



The \$100 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest \$10 million in one community in each region ripe for development to transform them into vibrant communities where tomorrow’s workforce will want to live, work and raise families. The program emphasizes using investments to reinforce and secure additional public and private investments proximal to, and within, downtown neighborhoods, and in doing so will build upon growth spurred by the REDCs. Each REDC will nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

The NYC Regional Economic Development Council (NYC REDC) is currently soliciting interest in the program from communities in the region using the enclosed template. After applications are received, the NYC REDC will consider how interested communities meet the proposed criteria, and request certification by the State of the one downtown that the NYC REDC determines is best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

Applications are due by **5:00 p.m., Friday, June 3** and should be submitted to the following e-mail address: NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – DOWNTOWN TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: New York City

Municipality Name: New York City

Downtown Name: East 125th Street “Uptown Grand Central”

County: New York

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

125th Street is a point of pride in Harlem: Known as “Martin Luther King Boulevard”, it stretches from the Hudson River to the Harlem River. 125th Street is the place to shop, work, attend religious services and attend school. It is the heart of the Harlem neighborhood and its “Main Street”.

In recent years, however, the conditions along the eastern portion of 125th have lagged far behind the portions found further west. Eastbound From Fifth Avenue, residents have faced overburdened sanitation services, an oversaturation of methadone clinics and homeless shelters, and a high vacancy rate leaves many blocks empty and dark at night.

Since its inception three years ago, the New Harlem East Merchants Association (NHEMA) has worked to make East 125th Street a vibrant and active place for people who live and work in Harlem. Through the provision of supplemental sanitation services, beautification with flowers and street trees, bright new

street signage, holiday lights, and community programming at a new community plaza, we are building momentum between small business owners, property owners and residents to reveal the beauty of our neighborhood and make our main street a place where people of all ages, income levels and ethnicities can live, work and do business.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines.

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

Our “downtown” business district is East 125th Street, from Fifth to Second avenues. The heart of this district is the community plaza underneath the Metro-North viaduct at East 125th Street & Park Avenue.

- 2) Size.** Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown.

The Metro-North station at the heart of our commercial corridor at East 125th Street & Park Avenue is the only Metro-North station located in Manhattan outside of Grand Central Station. It is said that some 4,000 people enter and exit this station daily on their commutes between nearby residential areas, the 4/5/6 subway lines at 125th Street & Lexington Avenue, and the 2/3 subway line at West 125th Street & Malcolm X Boulevard. By car, the East 125th Street corridor leads up to the Robert F. Kennedy (Triborough) Bridge and the Harlem River Drive. East 125th Street also features the M60 Select Bus service that connects Morningside Heights and Columbia University to LaGuardia Airport via 125th Street.

Residential areas are a part of the East 125th Street corridor, with large development sites along its intersection with Park Avenue. To the north and the south of the downtown corridor, there is an assortment of single and multiple family building typologies. Traditional Harlem brownstones line the east-west blocks just west of Park Avenue and to the east are larger complexes that include the Section 8 buildings such as Taino Towers, and the NYCHA developments such as Jackie Robinson and Wagner houses. The Salvation Army is also building new senior housing at the cross streets of East 125th Street & Lexington Avenue. Slightly farther east is Tapestry 124, Harlem’s first LEED certified rental apartment building.

New York City’s population is growing and Harlem is no exception. The community is preparing to accommodate the increasing demand for housing and retail services through an extensive planning process. In order to institute required mandatory affordable housing units, the city must undertake a rezoning action across a large swath of the neighborhood. In the year preceding this grant opportunity, Community Board 11, the local councilmembers, and the Borough President organized a community planning initiative to define the scope and the goals of such a rezoning. East Harlem is poised to grow according to a community vision and the corridor surrounding East 125th Street and Park Avenue is part of that vision.

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

For more years than we can count, this area was in dire need of sanitation and social services -- abandoned and forlorn, with piles of street trash and a large number of encampments of mentally ill and drug-addicted individuals. Since its inception, NHEMA has won a NYC Small Business Services Neighborhood Challenge grant and received city council discretionary funding to hire formerly homeless individuals to clean our streets. We have further worked with NYC SBS to study the area and organize the small businesses through capacity-building, placemaking and merchant organizing awards. Since Summer 2015, the open space underneath the Metro-North viaduct at East 125th Street & Park Avenue has been designated as a Community Plaza by the NYC Department of Transportation, enabling NHEMA with One NYC funding to clean the plaza daily and program it with community activities such as a GrowNYC farmer's market, musical performances and exercise classes.

