

Tonawanda Tomorrow Kick-Off Workshop
November 10, 2016, 6:30-8:30 PM
Phillip Sheridan Building



About the Meeting

This workshop was the community's introduction to the Tonawanda Tomorrow initiative. Attendees were asked to evaluate community values statements, hear about how other communities across the country have moved forward after a local power plant closed, and brainstorm a vision for the town's future 20 years from now.

About Tonawanda Tomorrow

Tonawanda Tomorrow is an effort to create good-paying 21st Century jobs, prepare people for those jobs, and reinvest in what makes the town a great place to do business and raise a family. The effort is led by the Town of Tonawanda and its community partners and will produce an economic action plan that grounded in data, shaped by the community, and deepens the Town's role in the regional economy.

Overview

Town Supervisor, Joseph Emminger, welcomed everyone to the meeting and talked about the project's significance to the Town's affairs. Bart Roberts of the UB Regional Institute reviewed the workshop agenda, gave an overview of the project, and facilitated a conversation about community values that may shape the economic action plan resulting from this project. Rebecca Newberry, from the Clean Air Coalition, established the ground rules for discussion and ensured that the event stayed on schedule. Cindy Winland, from the Delta Institute, spoke about the actions other communities have taken to revitalize themselves after the closing of a power plant. A dozen volunteer facilitators guided attendees at each table through the visioning discussion. Discussion notes were taken with markers on large sheets of paper and are summarized in the section of this report titled "What did they say?"

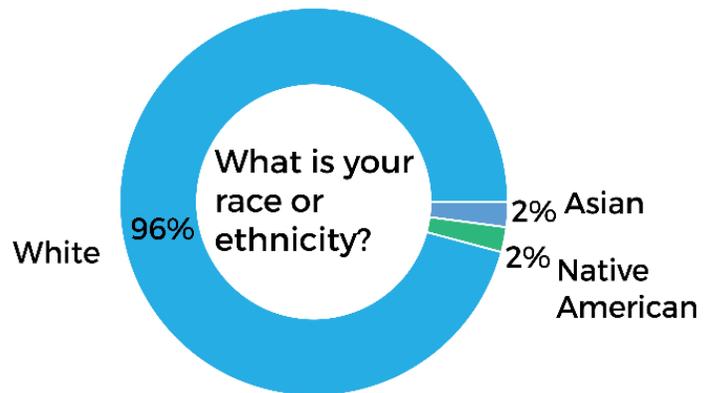
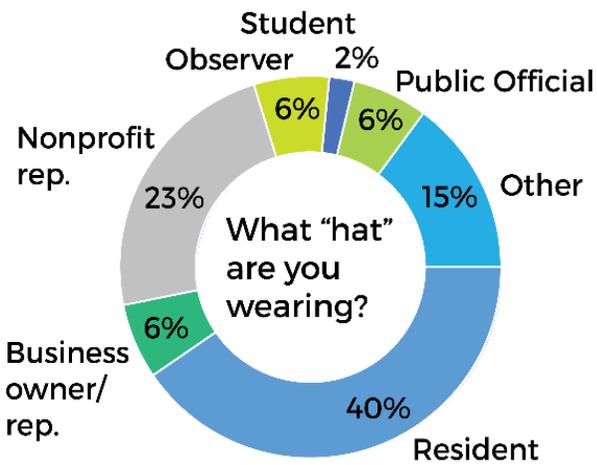
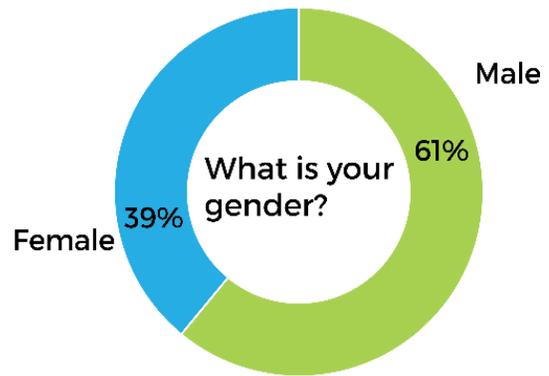
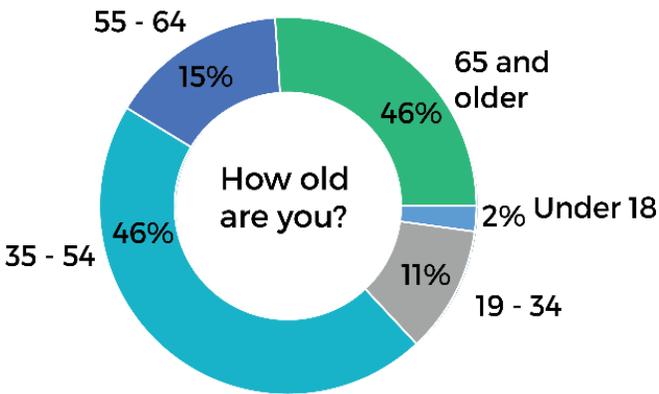
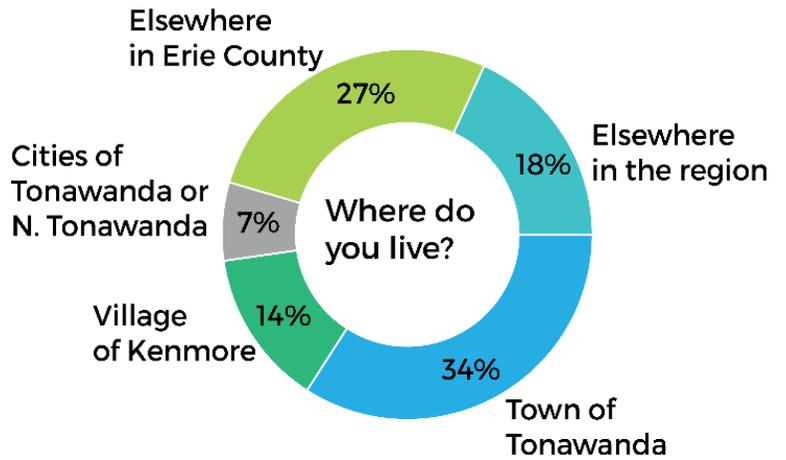
Who Participated?

