



## Retaining Millennials in the City of Poughkeepsie



Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress Regional Fellows Program

Tiombe Carter  
Brian Doyle  
Nicole Jorgensen  
Mark Malone  
James McConnell  
Karl Schlegel  
Jean Uwilingiyimana  
Sabine Werner

June 2014



*Funded, in part, by a grant from the Hudson River Valley Greenway*

## POK Millennials

For decades, residents of the Hudson Valley have been concerned about the implications of “Youth Flight,” or the region’s loss of young people. With the millennial population in particular, the decision about where they will live has the potential to heavily impact regional community and economic development.

In addition to the housing market and economy, major beneficiaries of millennial retention are local colleges and universities, for which a thriving youth population would significantly increase competitiveness. **Our project, “Pok Millennials,” focuses on strategies the City of Poughkeepsie can undertake to retain its population of graduating millennials as they transition into the next stage of their lives.**

### The Assignment

For research purposes, our group targeted millennials between the ages of 18 and 24, specifically upper level college and university students who have either been raised in the Hudson Valley or who have moved there to attend a college or graduate school in the area surrounding the City of Poughkeepsie (“the City”). In order to understand how to entice these millennials to remain in the City after they graduate, we first needed to answer the question: “Why Poughkeepsie?”

### **Why Poughkeepsie?**

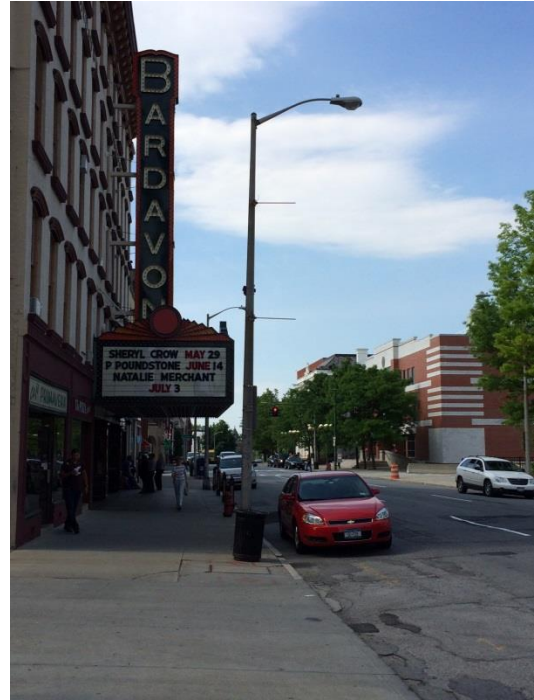
Poughkeepsie has significant potential to serve as an attractive home for millennials for a number of reasons:

- Five Major Colleges / Universities
  - Captive population: Thousands of millennials are already in the close vicinity of Poughkeepsie for their education. They can be enticed to stay and begin their post-graduate life there with positive engagement and experiences in/around the City.
- Convenient Transportation
  - Metro-North Railroad Access: The Poughkeepsie train station provides easy access to New York City for recreation or employment. During peak travel times, commuters arrive at Grand Central Station within one hour and forty minutes.



### Why Poughkeepsie? (cont'd)

- Culture & Entertainment
  - The Bardavon 1869 Opera house, The Mid-Hudson Civic Center, The Chance theatre along with other venues provide a regular source of live entertainment.
  - Area restaurants (e.g., the Artist’s Palate, Brasserie 292, Mill House Brewing Company, among others) offer noteworthy fare in a trendy atmosphere.
  - Residents have convenient access to New York City and to the Hudson Valley’s unique natural beauty through Poughkeepsie’s Walkway Over the Hudson which connects to the Rail Trail, and through several other state parks and nature preserves that are just a short distance away.
- Vibrant Creative Economy
  - Arts Mid-Hudson (formerly The Dutchess County Arts Council) is headquartered in the City of Poughkeepsie and has several hundred members. Barrett Art Center, Cuneen Hacket, Children’s Media Project and Mill Street Loft are anchor creative centers.
- Investment Potential
  - The City of Poughkeepsie is receiving significant attention and investment from the private and public sectors, which are working in partnership to develop the City’s housing and economic base. Such examples include Hudson River Housing’s Middle Main Initiative and the City’s revitalization plans for the Central Business District, which is among several city-specific initiatives receiving support from the Dyson Foundation. Residents who “buy in” to the City today will reap the benefits of this collective investment.

