Downtown Revitalization Initiative

“Resurgent Rensselaer” – Submitted by the City of Rensselaer

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Capital District

Municipality Name: City of Rensselaer

Downtown Name: Rensselaer Transit Village

County: Rensselaer

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

The City of Rensselaer is in the process of reinventing itself as an active waterfront transit village where residents can “Live, Work and Play.” In order to accomplish this mission, the city plans to completely redevelop its waterfront, redefine Broadway as its Main Street, and improve connectivity from new residential, retail, commercial and recreational uses to the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station.

Justification. Provide an overview of the downtown, 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.

The City of Rensselaer is the prime example of a community which is in the midst of rebirth as a modern-day transit village. The city boasts a wonderful location with easy access to regional rail transportation, waterfront recreation, new mixed-use housing developments and a traditional Main Street thoroughfare along Broadway. Moreover, Broadway directly connects the waterfront to a number of historic resources within the city, offering an opportunity to rebrand the city as a modern transit village and historic maritime port of call along the Hudson.

A historic impediment to redevelopment along Broadway and the waterfront has been the existence of perceived and potential brownfield sites, as highlighted in the City’s New York State Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program Nomination Study. That study highlighted a number of strategic sites which represent key redevelopment opportunities that can act as catalysts for revitalization, and a number of actions that will ensure the revitalization of the transit village. In order to further this vision, the City has encouraged the adaptive reuse of vacant properties in alignment with smart growth principals over the last 5 years. As background, the City updated its zoning regulations in 2012, allowing for mixed use development along the entire waterfront and throughout the downtown area. Prior to 2012, the City’s zoning regulations severely handicapped adaptive growth due to an adherence to single use development. Since the change, the City has taken advantage of over $70M in new private and public investment, leading to an increased number of new residential developments, restaurants, port rehabilitation, and major developments along the waterfront. As a result, Rensselaer will soon act as a hub for those who seek active lifestyles and desire to be in a place where they can live, work and play.

The downtown lies directly across the Hudson River from the City of Albany’s Central Business District, offering outstanding views of the Albany Skyline along the riverfront in walking distance from both the Rensselaer/Albany Transit Station and downtown Albany. Due to the combination of all of these factors, the
City believes that it is primed to become a shining example of how urban waterfront redevelopment should and can be approached in the Capital Region. If awarded, the City will leverage $70M in prior and current investment with $180M in planned investments, in order to create a downtown which offers a central location for residents to live, work and recreate.

**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 DRI program description.

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 concentrated 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. Attach a map that clearly delineates the downtown neighborhood.

The Rensselaer Transit Village is very well defined, physically constrained to an area between the Hudson River on the west and the Amtrak Rail Lines to the east. The area includes 4,000 linear feet of natural shoreline along the Hudson River, covering 200 acres of underutilized and vacant land which once acted as a hub for rail and commercial activity. Defined by the City’s New York State Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program Nomination Study, the City is committed to having the area serve as a catalyst for economic development, despite the fact that a long-standing impediment to redevelopment has been the existence of perceived or potential brownfield sites. As referenced in this application, many of these sites have significant historical, recreational and cultural importance that can be re-valued.

Despite the current landscape, the Rensselaer waterfront provides what some might argue to be the most spectacular urban view in the Capital Region. The existence of this valuable resource, the City has been prevented from pursuing major redevelopment for decades due to dated regulations and the fact that the Amtrak rail lines create a physical barrier between the historic city neighborhoods and the waterfront. If awarded DRI funding, the City would ensure the viability of all prior, current and future investments by undergoing a redesign of pedestrian and bike accessibility from its residential neighborhoods to and from the train station, waterfront, open space and business districts.

Downtown Rensselaer, largely composed of Census Tract 515, is officially designated as a “distressed area” with roughly 20% of the population living at or below the poverty line. However, this tract of land is currently in the midst of economic rejuvenation. The end goal of the ongoing improvements is to create a new environment where residents can live work and play in downtown Rensselaer. Situated between a hub of leading technology businesses and educational institutions, the long-forgotten waterfront will be forgotten no longer through the construction of new residential housing, a waterfront hotel, 165,000 square feet of new retail space, and major recreational improvements in and around the historic sections of the City. In order to round out the improvements and ensure the long-term sustainability of the investments being made, it is essential that the City follow through with a well devised public access plan to ease accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists in and around the City. The major goal of this DRI project will be just that, in order to connect a multitude of important centers of place within the compact downtown. In fact, within a one-half mile radius, downtown Rensselaer will boast access to waterfront recreation, the 9th busiest Amtrak Station in the country, a marina,
historic district, institutions of higher education, a “main street”, major technical and pharmaceutical companies, government centers, a commercial port, modern housing and easy access to the state capital. It is the City’s belief that no other community in the capital region can offer so many public service assets situated strategically in such a compact neighborhood.

Near the center of the targeted revitalization area, nestled between the historic city neighborhoods and the waterfront, is the Rensselaer Train Station which serves as many as 800,000 travelers a year. Unfortunately, this population is not able to easily access Rensselaer’s “Main Street” along Broadway, or the waterfront due to a number of existing physical barriers. As a result, the vast majority of these travelers are using the station to get to and from other destinations such as Albany. Due to the fact that the City is moving forward with revitalization plans for the historic waterfront district, it makes sense to offer a new system of accessibility which can capture this population within Rensselaer’s downtown. The walk from the station is literally minutes from the waterfront, recreational areas and Broadway.

It is important to note that just to the northwest corner of the train station, amid other underutilized properties, lies a 24-acre vacant parcel on the river which is considered the “Project Anchor Site”. The site, called DeLaet’s Landing at 100 New Broadway, is in the midst of construction for a $300M project which includes a new four-story 144,000 square-foot apartment building with 96 new units, a new hotel as well as an office building. The rear of the site borders an Amtrak maintenance yard, whose noise will be buffered through various landscaping improvements. In addition, Amtrak has acted on the adoption of new locomotives which are less noisy.

This property has also been identified by numerous developers as having very high redevelopment potential for educational purposes due to its strategic downtown location adjacent to Albany on the Hudson River. In fact, it had recently been proposed to host the Rensselaer Clean Energy Deployment Center (CEDC)—a mixed-use development which was identified as one of the top initiatives of the Capital 20.20 Strategy—as well as SUNY Polytechnic Institute campus space and several other proposals. The current construction and planning which is taking place is being bolstered by the completion of a $3M pedestrian esplanade by August 2017 and the receipt of a Transportation Alternatives Program grant in the amount of $1.28M to construct the first section of the Rensselaer Riverfront Multi-Use Trail. This trail wills stretch along 5,000 linear feet of waterfront to connect to regional trail and bike paths. It will offer both passive and active recreation, in an area which will boast new housing stock and a historical footprint.

This Project Anchor Site is believed to be the best starting point for a multi-phased revitalization effort. It is important to note that the large majority of the target area is comprised of vacant and underutilized land which was formerly industrial, and therefore this revitalization project would not be displacing any people, homes or businesses. In this sense, it is a “clean slate” of opportunity to greatly improve the City of Rensselaer economically, socially and visually. However, in order to see this vision through to fruition, the City needs common sense and well-designed multi-modal accessibility improvements from all of its critical centers of place. When that happens, the city strongly believes that the continued transformation of its historically blighted waterfront area will result in its birth as a millennial transit village situated along the Hudson River Waterfront.
2) Catchment area. 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 destination.