58 people attended the workshop, including: Wayne Alt, RJ Ball, Jenn Bauth, Brian Bonner, Chris Borgatti, Donna Browning, Timothy Callan, Bill Conrad, Jackie Creedon, Trish Donohue, Diane Evans, Ed Flynn, Philip Haberstro, Evan Hacick, Missy Hall, Jim Hartz, Tom Hersey, Cheryl Hunes, Daryl Hyzy, Paul Jeorr, Jim Jones, Sue Kelly, Mike Kooshoian, R. Lipsitz, Andy Luchth, Ron Maler, Lynn Marinelli, Larry Martin, Piet Metz, Brett Moore, Melissa Mundy, Roscoe Naguit, Rebecca Newberry, Chris Orlando, Colleen Osborn, Nick Reed, Rachel Roberts, Susan Roywalski, Len Sauro, Suzanne Schafer, Mike Schraft, Gary Schulenberg, Ron Scott, Rose Sickler, Cory Speers, Dacon Stinner, David Stinner, Diana Strablow, P. Stuhlmiller, Maria Tisby, Valerie Thomas, AJ Verel, Joseph Vertalino, Dave Wasiura, Stacey Watson, Larry Wells, Sandi Wheaton, and Sharon White.

They came from 18 different ZIP Codes: 14223 (15), 14217 (11), 14150 (5), 14072 (2), 14214 (2), 14304 (2), 14623 (2), 14032, 14094, 14120, 14201, 14202, 14209, 14212, 14216, 14218, 14225, and 14226. Note: Some attendees are not accounted for here as not everyone provided an address or ZIP Code.

Demographic Profile of the meeting

Working with electronic polling devices, or “clickers,” participants were asked to tell us about themselves and where they are coming from. The graphs on this page illustrate the results of that exercise and provide a snapshot of who was in the room.



What did they say...

...about community values?

The audience evaluated a series of seven value statements that could be used to guide Tonawanda Tomorrow's planning process. The statements were based on the major themes observed in an analysis of around two dozen local and regional plans on a wide range of topics, such as land use and zoning, waterfront development, brownfield redevelopment, and economic development.

