

Northern Dutchess Alliance Case Study

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1. Municipal Characteristics

Indicators	Town of Red Hook	Village of Red Hook	Town of Hyde Park	Town of Pleasant Valley	Town of Milan	Town of Rhinebeck	Village of Rhinebeck	Town of Stanford	Village of Tivoli	Dutchess County
2000 Population	10,408	521	20,851	9,066		7,762	3,077	3,544	1,163	280,150
Land Area (sq. mi.)	36.7	0.9	37.0	32.9		36.6	1.6	50	1.8	801.59
Assessed Value Fully Taxable	\$538,373,233	\$15,877,195	\$897,837,806	\$544,193,082	\$297,366,811	\$570,781,746	\$163,817,001	\$379,855,259	\$26,376,286	\$12,323,064,973
Full Valuation Taxable Real Property	\$803,542,138	\$16,201,219	\$1,471,865,255	\$850,301,690	\$297,366,811	\$858,964,252	\$246,526,713	\$542,650,370	\$70,657,075	\$24,880,843,128
Total Tax Levy	\$1,969,618	\$762,045	\$4,186,234	\$2,397,594	\$841,869	\$2,265,635	\$1,284,004	\$1,429,552	\$360,107	\$206,680,815
Total Debt Outstanding	\$1,455,813	\$368,885	\$12,006,935	\$958,508	\$695,545	\$360,000	\$3,583,750	\$43,231	\$896,756	\$66,225,000
Total State Aid Revenue	\$658,754	\$8,896	\$1,987,815	\$696,418	\$193,838	\$688,069	\$115,116	\$409,516	\$58,692	\$77,500,396
Total Revenue w/ State Aid	\$3,195,800	\$497,196	\$8,803,914	\$3,781,010	\$1,533,834	\$3,474,483	\$3040,389	\$2,354,903	\$844,590	\$395,494,991
Debt Service	\$121,125	\$52,337	\$560,081	\$132,135	\$93,022	\$56,010	\$578,296	\$39,473	\$109,434	\$19,049,027
Total Expenditures w/ Debt Service	\$3,484,810	\$484,416	\$10,859,581	\$3,564,036	\$1,482,361	\$3,310,439	\$3,528,444	\$1,936,222	\$1,251,734	\$391,225,935
Expenditures:										
Transportation	\$1,170,717	\$193,511	\$3,775,114	\$1,556,193	\$618,552	\$1,122,168	\$504,256	\$100,0150	\$178,453	\$30,815,773
Economic Development	\$4,180	\$2,420	\$19,737	\$16,996	\$3,540	\$16,840	0	\$2,097	\$17,550	\$131,860,451

2. Project Description & Impetus

In the mid 1990s, Dutchess County found itself in a difficult economic position. The county was reeling from the loss of 20,000 jobs, the aftermath of two years of rapid downsizing by IBM. Once described by the *New York Times* as a 'company county,' Dutchess officials set about to recover the county's economic base by making two strategic changes. First, economic recovery would be built on smaller and more diverse business enterprises, and second, the economic development patterns needed to make sense region by region within the county.

Three sections of the county coalesced as regions and formed organizations through which the region's collective interests were discussed and prioritized, and then conveyed to county officials. Only the northern section, the most rural region in Dutchess County, lacked a collective presence and shared voice. The county executive, William Steinhaus, felt that the communities of northern Dutchess needed to define their regional needs through a similar process. In his 1996 State of the County address, Steinhaus suggested that a northern Dutchess organization be established to represent "as diverse a set of interests as possible from northern Dutchess to formulate future economic development policy" (*Poughkeepsie Journal* 4/8/96). He noted that the character and economy of the northern segment of the county centered on agriculture and tourism.

The county executive's interest coincided with bottom-up recognition on the part of northern Dutchess municipalities that they needed to take collective control of their future. Residents of the northern county communities could see Southern Dutchess developing and changing rapidly. One of the early founders of NDA, Assemblyman Marcus Molinaro, then mayor of Tivoli, explained he and fellow municipal managers had been holding conversations on how to "plan for the future, mostly from a regional identity point of view." He explained that a number of issues were percolating, such as an expansion of the Metro-North railway, which could be best addressed by a regional body. In addition, the region struggled with its identity. Did it want to retain its rural character or did it want to permit or encourage major development? Decisions on transportation infrastructure development rested on the answer to this question.

An article in the *Daily Freeman* on April 19, 1996, summarized the northern Dutchess leaders' sentiments on this topic: "...although they want to foster economic growth, they do not want the region to become the manufacturing mecca that is the southern portion of the county...they want to...encourage economic development that can coexist with the rural character of Northern Dutchess."

