



Regional Economic Development Councils



Western New York Downtown Revitalization Initiative



Office of Planning and Development



Homes and Community Renewal



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

Description

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest \$10 million in each of 10 communities ripe for development to transform them into vibrant communities where tomorrow's workforce will want to live, work and raise families. The program emphasizes using investments to reinforce and secure additional public and private investments proximal to, and within, downtown neighborhoods, and in doing so will build upon growth spurred by the Governor's Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs).

Cesar A. Perales has been designated Chairman to lead the initiative. Private sector experts and planners from the Department of State (DOS), with support from other state agencies, will assist selected municipalities in building strategic investment plans and identifying key projects consistent with the DRI's program goals.

Downtown Identification

Each REDC will nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI. The REDCs will use a template to nominate downtowns by June 30, 2016. The REDC may utilize an existing subcommittee or form a specific subcommittee to advance this project. The REDC may gather public input on downtowns under consideration.

REDCs will weigh, at a minimum, the criteria below when nominating downtowns:

- 1) Downtowns should be compact, with well-defined boundaries. There is no minimum or maximum size for downtowns. Downtowns can range from a corridor or block(s) of a neighborhood to the municipality's traditional central business district. However, core neighborhoods beyond the central business district are also eligible. For example, an arts or entertainment district could be the focus of the DRI, however, it should be shown how these areas complement existing downtowns.
- 2) The municipality, or the downtown's catchment area, should be of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown. In analyzing this, REDCs should consider whether there is a sizeable existing or increasing population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown destination.
- 3) Downtowns should be selected that are able to capitalize on prior, or catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. When evaluating a downtown for nomination, the REDCs should consider:
 - The presence of nearby investments planned or undertaken through the REDCs or with other public or private funding;
 - Continuity with the REDC's previously articulated vision for the area/region and consistency with recent planning efforts for the area;
 - The existence of developable properties within the downtown, including properties that can be utilized for affordable housing;

- The growth potential and community involvement of anchor institutions in or near the downtown;
 - The municipality's current investment commitment to the downtown, including through business improvement districts or partnerships with non-profits;
 - The ability of existing infrastructure to support development of the downtown, and the potential to maximize recent infrastructure upgrades;
 - Application of Smart Growth principles; and
 - Investments in arts and cultural institutions and activities.
- 4) A crucial part of the selection of a downtown is the recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown. The attraction of professionals to an active life in the downtown will support redevelopment and make growth sustainable in the long-term. In evaluating job growth near the downtown, REDCs should consider:
- The presence of major job-creating projects and initiatives near the downtown;
 - The existence of new and expanding employers;
 - Whether new and existing jobs are accessible from the downtown by foot or via public transit; and
 - The diversity in area job opportunities, with different salaries/entry levels and potential for mobility between jobs.
- 5) The downtown must be an attractive and livable community for diverse populations of all ages, including millennials and skilled workers. In evaluating this, REDCs should consider whether the downtown contains, or could contain, the following physical properties and characteristics:
- Developable mixed-use spaces;
 - Housing at different levels of affordability and type;
 - Commercial and retail main street businesses, including healthy and affordable food markets;
 - Multi-modal transit;
 - Walkability and bikeability, within the downtown and connecting the downtown to surrounding open space networks and regional destinations;
 - Accessible recreation amenities, parks and gathering spaces;
 - Access to health care facilities;
 - Cultural and entertainment amenities; and
 - Broadband accessibility.
- 6) The downtown should already embrace or have the ability to create and implement policies that increase livability and quality of life, including through:
- Downtown plans;
 - Modern zoning and parking standards;
 - Management structure, such as a Downtown Manager or Downtown Business Improvement District;
 - Complete Streets plans and laws;
 - Transit-oriented development;
 - Land banks;
 - Energy-efficiency;
 - Smart Cities innovation; and
 - An inclusive environment for New Americans.

- 7) Downtowns must have sufficient local community and public official support in order to develop and implement their strategic investment plan. Local leaders and stakeholders who are committed to working together on a plan and the initial local lead should be identified.

Strategic Investment Plans

DOS will rapidly launch the DRI Fast Track Planning Initiative in July 2016 following certification of 10 downtowns. The communities will enjoy technical support from both state and private sector planning experts and a locally established committee. Private sector planning experts will be paid out of the \$10 million awards (up to \$300,000 per community), with the remainder of the award utilized to implement the plan. For downtowns that identify a need for healthy and affordable food markets, up to \$500,000 of implementation funding will be available statewide for projects that are consistent with the Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative.

