we call this "incestuous tourism"?
  - One definition of tourism → "Creating a better set of amenities that tourists pay to support"
- Industrial Property is increasing in value
- It's scary that the largest industry is manufacturing, followed closely by GOVERNMENT
- People are coming from NY and that is currently an untapped market
  - East Haddam USED TO have 30 resorts all frequented by NY'ers
- Why did hospital employment decrease? Jobs are shifting within the corporate entity
- Manufacturing jobs = majority of \$\$\$. Where will that be in 10 years?
- Should we be concerned with the future of the aerospace industry?
- Water & Sewer infrastructure:
  - Do we decide to funnel those businesses to Middletown and keep the characters of our towns the same?
  - Is there any availability in Middletown?
- Transit:
  - State is spending the transit money elsewhere
  - 9TT is flourishing
  - Ralph (Lyme) says that the "Lower River Way" suits our needs

- Everybody wants transit but they won't use it
- People are using 9TT are not from here. They are taking it INTO the region.
- We'll never be the "New Hamptons" because vacationers will never be able to get here
- Major Concern: The State's Focus. Middlesex County is being left out.

### What do you think is missing from our work to date?

- We don't have the faith in our state government
- We need to work on our approval process
- Schools
- People who work from home. They NEED reliable internet
- Minority participation including women and small businesses
  - The problem is information AND process
- Why is it so hard to sell a 4 bedroom house? Did we overbuild?
- White Elephant in the room: PROPERTY TAX
- Are we creating opportunities? Especially for minorities?
  - Our demographics are changing
  - INCLUSION: How do we do that? Grassroots organizations.
- Opportunity to enhance → It's infill development!
- Town & Village Centers need to be nodes in a network
  - Not necessarily more transit
  - Interaction within networks
- Are we even a region? Can we be a region?

## Millennials Briefing Session

November 4, 2015

Ninigret Partners and RiverCOG staff held a briefing and discussion with a group of 12 millennials from around the region. The session focused on understanding what attracts millennials to the region and what barriers they face as they work to stay here.

**Results:** The discussed resulted in the following observations:

- Housing options and housing costs are a key issue.
- The ability to be involved in the community ranging from community service to serving on important committees is an advantage of smaller communities.
- The range of the activities (indoor and outdoor) are attractive but "improvement" in certain areas such as nightlife options and access to the river were highlighted.
- There are open questions as to whether they can continue to pursue their career within the RiverCog region and several were either starting businesses or considering the possibility to help make remaining in the region more plausible.

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Appendix A: Public Participation Summary

## Diversity Briefing Session

### January 7, 2015

Ninigret Partners and RiverCOG staff held a briefing and discussion with leadership from Middlesex's NAACP chapter. The session focused on understanding the challenges facing the region's minority populations and opportunities to embrace the region's growing diversity moving forward.

**Results:** The discussed resulted in the following observations:

- There is a need for equity in terms of employment and other opportunities.
- A regional vision is necessary for how to increase opportunity for underrepresented populations as well as a set of programs that are structured to support it.
- Current businesses development programs don't offer enough support; there needs to be more "resource centers" to help after the training programs have ended.
- There is a need for a Steering Committee to guide implementation of the vision that is diverse in its composition and reflects the groups you are trying to attract.

## REGSC Meeting

### January 13, 2016

Ninigret Partners staff presented the findings and preliminary recommendations for the economic growth strategy. Staff also requested members complete a complementary visioning and priority setting survey that complemented information from Regional Summit 2. Also, comments cards were handed out so that members could share additional ideas.

**Results:** The results of participant activities are listed here:

**Vision Statements.** Participants were asked to weigh on how much they agreed with each vision statement on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being completely disagree and 5 completely agree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Development respectful of the distinctive character and natural beauty of our communities.				4	9
Cities, towns, and villages that are great places to live for all of our citizens.			1	4	8
Natural and historical assets that are celebrated and accessible, supportive of our region's lifestyle and economy.				6	7
Businesses and economic opportunities consistent with the nature of our communities.			3	6	4
Transportation options that link citizens to our region's job opportunities and amenities.		4	3		6

**Investment Priorities.** Participants were asked to allocate \$100 towards what they think are the top priorities for investment in the region:

Infill Housing Development	\$	230
Water and Sewer Infrastructure	\$	190
21st Century Employment Spaces	\$	190
Job Training & Apprentice System	\$	125
River Activities	\$	120
Tourism Infrastructure	\$	105
Transit System	\$	100
Outdoor Rec. Areas	\$	85
Marketing Campaign	\$	75
Conservation	\$	70

**Comment Cards.** Several Steering Committee members shared comments with Ninigret Partners staff regarding the effort, summarized here:

- There is a need for an entity to help implement recommendations
- Need to think about timing of recommendations, which are short term and long term
- Design standards are important to ensuring predictability and cost of development
- Need to make sure there is a broad based and inclusive group moving the recommendations forward.