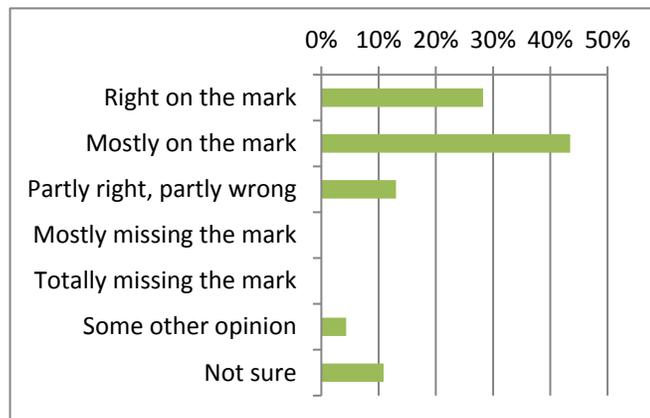
Each participant used an electronic polling device to submit their responses. Participants could submit their response to a question, or change their response, until polling for that question was closed. They were free to skip any questions. Once polling was closed, the results were shown on the presentation screen and the facilitator invited participants to discuss the reasoning behind their selections. The following are the results and key points from the discussion.

Theme: Sense of community

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda believes in community, where neighbors look out for each other and have pride in where they live.



Total responses: 46

Facilitator: Does anyone want to comment on what they think is wrong with this statement?

Audience discussion:

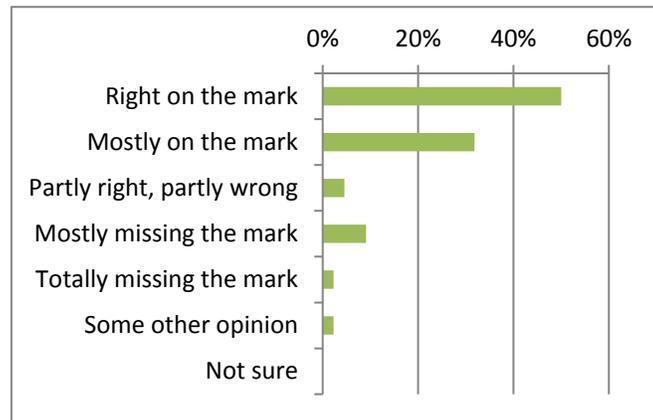
- This statement would have been more accurate 30 years ago. There was more unity in the leadership group. World War II folks were closer. They had pride in their homes and lived in them longer than do younger generations.
- Outmigration seems to negatively affect the community's cohesion.

Theme: Waterfront

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda's waterfront is a key town asset, but we need to invest in it to make it better, easier to get to, and benefit residents and businesses.



Total responses: 44

Facilitator: Those of you that selected “Mostly...” or “Totally missing the mark”, can you explain your reasoning?

Audience discussion:

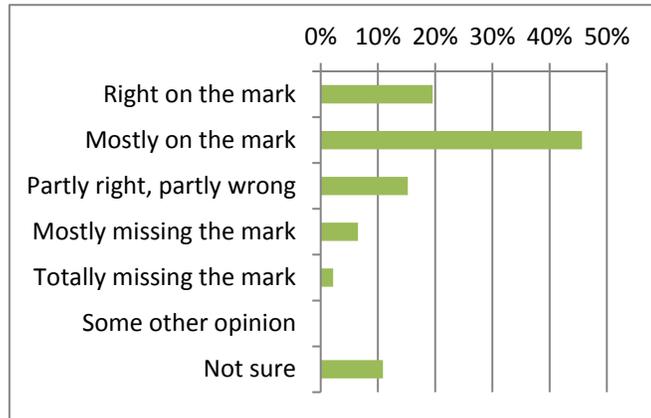
- The good, big parks that we have are not owned by the Town but by the County. The Town needs to provide more pocket parks.
- There is too much focus on the Buffalo waterfront instead of ours.
- We're not using our waterfront well now, but it has potential.
- People historically went to other places throughout the region, like Crystal Beach. They don't really think of our waterfront as a place to visit.
- The river is still a commercial highway to industrial facilities. It's important to protect those activities, too.

