

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – DOWNTOWN TEMPLATE

THIS TEMPLATE IS PROVIDED AS GENERAL GUIDANCE AND THE MINIMUM CRITERIA NECESSARY FOR THE REDCs TO EVALUATE AND SELECT A DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD. INDIVIDUAL REDCs MAY REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS PART OF THEIR SELECTION PROCESS.

BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: Village of Highland Falls

Downtown Name: Business Corridor

County: Orange

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

We are a vital untapped link in the Mid-Hudson Region. We are a small but powerful engine which is positioned to make huge positive impacts in the region. The primary use of this DRI grant will be to revitalize and maximize our downtown infrastructure. The transformation will include branding, experiential, and visitor support. The timing of this opportunity amazingly coincides with two others: waterfront access and development of a large land tract, both of which have possibilities for a source of funding mostly outside of this grant. Historic Main Street, the business corridors and our park need to be ready. As undeveloped property here is rare, and the Highland Falls Economic Development Corporation (HFEDC) stands to gain about 28.5 developable acres from an estate. Moreover, Highland Falls has received Greenway Communities Grant Program support for a “Waterfront Redevelopment Project to be located in the Village of Highland Falls”. The Greenway grant study will consider means to acquire and develop Hudson River waterfront access for recreation, tourism and transportation to the area, for example, the southeastern portion of Orange County will have the west bank of the Hudson River transportation to the Metro North Railroad service on the east bank. Revitalization of our business corridor, along with these projects, will transform this Village into a major New York “Path through History” along the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail System. It will ensure economic investment, historical integrity, and environmental stewardship. The DRI grant will provide rich returns for private, public or combined partnership in the areas of lifestyle, tourism, recreation, culture, the preservation of history, promotion of green and healthy living, natural beauty, war veteran services, cyber-security and care of the ecosystem.

Our greatest strength as a secluded paradise in the valley of the Highlands along the Hudson River is at the same time our greatest challenge. Our property tax base is mostly limited to what can be renovated, rebuilt, or re-purposed in this 1.081 square mile treasure -minus the spaces of undevelopable granite bluffs and boulders, three schools, municipal buildings, West Point buildings within the Village boundaries, non-taxable faith-based properties, water and roads. Our ability to raise public money is limited by the facts that; 1) the federal government granted land in the Town of Highlands, of which the Village is part, to West Point during World Wars I and II; 2) NYS gave a smaller portion of town land to the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and Bear Mountain State Park; as a result, 93% of developable land and property tax base is inaccessible. 3) It is not possible through taxation or bonds to fund vital, expensive projects. This grant will enable us to advance with long strides to developing and sustaining our invaluable potential.

Highland Falls stands ready to be the center of preservation, tourism, transportation and marketing. Orange County data reports 3 million visitors come to West Point annually. The DRI grant will tremendously enable us to boost the local and regional tourism economy with attractive opportunities outside the military gates. Increased civilian lodging will help it sponsor more cultural, sports, and entertainment events for tourists. A key goal for us is to provide overnight lodging in the heart of Main Street with Boutique Hotels and B&BS that are in walking distance to West Point. The DRI grant will also enable us to upgrade the appearance of Main Street as well as needed pedestrian and green community space, activities, shops, restaurants and parking. The grant will transform this village and area from a day trip to an overnight destination for many visitors to West Point as well as to two additional top New York State tourist attractions: Bear Mountain State Park and Woodbury Commons.

Highland Falls stands to be a center of public and private management for waterway and vehicular service and tours. We stand at the southeast corner of Orange County of as the crossroads of four counties with Rockland to the south and Putnam and Westchester, both to the east across the Hudson River. However, affordable vehicular and waterway inter-county transportation does not exist between the eastern and western counties. There is scant transportation between Orange and Rockland Counties. The Village can be positioned to be a center of transportation management between the Harriman station on the Port Jervis Metro North Line, and the Hudson Line Metro North stations of Cold Spring, Garrison, and Peekskill. Finally, Orange Country development studies note that the three cities that form an economic triangle in the middle of the county: Newburgh, Monroe, and Middletown. The development of Highland Falls will extend economic growth, job creation and residential development to the southeastern area of the county.

