

THE ROCKLAND ROUNDTABLE

Your Voice, Your Future



County Executive Ed Day welcomes attendees at Economic Development Forum

FEATURE



Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County

Months of planning by team members from the **Rockland County Department of Economic Development & Tourism**, the **Rockland Industrial Development Agency (IDA)**, and the **Rockland Business Association (RBA)** culminated in a day of presentations and one-on-one conversations during the inaugural **Rockland Economic Development Forum** on Wednesday, May 14, 2025. The day consisted of two different sessions intended to address the interests and concerns of various groups. Both were held at JCC Rockland in West Nyack, NY.

➤➤➤ Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County (continued)

Morning Session for Stakeholders

A morning session was held from 8:30am to 12:00pm and consisted of panel discussions with economic development leaders from municipal and county governments, advocacy organizations, and the business community.

County Executive Ed Day opened the session by touting the benefits of economic development for residents, highlighting the strong financial position of the County, as well as the fact that tourism spending helps to put \$618 back in the pockets of Rockland households.

Ken Zebrowski, President of the Rockland Business Association, introduced Keynote Speaker **Ryan Silva**, who serves as the Executive Director of the New York State Economic Development Council (NYSEDC). Silva discussed the state's economic development priorities, as illustrated in the recently approved 2025-2026 Fiscal Budget. NYSEDC advocated for, and the New York State Legislature ultimately committed to, several initiatives that will support the attraction of new investment, job creation, downtown revitalization, housing development and infrastructure improvements.



Keynote Speaker Ryan Silva

What is Economic Development?

After the Keynote Address, **Heidi Vandiver**, Operations Manager of the Rockland Industrial Development Agency (IDA), facilitated the first panel titled, "What is Economic Development?" which provided regional, state, and local perspectives. **Adam Bosch**, President & CEO of Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress, presented jarring statistics highlighting the crises of housing and affordability in both the region and the county, urging those in the room to advocate for creative solutions and immediate action.

**Government...has to
play an active role at
every level.
Adam Bosch**

➤➤➤ Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County (continued)

Linda Malave, Mid-Hudson Regional Director at Empire State Development, discussed the big picture of investment by the state in Rockland, which includes \$696.6M in funding through the state's Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process, leveraging \$6.5B of private investment, and creating or retaining 46,000 jobs, since the establishment of the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council in 2011.

\$696.6M
IN CFA GRANTS
FOR ROCKLAND

Steve Porath, Executive Director of the Rockland IDA, discussed the organization's "behind-the-scenes" efforts to spur investment in the county through tax exemptions and other incentives that have resulted in almost \$10B of investment in the past 10 years.

\$10B
INVESTMENT
OVER 10 YEARS

Economic Overview of Rockland County

The opening panel sought to lay the foundation for thinking about economic development on a broader scale. In moderating the second panel, **Debra Thomas**, Executive Director of the Workforce Development Board of Rockland County, hoped to initiate a discussion about the current landscape and existing opportunities in Rockland. Each of the panelists talked about the assets that can be leveraged in the county to ensure a sustainable future that evolves with the needs of residents and the business community.

Jenna Nazario, Director of Economic Development & Tourism for Rockland County, emphasized the importance of community involvement in decisions affecting the future of the county, as well as the unique opportunities that Rockland's strategic location – close to both New York City and the rest of the Hudson Valley – can offer.

ROCKLAND
STRATEGICALLY
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Al Samuels, CEO of the Rockland Business Association (RBA), and **Ken Zebrowski**, RBA President, shared the past, present, and future impact of an organization like the RBA. Samuels gave examples of when the organization took on “third rail issues” when no one else would, including advocating for a new Tappan Zee Bridge. Zebrowski, who served in the New York State Assembly for over 17 years, shared his vision for how the RBA can be an important advocacy partner, with information rooted in data and facts, to dispel fear and misinformation which can disproportionately affect the public’s views of economic development projects.