The strategic investment plans will examine local assets and opportunities to build a vision for revitalization unique to that downtown. The plans will include identification of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects that align with that vision and can be leveraged for additional investment.

Work on the strategic investment plans will be overseen by a local DRI Planning Committee. This committee should include representatives from a number of the following interest groups and organizations:

- The REDC for the municipality's region;
- Local and regional government officials;
- Neighborhood associations, homeowners, and renters;
- Property owners, local developers, and realtors;
- Chambers of commerce, local business associations, and business owners;
- Community foundations and community loan funds;
- Local development corporations, housing corporations, Industrial Development Agencies, and business improvement districts;
- Cultural institutions, including museums, historic sites, theaters, etc.;
- Educational institutions, including administrative and student leadership of area universities and colleges;
- Local non-profit and advocacy organizations that address quality of life (i.e. bicycle coalitions, park conservancies, arts organizations, YMCA, etc.);
- Social and public service organizations (local police, health care providers, etc.); and
- Faith-based organizations.

While strategic investment plans will be individualized to ensure sustainable growth in each unique downtown, fundamental goals include:

- 1) Creation of an active, desirable downtown with a strong sense of place;
- 2) Attraction of new businesses (including "Main Street" businesses), high-paying jobs, and skilled workers;
- 3) Arts and cultural attractions;
- 4) A diverse population, with residents and workers supported by complementary housing and employment opportunities;
- 5) An enhanced local property tax base; and
- 6) Amenities to support and enhance downtown living and quality of life.

Strategic investment plans will also consider, as appropriate for each community, the municipality's ability to create or improve these elements of the selected downtown, through policies as well as specific projects:

- Proximity and accessibility to daily destinations - particularly jobs and different housing types;
- Density in the downtown - compact zoning and building;
- Diversity in land uses and a zoning code enabling a mix of uses;
- Transit-oriented development with access to reliable public transit (within ½ mile of the downtown);
- Walkability/bikeability;
- Sustainable, energy-efficient development that aligns with the goals of the State Energy Plan;
- Smart Cities innovations that lower local government costs while improving municipal service delivery;
- Presence of and collaboration with anchor institutions in or near the downtown;
- Existence of healthy and affordable food markets;
- Accessible parks, public gathering spaces, and entertainment amenities;
- Inclusiveness of New Americans; and
- Demonstrations of support from key stakeholders and local capacity for implementation.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – WESTERN NEW YORK

REGIONAL INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest \$10 million in 10 communities in an effort to develop a downtown in each of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) regions that is ripe for development and will accelerate renewal and transform them into vibrant communities where tomorrow's workforce will want to live, work and raise families. Downtown districts in cities and villages all across upstate are experiencing restored vibrancy and increased property values by implementing projects that result in historic preservation, adaptive reuse, mixed use redevelopment with upper floor housing, walkability, traffic calming, and in-fill development.

Rediscovering and reinvesting in our city, town, and village centers is an economic development strategy grounded in smart growth principles and is setting the stage for success across our region. Old business districts that had suffered high vacancy and low valuation are achieving renewal by developing walkable, compact downtowns that have been transformed into places that are attracting retail investors and residents, thus stabilizing property taxes while also improving quality of life.

All of the WNY Counties have experienced sprawl without growth and some rural counties have seen nearly 100% of new homes and retail buildings constructed completely outside of incorporated municipalities. The unintended consequences of continued sprawl without growth can be high property taxes, impoverished municipalities, and village home abandonment. Each DRI proposal is encouraged to demonstrate local community stakeholder and public official support including partnerships with county government, IDA's, and other economic development organizations.

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) represents a significant State investment in one community to be recommended by the Regional Economic Development Council. Along with the specific criteria outlined in the guidebook and application, we must ask, "Would I invest there?" because a goal of this initiative is to inspire confidence and pride, ideally leveraging private sector investment which results in a virtuous cycle of self-reinforcing renewal.

Although we can only select one community for this initiative, the NYS Consolidated Funding Application (CFA), which is also open for applications, represents another opportunity to implement your plans with the assistance of State resources. We believe that the effort put forth to win the DRI competition will lay the groundwork for a future CFA because communities will take stock of plans and policies, convene leaders and volunteers, and discover new opportunities for downtown renewal. We hope this competition will encourage municipalities to take action to attract public and private investment with or without the DRI award. Thank you for your interest in the NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative in Western New York. We look forward to reviewing your submittal.

APPLICATION TEMPLATE

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (WNY REDC) is accepting applications from eligible applicants for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI). Please refer to the preceding attached Downtown Revitalization Initiative Guide for further information on the DRI program.

Eligibility: Only municipalities are eligible to submit an application for consideration.

