

# Leveraging SMS Signage to Shape a Rural Community Plan

The Orange County Department of Planning sought community input to guide its new County Comprehensive Plan



In May 2017, the Orange County Department of Planning announced that it would be creating a new County Comprehensive Plan that would help guide the future of planning, land use, and infrastructure in the rural New York county. The previous plan had been developed in 2003 and had been periodically updated with minor revisions and the inclusion of other countywide plans and strategies, including a 2015 Economic Development Strategy.

As part of the plan, the Department committed to engaging the community and making their input a driving force in shaping a shared vision for the County. As project leaders shared with the community: "With your help, the new County Comprehensive Plan will be a meaningful document that focuses on current trends and issues while summarizing the progress made on the existing Plan since its last adoption."



## Reaching a rural community base

The Planning Department launched their project website on the coUrbanize platform in May 2017, including engagement opportunities via both a dedicated feedback section and an interactive map. One of the challenges project leaders identified early on was how to reach community members and spread the word about the project site in the dispersed rural county.

To tackle this issue, the project team worked with coUrbanize to create and distribute physical signage in highly-trafficked areas of the community – including bus stops, storefronts, and sidewalks – asking specific questions about transit, housing, and infra-

structure with a phone number for texting responses. The Text messages would then populate directly to the interactive map and the comments section on the platform.

In total, the team placed 30 physical signs throughout the community. The initial signage asked questions related to five specific topics: Housing, Parks & Recreation, Jobs & Economy, Sustainability & Resiliency, and Transportation & Transit. After several months of feedback, the team added additional signage to introduce three additional topics: Arts, Farms & Agriculture, and Waste Reduction.

## Transportation to accommodate a changing County



**623** COMMENTS TOTAL  
**61%** POSITIVE SENTIMENT  
**25%** NEUTRAL SENTIMENT  
**1,753** USERS  
**2,946** SESSIONS

As feedback populated to the interactive map and comments section, many commenters pointed out the importance of a comprehensive Transportation network across the County – something that had been lacking from the previous plan in 2003.

In an update to project followers, the Planning Department shared: “Our previous plan did not provide a focus on Transportation. We’re

about to change that. Based on your comments and suggestions, the future of the Transportation network in the County is an important topic. We’re working on an all new comprehensive Transportation section to address how we can adapt our current and future network to accommodate a changing County landscape and environment.”



# A Comprehensive Plan that serves the community

Ultimately the Planning Department incorporated the 623 comments shared via text and website into a new guiding document that will act as the Core of the Comprehensive Plan, a compact updated version of the previous Plan including new graphics and images. The draft versions of this document and the new Transportation Plan were shared with project followers in May 2018, bringing to a close a full year of authentic community engagement.

Using coUrbanize, the Orange County Department of Planning team:

- Defined the goals and strategies for how land might best be used, developed or preserved, and how financial, technical and infrastructure resources might be effectively provided
- Used SMS signage to reach rural community members and engage a more diverse user group
- Incorporated community feedback to address current and future transportation needs in the County

