



## Downtown Revitalization Initiative

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# APPLICATION

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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](http://www.ny.gov/dri).

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### BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: Village of Wappingers Falls

Downtown Name: Village of Wappingers Falls

County Name: Dutchess

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

The five-point vision for the Village of Wappingers Falls includes:

- 1) A historical downtown district complemented by infill development
- 2) A central business district complete with a diverse array of retail, service, and artisanal stores
- 3) A community with completely modernized and sustainable infrastructure
- 4) A strong connection between the central business district and the Wappinger Lake
- 5) A regionally patronized downtown which draws visitors from all of its surrounding transportation, including: State Roads 9 & 9D, Metro North Railroad, and Dutchess County Public Transportation.

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### 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.

Wappingers Falls blends historical charm with endless possibility for modern advancement. Dotted with local, artisan businesses and surrounded by sweeping waterfront views – this downtown is growing in population, economic strength, and potential.

The Village Board, largely unchanged over the past decade, has completed dozens of comprehensive planning initiatives and over \$30,000,000 in capital projects as it moves closer and closer to an economic renaissance.

Affordable, diverse, and with room to grow – Wappingers Falls is seeking Downtown Revitalization Funding to give the local administration a fresh perspective on options for redevelopment and to acquire the capital necessary to put the finishing touches on the Village’s comeback story. Without this funding, New York State risks losing more of this historic urban center which has proven to be susceptible to fire and building collapse in periods of disinvestment.

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## **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 Village of Wappingers Falls is a compact, green and truly unique Hudson Valley community which sits between the Hudson River and New York State Route 9 to the east and west, and is equidistant to Poughkeepsie and Beacon to the north and south. The Village is one square mile and home to 6,000 residents. The downtown which is the subject of this application is outlined in red within the green sub-map depicted above. With a 17% increase in population growth since 2000, close proximity to Metro North’s Hudson Line and a tidal estuary to the Hudson River lined with recreational trails – the Village embodies the perfect combination of “live, work, and play” opportunities outlined by the MHREDC. Due to the relatively small size of the Village, the borders of this downtown are the political boundaries of Wappingers Falls.

**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.

The Village of Wappingers Falls’ catchment area is entirely within the Wappingers Falls ZIP code, shown in the map above. This area encompasses parts of five different suburban municipalities in which residents’ primary urban center is the Village of Wappingers Falls.

The majority of the Village and its catchment area was constructed in two separate economic expansions. The first of which was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to support the growing mill factories that drew power from the Wappingers Falls. The height of this industrial boom saw over 40 factories which employed thousands. The decline of US manufacturing and a series of fires, explosions, and building collapses ultimately reduced the

number of employment opportunities in the Village, however, the housing stock which supported thousands of local workers still remains, and so does this housing stock's historical character. The second "boom" was the height of IBM which employed the majority of New Yorkers in this catchment area.

The Village of Wappingers Falls was never able to rebuild the lion share of its economic engines which once made it a center for American Industry renown as the "Birthplace of Blue Jeans" and the center of Upstate New York's textile manufacturing. The Village and its catchment area has a year-round population to support job creating, commercial and industrial new business. In fact, over 1/5<sup>th</sup> of Dutchess County's population lives within this catchment area. The Village has a stable local administration with strong public support and the willpower to enact real economic development. The Village has a vibrant historical character with rich cultural pedestrian generators like Grinnell Library (6<sup>th</sup> oldest in the State) and the County Players Theater.

**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 over two dozen occasions the Village has demonstrated that it can properly administer county, state, and federal funding. Projects which receive funding have always been completed and have provided real livability improvements, quality plans and reports, and have moved the Village along in terms of its desired revitalization. Funds have always been leveraged with private money and local in-kind support in an effort to multiply the magnitude of their benefits to the residents and business owners of Wappingers Falls. This revitalization was kicked off with the completion of a number of comprehensive planning documents in the early 2000's. These plans were co-sponsored with funding from New York State Department of State, New York State Department of Transportation, Dutchess County Planning and Development, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

With a clear vision for revitalization laid out in these planning documents, the Village has led Dutchess County municipalities in capital spending per acre and per capita. In total, \$31.2 million of public spending has been matched with \$64.8 million dollars of private investment over the past decade within Wappingers Falls. **For every dollar of public funding spent, the Village has been able to attract \$2.11 of private investment; thus proving the village's ability to spend efficiently and productively.** With over \$8 million dollars in new water infrastructure upgrades planned over the next several years and an additional \$1.9 million in various park, pedestrian, and environmental projects scheduled – the sum of public funding will increase and it is anticipated that private development will follow the existing trend of 2:1 investment. The Village's strategy, moving forward, is to continue to develop and execute comprehensive planning documents which prioritize infrastructure and livability upgrades which support future economic and population growth. The Village intends to develop on its anchor attractions while stimulating the development of vacant lots and blighted structures in its compact downtown.