Theme: Schools

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda residents strongly identify with their schools and value education as critical to quality of life.



Total responses: 46

Facilitator: Why is it missing the mark?

Audience discussion:

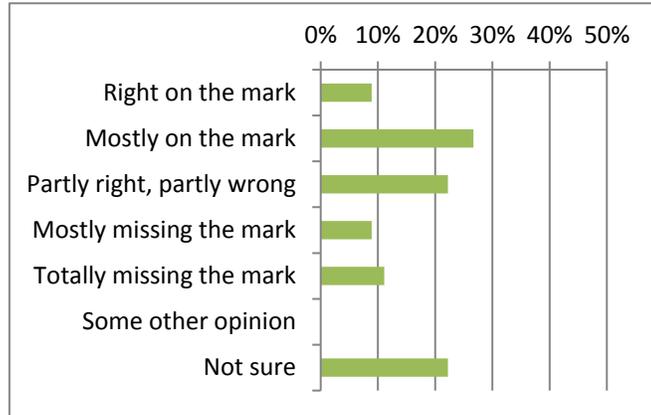
- The Town needs to coordinate more with the School District. Schools are a good reason to attract new residents.
- Tonawanda's "Big Picture School" is a highly innovative program for youth that we need to celebrate. We need to lift Tonawanda's educational innovation.
- The wording of the question is confusing. Tonawanda schools have been getting bad press lately and that's pushing away would-be residents. Talk of consolidation, urbanization, and low test scores are perceived negatively.

Theme: Community Revitalization

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda treasures vibrant neighborhoods & commercial areas and is ready to reinvest in the places that need to be revitalized.



Total responses: 45

Facilitator: Many of you responded “Not sure.” Why are you not sure?

Audience discussion:

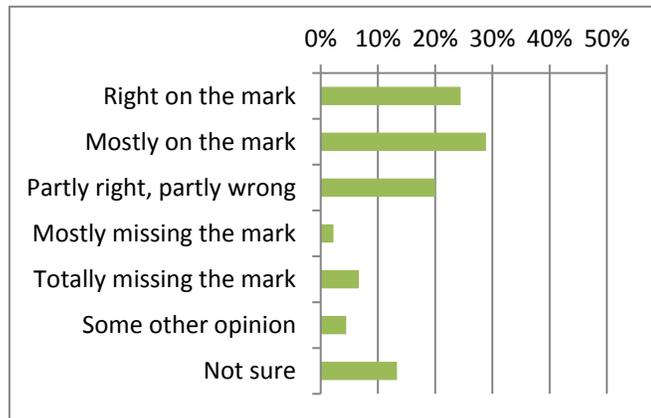
- Those that selected “Not sure” just don’t live here.
- It would be helpful if you defined “vibrant”.
- People don’t identify by neighborhood.

Theme: Workforce

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda has great work ethic that is passed on from generation to generation.



Total responses: 45

Audience discussion:

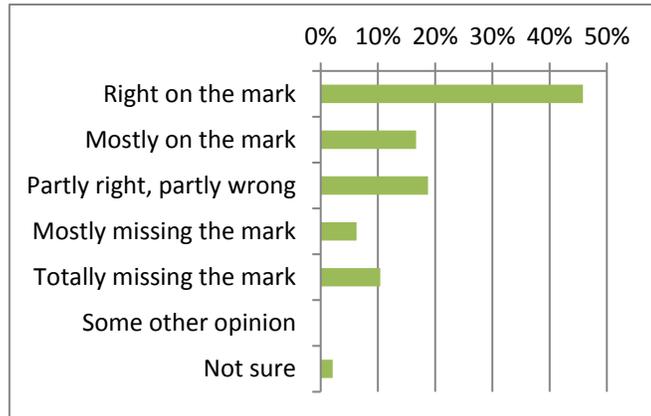
- The work ethic is not being passed on like it used to because people, specifically millennials, move away.

Theme: Health & Environment

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda believes we need a clean and healthy environment that doesn't make our community get sick.



Total responses: 48

Facilitator: Any comments about this one, positive or negative?