RBA:
**TACKLE “THIRD
RAIL ISSUES”
ARMED WITH
DATA AND
FACTS**



Rockland County Town Supervisors (L to R): Howard T. Phillips, Jr. (Haverstraw), Teresa Kenny (Orangetown), Jim Monaghan (Stony Point), George Hoehmann (Clarkstown), Michael B. Specht (Ramapo)

➤➤➤ Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County (continued)

Vision for Rockland County

Ken Zebrowski moderated the final panel of the session, which brought together the Supervisors of the five towns in Rockland County: **George Hoehmann** (Clarkstown), **Teresa Kenny** (Orangetown), **Jim Monaghan** (Stony Point), **Howard T. Phillips, Jr.** (Haverstraw), and **Michael B. Specht** (Ramapo). Each spoke about key projects underway in their respective towns, which ranged from the River and Rail Brownfield Floating Zone in Stony Point to affordable housing challenges in Ramapo and Haverstraw to redevelopment of retail and entertainment hubs in Clarkstown and rethinking of Blue Hill Plaza in Orangetown. The Supervisors called on business leaders and residents alike to engage in the process when they are in support of projects. While each town has its one unique set of challenges, the Supervisors collectively emphasized that cooperation with each other has been critical to their past successes. This spirit of camaraderie was evident in each of their remarks as they also recognized Supervisor Monaghan's service, as he is set to retire by the end of this year.

Evening Public Session

The Economic Development Forum continued with an evening session from 6:30-8:30pm at JCC Rockland. While the morning session targeted business, community, and government representatives and leaders, the evening session was intended to open dialogue with Rockland County residents. This session did not have any speakers or formal agenda. Rather, it was designed as an Open House, where residents could drop in at any time throughout the duration of the event. Representatives from the County, RBA, and IDA were present to engage in one-on-one discussions with residents.

In addition, to solicit feedback from attendees, the room was set up with a series of interactive boards with questions and activities relating to three distinct categories: **Housing, Economic Wellbeing, and Quality of Life**. The categories were selected as the focus of the activities and conversation based on feedback shared by residents prior to the event via an online registration form.

➤➤➤ Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County (continued)

The activities were intended to spur thoughtful discussion about the interconnectedness of the three key issues and how residents can take action to impact decisions in these areas. For example, when asked to respond to this statement: “A diverse economy with a mix of large, medium, and small businesses is a good thing for residents,” 100% of respondents “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” In contrast, the statement, “Residents and businesses in Rockland County welcome development in the downtown areas,” was met with many responses of “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” suggesting that even when residents agree on the need for a healthy local economy, they may have differing opinions on what is needed to accomplish this.

Furthermore, when presented with the statement, “I know how to get involved to support projects that would benefit the vision I have for the future of Rockland,” many “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” suggesting that more must be done by the County to communicate with residents. Another board asked, “How can we help you stay more informed about the future of Rockland County around issues of economic and community development?” the most common responses called for newsletters, community events, and opportunities for residents – especially youth – to get involved.

“What Do You Love about Rockland County?”

Here’s what some Rockland residents had to say:



➤➤➤ Stakeholders and Residents Gather to Discuss Economic Development in Rockland County (continued)



Rockland residents engage in discussions about Housing, Economic Wellbeing, and Quality of Life

We all have the opportunity and responsibility to shape the future of Rockland in a way that benefits us all for generations to come.

According to **Jenna Nazario**, Rockland County's Director of Economic Development, the Economic Development Forum was the first step in a process that will continue to engage stakeholders in the coming months. "We will carefully review the feedback that has been shared and plan our next steps accordingly.

Our goal is to engage the various stakeholder groups in Rockland County because economic development affects all of us. We all have the opportunity and responsibility to shape the future of Rockland in a way that benefits us all for generations to come." While the details are being developed based on the analysis of information gathered from these initial activities, Nazario says that the public can expect many more follow up activities in the form of additional surveys, community events, and even an upcoming podcast.