



Growing Together: The Revitalization of Downtown Geneva

Downtown Revitalization Initiative Submittal

June 10, 2016



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – APPLICATION TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Finger Lakes

Municipality Name: City of Geneva

Downtown Name: Downtown Geneva

County: Ontario

Downtown Description -

The City of Geneva has partnered with New York State to create a compact, vibrant economic engine. We have had many successes in our collaborations together; from dramatically decreasing the number of vacant storefronts, to creating a set of civic amenities that make downtown a special place, cherished by our community.

But there is much left to do. We continue to grapple with vacant, abandoned, and blighted buildings and the aesthetic, social, and economic challenges they present. We are also facing a poverty rate of over 25%; more than double that of our neighbors in Ontario County.

See **Page 1** that follows for a deeper overview of the challenges and opportunities for collaboration in downtown Geneva.

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.

The downtown district is well-defined by the boundaries of the Geneva Business Improvement District. A detailed description of the district coverage is included on **Page 2** that follows, and a map is provided as Attachment A at the close of this application package.

2) Size.

The Geneva Business Improvement District is comprised of 100 acres, primarily serving the City of Geneva, but drawing reliably on our neighboring four-county region. A detailed description of size aspects of the district is included on **Page 2** that follows. A map of the downtown district is found in **Attachment A** at the close of this document.

3) Past Investments & Future Investment Potential.

The City of Geneva and New York State have partnered on planning and implementation of millions of dollars in revitalization efforts for downtown and beyond. The concepts advanced by the DRI allocation will support continued revitalization activities in the downtown district, and build upon our successful partnerships over the last decade. Specific springboards on which we may capitalize are found on **Page 3**.

Our track record of partnerships and private sector collaborations will be catalyzed through alignment of regional and City strengths, and well-planned initiatives and investments. Specific opportunities and strategies for catalyzing future investment can be found on **Page 6** that follows.

4) Job Growth.

Downtown Geneva is home to over 200 firms and nearly 1,500 jobs. This represents nearly 20% of all firms citywide, and over 10% of jobs in Geneva. We have also seen a 10% growth in downtown jobs over the last five years. We have accomplished this via a balanced approach, with a mix of larger institutional firms and organic growth of microenterprises to develop a sustainable model for the future.

We have developed investment strategies to continue the growth and diversification of the job market in downtown Geneva; including entrepreneurial support, workforce development, and building renovations. Specifics on the Geneva job market, and on our strategies for growth are found on **Page 13** that follows.

5) Attractiveness of the Downtown.

The City counts among its assets an incredibly walkable and bikeable downtown district, as well as an unmatched inventory of historic structures. Our vibrancy is accentuated by a range of festivals and events occurring on a year-round basis in the Linden Street entertainment district and the Smith Opera House, as well as many other venues throughout downtown.

We can leverage DRI funds to support the continued revitalization of blighted historic structures, as well as capitalizing on infill development opportunities to diversify our housing stock relative to accessibility and affordability. We can also utilize these funds to mitigate the food desert in downtown by supporting the development of a grocery store. Specifics on these strategies can be found on **Page 15** that follows.



6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.

The City of Geneva has already taken steps to update zoning regulations with form-based guidelines to improve aesthetics and functionality of downtown spaces. Additionally, we have implemented new energy codes that have fostered sustainable energy projects throughout the downtown district.

Our comprehensive plan has laid the framework for additional improvements to zoning and other regulations to support broader quality of life improvements. More detail on policy readiness can be found on **Page 17** below.

7) Poverty Reduction.

Poverty reduction is a core objective for the City of Geneva. Since 2000, our poverty rate has climbed from 17.5% to 25.2%; and outstrips our neighbors in Ontario County by ratio of over 2:1.

The City's recently developed comprehensive plan challenges Council with the development of strategies to reverse this trend. Among our efforts in this regard will be workforce development, support of entrepreneurial efforts, and the development of safe, affordable housing. More details on our strategies can be found on **Page 18** that follows.

8) Local Support.

Our downtown revitalization strategy is deeply rooted in the principles of our comprehensive plan. This planning effort is reflective of over a year's worth of community engagement and feedback efforts. The Plan's steering committee was 25 strong, representing a diverse group of residents, businesses, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders.

A complete list of partner agencies in execution of our downtown development strategies can be found on **Page 19** below.

9) Other.

The primary contact for this program will be City Manager Matt Horn. He can be reached by phone at (315) 789-6104, or by email at mdh@geneva.ny.us. Additional plan information and closing thoughts can be found on **Page 22** that follows.

Overview

The City of Geneva, fueled by the collective impact of hundreds of public, private, not-for-profit, and institutional partners, has moved along an incredible trajectory to an exciting point of inflection. These efforts have yielded a sense of place and community and a uniquely urban experience rivaling much larger and more resourced communities. We have established a clear track record as stewards of private, state and federal investment toward a renaissance that continues to take shape amidst a challenging regional economic environment.

With that said, the proposed Downtown Revitalization Initiative funds will not merely be the “icing on the cake.” We continue to face real challenges in the area of blighted, vacant, and abandoned properties and a poverty rate that is double that of our neighbors in Ontario County. We propose to focus these funds toward eliminating the visual and social impacts of blight, and to elevate the economic and social challenges facing our most economically disadvantaged residents.

The city and our partners have focused on creating a compact, vibrant economic engine; diverse in its business and residential offerings so as to maintain a sustainable economic environment to be enjoyed by residents, workers, and guests to the region. We have capitalized on key investments from the Regional Economic Development Council, and executed on a well-planned investment strategy. Our partners have produced nearly \$20 million in redevelopment activity in the downtown district alone over the last ten years.

Our private and not-for-profit partners have also worked to create a range of employment opportunities with impressive job growth over the last decade. Today, the city’s downtown district offers as many employment opportunities as our industrial park does. Well-paying jobs are available for skill sets ranging from the most basic clerical and retail environment to advanced financial services, and everywhere in between.