Deadline: Completed applications must be received to the WNY Empire State Development office by 4:00 p.m. on June 3, 2016. No late submittals.

To submit a proposal: Each applicant must complete this application and include the requested attachments before 4:00pm on June 3, 2016. Completed applications and attachments must be submitted by email to: Christopher Schoepflin, WNY Regional Director, Christopher.Schoepflin@esd.ny.gov .

Questions: Contact, Mo Sumbundu, Mo.Sumbundu@esd.ny.gov , (716) 846-8347

Public Information Session: A public information session for interested DRI applicants will take place on Monday May 16 at 10:30am at Buffalo State College, Bulger Communications Center. For details and registration, visit: <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/western-new-york>

Applicant interviews: Applicants may be requested to participate in a brief interview regarding their proposal with the DRI Review Committee in Buffalo on June 13 or June 14 between 9:00am-11:00am.

For regional strategies, progress reports, and other regional initiatives referred to in this application, visit: <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/western-new-york>

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Click here to enter text.

Municipality Name: Click here to enter text.

Downtown Name: Click here to enter text.

County: Click here to enter text.

Point of Contact: Click here to enter text.

Title: Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text.

Email: Click here to enter text.

Downtown Description - Provide an overview of the downtown and summarize the rationale behind nominating this downtown for a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award):

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DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

In addition to the criteria set forth in the attached DRI Guidelines, applicants are strongly encouraged to nominate a target area with the following:

- Alignment with strategies and project criteria in the WNY Strategy for Prosperity
- High population density
- Demonstrated opportunity for revitalization that will create a diverse and vibrant community
- Established high impact leverage/matching funding within target area
- Capacity and ability to execute the strategic plan

Section I – The Downtown Community

Answer these questions to “paint a picture” of your vision for downtown renewal, including the economic development and quality of life improvements that you foresee.

- 1) Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment. *Attach a map of the target area, with streets and boundaries clearly marked.*

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- 2) Size.** Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown. *Attach a brief report/map which provides the density, household income and identifies employment centers within the target area.*

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- 3) Past Investments & Future Investment Potential.** Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. *Attach a list of investments made in the target area over the last 5 years, including funding amounts and major sources of funding.*

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- 4) Job Growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term. *Attach key statistics to describe job growth (by sector if possible) over the last five years.*

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- 5) Attractiveness of the Downtown.** Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, historic architecture or historic districts, healthy and

affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces. *Attach relevant photos, rendering, or images to demonstrate key properties or characteristics of the downtown you want to feature.*

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Section II – Local Support & Strategic Alignment:

Answer these questions to reassure us that New York State’s investment will have a strong chance of success. We want to know that the municipality has the capacity to both lead and implement, and that local policies are aligned with downtown renewal.

- 6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.** Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete-streets plans, transit-oriented development, and the use of historic districts or other designations to provide tax relief for private investors. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies. *Attach any relevant comprehensive planning documents highlighting policies that enhance the quality of life.*

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- 7) Local Support and Capacity to Execute.** Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan. *Attach a plan for project implementation, including key team members and outline the team’s applicable experience and skills to implement.*

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Section III – Strategic Alignment:

The Strategy for Prosperity was developed with the input of thousands of leaders and citizens across our region and every year we prioritize CFAs that advance the goals of this strategy. Your answers to the following questions will frame your vision for downtown renewal within the regional strategies.

- 8) Alignment with Regional Strategies.** Describe how your vision and proposed investments will support the following core strategies, target industry sectors, and project criteria.

Core Strategies:

Prepare Our Workforce
Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurship
Implement Smart Growth

Industry Strategies:

Advanced manufacturing
Health & life sciences

Tourism and arts
Agriculture
Bi-national logistics
Energy
Professional services

Project Criteria:

Creates/Retains/Fills Jobs
Maximizes Return on Investment
Ready for Implementation
Is Inclusive
Promotes Smart Growth
Oriented to Young Adults
Builds upon Strengths
Regional Impact
Improves Region's Image

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- 9) Opportunity Agenda, Inclusivity and Context-Sensitive Planning.** In an effort to prevent unintended consequences of revitalization such as projects out of scale with the neighborhood and/or displacement of current residents or businesses, please explain how you will include existing residents and businesses, particularly the traditionally under-represented groups, in the planning process and highlight any policy action that would ensure equity, diversity and opportunity for those already living in or invested in your targeted downtown neighborhood. Refer to the WNY REDC Opportunity Agenda for more information on these regional priorities.

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- 10) Other.** Provide any other information that informed the nomination of this downtown for a DRI award.

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A Division of Empire State Development