Through comprehensive planning, the following projects have been identified for investment:

- 1) Dutchess Bleachery – 25+ acres of vacant industrial property, recently remediated
- 2) East Main Street – Five mixed-use buildings recently left blighted/vacant in a fire
- 3) County Players Theater– a \$5 million expansion of one of Dutchess' most renowned venue

- 4) Wappinger Lake – The restoration of the Lake to a fishable/swimmable waterway
- 5) Franny Reese Park – Lake-front park in the center of downtown with waterfront access

**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.

In its heyday, this downtown employed thousands of New Yorkers and produces sizable contributions to the working class culture of New York State. The Village of Wappingers Falls has seen its population grow 17% since 2000. This population growth has subsequently resulted in an increased demand for employment opportunities. The Market Street Industrial Park and Route 9 Corridor house the Village’s largest employers. Route 9 boasts an impressive \$83,804,800 of commercial real estate within the Village’s downtown boundary. This corridor is an example of how Wappingers Falls can cultivate a successful commercial district and cultivate a successful atmosphere for “mom & pop,” artisan, and craft businesses which employ hundreds of residents.

Market Street Industrial Park is home to 28 businesses and prides itself on a record of successfully incubating local businesses into regionally significant economic engines. The park is home to the largest design library in the world, a number of modeling and theater businesses, and light industrial companies. The owners of Market Street Industrial Park are interested in growing the number of incubation spaces through an expansion. Other expansion opportunities are being explored by a number of staple village businesses. The Center for Physical Therapy, the aforementioned industrial park, and an emerging craft beverage industry offer the greatest opportunities to expand existing employment centers. Over the past 18 months alone the Village has seen the addition of three new craft beverage businesses. The Village is also home to a large professional population supported by local hospitals and medical facilities. With the expansion of Vassar Brother Hospital, the Village expects a further increase in population.

As a Brownfield Opportunity Area and the subject of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Strategy the Village has undergone a tremendous study in its pursuit to identify and stimulate job growth. Under the recommendations of these planning documents the Village has undergone a transformation of its public park land and pedestrian amenities. Modernized parks and community waterfront space is now connected by NYS DOT funded crosswalk, apron, and sidewalk improvements while new water mains, gas lines, sewer lines, and roadways have been installed on over half of the Village’s streets.

**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 Village of Wappingers Falls is highly walkable and features scenic views of the Wappinger Lake and Falls. The two largest pedestrian generators are the historic County Players Theater and the Grinnell Library, the 6<sup>th</sup> oldest in the state. County Players alone brings 11,000 visitors into the Village, per year. With funding from New York State Department of Transportation, the Village is spending nearly \$1.5 million on pedestrian improvements

that include new cross walks, lighting, curbing, and auto-traffic calming measures. This investment in pedestrian improvements is in an effort to improve multi-modal transit throughout this walkable community. With low rent and an affordable cost of living, the Village of Wappingers Falls provides residents with an array of housing options, rich cultural diversity, and an appealing atmosphere for millennials and skilled workers.

The Village boasts a number of locally-owned Main Street businesses which provide unique services, products, and dining experiences to Village residents and visitors. The Village has seen an impressive resurgence in terms of its food culture and is the proud home of half a dozen restaurants with culinary trained chefs and staff. The Village's proximity to the Culinary Institute of America makes it the landing spot for many CIA graduates. Over the last 2 years, almost half a dozen new chefs have opened new restaurants within the Village, all of which have seen remarkable success. This demonstrates a level of attractiveness to recent local college graduates, both as business owners and employees – as well as patrons. The Village also attracts commercial entities embracing the move toward locally sourced food and drinks as well as ethnic specialty restaurants. The downtown includes a homemade ice cream creamery, a craft brewery, and the offices of the local Obercreek Farm and Cidery.

In 2016, the Village's nightlife and bar scene began its own revival with the creation of a waterfront wine bar on Market Street, and both a brewery and a craft beer tavern on East Main Street. With the County Players increasing the frequency of their theater productions, thousands of pedestrians will be entering the Village annually to attend plays, eat dinner, and go out for drinks. These new amenities and developments are geared toward attracting a millennial population to live, work, and play in the Village of Wappingers Falls.