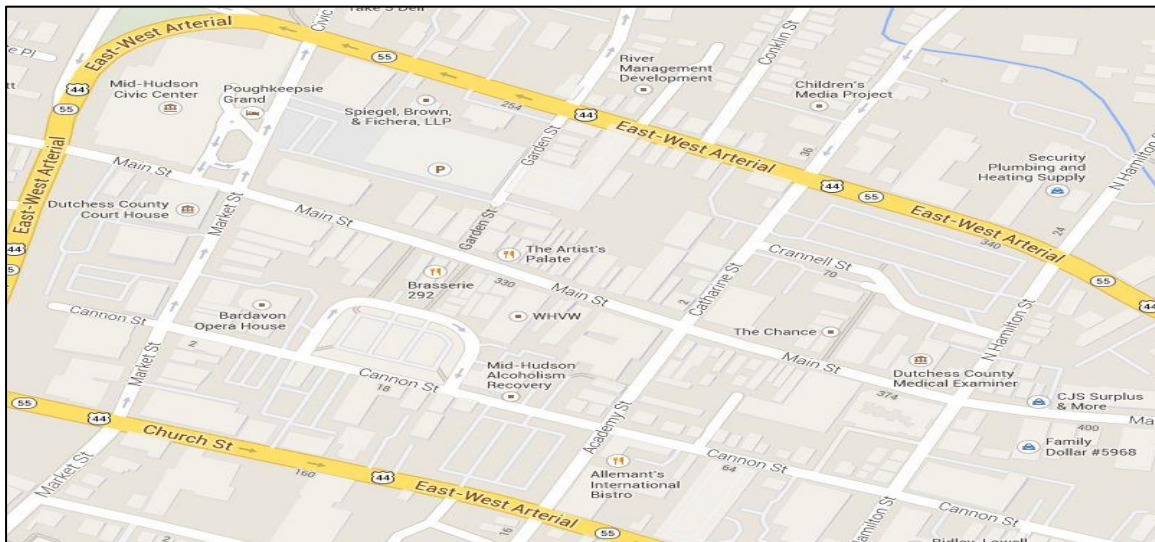


### Geographic Profile; Maps

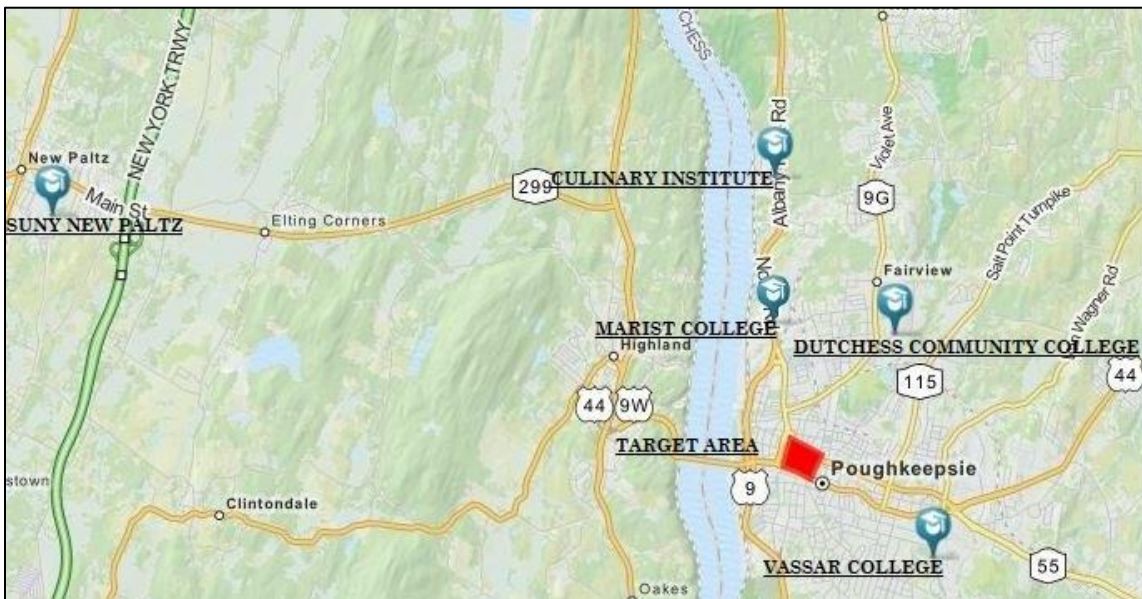
Poughkeepsie is located on the East bank of the Hudson River, midway between New York City and Albany. It is the county seat for Dutchess County. As of the 2010 Census, the City’s population was 32,736. The primary demographic makeup was 53% white, 36% black or African American and 11% Hispanic or Latino. The median age was 32 years old (52% female; 48% male). The most recent median income estimate in the City was \$39,528.