The Rensselaer Transit Village is a very compact redevelopment area which will serve as a strategic catchment area that has the advantage of lying in a prime location adjacent to multiple community assets. In fact, redevelopments in and around the focus area have already begun to attract new residents and private investment. This fact is easily supported by an over 21% increase in population from the 2000 to 2010 United States Census. Due to continued investment, the City’s population is expected to rise even further come time for 2020 reporting. The City hosts a unique ability to act as a town center for the region a stone’s throw from the state capital. From a physical standpoint, the following areas which surround the immediate Rensselaer Transit Village are considered additional “catchment” areas for new residential and tourism populations:

1) Existing Residential Neighborhoods:

Rensselaer boasts a number of historic neighborhoods which currently support single and multi-family housing in and around the downtown’s footprint. These neighborhoods provide a dense local population of residents who are within walking distance of new jobs, retail, services and recreational facilities in the midst of development. These areas can be seen just east of the target neighborhood on the Revitalization Target Area and Context Map images shown in Appendix B. In fact, they support a population of more than 2,000 residents who are within a ½ mile radius, and more than 5,000 residents who live within a mile radius on the east side of the river. However, these neighborhoods are still considered to be a catchment area for new populations due to the fact that there are approximately 200 vacant residential properties within the half-mile radius. These parcels have wonderful potential for new housing developments. Assuming that the majority of these sites will support single and multi-family housing, it is anticipated that their redevelopment can support anywhere from 500 to 1000 new residents. Furthermore, 339 new housing units are currently under construction or proposed for immediate construction within the immediate catchment areas. It is assumed that these ongoing projects will add a population of 1,000 new residents. In combination, it is likely that the City’s population will increase by another 20% within the next decade, at a minimum. These figures do not include additional Transit Oriented Development on currently underutilized parcels of land nearby the station, which is a priority for the city’s future.

2) City of Albany & Surrounding Vicinity:

Beyond the immediate one-half mile radius, Rensselaer offers many newer residential neighborhoods, as well as the major population center of the City of Albany. This footprint supports a current population of 20,000 people. This larger radius includes a population that will help to support the growth of new commercial and recreational uses in Rensselaer. In fact, the larger catchment area offers access to government, higher education, arts, culture, transportation and recreational facilities. Combined, this defines downtown Rensselaer as potentially the most ideally situated transit village in the region. In addition, additional suburban population areas which act as bedroom communities for Albany, notably the adjacent municipality of East Greenbush, continue to grow.
3) **Albany-Rensselaer Transit Station:**

Few communities in the Capital Region, if any, can boast the existence of a major rail station which supports easy travel across the eastern seaboard. In fact, in relation to Rensselaer’s future, the presence of the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station cannot be understated, as it lies within the center of the target neighborhood and offers a gateway to welcome large influx of business travelers, tourists and commuters into the heart of the target area. In fact, the station currently handles up to 800,000 people embarking and disembarking here each year. Yet, due to current pedestrian access barriers, very few of these people are entering the waterfront and downtown to spend money and recreate. As a result, the majority of this traffic is only using the station to get to and from other destinations.

In order to combat this loss and reroute these individuals to Rensselaer’s centers of place, the city is in the midst of creating a critical mass of new residential housing, commercial retail, services, restaurants, arts and cultural activities to attract this traffic to explore and patronize its downtown. The prevailing desire is to offer a downtown that includes the proper mix of development along the local waterfront and improved physical connections to create a very convenient and attractive destination for travelers to visit. In fact, if only 4% of these existing travelers were to be drawn to new downtown, it would provide for 30,000 new visitors a year. Representing an extremely conservative estimate, these visitors will assist in spurring Rensselaer’s future economy.

This active train station provides for a natural foundation for the continued development of a transit oriented neighborhood which will not only be attractive for local commuters coming into the area to work in the emerging tech industry, but also for young millennials looking for a transit village to live within. Considering all three catchment areas, the City of Rensselaer is capable of supporting a full-time resident population of at least 15,000 during the next ten years, and also supporting well over 1 million travelers and commuters annually via the train station, regional bus lines and roadways.

Rensselaer already acts as a natural catchment area for travelers to and from Albany, and with further investment and accessibility improvements, the City will have a new opportunity to act as a historic maritime transit village just across the river from the State Capital. The Rensselaer of the future is starting now, and will be highlighted by sprawling waterfront trails and parks, mixed-use housing and commercial developments, a thriving “Main Street” along Broadway, a growing commercial port and act as a continued technological industry hub. All of these assets are wonderful catalysts for economic development and community rebirth. However, the piece that will bind them all together is a new system of pedestrian and bicycle access from all of the City’s centers of place. This fact, combined with the restoration of our community’s underutilized remaining historical and cultural footprint, will ensure sustainable growth in Rensselaer.

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

The City of Rensselaer has an outstanding opportunity to capitalize upon prior, current and future private and public investments, as outlined below:
Historical Investment:

It is first important to note that Rensselaer has long acted as one of the most important centers of transit and commerce in the United States. Over the last 375 years, Rensselaer’s strategic position served as a transportation hub via the river and rail. The New York Central Railroad, Boston and Albany Railroad and Delaware and Hudson Railroads all passed through the station on a regular basis. This lifeline was critical to the county, defining Rensselaer from its earliest years as a railroad town. As a result, the community has consistently supported a “work, live and play” population, which thrived during the high point of rail in the 1800’s. Railroaders and their families patronized and supported local grocery, hardware, clothing, appliance, tavern, and restaurant establishments. In addition, they supported the development of churches, fraternal organizations, veteran’s posts, labor lodges, volunteer firehouses and political parties. So important was the presence of the railroad that the city council for decades had a railroad committee, as it had for other crucial concerns such as public safety, streets and schools. Most resident railroaders worked for the New York Central Railroad or the Boston and Albany Railroad.

By definition, Rensselaer acted as the main transit village in the Capital Region at the time. In fact, the good years of nationwide rail fortunes were graphically reflected in the good fortune of railroad towns like Rensselaer. During the peak years from 1890 to World War I, rail employment grew exponentially with expanding rail business, and the Rensselaer yard was always jammed with freight cars being marshaled for delivery to local industries or further travel in the region. Although the explosion of the common automobile after World War II changed the need for expansive rail lines, the City eventually reinvented itself as a railroad town once again through the creation of Amtrak, its maintenance facility and the eventual Rensselaer-Albany Passenger Station. However beneficial these developments were to ensure the sustainability of the community as an important transit hub, their construction and continued development has created modern day accessibility issues within the community itself, as it seeks to create a modern transit village. Yet, the city’s rich history offers an opportunity to capitalize upon the existing cultural footprint that remains in Rensselaer as it seeks to modernize itself.

Rensselaer was originally the pastoral domain of the Van Rensselaer Family, and originally was home to the Village of Bath. The Village offered a junction of farm-to-market roadways, access to the river and a ferry. Bath was given its name due to the existence of a natural sulphur spring. The roads and ferry naturally attracted commercial entities which sprung up due to the existence of the sulphur springs. In fact, Rensselaer’s waterfront was once home to multiple springs in several locations. These included the Harrowgate Spring, south of Crailo in what was then Greenbush; as well as a spring on the corner of what is now Tracy Street and Forbes Avenue. The Van Rensselaer Family soon took advantage of these springs and constructed new roadways and bath houses for use. Over time, the community became further developed via additional houses, a hotel, tannery and stores. In fact, the community has supported industrial activity for over 375 years, and there are many transit related historical footprints which still exist in the community and are underutilized. Rensselaer, and the surrounding Capital District is an area that was a natural birthplace for maritime and rail transportation routes. Beginning in the early 1800’s, Rensselaer began to act as the Gateway to Albany via the New York Central Railroad.