In terms of public space, the Village already has 4 urban parks within this walkable and bikeable district – proving that recreational opportunities are abundant. One very unique aspect of this downtown is its mixture of a tidal estuary, waterfalls, a lake, and a creek. The parks include the Village's green and historical center, a ball park complex with access to the Wappinger Lake, a soccer and football field, and a yet-to-be-named waterfront park along the Lower Wappinger Creek which is being completed with support from NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and equipped with a community boathouse. This boathouse will serve as a community education center, in addition to hosting a commercial kayaking operation.

The Village sees regular use of these parks from local residents and visitors from New York City who come up on the Metro North Railroad. The New Hamburg Train Station (1.1 miles from the Village's downtown) is only 83 minutes from New York City. The Wappinger Greenway Trail also connects the Village Core to 160 acres of Scenic Hudson and Audubon Society nature preserves. Spiritual Tourism also brings in thousands of guests per year. Mount Alvernia accounts for 22,000 room-nights per year. The Chapel of Sacred Mirrors also attracts spiritual tourists from across the United States and Canada.

**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 Village Board has been impressively progressive throughout the past 10 years, having dedicated tremendous resources to promoting transit oriented, mixed-use, and diverse development through modernized

policy. The Village has completed nearly a dozen comprehensive planning documents since 2000 and has utilized these plans to complete widespread policy implements. These documents address a number of topics including **Transportation** (Transportation Plan 2001); **Infrastructure** (Capital Plan 2009, Capital Infrastructure Plans 2010, 2015); **Natural Resource Protection** (Natural Resource Management Plan 2000, Tree Inventory Report and Management Plan 2015, Wappinger Creek 9 Element Plan in process); **Economic Development** (Comprehensive Plan 2001, Quality Community Plan 2008, West Main Street Revitalization Plan 2008, Action Plan 2009, Local Waterfront Revitalization Strategy 2011, Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Study in process).

In 2014, the Village Zoning Code was updated, using recommendations made in the 2011 Local Waterfront Revitalization Strategy. The new form-based zoning code specifically allows for more home businesses, promotes mixed use development, and is geared toward facilitating the new investments traditionally hampered by the complexities of urban infill development. In 2015, the Village began work on a \$370,000 Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Study (funded by NYS DOS) which will seek to improve the utilization of underdeveloped or undeveloped properties in the Village. This plan will look specifically at developing vacant industrial properties with job creators, providing solutions which help incentivize infill development, and develop a plan to better utilize one of the Village's more unique assets, the hydroelectric plant in the center of the Village. If nominated as a BOA, developers in the Village will receive additional tax abatement through the Brownfield Cleanup Program if building on a contaminated lot. In 2016, the Village was awarded an EPA Community-Wide Brownfield Assessment Grant which will identify and test for containments on the majority of sites suspected of contamination. These two grants in partnership with each other will effectively enable the Village to provide unparalleled tax relief to developers interested in building on vacant property throughout Wappingers Falls. In May of 2016, the Village Board unanimously moved to support legislation (A2384A and S7702) in the New York State Senate and Assembly which allows for partial tax abatement for mixed-use development in Village Centers over a 20 year period. This tax relief will help catalyze development otherwise shown to be cost prohibited due to regulations of building on zero lot lines within a federally designated historical district which borders a state highway.

The Village has also been progressive in its attempt to improve energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint. In 2015, Wappingers Falls took a Climate Smart Communities Pledge to support sustainable practices and in 2016 the Board voted to participate in the Solarize Initiative. All Village-owned property was retrofitted with LED lighting, the Water Treatment Facility began receiving all of its power from the one acre solar array located on-site, and a NY PRIZE Feasibility Study was completed on a microgrid concept which included 50% renewable energy sources. A commitment to transit oriented development and multi-modal transit methods has also put the Village at the forefront of the environmental movement. Housing developments have been constructed with proximity to Metro North Railroad's New Hamburg Station. In 2016 the Village began exploring the creation of a CCA or a CDG to reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions - and improve energy resiliency.

Additionally, the Village has partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County and Catholic Charities of America to carry out a LISC-funded Zombie Properties Grant. This project will include outreach get resources to those in risk of losing their home as well fund legal support to the Village to hold bank owned properties accountable to building code. In further partnership with Habitat for Humanity, the Village is working to establish an energy efficient housing development with a rent-to-own structured lease to promote homeownership in the Village downtown.

