Downtown Revitalization Initiative

“Downtown Staten Island”

A Proposal for the Creation and Long-Term Operation of a Business Improvement District in St. George, Tompkinsville & Stapleton

Submitted by the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation
Attn: Steven Grillo, First Vice-President
718.477.1400 ext 812
Downtown Revitalization Initiative
Application Template

BASIC INFORMATION
Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: New York City
Municipality Name: Staten Island
Downtown Name: Downtown Staten Island (St. George, Stapleton & Tompkinsville)
County: Richmond County

I. VISION FOR DOWNTOWN:
In St. George, Tompkinsville, Stapleton neighborhoods, major projects are currently underway that will transform Staten Island’s North Shore waterfront from an often dormant civic center which sees a flight of workers at 5:00PM to a thriving, world-class tourist, retail and dining destination. Through significant capital investment supported by the Regional Council for projects including the New York Wheel, Empire Outlets and Lighthouse Point as well as policy recommendations and planning initiatives such as the Bay Street Corridor rezoning

The Staten Island Economic Development Corporation (SIEDC) has been intimately involved in the development of St. George and surrounding neighborhoods for over a decade. SIEDC originally proposed the repurposing of the parking lots at the ferry terminal which led to the development of the New York Wheel and Empire Outlets, worked closely with Lighthouse Point to apply through the Consolidated Funding Application to secure significant tax benefits in 2016 and has served on the planning team for the New York City Economic Development Corporation’s Bay Street Rezoning effort. Additionally, SIEDC is the leading group on Staten Island in terms of merchant organizing, having created three Business Improvement Districts and four merchant associations in the past five years which outpaces all other groups in the borough combined.

Based on this organizational experience and the rapid and expansive growth of the North Shore, SIEDC proposes utilizing Downtown Revitalization Initiative funds to create a scaleable Business Improvement District plan starting in St. George and expanding to Tompkinsville and Stapleton respectively. This is a critical opportunity for smart development and business-friendly and proactive planning on the North Shore and a concept which can greatly improve the future opportunities of the downtown district.
II. JUSTIFICATION:
St. George is the historic central business district and government hub for Staten Island. St. George and the adjacent neighborhoods of Tompkinsville and Stapleton form the centerpiece of the development effort on the North Shore and are generally considered to be “Downtown Staten Island.” The three neighborhoods are connected by the Bay Street Corridor which runs approximately 1.8 miles between the Staten Island Ferry Terminal and Vanderbilt Avenue in the southeast. This proposal also includes a 1 mile stretch of Richmond Terrace between the terminal and Jersey Street to the northwest.

The neighborhoods serve as the gateway to the borough from the Staten Island Ferry and Bay Street and the area is undergoing a $1 billion redevelopment thanks to public and private investment in major capital projects. The New York Wheel, Empire Outlets and Lighthouse Point along the St. George waterfront and the residential and mixed use development at Urby in Stapleton are known has the “Core Four” and have paved the way for a renaissance on the North Shore.

Additionally, over a dozen critically important social, cultural and community destinations are within the district. Richmond County Bank Ballpark (home of the Staten Island Yankees), the Staten Island Museum, historic St. George Theatre and National Lighthouse Museum are exciting local tourist destinations which highlight the history and fiber of Staten Island. Five business incubators including the SIEDC’s North Shore Incubator and the College of Staten Island’s recently opened Technology Incubator host many small and start-up firms eager to call Staten Island – and the North Shore – home. Other destinations including the borough’s first craft brewery – Flagship Brewery – located at the recently redeveloped Minthorne Street building which also boats a British pub and barbeque restaurant as well as the 5050 Skatepark.

The three neighborhoods are particularly unique and distinct in their own rights, but when connected can create a remarkable and vibrant shopping, dining and cultural opportunity for Staten Island. Over 25,000 residents call the area home and thousands of others come on a daily basis for work or transit.

St. George is a bustling civic center with thousands of government workers and over 70,000 ferry passengers a day bustling along the streets. Tompkinsville is the true gateway to the rest of the borough from St. George as the major thoroughfare – Victory Boulevard starts next to quaint but underutilized Tompkinsville Park. Further down Bay Street from the ferry terminal, Stapleton is a rapidly growing neighborhood with a mix of unique former industrial spaces, historic buildings and the new residential development – Urby – at the former Navy Homeport.