Audience discussion:

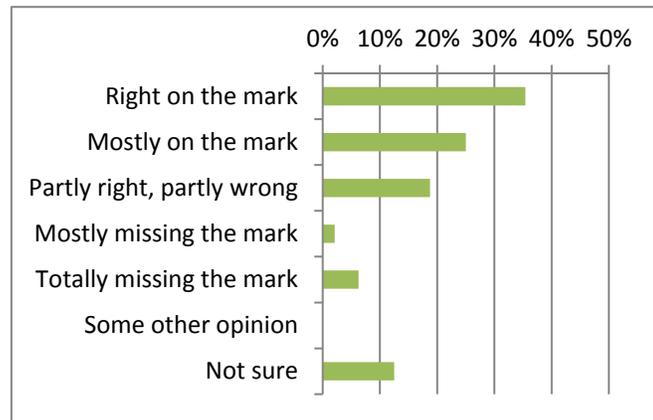
- Does "Tonawanda" refer to the town government or the community?
- Tonawanda Coke is an example of something that took a long time to get the desired outcome.

Theme: Industrial Heritage

Does this statement accurately reflect what you believe about the town and its community?

Value Statement:

Tonawanda's industrial heritage is important to our town's identity and economy.



Total responses: 48

Facilitator: Any comments about this last statement, positive or negative?

Audience discussion:

- People worked in industry a long time here and they didn't seem to be affected by it, but newer generations do seem to. Not sure why that is. [Note: There was audible disagreement from many in the audience in response to this comment.]

...about the data on the town's economy, workforce, and amenities?

After briefly conversing about community values, UBRI presented some statistics about the town's economy, workforce and mobility. Attendees then quickly exchanged impressions about the information received with others at their table. A summary of their notes follows.

What data surprised us?

- Commuting and walkability [2 mentions] data reflect positive town qualities.
- Age demographics.
- Young homeowners. Millennials are moving in.
- 34ish young people moving in with young families (schools, lower cost of living, well-run services, safe)
- Population aged more than leaving (revolved).
- Workforce is gaining new younger employees.
- Tonawanda's statistics are more positive than for Buffalo.
- There is a significant amount of small businesses and businesses with less than 10 employees.
- Good ratio of employees live in area.
- Buying a house is possible –good for area.
- More vehicle ownership has caused changes in mobility.

- Workforce is becoming more specialized/service based (not big manufacturing)
- Not very surprising data. People move away to find jobs (perception of area and schools).
- 36% workforce in manufacturing/transportation construction
- Gap between young workers and older workers – workforce development is an issue.
- Housing stock/home ownership

What questions or issues did the data raise?

- Manufacturing workforce is aging. Will companies replace retiring workers age 55 and older or downsize?
- Is education preparing our students for the new economy? What levels and types of education will be needed? Make an assessment of trades. There might be a need to teach trades and manual skills.
- Manufacturing and transportation jobs data was not surprising. This suggest that these employment opportunities should remain given the land/river, etc.

What other data would we have liked to see?

- Health of population
- Social capital
- Taxed to death – Data did not compare taxes, and property taxes in NYS are a problem.
- No data on police?
- Concerns about schools - Education class sizes, NYS rules, space for technology/science labs, school performance data and ESL. Most private schools in region/NYS 19-22% of kids over last 30 years.

Other thoughts

- A data driven plan is important. Good data equals good decisions.
- A summary sheet of the data for a handout would be useful.
- The wording of questions threw us off. Our answers reflect our perception of what was being asked.
- Some questions were difficult to answer for those that are not residents of the town.
- We need to provide different incentives for work, not just \$, but work-life balance.
- We need to offset Huntley loss. For that we need diverse development.
- Lack of diversity in the group (How is the info being used?)
- Population and community social capital develops in waves beads on new families.
- Not coping with cost of compliance ADA, sewer, and aging infrastructure.

...about their vision for the town in 20 years?