**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.

The Village has completed thorough public vetting of its vision for revitalization. This process has included public hearings associated with roughly one dozen planning initiatives and annual community input meetings for each political ward of the Village. Ideas which garnered the most support include: the expansion of County Players Theater, the rebuilding of the entire East Main Street block burned down in a June 3, 2017 fire (6 businesses, 41 residents displaced), the completion of the Lower Wappinger Creek Community Boathouse, and the redevelopment of the Dutchess Industrial Park referred to as “The Bleachery.”

The County Players Board of Trustees, Grinnell Public Library District, Wappingers Falls Business and Professional Association, and the Wappingers Falls Historical Society have supported this Downtown Revitalization Initiative pursuit. The Village vision for revitalization also incorporates input from Hudson Valley Greenway and Wappinger Creek Inter-Municipal Council studies.

In terms of political support, the Village Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to approve the submission of the application for the second straight year. This same board has remained largely unchanged for the last 10 years while completing \$31.2 million dollars of public planning and capital projects for the Village’s revitalization. This governing board has experience to complete projects in a timely manner and attracting private investment to match public spending at a rate of 2:1.

The Local Lead for Wappingers Falls’ DRI Program would be Mayor Matt Alexander. Mayor Alexander served 4 years on the Village Planning Board from (2002-2006), a year as Village Trustee (2006), and has served as Mayor since 2007- being elected to 6 consecutive terms and earning both Democratic and Republican nominations. The Mayor has experience in the private sector as a CPA and CFO for several publicly traded companies. This capital finance and planning background has proven to be a tremendous asset for the Village.

**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 Village is poised to leverage its growing population, well-defined urban core, business growth, and recreational assets to complete its decade-long revitalization process. The last major obstacle is the rejuvenation of its decayed building stock. In the past month, another five mixed-use properties succumbed to disaster – this time in the form of a fire. That brings the total of vacant lots or blighted structures to nearly 20 in the 3 block historic core of this downtown. The Village is ready to move development off of the outskirts of its

downtown and finally see a concentrated investment in this urban center which has seen loss after loss of its viable structures.

Practically all of the blighted property in the Village has associated plans for redevelopment and have ownership actively seeking means to make these projects feasible. This DRI program is the catalyst to repair all of these former economic engines to their past glory within a short-term timeframe.

The Village will have fully modernized pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, water infrastructure, and roadways within its downtown to support DRI funding. Additionally, the Village is in the middle of two waterfront park projects and has added 28 off-street parking spots within its downtown. Funding is already in place to add another 20 parking spots and equip two existing spaces with electrical vehicle charging ports. Therefore, the Village’s infrastructure, public amenities, and recreational open space are all ready to support the modernization and upgrading of the Village’s business stock through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

**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 Village of Wappingers Falls has an experienced grants administration team headed by Mayor Matt Alexander. The team also consists of a full-time administrator, a clerk, an MWBE Officer, and two staff members in the Treasurer’s office. This team has successfully administered millions in county, state, and federal funding. This team has the ability to dedicate sufficient time and resources to this DRI award while remaining in good standing with existing grant funded projects.

This team has successfully closed out grants with the following agencies: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Environmental Facilities Corporation, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, Hudson Valley Greenway, Dutchess County Planning and Development, and The Hudson River Foundation.

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

[Click here to enter text.](#)

\*Don’t forget to attach a map that clearly delineates the proposed DRI Area. (See item 1.)

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## 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](mailto:NYS-CapitalDist@esd.ny.gov)

Central New York [NYS-CentralNY@esd.ny.gov](mailto:NYS-CentralNY@esd.ny.gov)

Finger Lakes [NYS-FingerLakes@esd.ny.gov](mailto:NYS-FingerLakes@esd.ny.gov)



Long Island	<a href="mailto:LIREDC@esd.ny.gov">LIREDC@esd.ny.gov</a>
Mid-Hudson	<a href="mailto:NYS-MidHudson@esd.ny.gov">NYS-MidHudson@esd.ny.gov</a>
Mohawk Valley	<a href="mailto:NYS-MohawkVal@esd.ny.gov">NYS-MohawkVal@esd.ny.gov</a>
New York City	<a href="mailto:NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov">NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov</a>
North Country	<a href="mailto:NYS-NorthCountry@esd.ny.gov">NYS-NorthCountry@esd.ny.gov</a>
Southern Tier	<a href="mailto:NYS-SouthernTier@esd.ny.gov">NYS-SouthernTier@esd.ny.gov</a>
Western New York	<a href="mailto:NYS-WNY-REDC@esd.ny.gov">NYS-WNY-REDC@esd.ny.gov</a>

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