3. Proposal(s) and Proposed Funding

There was no set proposal or structure at the beginning, only the objective of the county executive in forming a forum to discuss job growth and regional issues collectively with regional municipal officers. This coincided with the objective of several forward thinking local leaders who wanted to create a body that would build a regional identity to guide inter-municipal planning and development.

The annual operating budget of the Northern Dutchess Alliance (NDA) is about \$4,000 to \$5,000 annually. One of the primary regular means of obtaining revenue is the collection of annual dues from members, the schedule of which is set by formal vote of the members for approval. The schedule of dues listed municipal rates according to population and association rates according to number of members.

The Rural New York Grant Program sponsored some of the early activities of the Alliance. On Sept. 28,

1998 the grant awarders notified the Northern Dutchess Alliance it won a grant worth \$7,000, a combination of \$5,000 available for professional services from a regional university geography professor and \$2,000 of direct funds. The Alliance used the professional services to help map assets. The NYS Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources, awarded a grant in the amount of \$64,000 in 2000 to support general Alliance activities and prepare for the *Northern Dutchess First* report. Other grants have funded different Alliance-initiated activities, such as those obtained from the Greenway Compact.

4. Legal Foundation and Legal Checklist

Constituting a discussion forum in the form of the Alliance was not legally complicated, but acting on some of the policies and activities articulated by the body may require extensive knowledge of NYS local government law and specific acts on the part of participating municipalities. The Alliance does not retain a staff attorney, although aspects of NYS law are researched for each initiative. However, attorneys representing individual municipalities attend meetings and voice their perspectives on issues under discussion. Additionally, Professor John Nolon of the Land Use Law Center, Pace University Law School, provided guidance on the legal aspects of land use planning relevant to the inter-municipal/sustainable economic growth focus promoted by Alliance

New York State consolidated law, specifically General Municipal Law (Articles 5-G and 5-J), establishes the parameters of inter-municipal cooperation. Any such joint programmatic efforts must already be within the legal purview of each municipality that is party to the agreement. Article 5-J extends these parameters to cooperation in comprehensive planning and land use regulation. Within inter-municipal contracts for cooperation in planning and land use regulation may be specific provisions for the amendment of local laws and ordinances for purposes of alignment with a given inter-municipal agreement

5. Views on the Issue

Arguments pro /Those in favor:

The main arguments in favor of forming the Alliance were policy related. The county executive wanted to form a regional entity that would enable him to approach northern Dutchess municipal leaders and discuss regional economic development and planning policy. County Executive Steinhaus wanted to avoid having to visit each municipality to outline his ideas and positions, and preferred a single negotiation around planning policy for the region. Officers representing Northern Dutchess County municipalities and other stakeholders wanted to form a regional entity that would empower residents to take control of their future through inter-municipal planning and remove the obstacles to cooperation that might otherwise result in unsustainable and undesirable growth

The county executive initiated and promoted the Alliance to further his administration's ability to coordinate economic development in northern Dutchess County. He announced the idea in his 1996 State of the County address and continued to be active throughout. The main Dutchess County department involved in Alliance activities on a sustained basis was planning and development. Planning Commissioner Roger Akeley, and professional staff person Nola Hooper, participated in meetings and activities in support of the Alliance and the political/programmatic goals of the county executive. One municipal official we spoke with explained that in the early days of the Alliance, before the members reached agreement on a formal structure, Alliance members Marc Molinaro and Noreen Reilly reached out to the county planning department to participate. They apparently felt that the county could help Alliance members specify objectives and determine the structure of the organization. The municipal

governments who agreed to participate supported the development of a structure to facilitate inter-municipal cooperation on issues that cross municipal boundaries.

Some local business leaders came out in favor of the Alliance over the Northern Dutchess chamber of commerce proposed by Thomas LeGrand because they believed the goals of economic development and retaining the traditional character of communities could coexist. The Rhinebeck Chamber of Commerce preferred the Alliance structure to a regional chamber of commerce because its chamber of commerce possessed the most defined identity, as described by one of the early founders, and feared losing its role as the “premier organization” promoting tourism in Northern Dutchess. He explained, “They were concerned about this becoming a group where they would lose their identity, so that really steered us toward more of a land use, economic development organization that had all of the stakeholders at the table.”

Arguments Con/Those opposed:

The main challenge against the Alliance came early in its formation on policy grounds, when Thomas LeGrand introduced and advocated for the idea of forming a Northern Dutchess chamber of commerce. A conversation ensued among members of the business community and political and civic leaders if such a chamber would serve the same end as the proposed Alliance. Stakeholders needed a forum for achieving regional cooperation for economic development, using a sustainable strategy that preserves the character of the Northern Dutchess region. Promoters of the Alliance argued the proposed chamber would only focus on the needs of merchants, whereas the Alliance would focus on the needs of people and communities through economic development.