After listening to the Delta Institute presentation, Bart Roberts instructed the audience on the following visioning exercise:

Picture yourself 20 years from now, in the year 2036. You are reading the local news and they have a feature about how Tonawanda has changed over the past two decades. What did the news say about economic conditions in the Town of Tonawanda? Share with the group whatever comes to mind. Here are some questions to consider:

- *How is Tonawanda's economy known in 2036 throughout Western New York and the rest of the world?*
- *What types of businesses do we have and what are they doing or making?*
- *What makes Tonawanda a special place to live, work or invest in?*

- *What is our waterfront like?*
- *What do our commercial corridors look like?*
- *What types of neighborhoods and communities have we created?*
- *How do people get around and where do they go to have fun?*
- *What are people in Tonawanda really proud about?*
- *What about the community has been preserved and restored?*
- *What are some reasons why people move to Tonawanda?*
- *What does the headline read?*

Attendees then worked again in groups to brainstorm ideas for the town in 20 years. Their comments are here summarized:

General

- Tonawanda's community is on a trajectory to improving.
- Tonawanda is a healthy community socially, economically and humanly.
- Tonawanda is current, relevant, and on the cutting edge.
- Quality of life in Tonawanda has been preserved over those 20 years.
- Tonawanda will be known for its fresh water, walkability, good people, good schools, and diverse green economy.

Economy

- Tonawanda and the region have a stable economy that is not subject to boom and bust cycles. There is real private sector economic growth and more jobs in the area.
- Tonawanda shifts to a more diverse economy without losing basic industries. It moves away from heavy industry towards green and light manufacturing, and "blue economy" activities. It becomes a showplace for desirable industries and wind energy (e.g. Bell Aerospace). We don't suffer as much when there is big change within an industry.
- Tonawanda's workforce is age diverse and has closed the skills gap.
- Employers, especially in the health industry, pay living wages and are union-friendly.
- Tonawanda encourages and supports local businesses, including mom and pop shops. It also prioritizes investments in worker-focused industries, which are capable of attracting more people to the area and therefore generating more tax revenue.
- We intentionally attract foreign investment.
- Participate in space exploration with local business.
- Older labor agreements/contracts
- Solar Park – More business development/business park.
- Allow small businesses in neighborhood to make more "community" such as bakeries, small grocery, so you don't have to leave often. This may replace large manufacturing.

Education

- Tonawanda public schools improved, in part as a result of consolidation, and they are doing great projects.
- High schools are teaching skills that are useful in advanced or hi-tec manufacturing.
- Community wellness/school

Environment

- Trees (2) and foliage in the city, masking skyscrapers, greening of city.
- Harness natural biosphere for research (e.g. marine bio)
- Implement solar energy generation and improve storage capabilities.
- We want clean energy businesses. Would be good use of resources. Sustainable energy requirements.

Governance

- The Village of Kenmore is dissolved (2 mentions), reducing fees and redundancy/duplication of services (3). Compare to Depew.
- The government and the community are working together (2), especially to do promotion. They also continue to partner with other local agencies.
- Tonawandans are proud of their leaders.
- Town services haven't been privatized. We have been able to retain services and their quality is high (2), including snow plowing and libraries. We're taking care of ourselves and take pride in it.
- Bureaucracy

Housing

- The town housing stock meets the needs of shrinking nuclear families. It offers more lofts, apartments, and high rises.
- There is an influx of people to Tonawanda and we are able to retain/get new generations to stay.
- Housing stock – older.
- Transition community - 1st home.
- New build housing along water.
- Afford homes.

Waterfront

- Tonawandans are proud of their waterfront.
- Visitors say things like "Had a great time at the Cherry Farm!" and "I can't believe this was a power plant."
- Built-up waterfront with less industry, more diversity and recreational opportunities (3) like in Chicago or Portland, OR. Amenities and activities could include small boat launches on the river; more shopping and restaurants like in Canalside; domes, parks, concerts on the water; a major festival everyone wants to go to like Canalfest.
- Cherry Farm is turned into nice public parkland.
- Sign – Welcome to Tonawanda.
- Tourism focused on industrial heritage and waterfront.
- Use space on water for greenbelt activities.
- Past industrial mistakes have been a positive – We have this much land near the waterfront.
- Access to the water.