The city’s development policies, coupled with public and private investment, have created a vibrant, mixed-use district with access to a range of cultural and recreational opportunities, health care providers, fresh, affordable food, and broadband infrastructure to support business growth. All of this is available within a short walk or bike trip—in fact, Geneva outpaces county, state, and national averages for individuals walking or biking to work. All of these efforts have yielded a unique sense of place—an urban setting in a largely rural environment. Downtown Geneva is truly a service center to the region.

Geneva will leverage this funding to address our blight and challenging poverty rate in the same manner that has yielded economic fruit to date. We will collaborate with our partners in government, the private sector, and not-for-profits to develop community-led, solutions-driven planning efforts and execute these with great focus. Our recent comprehensive plan identifies critical strategies, which when applied appropriately, will turn the corner on our remaining challenges.

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative aligns perfectly with our goal in this regard—engaging a community-based planning effort, leveraging the resources of the private sector with public funding, and applying laser-like focus to those areas most likely to bear fruit. We stand ready to take advantage of this progressive approach at community revitalization.

District Boundaries

Downtown Geneva is a vibrant, mixed-use district, well-defined by the boundaries of the Geneva Business Improvement District (GBID). It is a compact, walkable neighborhood on the northern gateway to the city; encompassing a National Register Historic District, and the city's vibrant Seneca Lake shoreline.

The city's recently developed comprehensive plan suggests focused investment in the core of the district, identified by the areas bounded by Castle Street to the north, Seneca Street to the south, Exchange Street to the east, and Main Street to the west. The plan also calls for critical investments on the North Exchange Street and Lakefront Drive corridors, and the continued development of civic amenities on the Seneca Lake shoreline.



The plan also calls for critical investments on the North Exchange Street and Lakefront Drive corridors, and the continued development of civic amenities on the Seneca Lake shoreline.

Key amenities within the district's boundaries are the historic Smith Opera House, the Geneva Farmers Market, the Linden Street Entertainment District, *The Cooler* (the city's year-round sports arena), and the Geneva Entrepreneurs Lab--a start-up, co-work opportunity currently under development.

District Size

Downtown Geneva serves as the primary retail, restaurant, cultural and entertainment destination for the surrounding region. Over the last decade, it has also emerged as a major employment center, boasting over 200 firms and nearly 1,500 jobs in the central business district alone.



The diverse economic base, and wide catchment area (drawing reliably from a four county region) maintains Geneva's economic sustainability from a year-round standpoint. The presence of three academic institutions in close proximity to the district provides an "off-season surge" relative to retail, restaurant, and accommodations buying power, while our presence along the Seneca Lake Wine Trail serves as a key driver during the tourism season.

From an area perspective, the central business district is 100 acres.

Capitalizing on Past Investments

Downtown Geneva has seen tremendous public, private, and not-for-profit investment over the last decade. The city has leveraged nearly \$9 million in funding from various state economic development sources, and more than doubled it through private investment and city economic development support. Since 2006, downtown Geneva has seen nearly \$19 million in investment in civic infrastructure and private development.

Private Sector Investment

As was intended, the investment of state and local economic development dollars has spurred private sector investment in adaptive reuse of historic structures and infill development. The following are examples of key redevelopment projects in the private sector:

- Lyons National Bank—Mixed-Use Development and Operations Center: As part of a 2004 downtown revitalization effort, Lyons National Bank developed a branch location on a key corridor into downtown Geneva. Based on the success of their business in Geneva, the company developed a branch expansion and mixed-use office and retail space. In 2015, the firm located several key executives and administrative functions with the development of a 50-employee operations center in a previously vacant office building on a critical corner in downtown Geneva. Their downtown projects account for \$8 million in new construction, building rehabilitation, equipment, and technology investments.

- Hobart and William Smith Colleges Office Project: The city is home to three outstanding institutions of higher learning. Hobart and William Smith Colleges have made Geneva their home for nearly 200 years. In 2013, the Colleges announced an ambitious administrative office development in a formerly vacant office property in downtown Geneva.



The resulting project saw the complete occupancy of upper floors by the Colleges, and the addition of 75 jobs into downtown, making them the district's largest employer. The project is privately owned, creating valuable property tax revenue to the city, in addition to the tremendous spending power of college staffers. The project also triggered \$400,000 in building renovation investment.

- Civic Center: The Geneva Civic Center served many uses over its nearly 200 year history. Developed as a church, the property was also used as a car sales facility, a USO, and a community

college campus. In 2008, the city sold the property to private developers who have converted it to a mixed-use site, hosting multiple firms on the street level floors, and market-rate apartments in the upper stories. The property was revitalized using a mix of land cost write-downs by the city, economic development funding from New York State, and federal and state historic tax credits.

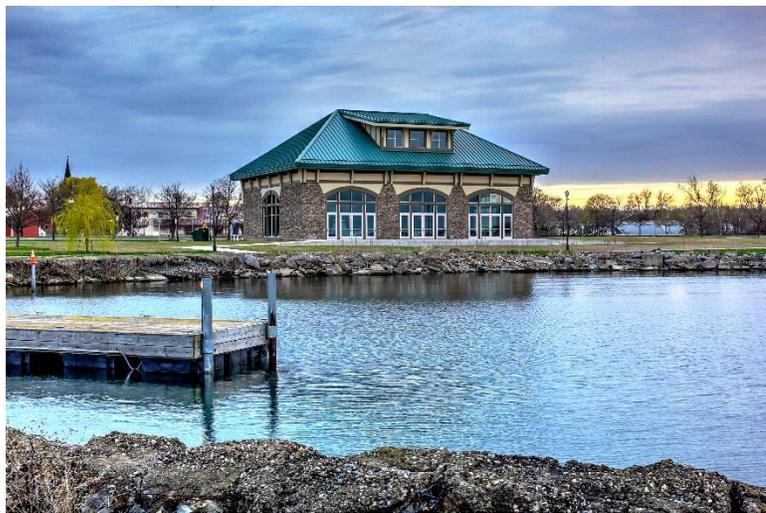
- Downtown Revitalization—Multiple Buildings: The city has leveraged a number of state grant programs to spur the revitalization of multiple historic structures in the downtown district. Façade improvement projects and the Restore New York program resulted in the redevelopment of over a dozen historic storefronts and leveraged over a million dollars in building renovation investments.

