NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Regional Economic Development Councils

Western NY Downtown Revitalization Initiative & Smart Growth Community Fund

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Office of Planning and Development

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Homes and Community Renewal

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Background

Business leaders, young professionals, entrepreneurs and retirees, among others, are increasingly calling New York's downtown centers home because of the high quality of life and economic opportunity. According to the Brookings Institute, investing in urban centers can improve economic performance, reduce infrastructure costs, and enhance the economic well-being of surrounding areas. Regional investments through New York State's ten Regional Economic Development Councils have created ripple effects in small-to-midsize downtowns. The result is renewed investments that, overall, will increase the local tax base, and further sustain and build upon regional economic development initiatives in ways that create broader economic and social gains.

In the spring of 2016, Governor Cuomo introduced a major new initiative – the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) - which invested $100 million in ten downtown communities to unlock dormant potential in ways that create and propel the resurgence of urban areas throughout the state. Each of the ten Regional Economic Development Councils invited communities to apply to be considered for nomination.

To guide the use of the $10 million award, the selected communities were required to complete a Strategic Investment Plan, with the assistance of a team of expert planners funded through the program. Each completed strategic investment plan identifies goals and strategies to accomplish a clear vision for revitalization and identifies specific catalytic, implementation-ready projects that align with the community's vision for the revitalization of their unique downtown area and are consistent with the DRI's program goals.

Communities selected in 2016 included:

- Elmira (Southern Tier Region)
- Geneva (Finger Lakes Region)
- Glens Falls (Capital Region)
- Jamaica (New York City Region)
- Jamestown (Western New York Region)
- Middletown (Mid-Hudson Region)
- Oneonta (Mohawk Valley Region)
- Oswego (Central New York Region)
- Plattsburgh (North Country Region)
- Westbury (Long Island Region)

The 2018 Executive and Enacted budget included a new $100 million round of the DRI, providing a $10 million award to ten new communities to develop downtown strategic investment plans. These plans, with the infusion of DRI investment, will implement key catalytic projects that advance the community's vision for revitalization, promote sustainable economic development, and create places where the next generation of New Yorkers can raise their families, work, and enjoy the diversity of recreational activities all within their downtown.

WNY Smart Growth Community Fund

In the Western New York region, applicants to the DRI that are not nominated as the $10 million winner of the 2017 statewide competition, will automatically be eligible for additional funding for transformative improvements to their downtowns through the Smart Growth Community Fund available through Phase II of the Buffalo Billion, announced by Governor Cuomo in 2017. Based on the information presented in a community's DRI application and interview, a select number of DRI applicants will be awarded Smart Growth Community funds ranging from $2 million to $10 million for downtown revitalization projects that closely align with the vision and goals of the DRI. While recipients of Smart Growth Community Fund awards will not be assigned a state planning team to develop a Strategic Investment Plan, they may be offered technical assistance to help with project implementation.

2017 DRI Application

The Regional Councils will solicit interest in the program from communities in each of their regions, accepting revised applications from communities that requested consideration in 2016, and new applications from communities that didn't participate last year.

Applications from interested communities must be submitted to the Regional Councils using the Downtown Revitalization Initiative Application Template available on the Regional Economic Development Council website. Among the items requested are a description of the size and boundaries of the proposed DRI area; recent investments and future investment potential; impact of job growth; downtown assets and efforts to increase the quality of life in the proposed DRI area; local support for the application; information on previous public engagements and planning documents related to investment of the area; demonstration of projects that will be ready for implementation within the first two years as a result of the infusion of DRI; and local administrative capacity to manage DRI activities.

Each Regional Council will review proposals from interested communities and nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI. The Regional Council may utilize an existing subcommittee or form a specific subcommittee to advance this project.

Downtown projects in communities that applied for nomination but were not selected will be prioritized for funding under the Consolidated Funding Application.

Downtown Nomination

Each Regional Council should nominate a downtown that closely meets the following list of desired attributes for participation in the DRI.

1) **Well-defined boundaries**. The downtown should be compact, with well-defined boundaries. There is no minimum or maximum size for a downtown, but it must be a concentrated, defined area. A downtown can range from a corridor or few block(s) of a neighborhood to the municipality's traditional central business district (for smaller municipalities). Core neighborhoods beyond the central business district are also eligible. For example, an arts or entertainment district could be the focus of the DRI if it's shown that investments in these areas complement an existing downtown.

2) **Sufficient catchment area**. The municipality, or the downtown's catchment area, should be of sufficient size to support a vibrant, year-round downtown. It should have a sizeable existing or increasing population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown destination.