The Village of Highland Falls is an oasis of history which must be preserved: geological, ecosystem, early settlement, early industrial, revolutionary war, Hudson River navigation, environmental, landscape and the Hudson River School of Art. The Village is also an excellent center for the research of the forgotten Hudson River Native Americans. We need a major museum, research, and learning center. The Village is surrounded by state and federally protected forest lands. Our environs include magnificent Highlands Mountains of the Appalachian chain to the north, west, and south. The eastern border is the Hudson River. This perfect get-a-way of natural beauty is nestled only 45 minutes via the Palisades Interstate Parkway from the George Washington Bridge of New York City; it is an easy drive for visitors from Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut for overnight stays.

We have also become the first Greenway Pact Community in Orange County. This DRI grant will enable us cast a vibrant spotlight on southeastern Orange County in the Trail System, a rich area that is overlooked except for Bear Mountain State Park and West Point.

In our own right, and aside from West Point and Bear Mountain State Park, the uniqueness of Highland Falls is its strength of opportunity. Our village is the closest and most perfect mountain get-away just outside of the New York City metropolitan area and on the Hudson River. It is contained on the south, west, and north by the spectacular mountain beauty. Its eastern border is the majestic Hudson River. In addition to the Village, there are many places to enjoy peace, beauty, nature, and history. At the cusp of the Village within a mere 4 miles to the north and less than 5 miles to the south are: part of Storm King State Park; Crow's Nest Mountain at 1,425' elevation and its spectacular River views from Old Storm King Highway and

State Route 9W north; West Point; the Village; Fort Montgomery Mine Dock Park riverfront; the Fort Montgomery Battle Sight; the suspension walking bridge over Popolopen Creek; The Appalachian Trail that crosses the Bear Mountain Bridge; the Bear Mountain State Park Zoo; along with its Lodge, Hessein Lake, dock, carousel, and hiking trails.

If the radius from the Village is extended a very few miles, there is to the north Constitution Island and Bannerman Castle; Storm King Mountain (the birthplace of the environmental movement and basis for NEPA and NYS SEQRA); Black Rock Forest; Museum of the Hudson Highlands Museum; the Black Rock Forest Science Center; and Storm King Art Center and Sculpture Museum. To the south are Doodletown; Perkins Memorial Tower (atop which New York City can be seen on a clear day); the Iona National Marshland Preserve (for bald eagle breeding); Seven Lakes Drive, and Anthony Wayne State Park. The entire area is a premiere Audubon preserve. It is also a haven for hiking, road cycling, and mountain biking.

The Village lies in the midst of striking geological history along the River Greenway Trail. The bold, rugged character of the mountains bear glacial striations of granite gneiss over a billion years old, were once buried miles beneath the earth's surface, then surfaced when the African and North American continents collided. In the short span of 7 miles of Route 9W between the Bear Mountain State Park Zoo and Crow's Nest Mountain, lie lowest point of the entire Appalachian Mountain chain, the highest ridge along the Hudson River at 1,425 feet, and the deepest point of the Hudson River at 216 feet. Navigators named this area of the Hudson River "World's End" due to harrowing river turns. Hence the strategic role of chains to sink British ships during the Revolutionary War!

We have diverse strategy for identity related to tourism: 1.) Establish transportation via water taxi to Receive tourists from the river; transport them into the Village via trolley system and bus network to transport tourists from the Hudson River. 2.) Establish bicycle lanes to support tricycle taxi routes; designated cycling routes from the Village through the town of highlands. 3.) Establish a planned water taxi for access to the prime hiking trails at Bear Mountain State Park. 4.) Purchase immediately 3 parcels of land: 1) Main Street next to Post office and Buttermilk Brook to create brook side picnic area, Main Street a possible 11 acre addition to Roe Park 5.) Assist merchants in the addition of boutique, spa-like Bed and Breakfasts, install bicycle racks and provide additional green space barriers 6.) Establish, in collaboration with local library, restaurant and coffee shop services, a hot spot for WiFi access.