However, where the three neighborhoods and the overall Downtown Staten Island district suffer is as much of the rest of the borough does – with a lack of master planning and connectivity. Based on SIEDC’s unparalleled local experience in merchant organizing, this application requests funding to create a long term plan and implementation for the creation and operation of a Business Improvement District in these three neighborhoods.
III. DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

1) Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood:
The positive impact of the “Core Four” projects is reaching across the borough. Significant media attention has been afforded to the borough and retail and industrial corridors on the east, west and south shores have all begun to benefit from the news of the major projects. While this distinction is beneficial for Staten Island as a whole, Downtown Staten Island still requires significant real world planning and project implementation if it is going to truly transform itself into a true central business district.

Smart planning dictates that we incorporate more than just St. George’s waterfront into long term decision making. Therefore, this funding would support a macro-downtown radiating from St. George to include Tompkinsville and Stapleton as well. The western boundary of the district would be Jersey Street in St. George while the eastern boundary would be Vanderbilt Avenue in Stapleton. SIEDC recognizes the importance of spreading the benefits of the St. George waterfront investments to other parts of the North Shore and across the borough.

The creation of a macro-downtown in St. George, Tompkinsville and Stapleton has the ability to enhance large-scale and long-term benefits for all of Staten Island. Included in this proposal is a map of cultural institutions and other important sites in the proposed district

Source: New York City Department of Small Business Services Neighborhood 360 Program, 2017
2) Catchment Area:
As there are three distinct neighborhoods that comprise the proposed downtown district, this submission also asserts that there are three distinct inland catchment areas.

The St. George catchment area extends west from the ferry terminal along Richmond Terrace towards the neighborhoods of Randall Manor, West Brighton and New Brighton. While there are pockets of low income and public housing projects within the catchment area, these neighborhoods are traditionally affluent enclaves of the North Shore. Valuable community and cultural institutions including Sailor’s Snug Harbor and the Staten Island Museum are along this corridor and it is a vital economic development goal not only to drive tourists to these destinations from St. George but also to help attract these residents to the commercial opportunities of the downtown district. The creation of a Business Improvement District with the goal of expanding marketing and direction to the catchment areas would be highly beneficial.

The Tompkinsville catchment area serves the Victory Boulevard corridor which is one of the most travelled roads on Staten Island. Victory Boulevard is a key connector between the inland North Shore and the downtown district. It is a natural desire and expectation that businesses and residential development will extend from Minthorne Street and Tompkinsville Park along Victory Boulevard and thereby creating a critical connection. However, varied land use and limited parking among other issues have historically limited development along this portion of Victory Boulevard. A Business Improvement District plan along Bay Street could potentially feed into Victory Boulevard and the surrounding commercial strips which could promote collective marketing, address land use and parking issues and create a cluster of businesses as an extension of the downtown district.

The Stapleton catchment area extends down the Bay Street corridor and inland to the Clifton and Concord neighborhoods. While there is an expectation that the development in St. George and the residential Urby project at the former Navy Homeport will promote moderate gentrification and spin-off real estate investment, Clifton and Concord will face significant development challenges. Historically low income minority and recent immigrant communities, these neighborhoods have a high number of public housing locations as well as limited retail services. A long term strategic effort to diversify the commercial corridors in these two neighborhoods by leveraging the Stapleton development could be a strong benefit to residents.
3) Past Investment & Future Investment Potential:
The proposed downtown district is without question the fastest growing area of the borough. Major projects, new real estate investment and a demand for businesses to locate in the area has transformed the image of Staten Island from a sleepy suburban enclave of New York City to a borough poised for unprecedented expansion. However, as with any area expecting to grow as rapidly as downtown Staten Island, a management plan is needed to address this investment and growth to ensure that all residents and businesses have a voice in the process and expectations of developers match the needs of the community for long-term benefit.

The downtown district is a rapidly growing area with remarkable potential to support a year-round commercial, residential and cultural destination. The robust economic indicators in the area include 31,000 residents, 4,000 daily workers, 70,000 daily ferry riders, 5,000 daily tourists and the potential of 4.5 million new visitors once the New York Wheel, Empire Outlets and Lighthouse Point projects are completed over the next 18 months.

Downtown Staten Island has seen an unprecedented surge in new housing units in the last few years. Major transformative projects include the 115 units at Lighthouse Pointe, the full development of the five buildings at Bay Street Landing including the 101-unit “Accolade”, “The Pointe” at 155 Bay Street with is a 57-unit luxury development,” a major planned development at the former Fish’s Eddy building at 139 Bay Street and nearly 300 units being built along Bay Street in Stapleton.

