

MID-HUDSON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Mid-Hudson

Municipality Name: Village of Millerton

Downtown Name: Millerton

County: Dutchess

Downtown Description - Provide an overview of the downtown and summarize the rationale behind nominating this downtown for a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award):

Imagine an historic, agricultural village in rural Dutchess County with a thriving Main Street that attracts people from surrounding towns, counties and even states to shop at its Farmers' Market, to eat at its coffee shop, its diner and its gourmet farm-to-table restaurants, and to enjoy the beautiful Harlem Valley Rail Trail. Now imagine a village where the farm and industrial job base has dwindled, where 15% of the population lives below the poverty line, where 60% of the school-aged children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and where housing costs continue to go up as the quality and quantity of the stock declines. On the one hand, a village with a growing population of weekenders and some very sophisticated small businesses. At the same time, a village with no sewer system, in which both residents and merchants must rely on their ancient and frequently failing septic systems, and where, as a result, business growth is inhibited. These are all facets of Millerton, NY.

Surely there is no community in our region where a \$10 million revitalization grant wouldn't be helpful. But in Millerton, the economic and cultural center of northeastern Dutchess County, it would be so much more: it would in fact be transformative. Because that single \$10 million grant could provide core funding for an innovative, regenerative wastewater treatment system, and simultaneously put all the unsightly and vulnerable utility lines underground. This DRI grant, applied principally to infrastructure, including broadband, would give the Village the ability to grow its tax base, to build on its tentative renaissance and to solidify its role as the cultural and economic engine for the whole eastern side of Dutchess County. And it would serve as a model for others.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines. **Answers to each question are limited to one page each.**

- 1) Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment.

Conveniently and helpfully, the boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood are the boundaries of the Village of Millerton. The Village is entirely located within the Town of North East, in Dutchess County.

- 2) Size.** Outline why the downtown, 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.

Millerton is strategically situated as the central economic and cultural hub at the center of a "city" of small towns in the north east corner of Dutchess County. Millerton sits at the intersection of a Federal highway, Route 44, and NY Route 22. This crossroads provides great access to Millerton from other parts of our region, from Massachusetts and Connecticut, from Poughkeepsie and across the Hudson River, and from New York City (2 hours by train or car). It is also the reason why, despite its modest resident population, Millerton is in reality a much larger town, attracting thousands of people to it and through it, on a year-round basis.

Since its days as an agricultural railroad center, Millerton has functioned as the downtown for many of the adjacent communities in New York and New England. Why is this? Millerton provides goods and services not offered in these nearby communities, such as a movie house which offers both first run films and live feed cultural performances (The Moviehouse, with 60,000 tickets sold annually), an independent bookstore (Oblong Books), multiple art galleries and antique stores, and an iconic general department store (Sapersteins). It has a well-known coffee house (Irving Farm) and a tea room (Harney's), both of which serve as local gathering spots. Millerton also offers a wide variety of restaurants, and has become a dining destination in its own right. And it has the Harlem Valley Rail Trail, which was enjoyed by more than 65,000 people last year.

There is no "off season" in Millerton. The local businesses are all year-round operations, and the restaurants are all year-round restaurants. The community spirit which typifies Millerton has given rise to a number of Village-wide activities throughout the calendar year, and which attract large audiences: Spring for Sound, organized by the North East Community Center (NECC), attracts over 1000 music lovers to the Village every June. In July, hundreds of bicyclists descend on Millerton for the annual Harlem Valley Rail Ride. In the autumn, Fall for Art, organized by the Millerton Business Group, pairs each business with at least one local artist and turns the Village into a weekend art gallery. The day after Thanksgiving, the Festival of Lights and a free movie at The Moviehouse draw hundreds of local families. Our local Farmers' Market, with its 23 vendors of local farm products, also operates year-round and attracts many hundreds of customers from near and far, who often go on to eat and shop in the Village. The population of Millerton may be small, but that size is offset by the way it functions in this "city" of small towns.

3) Past Investments & Future Investment Potential. Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

PAST INVESTMENTS:

The Moviehouse, a four-screen movie theater located in the middle of the Village, is the arts and cultural heart of Millerton, NY, bringing audiences from 20-30 miles away in the surrounding region and supporting the complementary businesses in the community. Located in a 1903 Grange Hall, the business has grown, developed and transformed itself since “movies” were first screened in the Millerton Opera House (now The Moviehouse) in 1912. Its owners have invested significantly in its purchase and renovation.

Harney & Sons Tea Blenders is a significant regional business with national and international distribution, with 155 employees, a retail tea room presence in Millerton and a 99,000 square foot manufacturing and packaging facility less than a mile away. Irving Farm, a coffee shop in the middle of the Village, is part of a small company operating in Millerton and New York City. Irving Farm recently built a 7000 square foot coffee roasting facility in the Village. Associated Lightning Rod is another distinguished local company, with a growing footprint of operations. They recently installed lightning protection on St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC as well as at JFK Airport.