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.*

From north to south the primary downtown business corridor includes all areas on and surrounding Main Street, including West Point Highway, from Thayer Gate until it joins with 9W South. From east to west, it also includes Veterans Way across Main Street then up

Mountain Avenue and then northbound to 9W as well as West Point Highway and the connecting streets between it and Main Street.

The heart of the Main Street district extends 1 mile southward from the Thayer Gate. The south to north entry way to Main Street extends a distance of 1.6 from 9W to the West Point Thayer Gate. The east to west entry way is 1.1 miles. Another core area is Roe Park and expansion mostly to the south and west of it. Development here will make it a site of major regional cultural events as well as local recreation, by creating access from State Route 9W. Development here will add to the attractiveness of our village as a place to live and raise families. The area also includes Route 9W from the northern to the southern boundaries of Village properties 2.6 miles. In these areas are properties and land that can be developed in the public interest. Land Bank created with grant funds would, purchase land and buildings to either build, renovate, or repurpose. The properties could then be re-sold to private investors or managed publicly in ways that increase livability and economic growth in the public interest. All proceeds from sales would return to the land bank for further development. The land bank projects will make the Village a more attractive place for development and living. The grant will also help us increase our local property tax base.

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.*

Census data indicates that the Village of Highland Falls and the Town of Highlands population remain steady with 0% change between 2014 and 2015. Our median age is 41. The Village is the primary, year-round downtown for the Town of Highlands, of which the 12,136 residents include the Village of Highland Falls, US Military Academy (West Point), Fort Montgomery, and the portion of Bear Mountain State with the lodge. As a college town, the Village downtown serves needs of the college operations and resident cadets, faculty, support staff and families. Many Village residents either work on or have jobs relating to the needs of the academy. Outside of the Town, the nearest services are 20 minutes away. Tourism supports the year-round economy. Many commute to work from the Village within a reasonable distance, time and on good Highways. They choose to live here because it is a peaceful town to raise their families. This increasing segment of our year-round population supports the economy.

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.*

We want to share what few can, especially in southern NYS. The DRI grant will open this area to others, either as residents, working commuters, or appreciating visitors. We have just been ranked 8th among smaller NY communities in terms of livability and safety by Credit Donkey, which publishes analyses to help New Yorkers save money and make savvy financial decisions. Our familiar name, "Hometown USA", stems from hospitality we extended when US hostages held hostage in Iran, traveled here after their release. We value life in a quaint, small community. We can walk to church, bicycle, walk to dine out, and shop at the farmer's market. We plan to encourage stores with healthy food and products. We embrace our population diversity with different socio-economic, education, skill set, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Many residents have sought us out to raise their families in a small town as a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of bigger, sprawling towns. Newcomers, as well as those who have lived

here for five generations, share a sense of place, caring, and community. Volunteerism is strong as evidenced in our many beautification organizations. The DRI grant will enable us to renovate and repurpose some buildings in order to provide new amenities and services. We are in good position to work with State grant planners. We have modernized Village and Town zoning regulations, a professionally prepared Comprehensive Plan, and Capstone Study. We are the first Greenway Community in Orange County and have committed to its five principles of natural and community sustainability. We have just applied through Greenway with the support of Orange County Development for a study to determine gaining and developing Hudson River waterfront access. There is a Community Response Team for emergencies. This designation, as well as our proximity to West Point and Indian Point, gives us a warrant to be a security center, including cyber-security. Our adjacency to West Point renders us a prime location to provide community transition services, including business start-up, for war veterans returning to civilian life from active duty. We have a strong Chamber of Commerce and the HFEDC is canvassing businesses and residents to determine priority services for existing and potential residents as well as visitors. Memorial Park, the entry way to historic Main Street, is being upgraded courtesy of a corporate community grant. Our Comprehensive Plan and work with MHR EDC planners will guide revitalization of the Main Street infrastructure and attractiveness.