The City believes that there is a wonderful opportunity to capitalize upon its history, particularly along the waterfront. The northern end of the City’s waterfront is the historical footprint of the Village of Bath. This are is
still home to a number of historical homes, including the “Woods House” which lies at the corner of Broadway and Tracy Street. The home is a great example of a tradesman’s home from the 1780’s. As the waterfront moves south, the City is home to historic footprints which acted as key New York Central Railroad infrastructure including the Maiden Lane Bridge and New York Central Roundhouse; whose original footprints are slated for mixed-use and recreational redevelopment. Further south, were the current Dunn Memorial Bridge is located, lies a historic professional baseball field where the first major league “Grand Slam” was hit during a game. This field is planned for improvement, as the city would like to capitalize upon its story and prime location adjacent to where a new hotel and 96-unit housing complex will be located. Furthermore, this site will be new host location for public festivals, concerts and events, capitalizing upon its prime riverfront location for passive recreation and cultural purposes. Moreover, a public marina and ferry is desired for the area adjacent to the Albany Yacht Club, and the area will be beautified with a focus on the arts and history of the maritime village.

As Broadway draws even more south it connects to the Fort Crailo Historic District, which is home to Fort Crailo and a number of other historic properties. Other prominent homes in the City along the waterfront include the Beverwyck Manor, Patroon Agent’s House and Office, Aiken House and Clark-Dearstyne-Miller Inn; all of which are cited on the National Historic Register of Historic Places.

From Bath to the Maiden Lane Bridge, New York Central Roundhouse and Fort Crailo Historic District, Rensselaer offers a pure and dynamic transit and maritime village of the past which can be footnoted and incorporated into the redevelopment vision of the future. The City is already capitalizing upon this vision, through a host of referenced housing, commercial and recreational projects along the riverfront, and plans to use the history and culture of the community to bolster the impact of those investments. As a point of reference, Rensselaer in many ways seeks to offer similar characteristics like those in Alexandria, Virginia; which was traditionally home to Potomac Yard Rail Station, now in the midst of redevelopment. Alexandria has used its history and culture to reinvent itself as a transit village which offers a maritime feel across from a metropolitan center and government capital. Rensselaer is a natural fit for similar redevelopment.

Current Investment:

The Rensselaer downtown area has recently been experiencing a number of aggressive private redevelopment proposals—particularly for the Project Anchor Site—and is also benefitting from several public infrastructure upgrades which have either been completed or which will be underway in the very near term. These combined efforts are expected to help leverage this revitalization project as well as other investments and improvements. In all, Rensselaer is currently leveraging over $38 Million in ongoing public investment to upgrade its roadways, sewer, and water infrastructure. (In addition to over $100 Million within the last five years) Moreover, the City is currently benefitting from over $340 million in Private Housing and Commercial Investments.

At the project anchor site, Public Esplanade improvements will support and leverage the development of a 96-unit apartment complex along the waterfront adjacent to the Dunn Memorial Bridge. This, in combination with the conversion of an old convent into 20 market rate apartments and roughly 50 new units along Broadway, will continue to spur future housing investment. Furthermore, the recent auction of city property generated $500,000 in private investment and rehabilitation of more than 30 underutilized properties. However exciting these investments are, it is important to understand that unless the City incorporates pedestrian and bicycle improvements to and from the train station from all residential neighborhoods, the future of Rensselaer’s
redevelopment as a historical maritime transit village will be in jeopardy. If awarded this DRI funding request, this need will be met in its entirety.

The following projects represent a number of the key current investments which are underway in Rensselaer through the private and public sector:

1) **Private Sector ($425M):**

The area within and around the revitalization target area has been home to several redevelopment proposals in the last few years, summarized below:

- **DeLaet’s Landing** — Located at the Project Anchor Site, included a proposal for a diverse mix of residential, commercial/high-tech office and retail uses on the vacant industrial riverfront in addition to the Rensselaer Clean Energy Deployment Center (CEDC) by SUNY Polytechnic. Moreover, Hard Rock International had also expressed interest in the site for the development of a new $300M hotel and casino.

- **Kiliaen’s Landing** — Just north of the project target area, a $60M mixed-use waterfront plan which is estimated to have the potential of creating 450 permanent new jobs and generate $1.5 million in annual property tax. Such tax revenues are crucial to the City of Rensselaer, which currently struggles with the highest percentage (65%) of tax-exempt properties in the state.

- **Cottage Hill Landing** — A $60M 170-unit residential proposal just outside and east of the project target area, within the dense older neighborhoods that surround it. This project is proposed on one of the many vacant residential lots that are found within a half-mile of the project site, a fact which illustrates the infill potential of the local catchment area.

- **Belltop Apartments** — A $2M 20-unit residential proposal along East Street on the edge of the project target area. This proposal seeks the adaptive re-use of a former convent. These types of private-sector projects are seen as an important catalyst for the local revitalization, especially considering their proximity to the train station and transit-oriented development potential.

- **Falls Edge Apartments** – A $1.5M 12-unit $1.85M residential project will replace vacant office space with housing for those who live active lifestyles near the Central Business District. The site is located just east of the project target area, but in close proximity to the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station and the waterfront.

- **Stoneleigh Apartments** – A $1M 14-unit residential project will provide additional market-based housing and 800 square feet of neighborhood commercial/retail space in close proximity to the downtown just north of the project target area. This project is a direct result of a full reconstruction of the public street and infrastructure in a block that hasn’t seen investment in over 50 years.
• Casale Apartments – A $1M 12-unit residential project will provide market-based housing adjacent to the downtown just north of the project target area. This project is also a direct result of a full reconstruction of the public street and infrastructure improvements along a block that hasn’t seen investment in over 50 years.

2) Public Sector Investments ($523 million):
Within the public sector, there have been several recent infrastructure upgrades and improvements completed, with more expected to get underway within the next year.

• Amtrak Terminal Expansion ($200M) - The busy Albany/Rensselaer train station at the epicenter of this revitalization area is currently undergoing a $200M expansion to add a fourth track between Rensselaer and Schenectady, which will increase ridership, and drive new local revenue.

• Railroad Bridge Rehabilitation ($250M) - The Livingston Avenue rail bridge, which crosses the Hudson River just north of the project area, is currently under preliminary design for replacement, and is expected to be upgraded to accommodate pedestrian travel across the river. This $250M pedestrian link is planned to connect to the new Hudson River Trail, which is going out to bid next spring.

• High-Speed Rail Plans (Cost Not Yet Known) - High-speed rail is currently being considered to link the Rensselaer rail station with New York City. A similar study to develop a high-speed rail link between Rensselaer and the City of Buffalo has also just completed the step of Environmental Impact review. These efforts underscore the strategic geographic crossroads that Rensselaer occupies in upstate New York.

• City Infrastructure Upgrades Underway ($50M) - The City of Rensselaer has recently financed $50M in significant infrastructure upgrades with the streetscape rehabilitation of Broadway—the primary boulevard through the center of the target area—with all new water, sewer, gas, sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and a bridge over the rail lines. At the south end of the target area, other infrastructure upgrades include all new gas lines serving the downtown neighborhood.

• Future City Infrastructure Upgrades Planned ($10M) - Similar to the Broadway improvements noted above, the City of Rensselaer is beginning another $10M in significant infrastructure upgrades along East Street in the eastern side of the project area. This work is scheduled to go out to bid in the next month, and includes new underground utilities, streetscape upgrades as well as sustainable “green-infrastructure” stormwater controls.

• Hudson Waterfront Trail ($2M) - Along the waterfront of the project area, plans are currently underway to construct a major segment of the Hudson Riverfront Trail, which will connect downtown Rensselaer with the Livingston Avenue Bridge pedestrian link noted above and areas north to Kiliaen’s Landing.
• Rensselaer Waterfront Park Design and Construction ($3M) - The city is currently work on the $3M DeLaet’s Landing Public Esplanade —located at the Project Anchor Site—as the centerpiece for surrounding private development. This work is being coordinated with private developers and the Waterfront Trail.

