



APPLICATION

Applications for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative will be received by the Regional Councils. Applicant responses for each section should be as complete and succinct as possible. Applications should be submitted as Word documents and must be received by the appropriate Regional Council by 4:00 PM on June 1, 2018 at the email address provided at the end of this application. Application guidance is provided in the *Downtown Revitalization Initiative Guidebook* found on the DRI website at www.ny.gov/dri.

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Long Island

Municipality Name: Town of Babylon

Downtown Name: Copiague

County Name: Suffolk

Vision for Downtown. Provide a brief statement of the municipality's vision for downtown revitalization.

To convert downtown Copiague into a vibrant place where people can walk, shop, relax, interact and spend time in a cohesive environment, and where the viability of the area is supported through strong local businesses and active residents.

JUSTIFICATION

Provide an overview of the downtown area nominated for the DRI program, highlighting the area's defining characteristics and the reasons for its selection. Explain why the downtown is ready for Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) investment, and how that investment would serve as a catalyst to bring about revitalization.

Buildings in downtown Copiague are a mix of new and old, where Polish delis and dollar stores stand with a recently-constructed, high-quality apartment building that abuts single family homes from the 1950s. Copiague's present and not-so-distant past included junk yards and auto garages within easy eye distance of Main Street, thanks to the outer edges of the downtown supporting light industry. While Copiague may not yet be a destination, businesses here have loyal customers and there are very few store fronts ever vacant.

In 2017, the Town of Babylon started a number of small planning efforts to improve the look of existing downtown buildings and increase the quality of any new buildings. In a little over a year, these planning efforts, *Babylon Better Main Streets* and the *Copiague Façade Improvement Program* have yielded \$7 million dollars in private development and building renovations from a Town investment of \$148,000.

There is an additional \$6 million in new development that is in the site planning phase. Because of this interest, the Town recently spent \$20,000 to hire a consultant to help with curb side management of parking, and to create a new paid parking program in conjunction with Long Island Railroad. This will help balance commuter parking throughout the Babylon line, and is one step to an integrated approach to managing the downtown's success. However, the Town needs assistance understanding the best approaches to mitigating downtown motor vehicle traffic while also improving pedestrian safety.

Downtown Copiague is changing for the better and is in great need of guidance to direct future efforts. The Town would like to use the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) investment to develop a street based comprehensive plan that directs and prioritizes projects while also revitalizing the street network. With the professional assistance offered through the DRI initiative, the downtown can grow smartly and make better use of its existing transit network.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the list of desired attributes for participation in the DRI as set forth in the *Downtown Revitalization Initiative Guidebook*.

- 1) Boundaries of the proposed DRI area.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be concentrated and well-defined. 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 that clearly delineates the area to be included in the downtown revitalization area.

The boundary of the proposed DRI area has been modified since our last application to include parcels further east and west. This new proposed boundary follows the urban renewal area for Copiague and is comprised of 125 acres.

The proposed DRI area is generally located at Marconi Boulevard to the north, Strong Avenue to the east, Hollywood Avenue to the south, and Bayview Avenue to the west. The western portion of the project area crosses the border between the hamlet of Copiague and the Village of Amityville.

A map of the area is attached as the last page of this application.

2) Description of catchment area. Outline why the proposed DRI area, 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 destination.

In 2010, the hamlet of Copiague was home to 22,993 residents. The hamlet is one of the 11 hamlets and three villages that make up the Town of Babylon (population: 213,603). The downtown train station is part of the Babylon Branch, the busiest branch of the Long Island Railroad with 24,660 commuters during the daily morning commute, and 25,990 riders on a standard Saturday. These numbers represent ridership for 2016. The Babylon Branch provides services to Montauk, allowing residents and visitors to Copiague to easily travel to Manhattan or points east.

3) Past Investment, future investment potential. Describe how this DRI area will be able to capitalize on prior private and public investment, or catalyze future investments in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

On September 28, 2017, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for Copiague Commons, a 90-unit affordable housing project spearheaded by the Town, Conifer Realty and CDC Long Island. This \$34 million project marked the beginning of the housing renaissance in downtown Copiague.

In 2018, the hamlet of Copiague saw \$7 million in private investments in new rental housing and improvements to existing business facades. These new rental units are market rate with 20% affordable under HUD. In addition, there is \$6 million in new construction coming in at the end of this year/beginning of next year as mixed use buildings and residential only buildings. The Town has worked with the developers of all of these buildings to make sure there is an appropriate number of smaller, affordable units as well as the 20% affordable units under HUD.