Civic Amenity Development

Placemaking is a key component of the city’s economic development strategy, particularly as it relates to downtown and the Seneca Lake shoreline. Creating an attractive, functional streetscape as well as civic and water-enhanced amenities drives business attraction and resident recruitment.

The following are examples of key civic infrastructure projects:

- Geneva Visitor and Events Center: In 2014, the city celebrated the opening of the Geneva Visitor and Events Center; a 5,000 square foot ballroom and visitor center on the shores of Seneca Lake. Construction was funded with the support of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, and the project is operated through a public-private partnership



with H&J Hospitality of Ithaca. The facility hosts a range of events, including weddings, corporate meetings, and civic events. The site is also host to the Geneva Visitor Center, which welcomes over 10,000 guests to the Finger Lakes each year.

➤ Seneca Lake Access Project:

The city is blessed to maintain one of the largest municipal lakefront parks in the state at Lakeshore Park. The site is a sixty acre parcel, with vast opportunities for connections to Seneca Lake. Thanks to over \$2 million in funding commitments from the Finger Lakes Regional Economic



Development Council, the site is being transitioned to an active, vibrant civic amenity. The project is based on a state-funded master plan, which split the total development into six phases. The city and state have equally funded the first three phases, which connect the city's lakefront with a multi-county regional biking and walking trail. Improvements also include a kayak launch, public plazas, a boardwalk, improved dockage, and other access points to Seneca Lake.

➤ Geneva Farmers Market: Geneva sits in the heart of one of the most productive agricultural regions in the state, and the Geneva Farmers Market connects family-grown produce to consumers making healthy choices. The Geneva Farmers Market is located in the core of the



downtown district; well-served by the county's public transit system, and supportive of populations of all economic means. The city and state partnered to transition an underutilized lot into this fresh, healthy food distribution opportunity. In addition to market amenities, including power and water for merchants, the city and state also partnered to develop a regional transit hub

and improve adjacent rear storefronts to enhance the appearance of the once-blighted area.

➤ "The Cooler:" Once an open-air ice rink, the city partnered with state and community supporters to enclose the facility and add year-round amenities, including a turf field. The space hosts NCAA hockey from Hobart and William Smith men's and women's varsity and club teams, as well as a range of high school and youth hockey programming. It serves as a key economic engine for downtown during the winter months, with thousands of athletes and spectators visiting Geneva for these events. In the summer, the site hosts box lacrosse and soccer camps, and a full schedule of other civic events.

Catalyzing Future Investments

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) planning and implementation framework is built upon principles that Geneva has leveraged to success for the last decade. Thoughtful, community-based planning processes, integration of private and not-for-profit sector partners, and application of expertise from design and community development professionals has long been Geneva’s project planning and implementation strategy, and has yielded many successes in the downtown district and beyond.

The city recognizes that a thoughtful planning process is critical to the success of any effort. As such, the project development framework will be informed by the planning exercise laid out in the DRI guidelines. The city will support this process through the application of community values, planning principles, and development priorities laid out in the state-supported comprehensive plan, recently developed in cooperation with the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC). This plan, and our associated strategies, have been developed to be in painstaking alignment with the Finger Lakes Forward plan, thoughtfully developed by the FLREDC.



As such, potential investments will center on those elements of the regional strategy that can be best leveraged in Geneva for economic success.

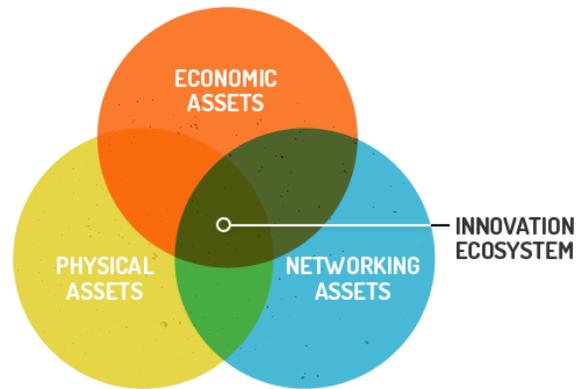
Potential investments will be measured for their anticipated impact toward the following principles and strategies:

- Capitalizing on the Region’s Prominence in the Craft Food and Beverage Sectors: Geneva is located in the heart of the Finger Lakes wine region, and has seen tremendous growth in wine industry investment and affiliated tourism activity. Additionally, downtown Geneva has capitalized on the locavore movement, and has established ourselves in a place of culinary prominence. We will seek to further leverage our location and local expertise in these markets.
- Fostering Entrepreneurship: The convergence of world-class academic and research institutions, private sector expertise, and an attractive, affordable lifestyle have cemented a culture of entrepreneurship in Geneva. We will seek out opportunities to capitalize on this convergence.
- Eradicating Poverty: Geneva’s poverty rates outpace those of our neighbors. We will utilize workforce development strategies, access to entrepreneurial support, and enhancements to healthy living opportunities to elevate our economically disadvantaged populations into financial and physical health.
- Enhancing the Quality of Life for All Residents: Our natural setting and unique urban environment combine to make Geneva an attractive community in which to live and work. We will seek out those investment opportunities that continue to make Geneva a great community.

While the planning process will make ultimate project determinations, a sampling of potential investments follows.

Finger Lakes Food and Beverage Innovation District

In 2015, City Council established the Innovation District as the core of our economic development strategy. The concept is based in the work of Bruce Katz and the Brookings Institution, and seeks to capitalize on the convergence of three premiere educational institutions in Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Cornell University, and Finger Lakes Community College; with a tremendous private sector presence in the craft food and beverage sectors; set in one of the most unique urban environments in the region.



The Innovation District serves as an entrepreneurial ecosystem, which fosters project development from the idea stage through full production. The city seeks to provide physical and technical resources to entrepreneurial efforts in the craft food and beverage sectors, and to provide a unique backdrop in which to operate. Project support is offered on a spectrum, dependent upon the maturity of the firm; with the most basic of small business development programming on one end, and Start-Up New York certified acreage on which to develop on the other.