• Broadband ($2M) – The city has embarked on an effort to establish an ultra-fast city-wide broadband network to attract new technology businesses and provide broadband services to underserved populations, built from the existing fiber-optic trunk lines they have already established. These combined efforts are part of the city’s strategy to help attract new clean-technology businesses and sustainable development into the downtown as part of a vision for Tech Valley.

• Environmental Compliance ($6M) - The city is proud to note that it is significantly ahead of schedule for eliminating combined sewer overflows into the Hudson River in accordance with the Albany Pool CSO Long-Term Plan developed with the CDRPC and the NYSDEC.

Future Investment:
The City has identified a number of key projects which would be tackled as a result of a DRI Award. Based upon the improvements which have been completed to date and those which are now underway, the below initiatives would serve to round out its vision for the Transit Village. However, without a DRI award, the City will continue to be plagued by inaccessibility and substandard transit flow at least for the immediate future. They include:

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Accessibility Improvements:
The City of Rensselaer has long suffered from the fact that access to and from the waterfront, Broadway and the Rensselaer/Albany Train Station is not easy. In fact, Amtrak’s Rail Lines, which are currently being increased from 3 to 4 (to allow for planned and expected ridership increases) run North-South right through the heart of the community. This creates a physical barrier that residents must contend with in order to get to and from Broadway and the waterfront. Moreover, both Columbia Street and Third Avenue support an average of 40 thousand daily motorists traveling right through the heart of Rensselaer to the Dunn Memorial Bridge, as the main gateway to Albany’s downtown. This creates a number of accessibility issues for pedestrians and bicyclists in their desire to get to and from the downtown and waterfront. It has hindered redevelopment for years, and as a result jeopardizes all prior and current port, technological, housing, public infrastructure and commercial investments moving forward. This problem is the main driver of Rensselaer’s desire for DRI Funding, as a proper accessibility and façade improvement plan must be developed for the entirety of the City in order to ensure that all prior, current and future investments are sustainable in the creation of a maritime transit village.

Just as important, a DRI award would allow the city to move forward with a number of critical façade and accessibility improvements along Broadway, ensuring that it properly acts as a “Main Street” within the heart of the transit village. Broadway is ideally situated between the waterfront and the train station, offering outstanding possibilities in relation to the attraction of new businesses, improved storefronts and streetscaping. As Rensselaer’s traditional main street corridor, its rebranding and improvement will serve as a major catalyst in
coordinating all of the ongoing investment projects within the transit village. However, DRI funding is essential to move forward with such improvements.

Completion of the Waterfront Trail and Promenade:

The City of Rensselaer has many unique recreational and cultural opportunities that currently exist, but these assets remain hidden from people passing through the City along Broadway and Columbia Turnpike. In fact, for years it was possible to drive through the heart of the City without ever seeing the Hudson River, despite it only being a few blocks away. This reality is changing with expediency, and the DRI target area includes a waterfront redevelopment plan which is already experiencing the construction a major segment of a new Hudson Riverfront Trail that will connect downtown Rensselaer with the Livingston Avenue Bridge. The City also plans upon creating new trail and waterfront recreational facilities north of the Livingston Avenue Bridge, connecting to the historic village of Bath and the Patroon Island Bridge. This overall project is currently designed and under construction, and the City has received an additional $1.28M to add another 4,000 linear feet of trail. Nonetheless, the City will be seeking additional grant funds from Federal, State and Charitable Programs in order to ensure the completion the entire waterfront park as envisioned. Additional grants might include the Recreational Trails Grant Program, Major League Baseball’s Baseball Tomorrow Fund, US Soccer Foundation’s Safe Places to Play Program, NRPA’s Play Spaces Grant Program and other recreation-based funding streams.

Construction of a new Marina to define the City as a Maritime Village.

Directly South of the Dunn Memorial Bridge lies open space which is currently home to a historic professional baseball field, gazebo, playground, tennis courts and a pedestrian plaza. This space ripe for redevelopment, and the City Currently has a designed project for the improvement of its recreational components. It is also desired to enhance this space by highlighting the city’s history and culture via the construction of a new public marina in the area just to the north of Second Avenue. The area currently hosts a handful of cultural and arts related events annually, an aspect which the City plans to build upon. The ultimate vision is to construct a maritime village which boasts restaurant, retail and other commercial activities along Broadway in close proximity to the waterfront marina and a passenger ferry to bring pedestrians to and from downtown Albany. The marina would also host historic ships on a regular basis for the public to view and learn about. In partnership with the Hudson River Foundation, Hudson River Valley Greenway, DEC Estuary Program, Scenic Hudson and National Parks Service, these ships might include:

- Halfmoon
- Mystic Whaler
- Clearwater
- OnRust
- Woddy Guthrie Boat
- John Harvey Fireboat
- Columbus Ships
- Jamestown, VA Ships
4) Recent or impending 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.

Over the past thirty years, Rensselaer’s industrial base has eroded as the region and the State have moved from manufacturing to informational and serviced-based sectors. While the city retains its important role as a shipping and distribution center managed by the Albany Port District Commission, the size of employers still located within the City limits and DRI Focus Area is much smaller. Although Rensselaer has become a bedroom community for the Capital District, great potential for redevelopment exists and is currently being experienced.

Significant stretches of land remained vacant and underutilized for years along the Hudson River, and many of these parcels are in the midst of redesign and redevelopment, actions which will transform Rensselaer into the Capital District’s premiere waterfront destination. In addition, the availability of well-established industrial areas are being re-marketed as affordable locations for supportive office, research and development, distribution and warehouse spaces for the growing high technology industry of the Capital District.

The historical loss of industry and resulting vacant buildings and industrial sites resulted in shrinking tax revenues for decades, which in turn increased the burden on residential property taxpayers. However, the redevelopment renaissance which is currently underway has placed the City in a position where it was able to provide a slight property tax cut for residents each of the last two years, virtually unheard of in today’s cities. This is precisely due to the Mayor and City Council’s focus and discipline over the last few years. It is anticipated that revenues will continue to stabilize and increase over time, and the community’s mix of uses will drive job growth in partnership with the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak Rail Station. This is in part due to the fact that the City is bounded by an employment triangle in the SUNY East Campus/Regeneron to the East and RFP Tech Park to the north with the state capital complex to the west. The city is at the crossroads of Interstate’s 787 and 90, and a short cab ride to Albany International Airport. The Port of Rensselaer is growing and new waterfront recreational facilities are under construction. This growth is evidenced by the fact that the City’s population, which declined from 1980 to 2000 by 12 percent, grew by 21 percent from 2000 to 2010.