The Alliance participants held conversations on which structure would be preferable, and ultimately there emerged more support for the broader focus of the Alliance

Local News Media Positions

Searchable databases indexing news articles and editorials on the Northern Dutchess Alliance do not go as far back as the early stages of the Alliance in 1996. We were fortunate to obtain a private news clip file containing some early news articles and editorials on the Alliance. The first editorial we located addressing the Northern Dutchess alliance appeared in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* published on May 26, 1996. The editorial suggested additional participants should be included up front: “Those folks [e.g., civic leaders and farmers] should be represented from the start. That will give the public a stake in the process and keep communication strong among all critical elements of a community.” A corollary to the editorial was a survey of reader ideas on how economic development and planning could be improved. Approximately three dozen readers responded. The editorial, taking note of the survey, summarized the results as demonstrating that “most want to preserve the rural élan and small-town distinctiveness of their communities” by preserving farming and trying to attract small businesses.

Another editorial published by the *Poughkeepsie Journal* on Sept. 6 addressed the division between those individuals supporting a new Northern Dutchess Chamber of Commerce and those supporting the formation of the Alliance, coming out in favor of the Alliance. The editorial remarked, “A regional chamber is a good idea, but this new alliance should be a broader group that focuses not on promotion, a key mission of the chamber, but on planning—how to position these towns to better guide growth, preserve their historic hamlets and villages and keep farming a major business...This alliance should be a separate regional body, not part of a large chamber of commerce.” It further suggested the Alliance members consider requesting Professor John Nolon, co-executive director of the Land Use Law Center at Pace University, make a presentation on regional planning at the next meeting.

In July 1997, the *Poughkeepsie Journal* published an editorial supporting the development of a regional plan that promoted equity of tax distribution across different sub-sections of the Northern Dutchess Region in order to maintain and protect their distinctive character. A June 8, 1998 editorial by the newspaper praised “the sharing of ideas and services by Alliance members” and declared that “their commitment to do no harm to one another’s interests are setting a precedent for the whole county to follow.”

6. Results (adopted, amended, rejected etc)

Participants (local governments and business and civic organizations and associations) discussed and negotiated the governing framework and focus of the Alliance over a period of approximately one year; the participants agreed in principle to (1) establish an intergovernmental/public-private alliance, (2) formalize a structure, and (3) elect officers after which [the NDA was] incorporated as a not-for-profit organization with tax-exempt status. The primary objective of the Alliance—creating a discussion/cooperation forum—didn’t change. The process of forming the organizational structure of the Alliance was emergent. It has continued to operate and meet since 1996, albeit with some lulls in activity during a few periods.

The members, broadly, and the elected officers, specifically; are responsible for implementing the broad policy and programmatic goals of the Alliance. Leaders are responsible for establishing the agenda and facilitating the general meetings. Responsibility for a specific activity might be assigned to subcommittees or individuals as appropriate. Implementation partners were sought where necessary and appropriate. Dutchess County, especially the county executive and the planning department, was instrumental in many activities of the Alliance, including the asset inventory mapping project, and many support activities, such as finding speakers for meetings, providing stationary, answering legal questions, performing statistical analyses, and providing assistance in planning processes.

Generally, the Alliance is more concerned with process than with product, explained one town supervisor. The Alliance brings the regional stakeholders together to build an agenda and a conversation around selected areas of cooperation and sponsors meetings with individuals possessing expertise on a topic of common interest to members of the group. Different initiatives may arise out of the discussions that are implemented by the parties involved.

Since its formal organization in 1997, the Alliance has continued to meet and implement activities according to the agenda set by the members. Some of its significant activities and accomplishments include:

- Engaging speakers for meetings to help build a broad based conversation on matters of regional importance
- Obtaining grant funding and helping member governments to obtain grant funding
- Creating an agricultural farmland protection plan
- Creating an inter-municipal green space plan that organizes development patterns
- Preparing reports on matters of importance to members, e.g., *Northern Dutchess First*

7. Implementation

Formation of the Northern Dutchess Alliance

In April 1996, the county executive, leaders of three local chambers of commerce, eight towns and villages, and other civic organizations met to hold the “Northern Dutchess Economic Forum.” A flier for

the meeting noted that the purpose of the meeting was to “discuss our Northern Dutchess economy, and identify business assistance opportunities and chart a structure to improve economic development in Dutchess County.”

News accounts varied on the number of forum participants, ranging from 100-200 community members, but were in agreement that the mood of the meeting was constructive and enthusiastic. Residents and business owners quoted in three local newspaper accounts of the forum expressed their eagerness to continue the discussion begun at the session. A conversation about forming a northern Dutchess group continued among local officials, county officials, and key stakeholders over the next several months, but before any action could be taken, an alternate group was proposed.