Here are more of our plans: 1) Provide for WI FI service along 1 mile of Main Street. 2) Widen the southernmost sidewalks on historic Main Street, as well as segments of sidewalk on Mountain Avenue from Main Street to Buttermilk Brook. The minimum total distance is .2 miles. 3) Replace above ground poles for utility services with underground wiring. This replacement could dovetail with a project currently in negotiation with West Point to expand sewer and gas lines here. This replacement could also unite with a Village project under assessment to replace wasteful incandescent lighting with LED lighting. We would use DRI grant funds to install attractive lamp posts and reconnect electricity to buildings. The pole, utility line and lighting replacement project distance would be 1.7 miles, if terrain allows. 4) Establish a bike lane from Thayer Gate the 1.6 mile distance of Main Street to the end of Old State Road (2.6 miles); 5) Build a 3 story facility behind the businesses between Schneider Avenue and Buttermilk Brook. Two of the stories would be used for parking, with access and egress on Schneider Avenue and Center Street. This facility will encourage more visitors to stop in the Village. It will also reshape the traffic pattern to exit the Village via Center Street and Mountain Avenue rather than back onto Main Street. The 3rd floor could be developed as office space. The roof could be developed as a roof-top garden café or solar energy source. 6) Expand Ladycliff Park to create more contiguity between the north and south ends of the historic district, encourage visitors and residents to use the park more, establish more green land use by re-designing wasteful and unsafe traffic patterns. 7) Purchase two lots on Main Street. The narrow one between the Post Office and Buttermilk Brook would be developed as a public space to enjoy the Brook; 8) Place decorative markers in the sidewalks at sites on the historic village walk and establish brick pedestrian walkways across Main Street; 9) Establish attractive, easily maintainable banks and landscaping where Buttermilk Brook runs east of Parking Lot 2. Place a stone wall and durable landscaping instead of steel barriers at the eastern side of the lot. 10) Purchase two parcels with buildings of former large businesses at the south end of Main Street near the junction of 9W south. Although these buildings are not in

the historic district, their prominence at the entry from the highways targets them for development.

Due to the scarcity of most of the undeveloped property in the Village, repurposing is the primary means of developing. Proceeds from sale or income would be deposited in Land bank for further use. There are several useful buildings of architectural significance in the heart of Main Street that can be purchased with a land bank and transformed offices, apartments, and overnight lodging. These developments will help commerce by increasing overnight pedestrian visitors on Main Street. Also, a stately 100 room hotel will be built on State Route 9W within the Village boundary to increase overnight tourism and transportation sectors. Holiday Inn on the same route has petitioned Town zoning board to add approximately 120 rooms. Here are plans, some of which could be included in a Roe Park expansion while others would be more suited to attract visitors on their way toward the historic area via Main Street:

1) A Village Visitor Center to include the local Historical Society; 2) A center for child care and indoor after school services to help working parents; 3) A major museum featuring the following histories: oral, Native American, early settlement, Revolutionary War, Hudson River School of Art, environmental, and geological; 4) Expansion of Roe Park up to 11 acres to become a year-round center of major events and cultural activities. This goal will also require creating public access to the Park from 9W; 5) A circle-in-the square year round amphitheater at Roe Park; 6) A permanent site for "The Center", our fledging community center at which locally talented volunteers provide rotating activities for all ages; 7) Restore Perigrine Hall and provide alternative housing for residents of attached apartments; 8) a River overlook preferably within walking distance of historic Main Street.

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.*

The Department of Defense is moving to privatization of services. Our proximity to West Point poises us to capitalize on this transition and bring a diversity of professionals and labor here to live. For example, the Village Board is currently negotiating through our US Congressman for us to extend sewer and gas facilities from West Point through the Village and thereby expand our capacities. We are ranked the eighth most livable small NYS community. Final planning is underway to bring a renewable hydro-electric micro-grid along Buttermilk Falls. This project stands to save taxpayers \$20 million. A Capstone Cadet Study identified businesses and services that the USMA community wants the Village to provide, for example child-care, which will also serve working single parents, transportation, small businesses to support a college campus. Our Chamber of Commerce is becoming a major economic driver for business, culture and tourism. Five new businesses have opened recently. The Chamber sponsored our first St. Patrick's Day Parade and will next month support two events that estimate thousands of visitors; the Department of Defense Warrior Games wherein war challenged veterans compete in sports, and second, a bicycle fundraiser where donors will sponsor 200 elite cycling athletes riding up to a 100 mile course in the Mid-Hudson. The event, which begins and ends in our village, will promote the Mid-Hudson as a premiere cycling area. A final event in June will commemorate the emancipation of UA slavery.