Please refer to the map below. After examining different areas of the City containing characteristics a millennial might find attractive (e.g., convenient access to transportation, restaurants/shops, etc.), we determined the Central Business District had strong potential, specifically the area located between Market and Hamilton Streets, bounded by the East and West arterials (Routes 44 and 55). This area is home to local government offices and has a concentration of small businesses, popular restaurants and arts and entertainment venues. This area also contains a selection of mixed-use buildings, with residential apartments on the upper levels of commercial spaces. The physical state of buildings is mixed; some buildings are renovated and livable while others are abandoned.



Four colleges and one university are located within a thirteen mile radius of the City, as shown below.



## Survey

We developed and circulated a survey to students at Marist College and the Culinary Institute of America in order to better understand the mindset and values among graduating millennials when choosing a place to live. We were also interested in the students' perception of and general feelings towards the City of Poughkeepsie and their level of engagement with the city and its surrounding communities. Results are summarized below.

- Of the 307 total respondents, 27 (9%) indicated that they planned on or had interest in remaining in the Poughkeepsie area after completing their education. Of these 27 respondents, 12 were from outside the Hudson Valley.
- Among the 280 respondents who indicated that they did *not* plan on staying in the Poughkeepsie area, 117 (42%) indicated that they felt *no connection* between their college experience and life in the city of Poughkeepsie, compared with 18 (6%) who *did* feel a strong connection with the surrounding community.
- Of the 126 respondents who felt *no connection* existed between their college and the City, 93% *do not* plan on remaining in the area.

Additionally, we asked students to assign a rating of 1 to 5 to certain lifestyle or community characteristics, 5 being Most Important. Three characteristics ranked the highest in terms of importance, with average scores of 4.2 or greater: Safe Neighborhoods, Access to Good Jobs, and Housing Affordability / Availability. Other characteristics deemed important (with average scores of 3.6 or greater) were Walkability to Shops and Services, Availability of Outdoor Activities, Convenience of Shopping Centers, and Being around People My Age.

**Safety** appears to be of particular concern. Many respondents, especially those who indicated that they felt no connection between their college experience and the City, indicated the City simply was not a safe enough place to reside.