Specific projects for consideration in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative may be:

- Geneva Entrepreneurs Lab: This is the point of entry in our entrepreneurial ecosystem. It serves as a co-work space and business incubator, with inexpensive office space, administrative support, and small business development programming, and access to venture capital; all set in the adaptive reuse of a long vacant anchor building in downtown.
- Microhousing Opportunities: A longstanding challenge for Geneva has been that we are host to many incredible job opportunities, but that the bulk of daytime employees pack-up and go home to other communities at the end of the day. This concept seeks to develop unique housing opportunities for entrepreneurs, who can live, work, and network with similar professionals within a compact, walkable community.
- Food Innovation Fund: The city has long administered an economic development revolving loan fund to support projects of all types in job creation and retention. We are seeking opportunities to capitalize a specific fund to support entrepreneurial ventures in the craft food and beverage sectors; particularly downtown in the Innovation District.

This project capitalizes on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward Plan:

- Agriculture and Food Production: The concept seeks to capitalize on the connection between the region's vast agricultural and food bounty and the academic and research resources of Geneva's higher education community.
- Entrepreneurship and Development: This project fosters entrepreneurship by connecting start-up ventures with technical and financial support, and creating jobs in the process.
- Pathways to Prosperity: This project seeks to lower the barriers of entry into entrepreneurial ventures for our most economically disadvantaged.
- Quality of Life: This concept provides a unique asset; compact district in which entrepreneurs can live, work, and play.

Complete Street Connections

The city has collaborated with New York State on a number of planning exercises that envision downtown connected to our surrounding neighborhoods, and to the vast civic amenities in place, under construction, and planned on Seneca Lake. Geneva is separated from Seneca Lake by a large highway, in U.S. 20/NY 5. Additionally, many of our neighborhood connections are via streets that were developed before the prevalence of automobiles, and thus were not constructed with multi-modal use contemplated.

The city seeks to connect the downtown with the Seneca Lake shoreline, and to our local and regional neighborhoods via a network of complete streets—with provisions for safe pedestrian access and cycling opportunities into the downtown district.



Specific considerations for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative may be:

- Lakefront Drive Connectivity: The city partnered with New York State on the Routes 5 and 20 Connectivity Plan; a resource developed to identify pedestrian and cycling improvements for connections between downtown and the Seneca Lake shoreline. There have been several fatalities along the 5 and 20 corridor in the last five years. Traffic calming and pedestrian/cycling access are paramount to quality of life.
- Exchange Street Corridor Enhancements: Exchange Street connects downtown Geneva with our most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The street profile provides little opportunity for access via any method but cars. Pedestrian and cycling improvements are needed to provide critical access to this distressed population.
- Castle Street Greenway: Castle Street provides the connection between downtown and the vast majority of our neighborhoods and schools. This street is also designed with little thought to pedestrian or cyclist traffic. Improvements providing for enhanced access by bicycle and pedestrian traffic will afford residents environmentally sound and healthy opportunities to access downtown.

These projects capitalize on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward plan:

- Reduce Poverty: One critical element of the multi-dimensional cycle of poverty is the physical access to jobs by economically disadvantaged populations. Increasing access to the market by transportation means other than vehicular provides a low cost alternative to accessing jobs. These improvements will create access opportunities from many of Geneva's most distressed neighborhoods.
- Cost of Living: Creating an affordable community in which to live and work is critical for attracting residents to Geneva. These improvements enhance the attractiveness of the downtown district, but moreover, decrease the cost of living by providing alternate means to access jobs, services, and amenities in the downtown district.

Affordable Access to Healthy Food

In 2012, the city partnered with the State of New York on the development of a Brownfield Opportunity Area Plan for our distressed north end neighborhoods, including those in downtown. One of the most significant findings of the study was that Geneva's most economically distressed neighborhoods were separated by miles from the closest year-round fresh food opportunities. Many disadvantaged families were accessing food via gas stations and convenience stores along the city's entry corridors.

According to the USDA, a food desert exists where a significantly concentrated set of disadvantaged residents has very low access to affordable fresh food. The Brownfield study, which ultimately led to the designation of the north end neighborhoods as a Brownfield Opportunity Area, recommended the development of a grocery store in close proximity to the neighborhoods.

As such, the city and our economic development partners have set this as a priority in our planning strategies.



Specific opportunities in this project may consist of:

- Land Cost Write-Down: The city has identified multiple potential sites which could serve a mixed-use development that includes a grocery. We have the opportunity to provide these sites to a developer at a reduced cost if project goals are met.
- Grant Support to Project Developer: DRI funds could be used to offset construction costs of a mixed-use building that houses a grocery store as part of its ground floor retail offerings.
- Loan Support to Project Operator: DRI and city revolving loan funds could support a loan to a potential project operator to create jobs and assist with start-up and ramp-up costs.

This project capitalizes on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward plan:

- Job Creation: A development of this magnitude has the opportunity to create multiple jobs in the downtown district; particularly those accessible to economically disadvantaged residents.
- Cost of Living: Reducing the cost of accessing healthy food alternatives results in a more affordable community for all residents.
- Reduce Poverty: A major factor contributing to sustained poverty is the lack of access to healthy food alternatives. This often results in poor health conditions for economically disadvantaged residents, further inhibiting their ability to obtain sustained employment.

Diversify Housing Opportunities

Downtown Geneva's recent revitalization efforts have made the development of market rate and high-end residential a more attractive investment opportunity for property owners and developers.

In a landscape once dominated by subsidized housing, the core of downtown now has very few housing opportunities for very low income populations. Additionally, the housing stock in downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods is largely multi-story development with low levels of accessibility. This has resulted in a significant outflow of retirees and other seniors, as they seek housing opportunities with greater accessibility. Finally, the city has been unable to truly capitalize on the economic impact of college students at the three higher education institutions in Geneva.



In many cases, these students are either living on-campus, which limits their economic impact on the region, or living in traditional, single-family neighborhoods, which contributes to quality of life issues for year-round households.

The city seeks to create a more diverse housing stock in the downtown district, in order to foster the economic balance that is inherent in the most successful of community development approaches.

Specific opportunities for this project may consist of:

- Land Cost Write-Down: The city has identified and retains ownership of multiple sites in the downtown district where infill development is appropriate. Land cost write-downs could be provided to developers who meet project goals.
- Grants to Project Developers: DRI funds could be used to support infill development or adaptive reuse projects that create a diverse set of housing opportunities for mixed-income, senior, and student housing in downtown.