In order to redefine the City has a supportive community for those who desire a place to live, work and play, the administration has been focused upon providing for new housing options. In fact, this boom can be referenced by reviewing the current list of projects that have recently been approved or are shovel ready. Many of which lie within neighborhoods that surround the transit village area, and support long-term job growth within the center of the Albany-Rensselaer employment triangle:

**Housing**

Immediately surrounding Transit Village Area:

- Falls Edge Apartments ($1.7M) – 22 High Street – 12 New Housing Units
- Stoneleigh Apartments ($1.5) – 1040 Broadway – 14 units
- Joe Casale Housing Project ($1M) – 1047 Broadway – 12 Units
- Bell Top Apartments ($2M) – Lawrence Street - 20 Units
• Cottage Hill ($50M) – Patrition Street – 173 Units
• Kiliaen’s Landing ($60M) – Tracey and Forbes Avenue – 200 Units

Anchor of Transit Village:
• UW Marx ($300M) – DeLaet’s Landing (Project Anchor at Full Build Out) – 515 Residential Units; 165,000 Square Feet of Retail Space, 250,000 Square feet of Office Space; 300 Room Hotel; 1,830 Parking Spaces
• UW Marx ($22M) – DeLaet’s Landing Residential – 96 Units – Currently Underway

Commercial/Technological:
• Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. — Just a short drive up the hill in the adjacent municipality of East Greenbush, Regeneron is planning a massive expansion of an additional 480,000 square feet as part of a second, nearby campus. This expansion is anticipated to increase their local workforce of 1,300 people with an additional 1,000. The company experienced $4.1 billion in revenue in 2015, a 46% increase.
• DocStrats — A promising information technology and training company located in downtown Rensselaer which has been growing steadily. With revenue of $3.17 million in 2013, they employ around 25 people, with plans to double their workforce over the next three years.
• Monolith Solar — Founded in 2008, this fast-growing company was started by two people in a garage and now employs 40 people in downtown Rensselaer. With the recent trend for solar installations growing quickly, this company is looking to expand further.
• Albany Molecular Research, Inc. (AMRI) — Provides manufacturing of bulk active pharmaceuticals and advanced intermediates, with more than 1,300 employees worldwide. AMRI’s Rensselaer facility is located along the waterfront at the southern edge of the target area, with 260 local employees.
• Vision Data Equipment Corporation — A growing supplier of IT media/publishing software applications, with offices just outside of the target area. Currently employs 40 people.
• Rensselaer Technology Park (2,000 New Employees to be Connected with Kiliaen’s Landing and Waterfront) — A campus dedicated to university-related technology ventures with the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, located at the northern end of the city. The above list represents an important sampling of the local technology businesses which are already established and serve as a growing foundation for creating a high-tech industry center in this area. By hosting these emerging technology companies, and attracting similar technology firms and educational institutions, it is believed that the city would be well positioned with long-term sustainable job growth as the technology market continues to blossom. It is also anticipated that additional growth in the technology sector, along with a diverse mix of downtown housing, recreation and retail business, will make the downtown a very attractive place to live, work and visit for current and future generations.

5) Attractiveness of physical environment. Identify the properties or characteristics that the downtown 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 City of Rensselaer has a number of strong natural features that are in the midst of being enhanced or are planned for improvement. All of these physical features will be used as economic development drivers throughout the future:

**Existing Location (Attractive, Livable, Active Lifestyles):**

The strength of Rensselaer’s attractiveness is due to its proximity to the Hudson River Waterfront. In fact, the primary neighborhood target area includes more than 4,000 linear feet of scenic Hudson River waterfront, which is ideal for continued mixed-use development with restaurants, parks, trails, marinas and other recreational activities. The waterfront offers unparalleled views of the Albany skyline, which adds value to the attraction of Rensselaer as a maritime transit village.

Moreover, the waterfront is located parallel to the City’s “Main Street” along Broadway. Broadway is home to commercial and retail main street businesses, experiencing both housing and commercial investments over the last five years, including the opening of three new restaurants. Broadway has historically been Rensselaer’s most diverse thoroughfare, as it runs north-south throughout the community, connecting the neighborhood which used to be the historic Village of Bath, the Albany-Rensselaer Transit Station and the Fort Crailo Historic District to the South.

It is also important to understand that Rensselaer is located at the center of an employment and event triangle which includes the New York State Capitol, Albany Convention Center, Times Union Center, Rensselaer Tech Park, SUNY East Campus and Regeneron. In order to capitalize upon this fact, the City is also committed to establishing an ultra-fast city-wide broadband network, which will serve to attract new businesses, residents and serve underserved populations. The network will be built from existing fiber-optic trunk lines in order to support the city’s strategy to help attract new clean-technology businesses and sustainable development into the downtown as a transit village.

Due to its location, Rensselaer is a regional crossroads for Upstate New York, with convenient access to important north/south and east/west corridors including Interstate 90, Adirondack Northway, the New York State Thruway and active rail corridors.

**Housing**

The City is currently welcoming the construction of upwards of 800 new housing units through dynamic mixed-use developments along the waterfront. The addition of these units will help to attract skilled workers to the City of Rensselaer, and will drive the further development of a re-imagined maritime transit village. This approach will enable the attraction of the new Millennial Generation (born between the early 1980’s and the early 2000s), which surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest generational cohort in the United States in 2015. Combined with the growing number of Baby Boomers contemplating re-location as they approach retirement, this demographic represents a sizable number of renters and buyers who are seeking areas that they can live, work and play. In a 2016 Report by the Regional Plan Association, it was noted that 56 percent of Millennials...
and 46 percent of Baby Boomers now prefer to live in more walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. Moreover, there is a growing shortage of multi-family housing, as the nation’s current supply of single-family homes is estimated to exceed future demand for at least the next 25 years. Armed with this knowledge, and the resources to meet this demand, Rensselaer will now boast new housing stock in a prime transit village location. A continued commitment to such development, as well as complementary accessibility improvements, will ensure the sustainability of the City as it moves into future decades.

It is also important to note that the City’s housing stock offers not only market-rate but affordable units throughout the downtown and along the waterfront. In addition to market-rate and affordable housing, the city boasts over 200 vacant lots within existing residential neighborhoods which can be redeveloped for single and multi-family housing units at a wide range of values.

**Zoning:**

The City of Rensselaer changed its zoning code in 2012 to allow for mixed-use development along the waterfront and through the downtown. This has had a dynamic effect upon the City’s housing stock and planned commercial developments. Despite the activity, there remains to be a host of additional developable, mixed-use spaces which exist along the waterfront and surrounding the train station. The City estimates that this change has opened up thousands of additional square feet of underutilized re-developable space downtown and along the waterfront that can offer affordable, market rate housing, commercial and recreational uses.

**Recreation:**

It can be argued that the centerpiece of the City’s revitalization efforts are centered around the creation of new arts, cultural and recreational opportunities. As evidence of this fact, the City is currently moving forward in the redesign and construction of a new Rensselaer Waterfront Park. The park will be connected to a waterfront trail as the centerpiece attraction for new private sector development along the river. Moreover, as a part of the project, there is also a public park at the Dunn Memorial Bridge, as well as a boat launch. In addition, the City’s plan also calls for a Phase II of the project, which will extend the trail northward to the historic Village of Bath, including numerous new athletic fields and pedestrian plazas. The key for all of this redevelopment rests upon the city’s desire to offer both passive and active recreation to visitors and residents alike.

**Arts and Culture:**

The City of Rensselaer offers a multitude of historic and cultural features that are currently underutilized. Among these are its waterfront, a number of historic properties relating to the City’s story as a port and transit community. As a result, it seeks to capitalize upon these features by providing for a host of façade improvements along Broadway, strategic historical and artistic signage and the adaptive reuse of former rail infrastructure which has been discovered throughout the transit village. The city also plans to enhance connectivity to and from historic sites such as the Village of Bath to the north of the DRI area and Fort Crailo to the south of the DRI area, improvement of a historic waterfront baseball field, improved locations for public events such as farmer’s markets, an enlarged marina area with historic boats and the reuse of underutilized property for artistic purposes. In order to see this vision through, the City will work closely with those invested in its rebirth, as well as pursue alternate sources of funding through federal, state and charitable grant programs such as the federal Boating Infrastructure Grant Program, Maritime Heritage Grant Program and numerous
creative placemaking grants offered through the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts. However, the key to the integration of these sites is the creation of a full pedestrian and bike accessibility plan for the entire city, which is the pure focus of this DRI funding request. As cited, DRI funds would help to ensure the development of the plan and construction of many essential pedestrian and bike accessibility improvements.