152 students completed the open field section of the survey; 34% were concerned with safety or crime. Students write:

*“...the only reason I ever actually go into downtown Poughkeepsie is for ethnic food which is unavailable elsewhere. If there were more small businesses, activities and the town felt safer, myself and many others would be more likely to go there.”*

*“Affordability and safety are really two major concerns. I know that I could get a job in Poughkeepsie, but I don't know if I could afford to live in the part of Poughkeepsie where I would be safe to live alone.”*

*“Safety is my main priority. Sometimes when I'm driving through Poughkeepsie, I don't always feel safe. And I definitely do not feel safe enough to walk, especially by myself.”*

## Best Practices

### **New Haven, Connecticut**

We studied the revitalization and millennial retention strategies of college towns to collect “best practices” for the City of Poughkeepsie. We focused on New Haven, CT and the Storrs Center in Mansfield, CT. New Haven's downtown area, near Yale University, enjoys a large early- to mid-20's population, demonstrated by the daily sidewalk bustle.

New Haven shares certain challenges with Poughkeepsie: an above-average crime rate, below-average median income and a commute to New York City that is arguably too long to be feasible (104 minutes from New Haven; 96 minutes from Poughkeepsie). However, in New Haven – where a large number of amenities can be accessed by walking, biking or public transportation — these challenges are not daunting to millennials.

Over the past fifteen years, dozens of Zagat-rated restaurants, a green grocery store/co-op and several millennial-targeted stores (e.g., Urban Outfitters, American Apparel, Apple Store, J Crew, Origins) have been built within walking distance of New Haven’s downtown area: “New Haven Green.” Bicyclists can access a greater area via shared-lane markings on streets surrounding the Green which lead to five park bike paths, all located within two miles of the Green.

For further travel, the “New Haven Green” is one bus stop on ten different daily Connecticut Transit bus routes. In addition, Union Station’s Metro North and Amtrak trains are a half-mile walk (or 10-minute bus ride) from there. Apartment complexes rent 1-, 2- and 3- bedrooms starting under \$1,200/month, an affordable option for recent graduates who often begin by living with roommates until earning enough to live alone or share space with a life partner.

### **Storrs Center, Mansfield, Connecticut**

Poughkeepsie can also reference recent improvements in a smaller college town: Storrs Center in Mansfield, CT, located near the University of Connecticut (“UConn”). Storrs Center is a mixed-use town center and main street corridor of approximately four square blocks, located one block away from the Fine Arts School at UConn. Students and area residents are drawn to the unique eateries and millennial-targeted shops (e.g., a bookstore, game/hobby shop, tattoo/piercing, One Tribe clothing) which occupy the ground level of buildings. The sidewalks are wide and tree-lined with benches and bike racks that welcome people to visit, sit, stay and spend. Storrs Center also contains the Nash-Zimmer Transportation Center, a central transportation node providing bus access through neighboring cities as well as the UConn inter-campus routes.

Separately, a new vehicle was created to oversee the development of Storrs Center: the Mansfield Downtown Partnership (MDP). MDP is an independent, non-profit organization composed of representatives from the town, community, local businesses and the University of Connecticut. This public/private partnership is responsible for developing, marketing and managing the Downtown business district. The creation of an outside organization helped facilitate the revitalization effort while balancing the sometimes-competing interests of the town and the University.

The larger New Haven downtown area and the smaller Storrs Center offer valuable ideas from their neighborhood revitalizations. Engaging young people in active, interesting off-campus neighborhoods while they are still students helps them visualize and possibly embark on a positive, post-college life experience in their college town. Mixed-use buildings – with shops/restaurants on the ground level and apartments above – maximize walkability to areas of interest. Wide sidewalks, trees, benches and shared-lanes for bicycles all encourage millennials to enjoy the area.

### Essential Partnerships: Poughkeepsie’s Learning Living Community and Incubator Residence

#### **Learning Living Community**

As we consider developing the City of Poughkeepsie as a “magnet to millennials” we recognize that familiarity and presence of students from surrounding colleges increases the likelihood of students, after they graduate, to make the City of Poughkeepsie their home. **So, how do we encourage this greater familiarity and presence?**

The City of Poughkeepsie offers itself as a unique laboratory in which academic education can be amplified and enriched by practical life experience as encountered by students in pursuit of various fields of study. Be it Social Work, Criminal Justice, Organizational Theory, Political Science, Tourism/Hospitality, Urban Planning – all of these fields of study can be informed by a “Learning Living Community.”