FUTURE INVESTMENTS:

The expansion of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail has the potential to drive significant future public investment. The Rail Trail is presently complete from Wassaic to Millerton. A section from Millerton to Copake remains to be completed. Dutchess County has committed \$11,000,000 to its construction, and has scheduled completion of the Trail by 2018. Because of its rural location, there are few places where one can easily access the Trail. Millerton is the economic center of the Rail Trail. In fact, Millerton is the only place where the Trail comes right into the middle of a town. In recognition of this, the Village recently applied for and has been awarded a Community Development Block Grant of \$75,000 for the purpose of installing composting toilets on the Rail Trail, in close proximity to Main Street.

Future private investment will likely come from three principal sources:

- *From additional retail, service and B2B businesses opening, and from existing ones expanding.
- *From the continuing growth of arts and culture organizations, such as The Moviehouse, Gilmor Glassworks, the Re Institute, and 14th Colony Artists.
- *From a new, bigger and better food market to be established in the soon-to-be-vacated space of the Grand Union Supermarket.

- 4) Job Growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

There are three principal areas in which job growth has been increasing. The first is in retail. Millerton has a lively group of small retail businesses on Main Street, almost all locally owned and almost all staffed by their owners. This includes a number of food and beverage establishments, which are a significant draw for visitors from elsewhere, and which complement the presence of The Moviehouse and the Rail Trail. However the growth of the retail sector has been stymied by the challenge of wastewater treatment. Business owners have to install and operate expensive septic systems, and many of these require frequent pumping. A sewer system for the Village has been a long-standing goal of the Village and merchants alike. The potential for development resulting from a modern, efficient and environmentally advanced system cannot be understated. Without it, the Village will be forever handicapped.

Culture and the arts is a second major sector of potential employment. The Moviehouse, with its four screens, is located right in the heart of the Village, and draws people from 20-30 miles around, sometimes even further. The owners of The Moviehouse are presently looking for opportunities to expand, and have researched suitable adjacent properties. Once again, the lack of a municipal sewer system has been a stumbling block, as there is not adequate land available to expand antiquated septic systems. A group of local citizens has been exploring the potential for a small live theater for plays, dance and cabaret, which would further cement Millerton's reputation as a home for the arts and would nicely complement the visual arts center that has blossomed in Wassaic, 12 miles to the south.

A third area is in agriculture and food distribution. Millerton has been an agricultural town and a commercial center since 1852, and substantial agriculture continues to this day. There are 16 farms still operating in the Town of North East, for which Millerton is the downtown. These are not the traditional dairies of the past, but smaller, high quality fruit and vegetable growers, organic poultry and meat producers, CSA's, and high end hay and horse farms. Millerton has seen an influx of younger farmers, such as the three young women (all local) who have started Rock Steady Farm and Flowers. They have taken over an existing farm, where they grow a wide variety of vegetables and operate a CSA at yet another farm. As additional venues for selling high quality produce locally are developed, possibly through a food cooperative at a renovated Millerton Elementary School, we can anticipate additional jobs being created. This is especially meaningful for graduates of Webutuck High School, many of whom come from families with agricultural backgrounds. All of these agricultural enterprises feed into the Village's year-round Farmers' Market, run by the North East Community Center, which provides fresh and healthy produce to residents and visitors alike, and which also reaches lower income residents through SNAP, WIC checks and other programs.

5) Attractiveness of the Downtown. Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, healthy and affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces.

Named one of "The Ten Coolest Small Towns in America" by Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine, the Village of Millerton is a charming 19th century jewelbox of a downtown. Main Street starts with the highly regarded Gilmor Glassworks at the western end, which is across from the Harney Tea Room, and curves around past The Moviehouse, with its clock tower, listed in the national register of historic places, and past Irving Farm Coffee Shop, where TV stars stand in line for lattes next to hardware store owners, millennials and organic farmers. Continue past the Victorian inn formerly known as Simmons Way, where the Hall of Fame ballplayer Eddie Collins was born, down a tree-lined avenue lined with everything from the well-loved library, yoga studios and herbalists, finally ending at the exquisite 1868 Baptist church (one of three churches along the street) with its rose window and colorfully painted wood façade.

The Millerton Farmers' Market runs year-round and attracts many hundreds of customers to its 23 vendors of local farm products, meats and cheeses, who then eat and shop in the village. The Harlem Valley Rail Trail begins 11 miles to the south, and by 2018 will continue straight through to meet up with the northern section in Copake, making a total 30-mile path through woodlands and wetlands along the far eastern edge of the state. When completed, it will include outdoor classrooms designed in collaboration with the world-renowned Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. A 16 acre public park, Eddie Collins Field, contains ball fields and basketball courts along with a state of the art, handicapped-accessible playground. All of these features are used by Millerton's economically and ethnically diverse population - long time residents, weekenders, new Americans, young families and the elderly.