These buildings mark the beginning of a downtown housing renaissance in Copiague, as each new structure begets additional interest by prospective developers and current business owners. To capitalize on the momentum achieved thanks to the adoption of the Downtown Copiague zoning district, the Town hired consultants to develop the first ever façade improvement program to augment the guidelines of the zoning district. Currently the façade improvement program has seven participating businesses.

At the street level, the Town is investing \$200,000 in streetscaping this summer/fall and has committed the same amount of funding for 2019. An additional \$200,000 in grant monies will be used this summer to complete the first phase of the Copiague Great Streets project.

All of these investments were brought upon by Town staff working with local business owners and developers to create growth in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. With the award of the DRI investment, the Town could leverage these additional resources to develop a strategic implementation plan to better focus the revitalization effort.

- 4) Recent or impending job growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within or near the DRI area will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

People living in Downtown Copiague have opportunities to work within walking distance of their homes, take the train or bus to the numerous jobs along the Route 110 business corridor, or to take the LIRR for the one hour commute into the City. Residents are within 34 miles of John F. Kennedy, LaGuardia and MacArthur airports, as well as Port Jefferson, home of the high speed ferries to Connecticut. Combine these numerous transportation options with a burgeoning cost-effective housing market, existing bakeries, butcher shops, and restaurants selling the traditional foods of Poland, Italy and the Dominican Republic, and one sees an interesting and attractive downtown for all ages and abilities, is apparent.

The Town of Babylon has an unemployment rate of 4.3% (April, 2018), a job growth rate of 1.76% and a long-term employment projection of an 11% growth between 2012 and 2022 (New York State Department of Labor Statistics).

The Town of Babylon's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) is pivotal in developing local economies and creating jobs throughout the Town. The IDA helped provide the financial incentives for Copiague Commons, a 90-unit affordable housing project on Railroad Avenue in Copiague. This project provided construction jobs, but perhaps more importantly it provides affordable housing next to the LIRR station, creating access to employment without necessarily needing a car. The Office of Downtown Revitalization works closely with the IDA to support redevelopment of parcels in the DRI area.

In addition, the Town is starting a new small business council to provide peer-to-peer coaching, networking and new skills training in an effort to bring long-term sustainable growth.

- 5) Attractiveness of physical environment.** Identify the properties or characteristics that the DRI area possesses that contribute, or could contribute if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown for a diverse population of varying ages, income, gender identity, ability, mobility, and cultural background. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, varied housing types at different levels of affordability, walkability and bikeability, healthy and affordable food markets, and public parks and gathering spaces.

The commercial and retail main street businesses in Downtown Copiague strongly reflect the diverse population of residents from the Dominican Republic, Poland and Italy. Residents are drawn by the affordability of housing, both single family and newer apartments above Main Street businesses, and the proximity to major employers locally and regionally that is available via the Long Island Railroad, Suffolk County Transit buses, and Suffolk County Accessible Transportation.

Downtown Copiague is a 15-minute bicycle ride to Tanner Park, a beautiful Town-owned facility located on the Great South Bay. Residents and visitors can also take the train further east to enjoy the beaches in the Hamptons. Tanner Park offers a concert series in the summer months, and has numerous recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

The density of the downtown promotes biking and walking to run errands, though the lack of safe places to cross the street has been noted as an impediment to more discretionary trips using these modes.

6) Quality of Life policies. 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, comprehensive plans, complete streets plan, transit-oriented development, non-discrimination laws, age-friendly policies, and a downtown management structure. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

The purpose of the Copiague Vision Plan, and the extensive list of related projects implementing the plan, is putting forward the best possible projects to improve the quality of life and health outcomes for people of all ages, abilities and income levels living and visiting downtown Copiague. The Office of Downtown Revitalization implemented a significant tenet of the Copiague Vision Plan with the adoption of the Downtown Copiague zoning district. This zoning district promotes affordable housing, housing density in proximity to transit, mixed-use buildings and development that does not hinge on high parking calculations. The zoning offers incentives for shared parking agreements and density bonuses for housing within 500 feet of the train station.

The Town vigorously promotes and builds affordable housing in downtown Copiague by teaming with the Community Development Corporation of Long Island (CDCLI) and the Long Island Housing partnership. In addition, the Town is working on a new affordable housing policy requiring developers to build one unit of affordable housing per five units of housing, and will not accept payment in lieu of construction, closing a significant gap in the Long Island Workforce housing law.