The area boasts many diverse strengths from an economic development planning perspective. The waterfront location and views of New York Harbor and the Manhattan skyline have led to over $1 billion in investment via major projects but also increased real estate investment and development as a result of catalytic projects. The Staten Island Ferry is one of the top five tourist attractions in New York City and transports 70,000 daily passengers which because of a lack of merchant organizing and long term planning, do not access the downtown district and provide a commercial benefit. While the proposed district has many businesses which have called the neighborhood home for decades as well as a strong presence of government workers, there are also a number of new co-working and incubator spaces as well as art and cultural locations which have helped bring a new young professional demographic to the area.
4) Recent or Impending Job Growth

According the New York City Department of Small Business Services’ Neighborhood 360 report which published in early 2017, Downtown Staten Island remains a fascinating paradox. While recent development has resulted in significant growth in the commercial sector, indicators including median household income and unemployment remain challenges for local residents.

The major waterfront projects have produced a positive trend for both construction and permanent jobs in the area. The “Core Four” of the New York Wheel, Empire Outlets, Lighthouse Point and Urby will or have already created 3,000 construction jobs and over 1,600 jobs once the projects are completed. This staggering figure is an indicator of the demand that exists for a competent and local workforce. This is especially important when considering commuting trends on the North Shore. Only 350 residents reported to the Neighborhood 360 study that they both live and work within the district. Over 9,000 residents work elsewhere and strong employment opportunities developed by the Business Improvement District to connect local employees with local jobs is a critical community improvement.

Businesses within the district make $290 million in retail sales annually, however $298 million is spent outside the area. Grocery stores, clothing stores, and gasoline stations represent over $100 million in local financial intake – demonstrating a lack of diversity of successful businesses including restaurants, specialty food stores, health and human services and other retailers which need to be attracted to the area through a comprehensive merchant organizing effort. Furthermore, according the study, only 33% of shoppers in Downtown Staten Island spend more than $50 during a normal trip and there is a significant demand for higher end products including healthy food options, fresh produce, bakeries, coffee shops and arts and entertainment for families including a theater.

To address these issues, this proposal believes that a Business Improvement District with a strong management and oversight plan as well as experiences marketing and real estate abilities can utilize the benefits of the area while addressing the clearly demonstrated needs of the community. With thousands of square feet of commercial office space, Downtown Staten Island can offer businesses a more affordable option than many other business districts, easy access to Manhattan, Brooklyn, New Jersey and the rest of Staten Island, and broadband connectivity that is among the best in the country, making it especially attractive to tech companies.
5) Attractiveness of the Physical Environment

As with local job growth, Downtown Staten Island presents interesting contracts in terms of the physical environment. While most of the development in the area was inspired by the remarkable views of New York Harbor and access to the waterfront, many of the inland areas struggle to maintain an appealing appearance. According to the Neighborhood 360 study, an analysis of the Bay Street corridor in Tompkinsville and Stapleton revealed that 70% of storefronts were in either “poor” or “average” condition. Litter and sidewalk cleanliness is a major issue and the high vacancy rate (21% on average for the three neighborhoods) breaks up the continuity of the shopping districts. There is also a significant need for lighting especially in Stapleton and Tompkinsville where there are many “punch-through” streets, former industrial sites, railroad trestles and storage yards. This proposal recommends a significant investment in sidewalk beautification including tree pit maintenance, private maintenance vendors, street furniture, public art and wayfinding signage to encourage walking and biking throughout the district organized by the Business Improvement District.

Of particular importance to the long term planning for the area is a combination of recommendations including improved walkable areas in St. George due to its hilly and disconnected terrain, more affordable housing stock to increase residential density and activity and better connectivity and cooperation among parks, recreation spaces and the waterfront.

This whole area is walkable, but the current configuration of businesses makes the waterfront feel cut-off from the rest of the community. A Business Improvement District would be focused on draw the community up the hill in St. George to businesses along Hyatt Street and Stuyvesant Place among others. Through public art installations directing people upward, historic walking paths, or enticing and directive signage, there is a need for this effort. This work should be coordinated by a local Business Improvement District that works in conjunction with developers and city agencies.

Downtown Staten Island has a variety of housing uses and stocks. There are large apartment buildings, public housing, modern waterfront apartments, older second story living accommodations above stores and historic mansions. It is critical that an effective and equitable housing plan be established that maintains the character of the neighborhoods but also provides for affordable housing opportunities and innovative adaptive re-use of vacant spaces. The Business Improvement District can analyze housing development opportunities in Downtown Staten Island – especially those which can be coupled with Transit Oriented Development.