Recreation & Tourism

- Tonawanda became a destination/location for arts and culture. There is a thriving and vibrant cultural scene with a preserved Riviera Theatre, a playhouse, music and art, community events and festivals much like at Larking Square. There are also locally owned shops and restaurants (breweries, wineries) and we don't have to go to Buffalo to eat.

- The Historical Society retained/captured our town's sense of history (e.g. museum) and preserved historic buildings and houses.
- We started small and now have great bike trails that are linked together and connect riders to other areas (accessibility).
- We have more parks and green spaces, or mini central parks, throughout the town and they attract younger generation. We can use them year-round; they allow for winter-time use (snowshoes, ice rink, etc.).
- Amusement park
- We capture international and national traffic/travelers.

Taxes

- The homestead tax is gone, leading to the development of business parks with property taxes as low as they come. We lose the stigma where we are perceived negatively around the region for having "high taxes."
- We became a national model for how to replace revenue from retired coal plants.
- Not enough business/sales tax. Homestead/Non-homestead, re-assessment may help/may not.

Transportation

- We can "live, work, and play" within a 10-minute walk (but kids will need to be bused to consolidated school...)
- We will live and work in Ken-Ton and go to Buffalo for "entertainment."
- We will be a more walkable community (2), with safer roads, bike lanes that connect us to other communities, and better public transportation (2).
- Metro Rail connects to North Campus and there is high density housing on the Tonawanda side of Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- Delaware/Elmwood vision – want it to be the HUB! Extension.
- Open access via water gateway commerce, connecting regional communities via Tonawanda.
- Access and integrated corridors.

Safety

- Police are good.
- Keep our community safe – Be active.
- Safe neighborhoods.

Huntley site

- Huntley property will be like Canalside, River Bend, or Toronto. It will be repurposed with more parks, access to the water like Niawanda, buildings reused, restaurants, and views of the river.
- It won't be a flashy shopping center, not service, not to draw people in.
- Wind/solar utility
- Needs to be taxable activity, not a park.

Redevelopment

- Diverse industry and real estate uses
- Robust strong anchors
- Will follow smart growth principles
- Must have mixed use projects and investments!

- Mixed use attractions.
- Regrowth, renewal, diversification, and resilient flexibility
- Constant renewal and regeneration
- Changing development regulations – create a pathway.
- Developer on water
- Investment in public space and facilities
- Keep small town feel balanced with new development
- Old schools turned into apartments/nursing homes
- Bills stadium on Tonawanda Coke property

Other

- People don't like change.
- How was rails to trails funded?
- Does town government have the capacity to affect change?
- Socio-economic
- Federal and state grants

...in the comment sheets?

All attendees received a comment sheet upon arrival to the meeting and were encouraged to return it to the facilitator at the end of the event. We received a total of 26 comment sheets. The following section presents a summary of their comments. Nineteen people requested to stay involved in the project.

Comments to help guide Tonawanda Tomorrow

- Let's explore housing stock and what to do about it. Recreational opportunities (expanding). Nice job!
- Make collaboration with Ken-Ton School and Town Board with joint presentations for Tonawanda residents taxpayers and getting our opinions re: safety and gleen environmental issues
- With the statistics about the area - compare taxes
- If you build it they will come. If you build right they will stay!

Thoughts about the meeting

The meeting...	Not at all	Sort of	More or less	Absolutely
had a clear purpose and set of objectives	12%	-	15%	73%
Was at a convenient time and place	-	-	15%	85%
offered options to be heard	-	-	15%	85%
effectively used time	-	8%	19%	73%
made me interested in continuing my involvement in project	-	8%	8%	84%

Other comments about the meeting:

- We need to support our basic heavy industry - we can abandon what we have
- Well run. Thank you.
- Make sure results of group work are sent out to participants. Data - What about educational level of people in town. Survey questions need work.
- Need more time for comments. Speakers presented a well-organized program
- I don't see the point of these meetings if you rush through people's opinions and answers. Also the speakers were rushed. Loved the brainstorming aspect!
- 1) People read the question differently which skewed the way the questions were being answered. Perception is everything! 2) Tried to do too much in too little time which makes tough to get solid feedback. 3) Concept of worrying about tomorrow effective. Planning is excellent!
- Good meeting!