Modeled after the “Year at Home” program initiated by Marist College over forty years ago (as a successor to their Year Abroad Program), the Learning Living Community would provide intensive internships in a wide range of studies. Much like the Year at Home Program, the Learning Living Community would invite students for one or two semesters to live within a community where various social and political challenges would be collectively studied and addressed.

The Learning Living Community would include a collaborative whereby area colleges and universities (Marist, Dutchess Community, Vassar, SUNY New Paltz and Culinary Institute of America) would provide an experiential learning residence in the City of Poughkeepsie. The Learning Living Community would be established by a cooperative of schools, for example one institution could lease a building to another, or perhaps more feasible – a private developer could design / build a building with input from the schools, then lease spaces to each one in the cooperative.

Those students immersed in various governmental, not-for-profit, law enforcement or other business and community organizations would live with students from their own and other schools which are similarly embedded in “on the ground” learning. As students return to their in-city cooperative residence from their internships, they would be provided with the opportunity to attend classes and participate in discussion groups, thereby informing one another’s experiences. **This rich opportunity is primarily proposed to immerse students in a crucible of urban living where they can learn from and contribute to community efforts to create a safe, attractive, well-managed city.**

There are few small cities so poised as Poughkeepsie to offer a depth of learning that transcends the classroom. The area colleges and universities can offer students the most practical experience in community building while also enriching community conversations and development in the City of Poughkeepsie, one of the most challenged yet promising small cities in the region. Poughkeepsie’s challenges and possibilities are ideal matches for various area college majors. This Learning Living Community would be an ideal opportunity for individual students to share their talents and learning with one another as well as with key stakeholders within the city.

### **Incubator Residence**

A second, inventive and perhaps bolder initiative that holds abundant promise for millennials who are seeking professional and career development is an “Incubator Residence,” or young adult enclave. This is a development where persons pursuing advanced degrees and/or exploring industry innovations will have an environment that nurtures those pursuits.

It is widely recognized that college towns ranking highly among the best places to live enjoy the following characteristics: high concentration of students to every 1,000 residents; a large number of businesses to every 100,000 residents; high concentration of 24-35 year olds with degrees; large expenditures on R&D; a high percentage of residents comprising the creative class; and a low percentage of persons with degrees leaving the city. We can conclude that Poughkeepsie has sufficient attributes and potentialities to support it becoming a college town. The recent survey of undergraduates and graduating seniors confirms what we know anecdotally about the expectations and desires of young adults: they want to live in places that have the characteristics of a college town.

We envision that the anchor academic institutions and leading businesses and organizations, together with emerging graduates, collaborate with an innovative developer to create the Incubator Residence. Dutchess Community College, Marist, SUNY New Paltz, Culinary Institute of America and Vassar are established institutions with unique student populations. We can assume that each has initiatives that would likely advance its long term growth and development given the right circumstances. In addition to these schools, established and startup businesses that are developing new products and services could benefit from a controlled research environment and partner in this initiative. The incubator residents will inform the needs and desires of millennials who are transitioning to young family life. **Together, this group of vicinity institutions and companies would promote and support a housing development that could serve as a magnet for bright individuals seeking access to their resources.**

A reasonable reservation around this plan is that the business environment is not as strong as it has been and does not appear to be rapidly improving. Yet, this challenge may very well be an opportunity. Growing companies and entrepreneurs are attracted to places with resources and opportunities. **A development where each academic institution sponsors twenty units (potentially 100+ units) housed with educated, forward thinking young adults supported by well-respected institutions is a great attraction to businesses.**