**Multi-Modal Transportation:**

As cited, the City offers a multitude of transit related options which are founded in maritime, rail, pedestrian, bike and vehicular modes of transportation. However, the current physical system which is in place does not encourage forms of transportation beyond vehicular to the degree desired by the City. It is this issue which is the focus of the City’s DRI Application, as there is a significant need for detailed planning and the construction of new pedestrian, bike, rail and maritime forms of transportation enhancements.

As highlighted, the primary anchor area of this project includes the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station, served by two bus lines, with direct access to NYC, and a multitude of opportunities for new walkable, transit-oriented development. The transit station is ironically both Rensselaer’s greatest asset and largest barrier to reaching its goals. First, the station offers access and egress from the community for over 800,000 travelers each year, a figure which feeds the outstanding growth opportunities which exist in the City. However, the location of the rail lines themselves and the Amtrak Maintenance Yard to the north create a multitude of walking and biking accessibility issues which prevent many of these travelers from experiencing what Rensselaer has to offer. In fact, the station itself is surrounded by a host of underutilized land, consisting of thoroughfares designed to encourage provide for direct connections to Albany and six underused parking lots. Moreover, the rail lines themselves bisect the City north to south, preventing easy pedestrian and bicycle access to Broadway and the waterfront from the east. In fact, Herrick Street offers the only form of pedestrian access, and no local wayfinding signage to ease access to Rensselaer’s centers of place.

As further justification for the need for these improvements, it is important to note that housing outside of the downtown consists of dense, older residential neighborhoods which provide hundreds of single and multi-family homes and potential residential properties that are also within walking or biking distance. Yet, the physical make-up of the community also makes it difficult for these residents to easily access Broadway and the waterfront. In order to ready itself for accessibility improvements, the city has been actively working to rebuild many of the primary downtown streetscapes with new sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and other amenities. It has also spent upwards of $50 million in public infrastructure improvement within these residential neighborhoods over the last 5 years.

In addition, Rensselaer’s pedestrian and bicycling accessibility points to get to and from Albany are limited to the Dunn Memorial Bridge. Unfortunately, the bridge’s design does not encourage pedestrian traffic in a manner which can truly reduce vehicular traffic and congestion. Rensselaer’s main street, waterfront and Albany’s downtown all lie from one half mile to one mile of the train station, but unfortunately this distance feels unmanageable due to the current pedestrian and bicycle routes which are offered. Despite this fact, the city plans to incorporate new forms of connectivity to and from Albany, to ensure the a DRI award provides for a seamless benefit between the two downtowns. Project ideas include a gondola linking Albany from the train
station as well as a ferry service from the new marina to be constructed. The City is also considering the adaptive reuse of old rail infrastructure to offer new forms of pedestrian connectivity from both sides. All of these actions would ease the connection and support multi-modal transportation from Rensselaer’s Transit Village.

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 plans, 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 City of Rensselaer is currently in the process of re-defining itself as a model community for sustainable growth, clean technology, mixed-use housing and waterfront recreation. As part of this effort, it is actively working to encourage focused-growth within the downtown area and the reconstruction of local streetscapes to create a pedestrian-friendly environment that attracts those interested in living, working and playing in a modern transit village. Moreover, as a result of the City’s Brownfield Opportunity Areas Nomination Study, the Rensselaer Revitalization calls for the redevelopment of properties which have long been vacant or underutilized in a manner which promotes the continued growth of the transit village. This focus centers on a planned desire to integrate mixed-use development, parking features, revised zoning regulations, complete streets policies, transit-oriented development and adaptive reuse policies to support a diverse and inclusive growing population within the limits of the City of Rensselaer. Unfortunately, this cannot be accomplished in an expedited manner without DRI planning and implementation support to integrate the many assets which exist in Rensselaer.

To set the stage for Rensselaer’s renaissance, the City recently reconstituted its IDA, which has facilitated two major development projects in the city, with more to come. The centerpiece of the City’s revitalization efforts are directly driven by the existence of the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station, located at the center of the revitalization target area. To date, the station has played a pivotal role in helping to establish a more sustainable transit-oriented community. Recent station improvements included investing in the development of a fourth rail line, which will increase ridership in a significant way for decades to come. In order to capitalize upon this investment, the City has recently pursued and conducted a number of critical actions the support the improvement of quality of life in the city:

- New Zoning Codes - The city adopted new zoning codes in 2012 which were designed to provide great flexibility while promoting a compact, walkable urban center to help encourage infill development. The City is also considering the development and use of a form-based code to bolster this initial change and guide redevelopment efforts moving forward.

- Waterfront Redevelopment – The City is completing a $3M waterfront promenade adjacent to the $300M DeLaet’s Landing Project, which will include 515 Residential Units; 165,000 Square Feet of Retail Space; 250,000 Square Feet of Office Space; a 300 Room Hotel; and 1,830 Parking Spaces. Moreover, the City just received $1.28M in order to begin the construction of a proposed waterfront trail to run north from the Rensselaer Transit Village. The Transit Village will also include a ferry to and from Albany.
from Rensselaer, coupled with a Gondola from the Albany-Rensselaer Transit Station to downtown Albany; both of which are in the planning stages.

- **Transit Oriented Development** - The downtown is blessed with a very active regional transit hub, which provides the foundation for a successful transit oriented development. However, much of the land directly around the train station is currently vacant or devoted to surface parking. This provides an excellent opportunity for active mixed-use infill development to make more efficient use of the real estate and strengthen connections to the waterfront.

- **Complete Streets** – The city is pursuing the adoption of a complete streets ordinance as a part of accessibility redesign. It is believed that such a policy will enhance connectivity, increase safety and encourage the use of alternate forms of transportation beyond vehicular. All of these benefits support the City’s future vision for growth and sustainability as a maritime transit village.

- **Adaptive Reuse** – As a part of current streetscaping and waterfront redevelopment efforts, the City is focused upon the need to reuse the historical footprints which exist. These include former New York Central Railroad property, a historic baseball field and former port related infrastructure. In addition, numerous abandoned properties exist that are slated for adaptive reuse to include new housing and commercial entities.

- **Supporting the Tech Valley.** The city has been actively working for the past several years to advance a forward thinking economic development strategy by becoming a model community for clean technology, sustainability and smart growth. As part of this effort, it is working to develop a bold Community Broadband project, which is designed to both provide city-wide WiFi to connect underserved populations, as well as attract new leading businesses with Gigabit speed internet.

7) **Support for the local vision.** Describe the public participation and engagement process conducted to support 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 local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

If awarded, the local lead will be Charles Moore, the Director of Planning Development for the City of Rensselaer. The Planning & Building Departments are responsible for administering and facilitating the development and re-development of the city’s land and structures through the administration of the City’s Zoning Code and Building Code. The planning department also administers the City’s HOME program, which provides income-based grants for home rehabilitation under the Federal Housing & Urban Development Agency (HUD). As such, Charles is well in tune with the status of ongoing and planned redevelopment initiatives in the city, making him uniquely qualified to lead the DRI process.

The City of Rensselaer’s vision for its future as a transit village is also supported by all government, business, educational, healthcare and residential populations that have an interest in the community. In order to effectuate the overall vision, the City must first move forward with all of the proposed improvements designed for the DRI Focus Area of the downtown. Such improvements include the construction of a new marina,
waterfront trail system, hotel, mixed-use residential housing, streetscaping, façade improvements along Broadway, artistic and historical theming/beautification and accessibility improvements north to south feeding from the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station. As planned, the City is on the verge of completing an innovative and modern compact transit village bordered by the Hudson River Waterfront and the Albany-Rensselaer Transit Station.