This project capitalizes on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward plan:

- Cost of Living: A diverse set of housing options provides opportunities for economically disadvantaged residents and other targeted populations.
- Drive Private Investment: Grant funds will be leveraged significantly by private investment in the development of housing opportunities. This project is attractive to developers, as grant funds enhance the return on their investment, while meeting our community development objectives.
- Reduce Poverty: Increases in housing values in the downtown have resulted in displacement of economically disadvantaged residents. This results in clustering and concentration of poverty in other areas of the city. "Declustering" these households has proven to contribute to a reduction in poverty.

Seneca Lake Civic Amenities

In 2008, the city partnered with New York State on the development of the Lakefront-Downtown Master Plan. The plan called for downtown revitalization strategies to be implemented along with lakefront civic amenities, to be tied together with a complete street treatment of Lakefront Drive. Building upon that, the city



and state developed the Waterfront Infrastructure Feasibility Plan in 2012, which took recommendations from the Master Plan and identified opportunities for phasing and associated costs.

Since that time, the city and state have partnered on three phases of the lakefront civic amenities proposed in the Master Plan. In 2014, the city completed Phase I improvements, including shoreline stabilization, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and enhanced pedestrian access to the lake. In 2016, the city will complete Phases II and III, which include additional pathways, a kayak launch, and a plaza at Long Pier.

DRI funds may support execution of the remaining phases, including:

- Seneca Lake Marina: The plan calls for the development of a 100-slip public marina at the site of the city's lakefront hotel. The marina would be constructed with the development of an additional breakfront at Long Pier, and infilling new dockage. The city is in multiple conversations regarding potential public-private partnerships for marina operations.
- Castle Street Plaza: This pedestrian amenity is intended to create a clear sight line between the downtown commercial district and the lakefront, thereby creating a thematic draw and increasing pedestrian traffic. When coupled with pedestrian and cyclist improvements on Lakefront Drive, this results in much greater usage of civic amenities at the site.

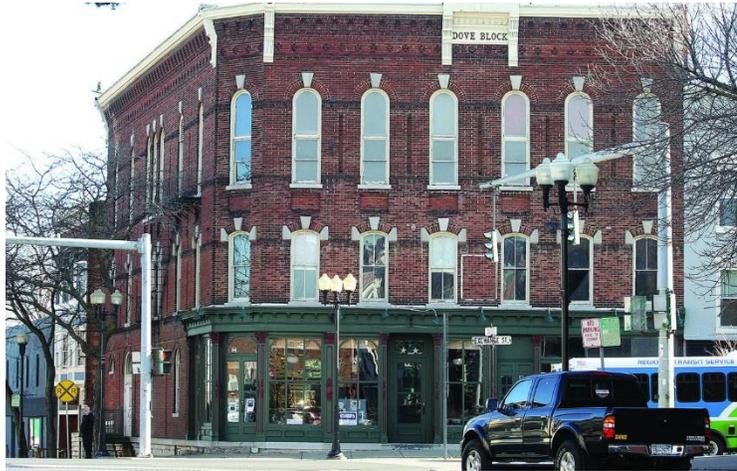


This project capitalizes on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward plan:

- Drive Private Investment: Downtown development opportunities become more attractive when coupled with the civic amenities provided on Seneca Lake. A robust, vibrant lakefront park creates a district that is attractive to all targeted populations.
- Arts and Culture: These amenities, when coupled with the pedestrian and cyclist improvements on Lakefront Drive, serve as an attraction to the performance and visual arts venues along Seneca Lake. Residents and visitors will be drawn to the lakefront, increasing attendance at festivals, exhibits, and concerts along the shoreline.

Anchor Building Redevelopment

Downtown Geneva has seen tremendous investment in its historic building inventory over the previous decade. Regional Council investments, when coupled with the addition of federal and state incentives associated with National Register status have prompted many investors to consider adaptive reuse projects in the district. Development has been incremental, and project investors have sought out buildings that could provide more expedient return for their investment. This has left larger, anchor



buildings, or major portions of them, either undeveloped or under-developed with very limited use largely focused on first floor retail or restaurant opportunities.

Vast opportunities exist in our larger buildings and upper stories for additional cultural, retail, restaurant, lodging, and residential projects. Challenges around these buildings deal largely with the size and scope of building rehabilitation and accessibility issues to upper floors which make them less attractive, particularly in environments of three or more stories. In the worst cases, these buildings have been vacant for decades, and are suffering from demolition by neglect.

The city seeks to offset costs associated with taking on these larger anchor projects, particularly when projects address identified strategic development objectives.

Project activities may include:

- Accessibility Grants: DRI funds could be used to provide owners with the resources necessary to offset costs associated with elevators and other accessibility improvements; opening upper floors to more responsive development.
- Energy Efficiency Grants: Funding could support building envelope and other improvements necessary to reduce the long-term costs of building ownership and operation.
- Grants to Support Mixed-Income Housing: In order to promote equity in downtown development projects, funds could be used to incentivize the development of low-income units among traditional market rate offerings.

This project capitalizes on the following elements of the Finger Lakes Forward plan:

- Job Creation: As the commercial elements of these projects become more viable, storefronts become occupied with job-producing retail and service ventures.
- Driving Private Investment: Funding formulae could be established to leverage state funds against private investment.
- Reducing Poverty: Creation of mixed-income housing results in the “declustering” of disadvantaged households. This has the added effect of reducing poverty over time.

Fostering Job Creation

At its core, the basis of any economic recovery is solidly dependent upon our ability to attract, retain, and grow jobs. This impacts every area of economic development, including local revenue generation, sustained growth of property values, and most importantly, eradication of poverty in our community.

Downtown Geneva is an economic engine on many fronts, but most importantly, it has become an incubator for job creation in the region. The district is home to over 200 firms—nearly 20% of all firms located in Geneva, and is host to nearly 1,500 jobs—over 10% of all jobs in the city. The most impressive factor in this jobs picture is the diversity of economic sectors represented. A longstanding myth about downtown development is that most jobs are retail-oriented. In downtown Geneva, the number of retail jobs are matched by the number of professional services workers as well as the number of public employees. This even mix provides for a diverse, sustainable jobs base. The non-retail jobs in the district provide foot traffic and buying power to support restaurant and retail activity.