3) **Past investments, future potential**. The downtown should be able and ready to capitalize on prior or catalyze future public and private investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas as evidenced by:

    - The presence of nearby investments planned or undertaken through the REDC or with other public or private funding;
    - Continuity with the Regional Council'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 varying levels of housing affordability and mixed uses;
    - The growth potential and community involvement of anchor institutions in or near the downtown;
    - The municipality's current investment commitment to the downtown, as demonstrated by

business improvement districts, actively engaged IDAs and land banks, 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 which may include smart shrinkage;
- Potential for development of energy-efficient projects and opportunities for green jobs; and
- Investments in arts and cultural institutions and activities.

4) **Recent or impending job growth**. A crucial characteristic is recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown, which may be as a result of Regional Council commitments or other public and private investments. The attraction of professionals to an active life in the downtown will support redevelopment and make growth sustainable in the long-term. Job growth should also be accompanied by:

- The presence of major job-creating projects and initiatives near the downtown;
- The existence of new and expanding employers;
- Accessibility of new and existing jobs from the downtown by foot or public transportation; and
- Diversity in area job opportunities, with different salaries and entry levels and the potential for mobility between jobs.

5) **Attractive physical environment**. The downtown should be an attractive and livable community for diverse populations of varying ages, income, ability, mobility, and cultural background. The following physical properties and characteristics are desired:

- Housing at different levels of affordability and type;
- Commercial and retail main street businesses, including healthy and affordable food markets;
- Multi-modal transportation to and from employment centers, other downtowns, and/or regional attractions;
- Walkability and bikeability, within the downtown and connecting the downtown to surrounding open space networks and regional destinations;
- Accessible recreational amenities, waterfront trails, parks and gathering spaces;
- Access to health care facilities;
- Community spaces, institutions and events that reflect the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity of the population of the state;
- Academic, cultural and entertainment amenities;
- Broadband accessibility; and
- Community design and/or housing that caters to all ages.

6) **Quality of Life policies**. The municipality should already embrace or have the ability to create and implement policies that increase livability and quality of life for all New Yorkers, including:

- Planning and implementation documents that may include but are not limited to economic

development, community development, housing affordability, affirmatively furthering fair housing, and civic engagement;

- Use of modern zoning codes and development standards that promote smart growth principles such as a mix of uses, compact development, transit-oriented development, shared parking, and walkability;
- Existence of a management structure, such as a downtown manager or downtown business improvement district;
- Application of Complete Streets principles that add to the enjoyment of amenities by all abilities and ages;
- Presence of expansive non-discrimination laws and/or other protections of diverse populations;
- Application of Smart Cities innovation technology; and
- Eligibility for Age-Friendly Community Certification from AARP/WHO.

7) **Support for the local vision**. The municipality has conducted an open and robust community engagement process resulting in a vision for downtown revitalization and a preliminary list of projects and initiatives that may be included in a DRI Strategic Investment Plan. Specific local leaders and stakeholders are committed to working together to advance revitalization efforts.

8) **Readiness.** The municipality is prepared for near-term implementation of projects that will advance downtown revitalization. It has identified a range of transformative projects that will be ready for implementation with an infusion of DRI funds within the first one to two years (depending on the scope and complexity of the project) and which may leverage DRI funding with private investment or other funds. Examples of the ways project readiness may be demonstrated include, but are not limited to, completion of feasibility and market studies, preliminary site design, site control of key properties by willing partners, funding commitments, and/or expression of interest by developers and investors.

Planning Process

A Local Planning Committee (LPC) will be convened in each downtown nominated to participate in the DRI. The LPCs, made up of local and regional leaders, stakeholders, and community representatives, will guide and direct the process of developing the DRI Strategic Investment Plans. With the support of a Consulting team made up of private sector experts, and state planners, the LPC will establish a community-based vision for revitalizing the downtown and develop a Strategic Investment Plan that includes strategies and recommends projects to implement that vision. The LPC will be particularly responsible for ensuring that the priorities and interests of the community are reflected in the planning process and the resulting recommendations.

The LPC should include representatives from several interest groups and organizations, such as:

- The Regional Council in which the DRI area is located;
- A member of the DRI LPC from the region's 2016 DRI;
- Local and regional government officials;
- Neighborhood associations, homeowners, and renters;
- Property owners, local developers, and real estate agents;

- 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, such as museums, historic sites, and theaters;
- Educational institutions, including administrative and student leadership of area universities and colleges;
- Local non-profit and advocacy organizations that address quality of life, such as bicycle coalitions, park conservancies, arts organizations, and youth organizations; and
- Social and public service organizations, such as local police and health care providers, and Faith-based organizations.

LPC members will approve the downtown vision and strategies and the final DRI Strategic Investment Plan. They will be asked to agree to a Code of Conduct as a reminder that they must always act in the public interest in their role as Local Planning Committee members. All full LPC meetings must be open to the public and notice provided consistent with open meetings law and any other local requirements.