Additional recreation opportunities include revitalizing/relocating the deteriorated Cromwell Center, finishing the pedestrian esplanade between Bay Street Landing and the ferry terminal, developing community gardens and non-traditional park space in vacant lots in Tompkinsville and Stapleton and developing an outdoor recreation site in proximity and conjunction with the waterfront. Tompkinsville Park, the Van Duzer Street Triangle, Lyons Pool and Tappen Park all represent opportunities for an organized effort for collective park improvements in a portion of the borough which has some of the worst open space access in the city.
6) Quality of Life Policies
Historically transportation issues have hampered development and quality of life in Downtown Staten Island. Effective planning for roads and mass transit, utilizing water-borne transportation and advocating for non-traditional and innovative projects such as the North Shore Bus Rapid Transit system, the North Shore High Line in Port Richmond and the SI Gondola from Elm Park to Bayonne are critical aspects when discussing the future of the district.

Other lower-impact transportation improvements should also be incorporated into this plan including activating the waterfront esplanade as an established and maintained pedestrian and bicycle greenway. The greenway would allow for potential future expansion throughout the entire North Shore and the creation of safe and efficient bike lanes on commercial corridors including Front Street in Stapleton. Planning is currently underway for the conversion of Bank Street into a large community walkway along the waterfront.

Specific to the Business Improvement District, the entity would focus on four specific sectors relating to improving quality of life – marketing and access, overall beautification, community development and business assistance.

Marketing & Access
- Way Finding & Signage Improvements
- Shuttle Bus/Bikeshare Program/Carshare
- Website, Events Schedule, Business Directory & Information Kiosks
- Temporary Art Exhibitions
- Vehicle Free Streets
- Waterfront Programs and Water Events

Overall Beautification
- Street Cleaning, Private Security & Graffiti Removal
- Banners & Street Lighting
- Tree Plantings

Community Development
- Housing Seminars
- Personal Lending Programs
- Business Development Programs/Incubator
- Senior Care Services
- Inventory of Available Residential & Commercial Space

Business Assistance
- Real Estate Assistance for Commercial Businesses
- Local Job Training
- Access to Micro-Lending
- Job Training and Placement for Local Residents
7) Support for the Local Vision
For many years there has been a lack of continuity between government agencies, residents, community stakeholders and businesses in the downtown area. Numerous groups have tried to create a path forward for Downtown Staten Island and all have failed. However, the recent investment in capital projects has promoted strong leadership and a clear vision. Central to this is SIEDC’s role through a variety of mechanisms.

SIEDC staff also serves on the Bay Street Corridor Technical Advisory Committee assembled by the New York City Department of City Planning and the New York City Economic Development Corporation as well as the committee for the Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Report for Stapleton produced by the New York City Office of Environmental Remediation. SIEDC is a partner with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to advance the goals addressed in the Neighborhood 360 study and is eager to work with local stakeholders including the College of Staten Island, Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership, Staten Island Arts and others.

Additionally, SIEDC is the most successful group in the borough in terms of neighborhood development. SIEDC has created three of the four Business Improvement Districts on Staten Island and serves over 1,000 businesses through its merchant programs including providing over $200,000 in supplemental services annually including marketing, grant writing and advocacy, beautification, maintenance and security.

8) Readiness
The timing of this grant opportunity combined with the creation of a Business Improvement District could not be better. Downtown Staten Island is in the process of substantial growth and the catalytic projects are being built as we speak. For over a decade Staten Island was ready and willing to embrace these efforts but today these efforts are exceptionally real. A combined effort between private developers, local stakeholders and a Business Improvement District would position Downtown Staten Island to finally be competitive with other areas of New York City. It would be an incredible missed opportunity to not create a three neighborhood program to provide strategic planning and management in conjunction with unprecedented development.
9) Administrative Capacity
The SIEDC is the leading business development and advocacy group in the borough. Since 1993, SIEDC has been working with businesses large and small to develop an effective plan for the future of Staten Island’s economy. SIEDC has overseen the creation of three of the four Business Improvement Districts on Staten Island and manages four other merchant groups which represent over 900 businesses in total.

SIEDC has been contracted by a number of City and State agencies to perform contract work including funding from Empire State Development to study the West Shore Light Rail transportation plan and the creation of an incubator program which led to over 20 businesses being serviced in three locations.

SIEDC is the Industrial Business Zone coordinator for the New York City Department of Small Business Services which administers financing, tax incentive program enrollment, employee training and navigating government services. SIEDC representatives have also served on countless committees including the New York City Regional Council, Governor Cuomo’s New York Rising, New York City Economic Development Corporation’s Bay Street Corridor Technical Advisory Committee and the Downtown Staten Island Commercial District Needs Assessment Committee on behalf of the Department of Small Business Service’s Neighborhood 360 program.