In the last five years, downtown Geneva has added 10% to its jobs base. This has occurred through a mix of major project announcements, and grant-supported small business development. Examples include:

- Lyons National Bank—Retail and Office Development: In 2006, Lyons National Bank developed its first retail branch presence in downtown Geneva. The firm quickly grew out of its initial location and developed a major mixed-use infill project in the heart of the downtown district.

Since then, the firm has located multiple key executives and its back office operations to downtown Geneva, and boasts over 70 employees in the district, with over \$5 million in annual payroll allocations.



- Hobart and William Smith Colleges—Administrative Offices: Over the course of the last decade, HWS has experienced tremendous student growth, and has worked to reorient their on-campus staffing model to allocate space to those offices with direct student support missions. Indirect support offices, including Institutional Advancement, Communications, and Information Technology were located in a longstanding vacant building in downtown's core. This has resulted in the addition of over 70 employees to the district.
- Microenterprise Assistance Program: The city has partnered with New York State on three successive, successful rounds of the Microenterprise Assistance Program; a grant program designed to support new and expanding firms with fewer than five employees. Since the initial round in 2011, the program has created over 15 jobs in the downtown district. A third round of funding was approved as part of the 2015 CFA round, and is anticipated to create an additional 15 jobs.

In addition to these critical projects and programs, the city has seen tremendous organic growth in the district. A 2008 storefront census identified that over 50% of storefronts in the district were vacant. In 2014, a follow-up survey showed less than a 20% vacancy. With each new storefront, another set of jobs develops in the district.

Strategies to Sustain Job Growth

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative presents an opportunity to both grow and diversify employment opportunities in the downtown district. As is noted above, institutional job growth presents opportunities for larger numbers with higher than average salaries. In order to sustain continued growth, we will need to foster development of a wide array of smaller projects as well.

Specific strategies to sustain and diversify job growth include:



- **Entrepreneurial Support:** As is noted in the previous section, City Council has committed to the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem to foster start-ups; particularly in the area of craft food and beverage. Lowering the barriers to entry for start-ups puts these firms on a critical path toward creating new jobs; both direct to the firms themselves, and in support functions including suppliers, additional retail, and other opportunities to serve new employees.
- **Workforce Development:** Eradicating poverty and creating jobs requires a ready and able workforce. The city has tremendous downtown partners in the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board and Finger Lakes Community College. We will work to identify the workforce needs of downtown employers, as well as the potential skills of downtown residents in need of work, and make the connections between human capital and opportunity.
- **Building Rehabilitation:** As was noted, we have experienced a dramatic drop in vacant storefronts. This is partially due to market recovery, but largely due to the investments made to get these storefronts market ready. With each market-ready storefront comes the enhanced ability to create new and diverse job opportunities.

Attractiveness and Vibrancy

Downtown Geneva is in the fortunate position of having been largely spared by the onslaught of urban renewal policies and practices of previous generations. The downtown district maintains an impressive collection of historic assets, many of which have been or are being restored. In 2014, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, along with the United States Department of the Interior identified downtown Geneva as a district listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.



In addition to its broad collection of historic architectural assets, the downtown core still maintains multiple opportunities for infill development. Over 10 acres of available land dot the landscape, with opportunities to blend mixed-use redevelopment among our historic treasures.

Downtown's vibrancy is cemented with a diverse set of retail and restaurant offerings, opportunities for fresh, affordable food, cultural and recreational amenities, and a strong mix of housing types and affordability.

Strengths

Strengths of the downtown district that align with the Finger Lakes Forward plan and the Downtown Revitalization Initiative include:

- While most buildings have been redeveloped in the last decade, there still remain several anchor and other strategic redevelopment opportunities among the historic building inventory. Additionally, there are multiple acres of land for redevelopment, with downtown addresses and lake views.
- Downtown maintains a vibrant mix of retail offerings, and is widely viewed as a regional center for dining; with an eclectic mix of restaurant offerings.
- The county's public transit system provides access from the region to downtown and vice versa.
- Downtown Geneva is incredibly walkable and bikeable. Nearly 18% of Genevans identify walking or biking as their primary mode of transportation. This outpaces county, state, and national levels by more than double. Geneva General Hospital, Finger Lakes Community College, and Hobart and William Smith Colleges are all within an easy walk to downtown.
- Downtown is abound with cultural and recreational amenities, including the historic Smith Opera House, which provides year-round concert and theater programming; "The Cooler", which hosts

ice and turf sports and events; the Linden Street Entertainment District, which features an open air festival marketplace during spring and summer months; Geneva Night Out, a year-round event that transforms downtown storefronts into gallery and performance spaces each month; and the North Seneca Rail Jam, a downtown ski and snowboarding competition, executed each year on a former Brownfield site.



- The downtown district is served by Ontario County's Axxess Ontario open fiber ring, which supports open competition for telecommunications services in the district. Additionally, the City of Geneva provides open access to WiFi facilities in the district.

The city can leverage DRI funding to capitalize on the unique, urban vibrancy in the downtown district by supporting the revitalization of our remaining historic building inventory, supporting the expansion of Ontario County's regional transit system to provide for greater access into and from the district, and expanding pedestrian and cycling amenities onto the entry corridors from Geneva's neighborhoods and the outlying region.

Opportunities

- The popularity of downtown as a redevelopment opportunity has limited the interest of building owners in affordable housing development. This has the potential to squeeze out low-income residents and limit diversity in offerings. Additionally, the historic building stock is limited in its accessibility, preventing seniors and the physically disabled from enjoying downtown living.
- While there remains an impressive mix of retail and restaurant offerings, and the Farmers Market provides seasonal food options, downtown Geneva and the surrounding neighborhoods qualify as a food desert—with many low income residents having little or no access to fresh, affordable food, particularly in the offseason.

DRI funds can be leveraged to address our opportunities through fostering the development of mixed-income and specialty housing, increasing the accessibility of upper floors in the historic building inventory, and supporting the development of a grocery store in or near the downtown core.