Building on the energy evident among business owners and chamber members at the forum meeting, a group lead by Thomas LeGrand reintroduced a proposal raised years earlier. The group proposed that the northern Dutchess chambers organize a Northern Dutchess Chamber of Commerce as the vehicle for regional economic development. A regional chamber already existed in the southern section of the county and had achieved some impressive wins for its communities.

Consideration of the region’s options continued for several months, roughly from June to October. Stakeholders weighed three options: create a multi-sectoral alliance of local governments, business groups, and civic organizations; establish a Northern Dutchess Chamber; or both. The problems cited with the single regional chamber were twofold. First, such a group would focus primarily on merchant issues, not the wider ranging concerns of all residents, and second, a regional chamber might jeopardize the distinct identities of the local chambers. Stakeholders observed that the chief drawbacks to developing parallel organizations were limits of time and resources to support both agendas. A more detailed history of this period can be found in Appendix D.

Documents from the period show that the debate continued until May of 1997 although the stakeholders edged toward consensus gradually. As early as the September 1996 meeting of the group, some decisions had been made. Individuals denoted as a steering committee were asked to prepare a draft charter and goals statement summarizing the key sentiments expressed in the meeting. This draft was distributed in late October to be considered by all members of a group named the Northern Dutchess Alliance. The draft listed about 40 members drawn from government, business, and civic organizations, but clearly stated that structural decisions were not resolved. A facilitated brainstorming session in December 1996 identified three strategic directions to serve as a framework for future Northern Dutchess Alliance activities, but did not yield a decision on structure. One study participant believed that the regional chamber model was eventually scrapped because the Rhinebeck Chamber refused to join the proposed organization.

There is little information on actions or discussions of the Northern Dutchess Alliance until late May 1997, at which point the organization was formally established. The Alliance members voted on bylaws, and nominated and elected interim leaders to serve as an executive council. Additional detail on events leading to the formation of NDA can be found in Appendix E.

Interviews with founding members of NDA reveal that the background conversation level during the yearlong discussion was fairly intense. A few local leaders were convinced that an alliance with elected officials as a key stakeholder group was absolutely necessary for the region’s well being. This group lobbied fellow officials throughout the period with obvious success. In addition, though the county executive pledged that he would not try to influence decision makers, he clearly supported the notion

that an alliance that included local governments was needed to address serious development issues already on the horizon. Outside organizations, like the Hudson River Greenway and the Pace University Land Use Law Center, were very supportive and influential in the fledgling alliance. Both organizations understood that broad coalitions of government, business, and civic organizations were needed to move a public agenda on community development and land use forward.

Early Northern Dutchess Alliance 1997-1999

Structure and Mission. The Northern Dutchess Alliance consisted of 10 towns and villages (towns of Clinton, Hyde Park, Milan, Pleasant Valley, Rhinebeck, Red Hook, and Stanford, and the villages of Rhinebeck, Red Hook, and Tivoli), six chambers of commerce, six community organizations, and 12 ex-officio advisors. Each organization had one official representative in the Northern Dutchess Alliance, although all members of the entity may participate. NDA's mission was "to create an institutional structure for regional cooperation and economic development that is broadly based and inclusive and that has within it a public process that will lead to the implementation of the goals, ideas, and policies established by the membership of the Alliance."

The Alliance adopted a structure that gives each dues paying entity one vote on Alliance matters. The bylaws allow for an executive council consisting of four standing officers and one at-large representative from municipal governments, one from business groups, and one from community groups. Each standing officer serves a two-year term, and the at-large members serve for one year.

Activities. Records show that in its first two years of operation, the Northern Dutchess Alliance was active on several fronts. An early step taken by the Alliance was to educate themselves about development concepts and current issues. The group used the services of John Nolon of the Pace University Land Use Law Center to gain an understanding of sustainable development and land use law and policy. NDA held meetings with outside groups on an expansion study for the Metro-North railway and a Dutchess County proposal on acquisition of the Hyde Park Fire and Water District water system. The Alliance's first project was to develop a regional inventory of land use, for which they later won a grant from the Rural New York Grant Program.

In 1998, NDA produced a white paper on transportation systems and guiding principles for the region. The Alliance also initiated a forum on the Taconic State Parkway Corridor Project and began an exploration of waterfront initiatives with the Department of State. In the next year, the study conducted by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) on Metro-North railway expansion had moved to the proposal stage and NDA held hearings with advocates and opponents.

8. Expectations vs. Implementation

The main results expected were the promotion of an inter-municipal discussion on economic development and planning policy, leading to increased coordination and cooperation. The Alliance was organized initially to primarily address economic development and to forestall the kind of development and rapid change to the landscape residents observed occurring in Southern Dutchess County. The Alliance also was expected to serve as a forum for new municipal managers to meet and get to know their colleagues, and in so doing, remain a "clearinghouse for dialogue."