Currently the plaza on Park Avenue from 124th and 125th streets is the focus of a project by the NYC DOT and NYC Economic Development Commission to make traffic and pedestrian safety improvements via a federal DOT TIGER grant and funding from NYC City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. Scheduled to begin in Spring 2017, this project will repair broken sidewalks and add lighting underneath the dark Metro-North viaduct space. These improvements will further support programming, beautification and placemaking.

The Metro North Station on East 125th Street is the core of the downtown area. Perhaps not coincidentally, this area is also surrounded by vacant lots and unleased commercial space. There were various efforts to redevelop a large site to the southwest of the Metro North station, but the proposals were never able to attract financing. Even so, developers know there is a huge amount of potential and have been building assemblages of land within the downtown that will create the next wave of new affordable and market rate residential units as well as retail and office space.

The second phase of the Second Avenue Subway will bring exciting new connections to 125th Street at Lexington Avenue. The Q train will provide new service to Times Square and Herald Square. After the completion of phases 3 and 4 the Far East Side of Manhattan will be accessible like never before and the future "T" train will be an important connection with Hanover Square in Lower Manhattan. Existing Metro North service is one of the best-kept secrets in Manhattan. Companies that wish to provide back-office services to firms in East Midtown around Grand Central Station will have an incredibly fast one-seat ride between 125th Street and 42nd Street with the commuter rail acting as a "super express" service.

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

Northeast Harlem currently employs a large number of healthcare, education and nonprofit professionals, evidenced by the large number of anchor institutions along or close to the East 125th Street corridor including Carter Hospital, Boriken Neighborhood Health Center, the NY College of Podiatric Medicine, the Association to Benefit Children, Harlem Children's Zone, the Caribbean Cultural Center of the African Diaspora and the National Black Theatre.

Expected to arrive soon at East 125th Street & Third Avenue is the East Harlem Media, Entertainment and Cultural Center (MEC), the first phase of a 1.7-million-square-foot, mixed-use development on three predominantly vacant parcels. The final development will include 30,000 square feet of dedicated community and cultural space, more than 600 affordable housing units, a public plaza, new office and retail space, and a hotel.

East 125th Street also has a number of vacant parcels expected to be developed with 80/20 affordable housing and ground-floor retail. Among these properties are an assemblage that includes the former Pathmark supermarket at 125th Street & Lexington Avenue (Extell), a former parking lot along 126th Street between Third and Lexington avenues (Blumenfeld Development Group), the southeast corner of 125th Street & Park Avenue (Waterbridge), the southwest corner of 125th Street & Park Avenue (Continuum/Durst), and the southeast corner of 125th Street & Fifth Avenue. The area also features recently renovated but not yet rented commercial space in the Corn Exchange on the northwest corner of 125th Street & Park Avenue, and the Nass Building on the northeast corner of 125th Street & Madison Avenue. Large residential developments need ample building staffs and the service sector has proven to be a source of good jobs that allow families to grow.

Tech is growing industry in Harlem. There are currently two mature tech incubators operating in Harlem. Millennials are attracted to Harlem for its authenticity, storied history and rich culture. A strong downtown will welcome the enterprising entrepreneurship that this is common in this generation. NHEMA works closely with our small business owners, the East Harlem Talent Network and the Union Settlement Business Development Center to ensure that new developments and startups hire local workers.

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

From the Nigerian art that adorns the walls of the National Black Theatre, to the “Harlem Encore” sculpture that graces the sides of the Metro-North tracks, our neighborhood has a strong cultural history of which we are proud. As the area becomes more active and K2 epidemic continues to wane, we are seeing increased use of community gathering spaces. These include Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem Art Park, “Crack Is Wack” Playground, the East River Esplanade and the community plaza that we are revitalizing at 125th Street & Park Avenue. A new Citi Bike station is planned for Park Avenue between 124th and 126th streets.

