

Downtown Revitalization Initiative In Focus

The Role of Public Art and Artist Housing in Downtown Revitalization



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Initiative
In Focus — A SERIES

Governor Kathy Hochul's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) is transforming downtown neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. Recognizing that companies are increasingly seeking to relocate and invest in vibrant, walkable downtowns in an effort to attract and retain a talented workforce, DRI is an investment to improve the vitality of urban centers across New York State.



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Rome's **Capitol Complex** has once again become an anchor for the arts and downtown vitality.

Art is Economic Development

Art isn't just hip. It's an economic boon.

A recent study found that the arts sector contributed \$763.6 billion to the US economy—which is more than agriculture or transportation.

Art + Affordable Housing = Community Revitalization.

Simple formula; profound results... And we're seeing this equation unfold in several DRI communities.

Artists are often priced out of the housing and retail market in many cities, which is unfortunate, given the tremendous contribution they can make to local economic development and downtown quality-of-life. People just like to be around art and artists. And when you begin to attract people back to your downtown, you set in motion an upward trajectory of economic development, downtown revitalization and quality-of-life.

It's not just the presence of artists that contributes to revitalization. Public art is also becoming an effective tool for downtown revitalization—what has come to be known as “creative place-making.”

Mara Manus, Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, said:

“In New York State, the arts play a central and catalytic role in our communities. From Brooklyn to Buffalo, we have seen how our cultural sector is a transformative economic engine and a driver of community vibrancy that attracts new residents, businesses and travelers. As we make the arts integral to the Downtown Revitalization Initiative through creative placemaking projects, we create a world of opportunity for sustainable growth.”

So how do we weave art and artists into the fabric of our downtown revitalization efforts?

Several DRI communities are answering this question for us by incorporating artist housing and public art in their revitalization plans and projects, including Rome, Oneonta, Albany and Peekskill...

ROME

With a name like Rome, how could you not embrace the arts?

Capitol Complex

Rome is home to the Capitol Complex, which is being developed and modeled after Proctors Theatre in Schenectady.

The Capitol Complex, formerly Capitol Theatre, includes a large performance and movie theatre, a dance studio and 2 small screens that show both current releases, independent films, and former box office movies. The Capitol is the heartbeat of the emerging Arts District and is further supported by the REACH (Rome Entertainment Art Culture and History) Center, Fort Stanwix National Monument and several music studios and small main street businesses.



Rome's Capitol Theatre

Public Art Fund

As part of the DRI, Rome also created a Business Assistance & Public Art Fund. (Note that they combined “business” and “art” in the name—which just goes to the fact that art contributes to economic development.) The Public Art Fund is devoted to art that will be installed publicly throughout the DRI area, with priority given to an already-established West Dominick Street Arts and Culture District. Eligible projects include paintings, murals, landscapes, earth-works, sculptures, statues, monuments, photographs, drawings and collages. The City has been working with a committee of local experts, enthusiasts and stakeholders to see that the monies dedicated to the program are utilized in a way that leverages other sources of funding and art above and beyond the initial DRI investment.

Developer Ken Kearney is building mixed-income artist housing in several DRIs. Here's how he explained his vision for Copper City Lofts in Rome:

“The foundation of that was an influx of people in the artist community... we go to Peekskill and we go to Poughkeepsie and we have two vacant lots in qualified Census tracts—that's an area of high poverty and high unemployment, no investment. So how do you create a synergy to get private capital in here, how do you get more synergy, more people walking around. We said let's put some artists and middle-income, and it seems to have worked.”

”

The grant application for the Public Art Fund says it all: “Public art is a strong part of Rome’s history, part of our evolving culture, and adds meaning to our city. Effective public art creates a vibrant and invigorated downtown urban core.” ‘Nuff said!

Copper City Lofts

Rome is also moving on a 64-unit mixed-use artist housing project funded in part through the DRI called Copper City Lofts. The project is being built on a vacant lot across from City Hall. The developer, Ken Kearney, is combining artists with both low- and middle-income units to provide a mix of incomes and tenants. Of the 64 units, 50 would include a preference for artists.



Rendering of Copper City Lofts

Bus Shelter

Rome has also built art and architectural elements into its public realm to further showcase the downtown as an arts district. A bus shelter in downtown includes architectural components of the Fort Stanwix National Monument, an iconic structure in Rome.



This bus shelter takes its architectural cues from the Fort Stanwix National Monument

ONEONTA

Lofts at Dietz Street

The Oneonta DRI created a Downtown Improvement Fund. The Fund was established in part for projects that are “transformative” in nature. The Lofts at Dietz Street artist space is one such transformative project.

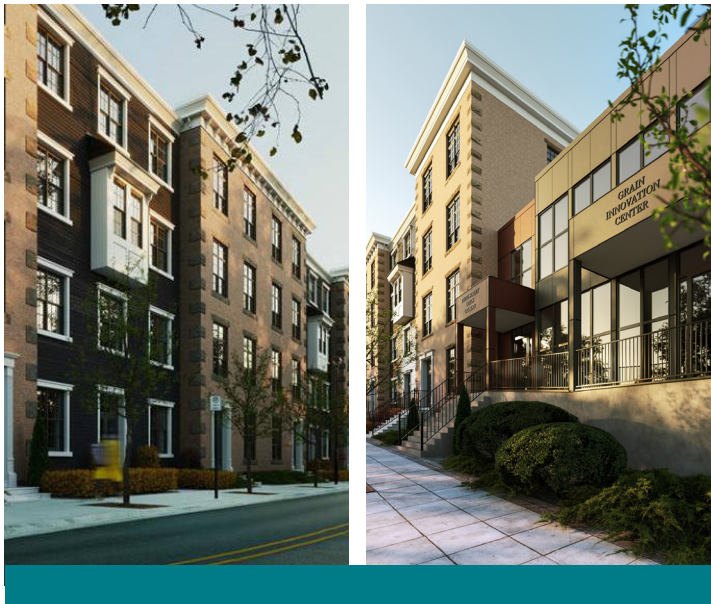
The Lofts will be a mixed-use project that includes up to 64 housing units—44 of which would have a preference for those involved in artistic or literary activities; the remaining units would be middle-income housing made possible by utilizing the State’s innovative Middle-Income Housing Program.