We are set to work with the MHR EDC Task Force on Veterans. We are an ideal location for community integration services due to our adjacency to West Point. A local bank is already

planning to sponsor a transition home where returning war veterans can live while they receive services to help them move into civilian life, including immediate needs for housing, mental health, medical and dental care, help in transforming a military resume to a civilian one, business start-up, etc. These services will bring professionals and support staff to live in our Village as well as encourage a diversity of employees to move here and raise their families. Recovery from both recent hurricanes led to our designation as a Community Response Team (CRT). As a CRT, we can build our identity as a security center. We are located strategically adjacent to West Point and within 10 miles of Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant. There is a satellite FBI office within the Village Boundaries. A cyber-security business once expressed interest in establishing a facility here. Becoming a security center will add needed information technology to the regional economy.

In this Village are invaluable oral history and archeological treasures to be preserved and made available to the public and researchers. Here lives the oldest living Buffalo soldier and stands a forsaken revolutionary war redoubt that links the history of the Fort Montgomery Battle Site, Trophy Point at West Point, and Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh. Preservation of Mid-Hudson Native American culture is scant. Establishing a research satellite here would add to our economic diversity.

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.*

The grant will enable us to recapture the grandeur of the historic section of Main Street during early 20th century J. P. Morgan investment era. The pleasing mix of architecture is mostly early twentieth century design. There are one, two and three story shops. Many multi-story buildings now have apartments above them. The public library as well as Town and Village Halls are here, the latter of which is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. There are three beautiful churches. The oldest building dates to 1860.

Feasible incentives and terms for Main Street building owners are needed to restore exterior architecture and/or facades to period specifications. Similar terms for owners of newer buildings to create exteriors and facades that blend with the Village's historic character. We also need to create a contiguous identity between the north and south sides of Main Street. Useful would be sculpture art, a visitor kiosk, booth-type shops in the green belts, and more trees. Enhancements are described in item 3 above.

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.*

We have been working for a year with the Town of Highlands zoning board to modernize complementary codes. Both governments have comprehensive plans prepared by the same consultant. The Village Plan contains bases of this DRI application, including pedestrian and street plans to provide easier and more inviting pedestrian and vehicular flow. We have a dial-a-bus to transport residents within the Village. The Chamber will recruit a privately owned taxi business to serve residents and visitors on Main Street and Roe Park.

There are opportunities for tourism to sustain transportation businesses. The same could exist for a small bus-type or trolley van. Small private tours are already warranted within the 7 mile radius identified above, except that West Point requires its own tours. Local tours can start and end at the West Point Visitor's Center in the Village, Bear Mountain State Park, or Woodbury Commons. A private vehicular business with reasonable prices from Metro-North Stations is desirable and will encourage week-end-get-away tourism via that Metro North rail system.

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 local lead will be Barbara Mennite, PhD, of the HFEDC. Support includes: Town of Highlands Board; Chamber of Commerce; civic and volunteer organizations; residents; business owners; Village of Highland Falls Historian; Highland Falls Library; Central School District Superintendent; Highland Falls Economic Development Corporation; Orange County Development; Greenway; Bear Mountain State Park (PIP); West Point Command, and county; state, and US elected officials.

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

The Village is conducting a study with public hearings to assess joining its municipal government and/or services with the Town of Highlands, either, partially or fully. We are evaluating impacts on town and village planning, zoning, taxes, and efficiency of services. Priorities are increase the quality and sustainability of life and reduce the tax burden while increasing the efficiency and quality of services. The Village center will remain the heart of the community in any case. The Town Board voted on May 23, 2016 to support this Village MHR-EDC DRI application.