Although there are many successes resulting from Alliance activities, the Alliance hasn't instituted any formal mechanism to evaluate and measure success, in part because it serves primarily as a forum for discussion. One of the early founders had this to say when asked how the Alliance measures success:

“You know that’s a good question. I don’t know—I think that’s probably one of the areas we need to work on...I think because we really are, again, this clearinghouse for dialogue, it’s hard to...show success or measure success.

The progress made by the Northern Dutchess Alliance during its first two years of existence fluctuated in subsequent years. A majority of the individuals interviewed for the study attribute the fluctuations, in part, to NDA leadership transitions. While leadership clearly mattered, founding members of the group identified a range of issues that made success a complicated pursuit. A cross-section of study participants identified political factors, member and leader continuity, fiscal support, and the posture of the Alliance with respect to action and advocacy as confounding issues in sustaining the organization.

Advocacy v. Dialogue Issues

The early organizers and leaders of NDA envisioned that the organization would first and foremost serve as a forum for conversation among the northern Dutchess communities. They reasoned that from conversation, problem solving and cooperative projects may well emerge. They anticipated that an ongoing dialogue would dramatically enhance communication, especially among elected officials, and produce an information exchange that embraced the interests of a wide range of stakeholders. From the perspective of these founders, the Alliance might be a place where consensus or a shared viewpoint would emerge, but the process was not intended to forge advocacy positions.

Two factors influenced their viewpoint. First, advocacy could easily mean that some of the Alliance members would be on the losing side of an issue. Creating losses for a member is anathema to sustained engagement. As well, advocating for certain outcomes could easily give rise to groups in opposition to NDA. If those foes possessed sufficient assets and the inclination, they could unravel the minimally resourced Alliance. Second, advocacy tends to constrict the focus of a group and the Northern Dutchess Alliance needed to be generative around a range of issues affecting the region

As clear as the rationale seems, proponents for dialogue recognize the validity of other perspectives. Some members could conceivably expect the Alliance to adopt a more relativist posture. For instance, any given member could be opposed to a policy or project under consideration by external entities, envisioning some degree of harm for their community. In such a case, those members might resent NDA for not actively supporting their cause, especially if there were no adverse consequences to other group members. Alternatively, members could assume that NDA was weak and not worth their participation if the organization did not align itself with the member’s cause.

NDA leaders tried to deal with member expectations about advocacy in reaching agreement on a mission statement. They settled on language that said NDA would provide an inclusive atmosphere for a ‘public process’ that could support implementation of the members’ will. This statement implies that NDA would neither advocate nor necessarily undertake action stemming from group policies. Instead, NDA would ensure the integrity of the public process and provide an inclusive environment. According to long term members of the Alliance, it appears to have been a difficult balance to understand, convey, and sustain.

It is worth noting that some of NDA’s problems in years three and four may have been related to a different approach to advocacy. The leader of the Alliance in that period was elected from its civic group members. During the new leader’s tenure, the title of the presiding officer was amended to ‘president,’ and the organization began to assume advocacy positions on public issues. The group voted on issues as a prelude to taking an advocacy position, creating a group of issue-losers among its

membership. The adopted stance also engendered hard feelings in the community. The next leader, elected from the local government group, retreated from advocacy and restored the balance NDA founders treasured.

Activity v. Discussion Issues

The difficulty in finding an appropriate activity level for NDA is reminiscent of the challenges surrounding advocacy. At the crux of the activity level issue are two questions: what constitutes productivity for a group like NDA, and what does it take to maintain that standard? Although there is no written record of deliberation around this question, it is highly likely that both questions were discussed in the executive council and in NDA meetings. One founding member said that from the beginning, the Alliance observed the principal of setting limited goals and achieving them so that the group felt successful. Whatever deliberation the group had on the issue, the first two years of NDA history shows a commendable level of engagement and activity as evidenced by written reports, organized briefings, and grant seeking.

As with the issue of advocacy, NDA founders reiterated a commitment to be a ‘clearinghouse for dialogue.’ Members with such a perspective reasoned that a strong activity focus, where the activity does not affect some segment of the membership, could cause the unaffected to lose interest in NDA. Since NDA is dealing with matters that take a long time to play out, the potential for losing members is not trivial.

A related concern expressed by study participants was the capacity of Alliance members to undertake activity. There is no permanent staff (there is currently one temporary, part-time staff member) in the organization and it is difficult to undertake action solely on the shoulders of local leaders, or busy residents and businessmen. These concerns suggested to some members that it was prudent to place boundaries around the amount of direct activity NDA would undertake.

An alternative perspective on activity was expressed as a question—when does conversation alone become a waste of time? Critics expressed the view that conversation that leads nowhere with respect to output is a waste. In contrast, some founding members clearly feel that conversation is rarely a waste, that it perpetuates awareness, and can support understanding and trust. Still, those same members admit that the balance in NDA’s portfolio needs to be recalibrated.