Among other things, Millerton lacks a multi-use facility for events and public meetings, permanent space for the North East Community Center's programs for children and families, and rentable office space that is handicapped-accessible by elevator. (All the downtown offices are above retail stores but have no elevators.) There is a solution to all these issues: just off Main Street is the old Millerton Elementary School. No longer used by the school district, the 24,000 square foot, three story building could be purchased by the village for \$1. Structurally sound, it has two 2,000 square-foot spaces (formerly auditorium and gymnasium) and 14 spacious, well-lit classrooms, each over 700 square feet, which can be converted to any number of uses, from senior apartments to offices to a municipal courtroom. A portion of this grant could be used to renovate this building, which as a multi-use facility would contribute to greater economic vitality in the downtown. If both the Village and Town offices were to relocate there, it could even contribute to cost sharing between the two governments, an oft stated goal of Governor Cuomo.

6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life. 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, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

In the Comprehensive Plan of the Village of Millerton, Goal #4 states: "Recognize and support the village of Millerton as the primary center of the community and encourage it to continue to function as the commercial and population center." Millerton and the Town of North East acknowledge that the 1994 Comprehensive Plan needs to be reviewed and updated. A review of the current Comprehensive Plan is the first step to a complete overhaul of the zoning codes to deal with current inconsistencies, ambiguities and with issues that are not currently addressed. Both Village and Town officials acknowledge the importance of reviewing and updating the code. Preliminary meetings have been held to put together a commission of stakeholders to form a Review Committee.

Land use is very much a function of infrastructure, and this is especially so in a more developed area like Millerton's "downtown". The ability to revise the Village's zoning depends to a large degree on whether the Village has a wastewater system. If Millerton is unable to put such a system in place, there are very few zoning changes that can be made to "revitalize" existing commercial and residential uses.

In 2009, after an extensive and concerted effort on the part of local residents, and with the support of local government, Millerton's downtown received recognition from the National Park Service, with its Main Street Historic District being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This recognition permits certain tax credits to be received for investments in the renovation of historic building facades.

7) Local Support. Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

In addition to the elected municipal officials, Millerton currently has several very active business and nonprofit organizations, all focused on moving the downtown forward, and all committed to working together on downtown revitalization. They include Townscape, a 501(c)(3) organization devoted to the improvement of the village. Successful accomplishments include the planting of many trees, annual flower planting, providing the winter holiday tree lights for the entire length of the downtown business district, and supplying the Village with new park benches, tables and chairs.

The Millerton Business Group, an association of Village and Town of North East business owners, has gained noticeable momentum in the past several years. This organization plans events to enhance Millerton's business district as a destination in the tri-state area. An annual example of their programming is "Fall for Art" where each business is partnered with a local artist. The businesses stay open late, serve wine and cheese and host art gallery openings up and down the street.

The Friends of Irondale Schoolhouse have worked tirelessly to purchase, move and restore a 19th century one room school house that was opened to the public in 2015. It is located at the junction of Main Street and the Harlem Valley Rail Trail, and will be open on weekends as an information center during the summer.

The North East Historical Society, which contributed significantly to the designation of the Main Street Historic District, is finalizing a walking tour of the downtown of Millerton that will be available at local businesses and at the Irondale School House early this summer.

The Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association works to build community and regional support for the Rail Trail. The Association played an important role in putting together the funding to complete the section of the trail north of Millerton to link with the section of trail in Copake.

The North East Community Center (NECC), is a highly regarded social services nonprofit that has served the people of Millerton and surrounding areas for over 25 years. NECC sponsors the Millerton Farmers' Market and holds the annual village-wide music festival, Spring for Sound, as well as providing a large-scale job training and paid internship program that prepares teenagers for careers and provides supervised workers for local businesses.

Townscape, which frequently liaises with the civic, commercial, and non-profit organizations in the Village, is prepared to organize, lead and participate in a local DRI Planning Committee.

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

Millerton is a village. The center of a town. A business district. And a regional center. It's also a community on the cusp of moving forward. But Millerton is at a tipping point.

As has been described, it has a great deal going for it. On the one hand, its manageable size means that the entire Village is easily walkable and bikeable. With its two major highways, it's a crossroads, within easy reach of a much bigger area. With a compact downtown, with a wide variety of small retail shops selling everything from blown glass to bullets to custom ironwork to work jeans, with a 4-screen movie theater in close proximity to its fine restaurants, it's a mecca for socializing and shopping. With the Harlem Valley Rail Trail going straight through it, it's a destination for walkers, bicyclists and outdoors enthusiasts. With art galleries and artisans and performing arts, it has a burgeoning cultural scene. It has a small department store. It has a full service pharmacy. It has a well-attended farmers' market. It has specialized car repair facilities. For a small community, it has a lot.

At the same time, it faces a large and very fundamental constraint. The lack of land left to develop within its boundaries leaves the Village with very little ability to grow. Without business growth, its meager tax base can never enable the Village to provide the things most communities would expect. Without a wastewater treatment system, without sewers, Millerton can never expand its business district enough to be truly robust. It can't increase its commercial space, attract new employers, or create more housing opportunities to meet the needs of its workforce. It can't repurpose existing structures to meet public, non-profit and private needs.

The cost of a wastewater treatment plant is the major obstacle. We believe the key to solving it lies in using new technology to produce an affordable, regenerative treatment plant for small tax-base communities. We believe Millerton is not unique in facing such a dilemma and we invite NY State to support us in finding a solution to this challenge, which can then serve as a development model for similar communities throughout the mid-Hudson region.