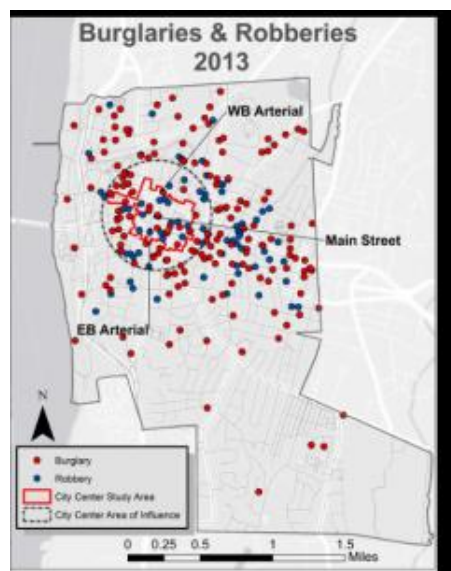
And, what better incentive to attract these coveted young people than exclusive access in a unique way? Promotional messages could include: "Live here and have access to SUNY New Paltz's 3-D printer;" "Live here and have access to Marist's Hudson River Valley Institute and IBM Cloud Computer Program;" "Live here and have access to Vassar's Power House Theater, Skinner Hall, and Loeb Gallery;" "And, while you live here, advance your endeavors, develop your research, increase your training plus provide valuable insight to surrounding companies poised for partnership or employment."

The Incubator Residence, located close to and linked with the Learning Living Community of students, will be a platform for innovative living. The Incubator Residence participants would also serve as a resource and source of mentorship for the Learning Living Community.

### Final Recommendations

As discussed throughout this paper, the City of Poughkeepsie is poised to be a magnet for the millennial population. **However, accomplishing this will involve the collaboration of various segments of the community: businesses, elected officials and area colleges and universities.**

One of the most important concerns raised in our survey is **public safety**. The maps below illustrate that the city center is indeed a high crime area. In order to attract millennials to choose Poughkeepsie as their home, the City needs to create a safe environment. **The presence of a walking police force that is engaged with individuals and business owners and involved in the community will heavily improve crime rates in the City.** We recognize that there are also disadvantages to community policing, one of which is the potential cost. However, this cost should be weighed carefully against the value of greater security.





Following our research of other successful revitalization strategies, we also recommend **the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) or a Merchants Association (MA)**. The creation of this type of district or association will help fund essential services and enable businesses to access grant funding. A BID or MA would also help fund seasonal operations (e.g., holiday decorations to enhance the City's character). We understand that the City of Poughkeepsie has evaluated this option in the past, but we continue to believe that a BID or MA could play a vital role in helping the City realize its potential as a "Millennial Enclave." We additionally recognize that the financial costs of creating a Business Improvement District must be shared amongst business owners rather than borne by one or two businesses.



The City of Poughkeepsie has begun to identify residential development opportunities, including potential mixed-use buildings. One building that may be well suited for this purpose is the former Up To Date building between Market and Academy Streets (photograph on following page). **To further attract millennials, the City should continue to focus on the acquisition and appropriate disposition of vacant properties (e.g., through the creation of land bank), with an eye towards mixed-use development.**

Our paper lays out an **Essential Partnerships** concept. While we did not have lengthy discussions with representatives from the area schools while collecting data and developing our ideas, we hope for this report to be a springboard for such discussions. Further visioning and planning for the Learning Living Community and Incubator Residence, to include the design, funding, programming and tenancy, will need to be developed through dialogue with area schools, the business and non-profit communities, an innovative developer and City officials. We understand that this is a long term plan which will require courageous commitment. **Yet the prospect of having a section of the city designated for millennials to live and work would greatly help the City of Poughkeepsie become a thriving enclave for millennials.**

In order to accomplish the tasks outlined above, **collaboration among the key sectors of the community – local businesses, colleges and universities, elected officials and law enforcement – is vital.** In order to facilitate this collaboration, we recommend the formation of a **coalition** between these sectors which will allow for the most efficient use of limited community resources. Mobilizing these sectors at the local level will propel the project forward. **The coalition may include subcommittees to address specific issues such as public safety and initiatives like the Learning Living Community and Living Incubator Residence.** A comprehensive approach to engaging and connecting multiple sectors of the community will strengthen the City's ability to create a millennial enclave.