Political Issues

Party politics and political sensibilities have played a role in NDA’s history producing costs and benefits. Each year the membership of NDA is subject to change based solely on the outcome of local elections. According to study participants, in years where there was a ‘friendly transition’ in a local election (the same party stayed in power) the new leader began participating in NDA in a relatively short time. Where there was an unfriendly transition, engagement took longer and required substantial outreach by leaders of the Alliance.

The issue of political gain may or may not have influenced member behavior, but it was a factor in NDA choices based on its *potential* effect. All elected officials are mindful of the need to accumulate wins for their community while in office. The wins in NDA were often subtle, and sometimes required a long view. As one study participant astutely phrased it, “We all like to go home with something, and sometimes regional and inter-municipal cooperation demands that we go home with nothing; that we are simply at the table to allow somebody else to succeed.” Some central figures in the Alliance noted that this aspect of political life was part of their calculus around advocacy and action decisions.

Study participants observed that political differences were generally healthy for the Alliance. Members brought the distinctive identities and inclinations of political parties to the Northern Dutchess Alliance, which helped prevent the organization from becoming locked into one mindset. Furthermore, because NDA members were aware of their political differences they were less sure of the group position on many issues. By some accounts, this situation perpetuated an atmosphere of constructive experimentation within the Alliance.

Leadership Issues

Study participants identified two confounding aspects of leadership transition on the Alliance. With respect to NDA leadership, the role of chair, and later president, turns over every two years. Each leader has the potential to move the organization forward, and bring new energy and vision, or have the opposite effect. According to those interviewed, NDA has had both. It was not clear if the members have discussed amending the terms of leadership, but if it has not already occurred, a review of the terms for NDA leadership may be in order.

Leadership transitions among members also affected the Alliance. As mentioned previously, the movement of new elected officials into office ushered in a transition that was either friendly or unfriendly. However, an official's 'newness' by itself demanded a significant investment of time by NDA leaders to inform and engage newcomers in the organization. As one study participant noted, NDA leaders sometimes had "to cajole and wheedle at length" to initiate and sustain the participation of officials. To lessen the task of bringing new members on board with NDA, the group adopted a schooling strategy for newcomers. NDA absorbed the cost of sending new officials to training programs consistent with NDA's continuous self-education efforts. These programs, at a minimum, expose each new member to issues of sustainable development and community process.

Fiscal Issues

A majority of study participants observed that sustained financial support would have helped the Alliance resolve its inaction dilemma, avoid some of its mistakes, and "steady the organization." One suggested use of funding is to hire staff. Permanent staff would relieve members of some responsibilities for action and speed up the completion of projects. Another use of financial support mentioned would be to purchase occasional expert help for NDA projects. A third suggestion offered would reserve funding for municipalities to help with challenges on the ground. From the perspective of some study participants, this could serve as a proxy for certain types of action, and mitigate the issues of time and member interest that currently limit action choices.

The down side of such a strategy is that if not carefully managed, there is a risk that such distribution could disadvantage other members or breed short term resentment. There may also be time limitations to a giveaway program. Over time, the distribution of targeted funds may lose its novelty and become an expectation for municipalities. In that case, funding ceases to be a resource for problem solving and becomes a budget item.

More than 10 years have passed since the Alliance's founding. It effectively served, even though there may have been periods of reduced activity, its role as a self-governing body and forum to build regional collaboration. NDA also created a learning network to improve knowledge of inter-municipal issues by improving access to technical experts and preparation of issue reports; an asset inventory mapping project; increased knowledge of and access to grant funding; contracted the preparation of the *Northern Dutchess First* and *Northern Dutchess Blueprint* reports; and supported collaborative projects between two or more municipalities arising out of Alliance conversations. Some members and leaders who

participated over the years have broader aspirations for the Alliance, including inter-municipal tax sharing proposals. These agreements would permit differential land use development patterns in different communities in the region, where some communities will be growth centers and others will maintain significant acreage of open space.

Assessment of NDA

We interviewed more than a dozen current or former members of NDA and found them roughly unanimous in their appraisal that in its early days the Alliance had been an asset to the region. In addition to NDA's status as one of the first multi-sectoral regional alliances, respondents said that NDA had succeeded in "ending the isolation of its municipalities" and "helping communities understand each other better and think more broadly." One individual remarked that the Alliance confirmed that the region "had to work together or get picked off one by one" by pressures or events."

The participants' assessments about the current status of NDA were mixed. It is important to note that the views of the participant group may not be indicative of the sentiments of all Alliance members; these results may inflate one view or another. About half of the participant group told us that the membership of NDA was growing disillusioned with the organization and that NDA was fading in terms of its value and relevance for the region. Among the criticisms relayed were that NDA has "little output," that leadership was "biased," that the group had not figured out how to sustain engagement, and that NDA "lacks focus."