Policies to Enhance Quality of Life

As has been noted, the initial revitalization of downtown Geneva has been well-planned. Planning efforts dating back nearly a decade have set the stage for redevelopment of this vibrant district, and have created a policy framework to support continued revitalization. Several examples include:



- In 2007, the city adopted traditional urban design guidelines for downtown, to ensure that infill development and adaptive reuse projects contributed positively to the urban character of the district. The recently developed comprehensive plan sets the stage for a complete rework of the city's zoning code to reorient the text to a form-based or hybrid code.
- In 2013, the city amended its zoning text to provide for the use of alternative energy in all districts, including downtown. This has sparked a number of on-site and remote net metering projects for solar energy. Additionally, that same year, the city converted all traffic signals and decorative lighting in the district to energy efficient fixtures, and updated all city buildings in the district for energy performance. The city is currently conducting a streetlight audit to determine the viability of LED lighting and smart systems infrastructure for our street lighting network.
- Building upon the recommendations of the 2008 Lakefront-Downtown Master Plan, the city and state partnered on the Routes 5 and 20 Connectivity Plan, to create physical and thematic connections between the Seneca Lake shoreline and downtown Geneva. The plan calls for a number of Complete Street elements in a Lakefront Drive reconstruction. These elements are reinforced in the recently developed comprehensive plan, which also includes a Complete Street recommendation for the Castle Street corridor, leading into downtown.
- The city's Local Development Corporation and Industrial Development Agency have partnered to begin acquiring and assembling property along the gateway corridor into downtown, particularly at the key intersection of Route 14 and North Street. This area was identified as part of the 2014 Brownfield Opportunity Area designation, and is targeted for redevelopment.
- The city and the Business Improvement District have a 30-year relationship of capital project development, enhanced maintenance, and economic development partnerships. The city executes a levy for the district, which supports projects in the downtown, and the GBID manages district event, maintenance, and marketing logistics. The BID sponsored the 2014 nomination for the downtown district to be listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places, and has implemented a number of New York Main Street grant programs throughout its history.

Continued implementation of adopted plans, including execution on the goals of the comprehensive plan, will result in an enhanced built environment, public streetscape, and overall quality of life for district residents, businesses, and guests.

Poverty Reduction

Concentrated poverty is a significant concern for the district and the city as a whole. The comprehensive plan notes that the individual poverty rate in Geneva has grown from 17.5% in 2000 to 25.2% in 2015. The family rate is troubling as well, having grown from 13.7% to 17.3% over the same period.

These numbers get far worse when drilling down to race, ethnicity, nationality, and age factors. Success for Geneva's Children, a local non-profit focused on improving the Geneva City School District, noted that over 40% of African-American and Latino households subsist below the poverty line, as do over 60% of Asian households. These figures far outpace our peers in Ontario County, the region, and the state. The underage poverty rate in Geneva nearly triples that of Ontario County, and almost doubles that of New York State.

The city's comprehensive plan calls for a focused effort at reducing poverty, and calls for a citizen-led effort toward identifying solutions. The city seeks to capitalize on the strategies identified in the Finger Lakes Forward plan, and on the work executed by the Monroe County Anti-Poverty Initiative.

Specifically, the city's downtown revitalization efforts will focus on three key areas of poverty reduction:

- Workforce Development: The city has great partners in Finger Lakes Community College, the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board and the Ontario County Office of Workforce Development. The city's Community Compact Steering Committee; a network of support agencies designed in part to advance the economic opportunities of our most disadvantaged populations, is developing a communications protocol to advise disadvantaged populations, via a multi-dimensional communications strategy, of workforce development opportunities in the region and on job availability. The Workforce Investment Board and Finger Lakes Community College's Geneva Campus are both located in the downtown district. Our workforce development partners will work with major employers to identify training needs, develop customized programs, and communicate these offerings to our economically disadvantaged communities.
- Access to Entrepreneurial Support: The Finger Lakes Food and Beverage Innovation District, and specifically the Geneva Entrepreneurs Lab is developing its support framework with the specific needs of the impoverished at the forefront of development planning. The city is cultivating partnerships with regional institutions to provide low-to-no cost access to the facilities and programs of the Lab for economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs who are seeking to establish businesses in the downtown district and beyond.
- Diversification and Safety of Housing: As was noted in a previous section, a potential unintended consequence of successful downtown revitalization efforts is the displacement of low income residents. When residents are priced out of one area of the city, there is a tendency toward concentrations of poverty in more affordable locations. The city is working with the Geneva Housing Authority and the Finger Lakes Community Development Corporation to identify sites and project plans for mixed-income housing that will retain economically disadvantaged households in a diverse housing environment. Additionally, this will have the effect of "declustering" poverty in other areas of the city.

Local Support



The city's downtown revitalization strategy is a product of our recently developed comprehensive plan. The plan was developed in cooperation with a 25-member steering committee, representing a very broad swath of the Geneva community. It was the intent of City Council and staff to engage representatives from many socioeconomic groups, as well as residents, businesses, institutional partners, local government collaborators, and city staff.

The product reflects a unique approach at community decision making, including the reinforcement of downtown redevelopment as one of our most critical priorities.

Our downtown revitalization strategy is supported by myriad economic and community development partners, including the State of New York, and local partners like:

- Geneva Business Improvement District (GBID): The GBID is the city's lead partner in downtown revitalization and development. The District is responsible for tenant recruitment and retention, district-level marketing, grant development and support, enhanced maintenance activity, and event development and logistics. Much of the revitalization activity in the last five years has been executed under the BID's *Full Occupancy Initiative*, a strategic plan for the revitalization of the district. The BID is chaired by David Linger, a downtown business and property owner, and Geneva resident.
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS): HWS prepares its students to lead lives of consequence. The Colleges provide an incredible start through service learning opportunities in support of many of the city's community development initiatives. The Colleges are a major employer and investor in the downtown district. The Colleges' entrepreneurial studies program is a core partner in the city's Food and Beverage Innovation District concept, and has committed investment in the Geneva Entrepreneurs Lab. The President of Hobart and William Smith Colleges is Mark Gearan.
- Ontario County Economic Development: Ontario County's economic development infrastructure includes a number of agencies charged with business recruitment, retention, and expansion throughout the county. The county's IDA, LDC, EDC, and Revolving Loan Fund have been critical partners in the redevelopment and resurgence of Geneva. Ontario County's Director of Economic Development is Mike Manikowski.
- Cornell University: Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station is a critical partner in the city's Food and Beverage Innovation District. The Station and its academic and research staff provide Geneva producers and entrepreneurs with advanced

technical support on food safety and regulatory compliance. The Station is headed by Dr. Susan Brown.

- Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC): FLCC has been a significant part of the downtown landscape for over 30 years. The College first established its Geneva outpost in downtown three decades ago, and recently cut the ribbon on its permanent home in downtown Geneva. The College serves as a key economic engine for the district, and is a critical workforce development partner. Geneva's Campus Director is John Cromartie.
- Finger Lakes Community Development Corporation (FLCDC): The Finger Lakes Community Development Corporation is charged with the identification and execution of strategic housing strategies in Geneva and Ontario County. The FLCDC owns a major housing project in the downtown district, the Seneca Apartments, and is developing a low-income senior housing project on the downtown gateway. The FLCDC's Executive Director is Andy Tyman.
- Finger Lakes Health: Finger Lakes Health is the region's largest employer, with over 1,000 employees across multiple campuses. Geneva General Hospital is located immediately adjacent to the downtown district, and provides the Geneva community with critical community health support. Finger Lakes Health provided key support in development of the city's comprehensive plan, and maintains professional offices as a property owner and tenant in the downtown district. The health system is managed by Finger Lakes Health President, Dr. Jose Acevedo.
- Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board: The Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board seeks to align human potential with opportunities in the workplace. The Board identifies job training needs and resources, and provides job seekers with technical support in acquiring necessary skills and placement in appropriate employment. The Board's offices are located in downtown Geneva. The Workforce Investment Board's Executive Director is Karen Springmeier.
- Geneva Housing Authority (GHA): The Geneva Housing Authority manages federal and state subsidized housing programs for the City of Geneva and Ontario County. The GHA is conducting a complete overhaul of its concentrated housing program, and working with the city on identification of opportunities for "declustering" of subsidized housing, and the development of mixed-income, mixed-use opportunities in downtown Geneva. The GHA is chaired by Dom Vedora.
- Geneva Industrial Development Agency (Geneva IDA): The Geneva IDA is one of the city's longest standing economic development partners. The Geneva IDA has been involved in the revitalization of downtown Geneva for over 20 years, providing financing and project incentive support. The Geneva IDA has also been a funding and advisory partner on the BID's *Full Occupancy Initiative*, New York Main Street grant programs, Microenterprise Assistance

Program, and the city's comprehensive plan development. The Geneva IDA is chaired by Frank Cecere, a downtown business and property owner, and former Mayor of the City.

- Geneva Local Development Corporation (Geneva LDC): The Geneva LDC was founded in 2011 to support economic and neighborhood revitalization efforts in the city. From the onset, the Geneva LDC established downtown redevelopment among its top priorities. The Geneva LDC and IDA have partnered to acquire and prepare redevelopment plans for key properties along downtown's gateway corridor. The Geneva LDC's business plan competition, *Race for Space*, is in its second year, and preparing to continue to fill downtown storefronts with entrepreneurial ventures. The Geneva LDC has also served as a technical advisory and funding partner to New York Main Street grant programs, Microenterprise Assistance Program, and the city's comprehensive plan development. City Manager Matt Horn serves as the Geneva LDC's Executive Director.

- Private Investment Partners: No revitalization effort is complete without the wholehearted support and investment of our private sector partners. Since 2006, the private investment community has committed over \$6 million in financial investment in the downtown district, and created hundreds of critical jobs.

- The Geneva Community: Like nearly every effort in our community, this initiative will succeed based upon the city's ability to capitalize on the expertise, energy, and enthusiasm of our citizenry. Engaged governance, talent capitalization, and grass roots revitalization efforts are the hallmarks of Geneva's successes to date, and they will continue to be in the future. This effort will be the community's plan.

The city's point person on the Downtown Revitalization Initiative will be City Manager Matt Horn. Matt is an experienced economic and community development professional, with over 15 years of experience in the field, across six states and a dozen communities. Matt has public and private sector economic and community development experience. He has been the Geneva City Manager since July, 2008.



In Closing

The first chapters of our story were not written overnight. The epilogue will not be either. Our efforts of the last decade, and those of our partners have put us on a trajectory towards an incredible tipping point. The next stage of the revitalization of downtown Geneva will require thoughtful visioning, well-crafted partnerships, and pinpoint execution. The Downtown Revitalization Initiative, galvanized by renewed efforts by our private and institutional stakeholders, will propel downtown Geneva to its position as a regional economic engine.

Connections.

Our partners and investors are key to our success. Geneva’s path has been forged by carefully listening to our stakeholders, identifying common themes relative to challenges and opportunities, and linking those who have with those who need. Thoughtful planning processes inherently contain opportunities to make these linkages. We will continue to do this, and where appropriate, grow these connections into collaborations.

Collaborations.

Government can’t (and shouldn’t) do it all. Where connections are identified, our best move is to get out of the way, and make conditions ripe for collaboration. Nearly all of our success stories are built upon successful partnerships between all levels of government, the not-for-profit sector, and private investors. We will continue to seek these out, and to leverage them to capitalize on the innovation and energy they produce.

Capitalization.

A well-developed plan, and great partners are like a menu and great ingredients. If you don’t capitalize, you’ve got a full fridge and an empty belly. We will translate these collaborations into investments and operations that sustain Geneva’s growth for generations to come.

Join us.



**DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION
INITIATIVE**

**GENEVA,
NEW YORK**

LEGEND

- 1. CITY HALL
- 2. SMITH OPERA HOUSE
- 3. POTENTIAL INFILL DEVELOPMENT SITE
- 4. THE COOLER
- 5. LAKEFRONT AMENITIES
- 6. FUTURE MARINA

Map adapted from the 2009 City of Geneva Policies on Lakerefront and Downtown Development