NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Office of Planning and Development

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

Description

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest $10 million in each of ten 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. 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 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.