To carry out their role, LPC members will be asked to attend a variety of meetings at which they will participate in brainstorming ideas; provide direction to consultants; review planning products; evaluate projects proposed in the application; gather input from members of the community including private citizens, businesses and association; prioritize actions and projects to advance downtown revitalization. Committee members may also participate in community outreach by making presentations to other groups, distributing information, reaching out to their networks, or other public engagement activities.

The LPC is responsible for representing the interests and priorities of the community, while the state agency staff will ensure that the process and deliverables are consistent with the goals, priorities and requirements of the Initiative. In addition, the state planning team, together with the consultants, will provide the necessary expertise, guidance, and technical assistance to develop a strategic investment plan that will achieve the vision and goals for revitalization of the downtown as approved by the Local Planning Committee.

Each LPC will be assigned a state planning team consisting of staff from the Department of State (DOS) and Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). The planning team will manage the consultant team assigned to the community, ensuring that the process and deliverables are consistent with the goals, priorities and requirements of the Initiative, and facilitate assistance from other State agencies as needed.

Each team of consultants will provide the expertise and technical services required to complete a detailed and actionable Strategic Investment Plan, building on the work completed by the community during the preparation of its DRI application. Payment for the private sector planning experts will be deducted from the DRI award to the community (not to exceed $300,000 per community), with the remainder of the award dedicated to plan implementation.

The DRI planning effort will include a robust public planning process that will develop a community vision, goals, objectives, strategies and action plan. The action plan may include both large- and small-scale projects as well as a variety of initiatives and programs for achieving identified strategies.

Strategic Investment Plans

Building on the community's vision for downtown revitalization and the projects identified in the DRI application, strategic investment plans will examine local assets and opportunities, and develop detailed project profiles for key economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects that will advance the community's vision and leverage additional investment.

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

1) Creation of an active, desirable downtown with a strong sense of place;
2) Attraction of new businesses (including "Main Street" businesses), that create a robust mix of shopping, dining, entertainment and service options for residents and visitors, and that that provide job opportunities for a variety of skills and salaries ;
3) Enhancement of public spaces for arts and cultural events that serve the existing members of the community but also draw in attendees from around the region;
4) Attraction of a diverse population, with residents and workers supported by complementary diverse housing and employment opportunities;
5) Growing the local property tax base; and
6) Providing amenities that support and enhance downtown living and quality of life.

Each of the DRI communities will prepare a Strategic Implementation Plan that includes projects to advance downtown revitalization in excess of the $10 million in DRI funding available to each community. Recommended projects may range in cost and scale from small improvements to large-scale construction projects, to major infrastructure projects, but the majority of projects recommended for DRI funding should be transformative capital projects that will be shovel-ready in 2018 and that can be completed within three to five years. In addition, a community may recommend zoning updates or other regulatory or programmatic projects that are critical to downtown revitalization, however, these should not represent a significant portion of the $10 million allocated to the community.

For each proposed project that may be funded through the DRI allocation, a detailed profile will be prepared and included in the Strategic Investment Plan that presents the project in the context of the overall vision and strategies for revitalization, and describes the relationship of the project to other priority projects. Sufficient information must be presented to provide a clear path forward to implementation, including, but not limited to, a project rendering, map, estimated cost, pro forma and other financials, required permits, timeframe, project partners, and potential funding sources. The profile will describe the catalytic impact of the project, including estimates for job creation and retention, where relevant.

The State will review the DRI strategic investment plans but will not necessarily approve projects beyond those proposed for DRI funding. The purpose of presenting the full range of projects that are possible in each downtown is to get a clear understanding of leveraging opportunities and how projects and actions may be interconnected. Projects selected for DRI funding will be assigned to the appropriate state agency to manage implementation of the project. The state agency selected and method of funding disbursement will be dependent on the specific project.

DRI Application Submission

Applicants for nomination as a DRI community should submit applications as Word documents to the Regional Council for their region. Applications must be received by the appropriate Regional Council by **4:00 PM on June 14, 2017**.

Region Webpage	E-Mail Address	Region Webpage	E-Mail Address
Capital Region	NYS-CapitalDist@esd.ny.gov	Mohawk Valley	NYS-MohawkVal@esd.ny.gov
Central New York	NYS-CentralNY@esd.ny.gov	North Country	NYS-NorthCountry@esd.ny.gov
Finger Lakes	NYS-FingerLakes@esd.ny.gov	New York City	NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov
Long Island	LIREDC@esd.ny.gov	Southern Tier	NYS-SouthernTier@esd.ny.gov
Mid-Hudson	NYS-MidHudson@esd.ny.gov	Western New York	NYS-WNY-REDC@esd.ny.gov

Related Document

Downtown Revitalization Initiative Application Template – A fillable form a municipality should use to submit an application for DRI participation to the Regional Council.

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Regional Economic
Development Councils

A Division of Empire State Development

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