Prior to this application, the city planning staff, Common Council, interested stakeholders and local residents have long been working toward a vision of creating an active redeveloped waterfront which is walkable and vibrant. In fact, the City has a long history of relevant planning documentation that dates back to the 1980’s, making many of the designs well prepared for implementation. In addition, many project related plans exist that center upon the DRI Focus area, including the DeLaet’s Landing and Brownfields Opportunity Area Revitalization initiatives, which took two years of planning each.

Moreover, the City received a grant through the New York State Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program (BOA) to conduct a Nomination Study. This study contributed to the development of Rensselaer’s Revitalization Plan, which provided an in-depth and thorough description and analysis of existing conditions, opportunities, and reuse potential for properties located in the BOA. Not to be missed, the BOA encompasses the same footprint of that of the DRI Focus Area. One of the major flaws that the BOA Study highlighted is a current lack of urban design that supports pedestrian connectivity:

“This is especially true with the fact that the downtown core is virtually cut off from the adjacent neighborhoods by the Amtrak tracks. Very few intra-city pedestrian connections exist to allow residents to freely and conveniently walk from their neighborhoods into the downtown. The same could be said for connections from the downtown core to the Hudson riverfront. In recent years draft Design Guidelines were created for the City which addressed building facades, site layout, signage, amenities, site access, parking and circulation. However, these guidelines have remained in draft form.”

It is this connectivity issue what the City needs DRI support in order to resolve. As with the BOA’s resulting Revitalization Plan, the City’s comprehensive plan outlines the full vision of what Rensselaer will be, once redevelopment is complete:

“Residents, workers and visitors will enjoy the high quality of life offered by the Rensselaer’s unique combination of small-city charm and regional access to large-city amenities. The City will build upon its unique heritage and exceptional location within the Capital District, renewing residents’ sense of pride in their community. The city’s waterfront along the Hudson River will be reinvented as a place to live, work and recreate. Public access to the Hudson River from neighborhoods, the train station and the central business district will be of paramount importance. A waterfront pathway/trail will provide continuous public access, connecting to activity centers such as downtown, the train station and adjacent neighborhoods. New businesses will be attracted to Rensselaer’s quality-of-life assets, excellent transportation infrastructure, and proximity to major educational institutions. The City will include a variety of housing options that meet the needs of its diverse population. Residents will be encouraged to participate in the city’s continuous planning and development process, especially at the neighborhood level. Their involvement will form the foundation of the city’s future.”
Most importantly, the city’s comprehensive plan Vision Statement also notes: “Residents, workers and visitors will enjoy the high quality of life offered by the Rensselaer’s unique combination of small-city charm and regional access to large-city amenities. [...] New businesses will be attracted to Rensselaer’s quality-of-life assets, excellent transportation infrastructure, and proximity to major educational institutions.” The city is committed to this effort to rebuild itself with a diverse mix of qualities which will make it attractive to new generations. The City’s Vision is also supported by the Rensselaer City School District, Capital District Transportation Authority, Rensselaer County Executive, City of Rensselaer Common Council, Amtrak, and local state legislative representatives.

Recent efforts toward this goal by the city have included the 2011 Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, and the 2016 Brownfield Opportunity Area Plan. If selected for this Downtown Revitalization Project, the City of Rensselaer Office of Planning and Building is well prepared and equipped to act as local lead to convene a local DRI Planning Committee of experienced and interested stakeholders and coordinate the effort with experts. The focus of which will provide for the development of a comprehensive accessibility plan which will protect prior, current and future investments in a manner that encourages multi-modal transportation.

Re-investment in Rensselaer is also supported and bolstered by previous and ongoing investments being made by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc., Documentation Strategies Inc., Vision Data Equipment Corporation, U.W. Marx Properties Inc., Fiscal Development LLC, Brayton Construction, Martin Electric, Albany Port District, Polsinello Fuels, Amtrak, CDTA and Monolith Solar.

8) Readiness: Describe opportunities to build on the strengths described above, including a range 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 the majority of projects proposed for DRI funding demonstrate their readiness for implementation.

The City of Rensselaer, led by its planning department, has developed a clear vision for growth which incorporates mixed-use redevelopment along the entirety of its waterfront resting upon its natural capacity as a transit village which is able to readily offer quality housing, recreational, commercial, governmental, educational, cultural and historical resources for visitors and residents alike. The City views the receipt of this DRI Funding Request as the final piece necessary to ensure expedited growth and development within Rensselaer. Specifically, the city would use DRI assistance in order to work with a team of expert planning professionals to design and implement a comprehensive accessibility plan that will deeply connect all of the outstanding resources that the City has to offer. This accessibility piece is so vitally important to ensure the sustainability of current growth initiatives and that key performance indicators are met within the coming decade. If awarded, Rensselaer will be able to address and bolster the connectivity of ongoing and planned economic development, transportation, housing, and community development projects in the city.

Below are a number of key aspects that define Rensselaer as a shovel-ready community:
Ongoing Redevelopment:

Rensselaer is no longer an untested market, as there are numerous waterfront projects which are underway, representing the construction of well over 800 new affordable and market rate housing units. Before the last two years, Rensselaer was in many ways a market that remain untapped. However, the ongoing projects at Cottage Hill, DeLaets Landing and Kiliaen’s Landing represent $410 million in ongoing diversified private investment within the community that result in 888 new housing units, 165,000 square feet of retail space, 250,000 square feet of new commercial space and a brand-new waterfront 300 room hotel with 1,830 parking spaces in the area. This investment, coupled with a variety of public transportation and a host of other relevant public and private investments, proves the story that the Rensselaer is on the verge of a new era.

Momentum is already underway. Martin Electric, a seventy-eight year old 50 employee company doing work for the region’s largest employers such as Global Foundries, Regeneron and the SUNY Polytechnic Institute has decided to relocate to vacant and underutilized space within the proposed DRI Transit Village area. Moreover, Martin Electric purchased virtually an entire city block and will relocate the headquarters to the City of Rensselaer’s downtown. They have recognized the potential and momentum that is currently underway and want to get in on the ground floor of the city’s resurgence. City DRI funds will be used to leverage and enhance this commitment by a large regional employer. In addition, the city is also working with a number of other local and regional developers on the revitalization of the strategic parcels outlined in our BOA/DRI Map.

Existing Transit Hub:

The neighborhood target area also offers the benefit of the fact that it lies in the center of a major transportation hub, and includes a variety of underutilized and vacant property. In fact, much of the real-estate directly around this train station is either vacant commercial land or surface level parking. In order to successfully adapt this asset into a successful local economic driver, this transportation hub must be connected to the rest of downtown and the waterfront with active mixed-use development and jobs as part of a transit oriented community. This step will be made if Rensselaer is chosen as the Capital Region’s DRI community, and it is necessary to break the pattern of downtown Rensselaer acting only as a “pass-thru” to other destinations, and instead becoming a destination itself.

A Community in Need:

It is also important to note that the City is committed to the notion that downtown and waterfront redevelopment must benefit the entire community. Downtown Rensselaer, largely composed of Census Tract 515, is officially considered a “distressed area” according to EDA, and is classified just short of the threshold for a “highly distressed” area, with roughly 20% of population living below poverty level. Planning efforts as part of this work will take the steps necessary to connect all populations to the quality of life assets which are under development. Moreover, planning efforts will also ensure that there will remain a diverse base of housing and job opportunities to protect the fabric that has made Rensselaer the wonderful community it has always been. Protecting Rensselaer’s sense of community will be of utmost importance, and ever present within the next decade.
Underutilized Land:

As further evidence of how ripe the City of Rensselaer is in relation to redevelopment and sustainability, it is worthy of note that the community currently has the highest percentage of tax-exempt properties of any city in the state. Although this presents a situation that can support innovative planning, it also makes funding projects through local capital very difficult, as tax revenues have traditionally been very low. In order to expedite their redevelopment, the City is in the process of foreclosing on strategic parcels through its InRem process. As a result of this process, many of these vacant parcels within the BOA/DRI Transit Village area will become City property that can easily be leveraged for redevelopment purposes. A DRI award will ease this process by providing additional leverage to ensure innovative accessibility planning and the connection of all of Rensselaer’s positive assets.