The new building takes the space of 50 parking spots in an existing underutilized parking lot. The developer they chose has a proven track record of developing similar projects in Poughkeepsie, Beacon and Peekskill and soon in Lockport, NY, with funding from their DRI.

To top it all off, Hartwick College has agreed to use space in the project for their new “Grain Innovation Center,” where they’ll be a regional source for testing out grains, hops, barley and other beer brewing grains.

Art, housing and beer—a powerful combination!

Oneonta did their homework on this one. They envisioned downtown as an arts hub in their Comprehensive Plan—so it started with good planning. And the Mayor led a delegation of developers, business owners and city council members on a tour of one of the developer’s other signature projects—The Lofts on Main Street in Peekskill, NY, also a DRI community (see Peekskill, below).



Lofts at Dietz is home to Hartwick College’s Grain Innovation Center

ALBANY

Clinton Square Studio

Similarly, the Albany DRI is providing \$2 million for the “Clinton Square Studio Project—a Live, Work and Exhibition Space for the Capital Region’s artist community.” Clinton Square Studio will be a new six-story, mixed-use building consisting of 66 affordable live/work lofts exclusively for artists and ground-floor retail and community spaces. The project will attract artists from across the region; provide a gallery and event space to draw visitors to the neighborhood’s emerging entertainment scene; and create ten housing units for performers and crewmembers from the nearby Capital Repertory Theatre. And it doesn’t hurt that it’s right up the block from the historic Palace Theater—the anchor cultural and entertainment institution in the Clinton Square neighborhood.



Clinton Square Studios (before/after)

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Capital Walls

The Albany DRI is also providing funding for Capital Walls—a public art initiative run by the Albany City Gallery—that will commission four large-scale mural projects on highly visible walls within Clinton Square. The murals will create a sense of place and add character to an important gateway to downtown Albany.

PEEKSKILL

Lofts on Main

The Peekskill DRI does not include an artist housing project... because they've already done one! The Lofts on Main Street project has enlivened the downtown area and, in many ways, laid the groundwork for the city's successful DRI award.

The Lofts, which obtained LEED Gold certification, includes 75 housing units—50 of which have a preference for those involved in artistic or literary activities; the remaining lofts are for middle-income households. The Lofts also has four retail/restaurant spaces, one of which is occupied by a locally owned and operated bakery. The lobby of The Lofts is designed as an art gallery to showcase the resident artists' wares. □



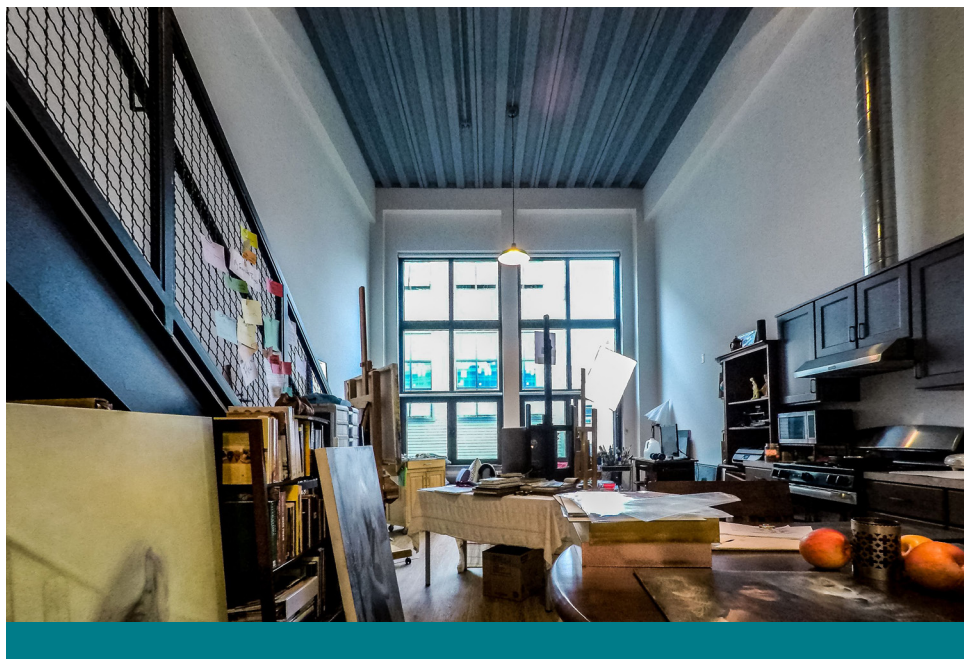
Mural titled "Escape to Nature: Where Peace Awaits," by Capital Region-based visual designer Jade Warrick (Source: Capitalize Albany)

**New York Governor
Kathy Hochul said:**

“The new Lofts on Main is more than just a building – it is a recognition that painters, photographers, musicians and more enrich our society while driving tourism and economic vitality.”

**Developer Ken Kearney, from
Kearney Realty & Development
Group, said:**

“The Lofts on Main was one of the first developments to utilize the State’s innovative Middle-Income Housing Program. This program has been a tremendous asset in revitalizing communities’ downtowns throughout New York State.”



Lofts on Main Artist Housing.
Above, exterior; below, interior artist studio



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