Somewhat more than half of the participants thought that the Alliance was still a necessity for the region, still viable, and with some tweaking, had a bright future. One leader suggested that as northern Dutchess made the transition from rural to mixed suburban-rural, local governments would become more professional and NDA would grow in importance.

A thread embedded in the comments of the more optimistic group was that NDA needed to become more active, and several participants offered examples of what those activities might be. These participants suggested that Northern Dutchess Alliance: 1) play a role in regionalizing some types of decision making, 2) build an entity with inter-municipal land use authority, 3) focus on consolidation of highway and fire departments because agreement on the scope and quality of that service is easier to obtain than is consensus on the question of the extent and type of development that should be permitted or encouraged, and 4) figure out a way to share resources in those cases where a community needs to take an action that is in the interest of all, but cannot afford to do so.

9. Factors contributing to success/failure/Lessons Learned

The Northern Dutchess Alliance fills a strategic void in northern Dutchess County and solves or prevents an array of problems that plague regions in transition. As originally conceived, the Alliance was a venue for conversation so that all communities whose decisions and fates were entwined were given the chance to understand one other and explore policy options collectively. This has been a difficult posture for NDA leaders to sustain over the years. Analysis suggests that there are six factors connected to the achievements and challenges encountered in NDA:

- Decisions about advocacy and productivity affect the sustainability of a regional alliance. Advocacy may only be possible if it grows seamlessly from within the group. Productivity is essential even in conversation-focused groups and may need to be redefined periodically.

- Dialogue can be the productive engine of a regional group but the conversation may require structure and a shifting focus to remain interesting and useful to members.
- Multi-jurisdictional groups are going to have continuity problems because elected officials come and go. Strategies to address continuity are needed, which are not limited to the persuasive capacity of a few charismatic individuals.
- The exchange of ideas with open minded, welcoming, smart people in an organization may be the greatest reward and most powerful draw for new people who need to be at the table.
- The political process plays a strong corrective role in regional alliances. The mandate for local accountability generates continuous feedback and adjustment within the regional collaboration.

Recognition of common concerns and shared values must be well ingrained in organizational lore and practices, and reengaged periodically to counterbalance pressures that tend to divide the group.

10. The 10 Step Program

The Alliance is not a shared service arrangement. Nonetheless, there are commonalities between the Alliance and shared service arrangements that permit its assessment against several of the steps outlined in the Ten Step Program. The county executive identified the challenge of promoting economic development to restore jobs lost by significant corporate downsizing. He felt he needed a forum to engage all municipalities in the region in one setting to obviate having to build consensus through numerous one-on-one meetings. Municipal and civic leaders observed growth patterns in the southern part of the County they believed to be inconsistent with the character and expectations of their communities. They wanted to build a forum to promote sustainable growth that retained the traditional regional emphasis on agriculture and tourism. Together they met and formed a broad based coalition consisting of business, civic, and academic participants to discuss regional economic development and planning policy and drawing on the expertise of local advocacy groups, academic institutions, and government agencies. Over time the working group addressed a lot of policy issues and generated numerous opportunities and options for achieving the broad objective of the Alliance—sustainable economic growth. Experts and partners were sought out over the more than ten years of the Alliance to provide training, facilitate meetings, deliver presentations on pertinent policy issues at Alliance meetings, and work with small groups on projects emerging from the Alliance agenda. Funds to sustain Alliance operations, including training for members and a part-time professional in recent years, were raised by member fees and grants. Members prepared and negotiated the contents of a charter, mission statement, and by laws, and formally incorporated as a not-for-profit organization. Since then, NDA meetings have been held on a fairly regular basis, serving as the platform for emergent perspectives and projects. Since the Alliance is primarily a discussion forum, no formal mechanism to evaluate success was initiated.

11. Technical Assistance

A number of individuals and organizations provided technical assistance to the Alliance on an ad hoc basis as different issues arose on the agenda during its 10-plus years of convening, such as consideration of the Metro-North railroad extension and the development of the *Northern Dutchess First* report. The Pace University Land Use Law Center was particularly influential in helping the fledgling alliance cohere. The Land Use Law Center provided training to incoming Alliance leaders that resulted in the building of a shared perspective and vocabulary, in addition to technical assistance on land use. Other helpful organizations include the NYS Department of State, NYS Department of Transportation, Sustainable Hudson Valley, Hudson River Valley Greenway Compact, Marist College, and the Training and Development Corporation. Most of the assistance came in the form of either grant money or the

transfer of technical information pertinent to Alliance activities.