How a DRI Award Completes the Transit Village Vision:

In order to recap the final pieces to Rensselaer’s resurgence as a transit village. These projects are all earmarked for DRI funding, if awarded:

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Accessibility Improvements:

The Problem: The City of Rensselaer has long suffered from the fact that access to and from the waterfront, Broadway and the Rensselaer/Albany Train Station is not easy. In fact, Amtrak’s Rail Lines, which are currently being increased from 3 to 4, run North-South right through the heart of the community. This creates a physical barrier that residents must contend with in order to get to and from Broadway and the waterfront. Moreover, the both Columbia Street and Third Avenue support an average of 40 thousand daily motorists traveling right through the heart of Rensselaer to the Dunn Memorial Bridge, as the main gateway to Albany’s downtown. This creates a number of accessibility issues for pedestrians and bicyclists in their desire to get to and from the downtown and waterfront. It has hindered redevelopment for years, and as a result jeopardizes all prior and current port, technological, housing, public infrastructure and commercial investments moving forward. Moreover, the city’s historic main street corridor along Broadway is in need of major accessibility and façade improvements to attract new residents and businesses alike in the heart of the Transit Village.

DRI Focus: The City would like to develop and implement a comprehensive multi-modal accessibility and façade improvement plan in order to ensure that all prior, current and future investments are sustainable in the formal creation of the waterfront transit village.

Completion of the Waterfront Trail and Promenade:

The Problem: The City of Rensselaer has many unique recreational and cultural opportunities which currently exist, but these assets remain hidden from people passing through the City along Broadway and Columbia Turnpike. In fact, for years it was possible to drive through the heart of the City without ever seeing the Hudson River, despite it only being a few blocks away.

DRI Focus: Rensselaer’s Transit Village includes a waterfront redevelopment plan that is already experiencing the construction a major segment of a new Hudson Riverfront Trail that will connect downtown Rensselaer with the Livingston Avenue Bridge. The City also plans upon creating new trail and waterfront recreational facilities north of the Livingston Avenue Bridge, connecting to the historic village of Bath and the Patroon Island Bridge.
This overall project is currently designed and under construction, and the City has received $1.28M to begin constructed. Nonetheless, the City will be seeking additional grant funds, hopefully through the DRI and from Federal, State and Charitable Programs to ensure the completion of the entire waterfront park as envisioned. Additional grants might include the Recreational Trails Grant Program, Major League Baseball’s Baseball Tomorrow Fund, US Soccer Foundation’s Safe Places to Play Program, NRPA’s Play Spaces Grant Program and other recreation-based funding streams.

Construction of a new Marina to define the City as a Maritime Village.

The Problem: Directly South of the Dunn Memorial Bridge lies underutilized open space which is currently home to a dilapidated historic professional baseball field (where the first professional home run was hit), a gazebo, playground, tennis courts and a pedestrian plaza.

DRI Focus: This space is ripe for redevelopment, and the City currently has a designed project for the improvement of its recreational components. It is also desired to enhance this space by highlighting the city’s history and culture via the construction of a dynamic new public marina in the area just to the north of Second Street. The area currently hosts a handful of cultural and arts related events annually, an aspect which the City plans to build upon. The ultimate vision is to construct a maritime village which boasts restaurant, retail and other commercial activities along Broadway in close proximity to the waterfront marina and a passenger ferry to bring pedestrians to and from downtown Albany. The City will also be pursuing funding from the federal Boating Infrastructure Grant Program. Once complete, the marina would also host Historic Ships on a regular basis for the public to view and learn about. In partnership with the Hudson River Foundation, Hudson River Valley Greenway, DEC Estuary Program, Scenic Hudson and National Parks Service, historic ships might include the Halfmoon, Mystic Whaler, Clearwater, OnRust, Woody Guthrie Boat, John Harvey Fireboat, Columbus Shits and Jamestown Tall Ships.

9) Administrative Capacity. Describe the extent of the existing local administrative capacity to manage this initiative, including potential oversight of concurrent contracts.

The City of Rensselaer is committed to seeing its revitalization efforts through to completion, regardless of its ability to receive this DRI award. However, the process by which accessibility improvements will be made will certainly be much longer if the community is not the beneficiary of this award. It is the City’s belief that it offers a setting for revitalization predicated on a shovel ready maritime transit village which is already under development. In comparison to other communities in the Capital Region, it is likely that no other municipality can offer an opportunity as strong as Rensselaer’s as it relates to the creation and improvement of recreational, commercial, historical, transit, cultural and housing assets in a compact district. As a result, this proposal has the full support of the district’s state legislators, municipal governing body, business district, Amtrak, Rensselaer City School District and existing residents. It is also important to note that the City is already undergoing such a transition as the population rose a staggering 21 percent from 2000 to 2010, and continues to rise.

The City is well suited to administrate such an award, through the leadership of the Mayor and his administration. As evidence of this fact, the City’s planning department has been working tirelessly over the last decade in order to foster redevelopment in a responsible fashion, and would take the same approach through a DRI project. As a distressed community which relies upon grant funding to enable a host of critical projects on
an annual basis, the City is well aware of the proper approach to work with the State in relation to grant requirements and the importance of adhering to program guidelines and timelines through implementation. In fact, the City is currently administering over $38 million in public projects that are tied to grant funds. This figure represents the shovel-ready nature of the community and the commitment city staff has to seeing its vision through to fruition. Also worthy of note, the City has adhered to the State of New York’s 2 percent tax cap, and has had two reduced taxes for residents each of the last two years.

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

The following links are provided for easy access to relevant information supporting our application. We encourage you to visit some of these to see the progress and work which has gone into our local revitalization vision:

Images of Proposed Redevelopment Concepts

Redevelopment Properties

“City of Rensselaer – Hub of New York’s Tech Valley”
www.rensselaerny.gov/Libraries/Clerk/WEB-CityofRensselaer.sflb.ashx

2016 Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Plan

2011 Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan

NEWS: SUNY Polytechnic Seeks Proposals for Rensselaer Riverfront

NEWS: Rensselaer Waterfront Transformation Wins State Funding

City of Rensselaer Comprehensive Plan
http://www.rensselaerny.gov/Libraries/Planning_Department/Comprehensive_Plan_2006.sflb.ashx

City of Rensselaer Future Land Uses Map
http://www.rensselaerny.gov/Libraries/Planning_Department/Future_Land_Use_Map.sflb.ashx

City of Rensselaer Zoning Map
http://www.rensselaerny.gov/Libraries/Planning_Department/Zoning_Map.sflb.ashx
ATTACHMENT A

Map of Rensselaer Transit Village and its Strategic Parcels
Make pedestrian and visual connections between:
- Train Station
- Downtown, and
- Waterfront Destinations

- Future dock expansion for "Tall Ships" Festival
- Expanded cultural and historical park
- ALBANY—RENSSELAER FERRY SERVICE
- Future Albany—Rensselaer Ferry Service
- Rensselaer Waterfront Esplanade
- Fort Crailo Historic Neighborhood
- Killiaen's Landing
ATTACHMENT B

Maps of Revitalization Target Area and Context Area