Each week year-round, NHEMA hosts a Fresh Food Box program in conjunction with GrowNYC at the community plaza, enabling local residents to access locally grown New York State produce at an affordable price with SNAP benefits and Health Bucks provided by the NYC Department of Health. The program also includes weekly cooking demonstrations and a compost drop-off. Nine blocks north of the historic La Marqueta vendor market, the program also features East Harlem food products including bread baked at the Hot Bread Kitchen small business incubator kitchen. While our nearby Pathmark supermarket closed last fall, the developer of that lot has agreed to include food retail on the ground floor when that building is developed, and the neighborhood is now served with affordable produce at NHEMA small business Wild Olive Market, City Fresh Market and a new Super Fi Emporium. In part as an indication of the healthy food work going on now in East Harlem, the City University of New York recently opened its new Urban Food Policy Institute on 125th Street just west of Fifth Avenue.

- 6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.** Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

Our downtown is part of almost every major strategic undertaking in Harlem when it comes to next generation transportation innovation (M60 SBS), modern zoning (125th Street Special District, East Harlem Plan), economic development (MEC) and placemaking. The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) works with selected not-for-profit organizations to create neighborhood plazas throughout the City to transform underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces. The NYC Plaza Program is a key part of the City's effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space. Eligible not-for-profit organizations propose sites in their neighborhoods through a competitive application process. DOT prioritizes sites that are in neighborhoods that lack open space, and partners with community groups that commit to operate, maintain, and manage these spaces so they are vibrant pedestrian plazas. There are currently 73 public plazas throughout New York City in some phase of design, development or implementation managed by local groups. About half of DOT plazas are in low to moderate income areas with limited capacity partners that struggle to meet the demands of providing a high quality public space in outer borough neighborhoods.

To address this issue, Mayor de Blasio has put \$1.4M in the FY '16 city budget to provide technical assistance and maintenance services to DOT's most needy plaza partners through its OneNYC Plaza Equity Program (OPEP). These funds and services enable every community in the city to have a high quality public space. Lower capacity organizations will get the help they need to keep up with the high standards required by the NYC Plaza Program and enable neighborhoods to grow in their ability to provide a valuable asset to their residents.

New Harlem East Merchants Association (NHEMA) applied to Round 7 of the NYC Plaza Program in 2014 identifying the existing space at 125th St & Park Avenue as a potential plaza site. After engaging in an extensive community outreach process, which included community workshops and Community Board presentations, DOT together with NHEMA implemented an interim materials plaza at this location in the summer of 2015.

DOT's partnership with NHEMA has been fundamental to the success of the interim plaza that has already contributed to a significant transformation of the space. DOT is excited by the prospect of building on this success as part of the OneNYC Plaza Equity Program that will provide NHEMA with additional maintenance and technical assistance services as well as allow DOT and NHEMA to develop concession models that will not only assist with the activation of the space but also create economic development opportunities for local businesses and serve the wider community.

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

The current placemaking efforts are not simply an important safety and economic development effort; it is to a greater degree an example of the working draft of a future DRI Planning Committee. The plaza visioning and planning process is a sustained, group effort that engages the Manhattan Community Board 11, elected officials, government agencies, cultural institutions, and local businesses. The New Harlem East Merchants Association (NHEMA) is the core of this group and the driving force behind this positive momentum.

In 2015 NYC DOT received a \$4.2M TIGER grant for the permanent reconstruction of the 125th St Plaza the focus of which is on making much needed safety enhancements at this high crash location such as enhanced crosswalks and enhanced lighting together with the reconstruction of the plaza to create an open and flexible public space. More can be done to create a strong sense of safety and enjoyment beneath the Metro North tracks for those who live and work in our downtown. For example, a former comfort station beneath the elevated tracks divides the public plaza in half. This inhibits the plaza from realizing its full potential and uncertainties over its structural integrity are an obstacle to committing resources to study how to best integrate its historic nature into the project. A well respected planning consultant estimated that to convert the comfort station into a concession that would bring in revenue to the plaza and generate activity would cost between \$4.35 million and \$6.35 million, including soft costs and contingencies. The Downtown Revitalization Initiative will enable our broad partnership to continue developing more ways to turn 125th and Park into a beloved nexus of people, ideas, and activity that is worthy of the nickname “Uptown Grand Central.”

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