The Copiague Blight Study, adopted by the Town Board in March 2017, determined that Copiague still has some areas, particularly east of the railroad tracks, which contribute to a blighted area. The Office of Downtown Revitalization has completed a draft Urban Renewal Plan offering recommendations on options for mitigating these areas.

In absolutely every case, the active and committed community has helped to create and shepherd the quality of life policies that keep Copiague going. The Downtown Copiague Implementation Committee, made up of representatives of 14 community and civic organizations, will play a significant role in managing the projects and the expectations that come with the DRI investments.

7) Public Support. Describe the public participation and engagement process conducted to develop the DRI application, and the support of local leaders and stakeholders for pursuing a vision of downtown revitalization. Describe the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to preparing and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a DRI Local Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

In putting together this application, the Office of Downtown Revitalization worked hand-in-hand with the Copiague Chamber of Commerce, Copiague Beautification Society, Copiague Façade Improvement Committee, business owners along Great Neck Road, Oak Street and Marconi Boulevard, Supervisor Rich Schaffer, Councilmember Tony Martinez and the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and

Planning. New York State Assembly member Kimberly Jean-Pierre and Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory have been active partners throughout this process.

There is the highest level of commitment among local leaders, local community members, and local business owners to create a collaborative team to achieve all of the goals of the local DRI Planning Committee. The initial local lead for the program will be Amy Pfeiffer, the Director of the Office of Downtown Revitalization, with direct assistance from the initial community lead, Sharon Fattoruso, the President of the Copiague Chamber of Commerce.

8) Project List to Demonstrate Readiness: Describe opportunities to build on the strengths described above by providing a list 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. Such projects could address economic development, transportation, housing, and community development needs. While such projects should have demonstrated public support, it is recognized that projects will ultimately be vetted by the Local Planning Committee and the State. Explain how most projects proposed for DRI funding demonstrate their readiness for implementation.

The intention of the Town in applying for DRI funding is to focus on three transformative projects that can leverage additional outside funding, be implemented in the first years of the program, and meet the goals of the Downtown Revitalization program. These three transformative projects include:

1. The improvement, expansion and pricing of downtown parking
2. The implementation of a street network that reduces congestion in the downtown district during peak travel periods
3. The introduction of quality public space and renovated buildings in place of blighted properties

For better or worse, parking is one of the most important issues phasing traditional downtown development. After reviewing several recent parking studies, it has been determined that the supply of available on-street and off-street parking should be increased, either by expanding access to existing parking areas, creating new parking in peripheral areas and/or pricing parking to establish higher turnover rates. By determining the right mix of pricing, availability and location, the Town will hopefully need to build less new parking, and will see fewer accidents between motorists looking for parking and pedestrians. A good parking plan will make the entire downtown operate more smoothly.

An optimal network of streets and roadway connections in downtown Copiague would consider the access points, parking areas and spur streets running to and through the LIRR train trestle on the east side of the train platform. This network would also link pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists to a secondary street network that alleviates some congestion on the primary streets. While the Town has made definite progress identifying mitigation measures, a more thorough look at how the roadways are used and by whom, would help the downtown streets. If more people get out of their cars and walking on Great Neck Road, there would be more shopping and cohesion between residents and their neighbors and neighborhood while reducing traffic.

One piece of the Copiague Vision Plan that has not yet been addressed is the creation of high-quality downtown public spaces as an amenity for the downtown area. It is thought that well-designed public spaces

can help offset the visual burden imposed by the elevated tracks running through the downtown area. Developing the public spaces in tandem with the renovation of buildings should produce the atmosphere by local residents. The work of establishing a public space plan as a section of an overall street-based guidance document for the hamlet will go a long way in creating sustainable growth in downtown Copiague.

9) Administrative Capacity. Describe the extent of the existing local administrative capacity to manage this initiative, including potential oversight of concurrent contracts once projects are selected for award.

The Town of Babylon’s Office of Downtown Revitalization will spearhead this effort, with additional assistance from the Department of Planning and Building and the Babylon Industrial Development Agency. The Office of Downtown Revitalization has led similar successful efforts in the hamlet of Wyandanch and East Farmingdale

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

Winning the DRI award for the hamlet of Copiague is the difference between making this area operate at its highest potential and having a few nice stores around a train station.



EMAIL SUBMISSION ADDRESSES

Please submit your application as a Word Document to the Regional Council for your region.

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