One active participant in the Alliance suggested the state provide some sort of SWAT team to come in and help such groups identify and implement goals, and support activities. He also explained the grant process in NYS is not “flexible enough to accommodate some of the creative processes that are underway,” that “you’ve got to fit into the peg that the State says you’ve got to fit into, whether it’s environmental protection funding or transportation funds—you’ve got to be in this mold.”

12. List of documents

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6. Northern Dutchess Economic Forum. Flyer.
7. Meeting Information Flyers: February 24, 1999; May 26, 1999; October 28 1998; May 27, 1997.
8. Metro-North Railroad Fact Sheet, Hudson Line Extension.
9. Northern Dutchess Alliance Ad Hoc Steering Committee.
10. Northern Dutchess Alliance Inventory.
11. Northern Dutchess Alliance. Mission Statement, Charter, Points of Focus, etc.
12. 1996 Operating Procedures.
13. Roles and Responsibilities.
14. Proposed Structure.
15. Northern Dutchess Ad Hoc Steering Committee Agenda, October 9, 1996.
16. Northern Dutchess Alliance Memo. Draft Goals, Charter and Discussion Paper. October 31, 1996.
17. Dutchess County Executive Press Release, December 3, 1996.
18. Northern Dutchess Alliance – Organizational Planning Session. December 16, 1996.
19. Tivoli Village Hall, May 27, 1997.
20. Northern Dutchess Alliance Agenda July 22, 1997.
21. Pace University School of Law, Land Use Law Center Memo, Horizons Waterfront Commission. July 22, 1997.
22. Attendance List, July 22, 1997.
23. Northern Dutchess Alliance Memo to Pamela Hurt, August 11, 1997.
24. Northern Dutchess Alliance Agenda, Minutes September 16, 1997.
25. Northern Dutchess Alliance Memo to Noreen Reilly, December 8, 1997.
26. Northern Dutchess Alliance Agenda, September 16, 1997.
27. Transportation Issues, August 19, 1998.
28. Northern Dutchess Alliance Agenda, September 23, 1998.
29. Northern Dutchess Alliance Memo from Marc Molinaro, September 23, 1998.
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31. The Taconic State Parkway Corridor Project, September 23, 1998.
32. Northern Dutchess Alliance Committee Reports, September 23, 1998.
33. The Rural New York Grant Program, September 28, 1998.
34. Meeting Information and Agenda, November 18, 1998.

35. Northern Dutchess Alliance Memo, Metro-North Railroad Extension Information, December 30, 1998.
36. Meeting Agenda, February 24, 1999.
37. Meeting Information, May 26, 1999.
38. Northern Dutchess Alliance, About NDA. www.northerndutchessalliance.org.
39. Pace Land Use Law Center, Reintroducing the Northern Dutchess Alliance, January 12, 2007.
40. Issue: Working Group Recommendations and the Comprehensive Plan. Redhookelections.com.
41. Northern Dutchess First Report, May 2006.
42. Pace Land Use Law Center Memo to Mark Molinaro, July 14, 1997.
43. *Taconic Newspapers*: 5/16/96
44. *Daily Freeman*: 4/19/96, 5/26/97, 9/5/96, 1/7/01, 3/1/01, 3/4/01, 4/2/01, 4/26/01, 5/24/01, 11/29/01, 12/9/01, 1/31/02, 3/1/02, 7/4/02, 10/20/02, 5/4/03, 3/25/05, 6/4/06, 8/14/06, 5/29/07
45. *Gazette Advertiser*: 9/12/96, 4/25/96
46. *Poughkeepsie Journal*: 4/8/96, 4/19/96, 5/26/96, 7/18/96, 9/5/96, 9/6/96, 12/17/96, 6/3/97, 7/97, 7/20/97, 7/28/97, 10/14/97, 6/8/98, 2/24/99,
47. *Hyde Park Townsman*: 8/22/96

13. Additional comments/suggestions/helpful hints

Participants interviewed had a number of ideas on how the Alliance could address obstacles noted previously.

Promoting Progress

The Alliance serves as an open forum, without any strict adherence to an order of discussion, such as there might be at a town board meeting. However, this produces a lack of focus at times. The openness of meeting doesn't usually result in strict timetables or pressure to accomplish objectives according to a rigid schedule. There needs to be some mechanism to monitor and promote progress.

Professional Assistance

Currently, but only in the last couple of years, the Alliance has part-time professional help, approximately five hours weekly. Full-time professional experience is helpful in keeping the group and its activities organized and focused. Having such professional help could smooth out the transition between the terms of elected officers, which in the past has led to instability in agenda and focus.

Structure of Leadership

The leadership structure may contain some inherent tendency toward instability in that it relies on the collective participation of elected officials whose terms may not overlap. A shared vision achieved among one group could be lost at the next election with the introduction of new members. Impromptu project-based structures could be formed that maintain the continuity of decision-makers even in the event that an election removes a member from their municipality's seat on the executive council.

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