

**Darren "Hal" McCabe**  
Mayor  
Mayor@HomerNY.org  
Cell: 607-345-7174

**Village Office**  
31 N. Main Street  
Homer, NY 13077  
Phone: 607-749-3322  
www.HomerNY.org



**Village Police: 607-749-2022**  
**Newton Water Works: 607-749-2511**  
**Glenwood Cemetery: 607-749-3517**  
**Streets and Parks: 607-749-3813**  
**Recreation: 607-749-2161**  
**Codes: 607-745-3177**

May 31, 2019

Mr. James Fayle, Regional Director  
CNY Regional Economic Development Council  
Syracuse Regional Office  
620. Boulevard, West  
Syracuse, NY 13204

Dear Mr. Fayle:

The Village of Homer is proud to submit this application for New York State's 2019 Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) funding through the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council.

We believe that Homer is a wonderful place to live and work and having a \$10 million DRI grant will significantly impact our future. The enterprise that has been advanced will be a pivotal economic driver for our downtown.

Business leaders and Village residents offered ideas and comments for this DRI application, those aspirations have been distilled into a balanced and sustainable vision.

We believe this application clearly illustrates that we are prepared to make our vision of a vibrant downtown a reality. This effort will be transformative, putting into play strong economic forces, that will not only enhance our Village's position directly, but the Central New York Region as whole.

Respectively submitted,

Darren (Hal) McCabe  
Mayor

cc: village trustees  
DRI working group members



## 2019 DRI Application

Applications for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) must be received by the appropriate Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) by 4:00 PM on May 31, 2019 at the email address provided at the end of this application.

### **BASIC INFORMATION**

- REDC Region: Central New York
- Municipality Name: Village of Homer
- Downtown Name : Homer
- County Name: Cortland
- Applicant Contact(s) Name and Title: Hal McCabe, Mayor
- Applicant Contact(s) Email Address and Secondary Email Address: [Mayor@homerny.org](mailto:Mayor@homerny.org) or [clerk@homerny.org](mailto:clerk@homerny.org)

### **VISION FOR DOWNTOWN**

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

Downtown Homer is a place that's authentically turn-of-the-century and decidedly different. At first glance, it's a historic village where River and countryside are as accessible as they are beautiful. A closer look reveals a downtown with an urban vibe where creative energy flows freely. Art, music, and healthy living help define the culture of this inspiring place. Downtown Homer is a hub that connects into surrounding communities. This is where the concentration of restaurants, retail, and services are found.

Downtown Homer is economically vital. While walking downtown, one can feel the entrepreneurial spirit. There's also a sense of community, which encourage families to move into the village. The closeness encourages a sense of place. With continued growth, it is possible for Homer's downtown to extend its impact and benefits for the region (Cortland County) and present opportunities to raise the quality of life for its residents, generate jobs and business opportunities.

Homer has a prosperous business district. Residential apartments lie above the businesses on third and fourth floors, extenuated by a variety of quality restaurants and entertainment. Tourists come to the Center for the Arts for a variety of musical performances. While in the Village, tourists eat at one of the many restaurants or are able to purchase items at clothing, hardware, and grocery stores. . Having adequate parking and amenities such as fast electric charging stations, benches on Main Street and good signage on available businesses and governmental services encourages tourists to return to the Village.

### **JUSTIFICATION**

Provide an overview of the downtown area nominated for the DRI program, highlighting the area's defining characteristics and the reasons for its selection. Explain why the downtown is ready for Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) investment, and how that investment would serve as a catalyst to bring about revitalization.

Homer is exceptionally well positioned to capitalize on prior investments and catalyze future private and public investment in downtown. The Village has demonstrated a disciplined and sustained approach to downtown revitalization, which will only be improved and accelerated by a DRI award. Having a vibrant downtown brings community spirit and encourages residents to upgrade their homes and for developers to build housing. Having regular scheduled public events. Such as Holiday in Homer, Easter Egg Hunts, Farmer's Market, Ice Skating on the Green in the Winter, Fireman's Field Days, Magic on Main, a summer concert series, and other events, bring people to Homer and instills pride of belonging in a prosperous environment. This will encourage entrepreneurial enterprises to move here to work and razor families in a safe encouraging environment.

- Downtown Homer is well-defined by geography, transportation, building types and its Development pattern and it has been identified as distinct historic Main Street by the Village in its Comprehensive Plan and zoning code.
- The Village and stakeholders have shown an ongoing commitment to downtown revitalization through planning initiatives, building organizational and administrative capacity, public infrastructure Improvements, and private investment for many years.
- A sustained and incremental approach to downtown revitalization has recently led to many small successes and built a more resilient downtown.
- The restoration of the Keeter Opera House and the new Duane Block building are transformative projects that has increased the confidence of business owners and the interest of investors in downtown.



Keeter Opera house

Keeter Opera House and clothing stores

- The Village's prior planning initiatives and soon to be adopted new zoning code, all of which include public engagement, insure that new development will have broad community support and enhance the defining character of Downtown Homer.
- The Village has demonstrated a long-term commitment in capacity and partnerships to be able to successfully undertake a sustained downtown revitalization program and already has the administrative capacity in place to successfully manage a DRI award. Currently the Village manages a small MAP grant to encourage new business development. A DRI award would further economic expansion.
- Downtown Homer is small enough that the DRI and leveraged private investment would make a transformative and highly visible impact but it is also large enough, as demonstrated by recent Investments and identified potential projects, to fully utilize the award.
- Homer's location in the middle of the state provides a unique opportunity to utilize the DRI to attract private investment and create a model for sustainable development . A DRI award for Homer will have a profoundly transformative impact on Homer and the Cortland area that will also benefit the state and show what is possible in an economically depressed County.

Revitalization of Downtown Homer is firmly underway. The groundwork has been laid, interest is high and the time for a \$10 million investment from the DRI is now. Downtown Homer is ready to complete its transformation.

### **DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION**

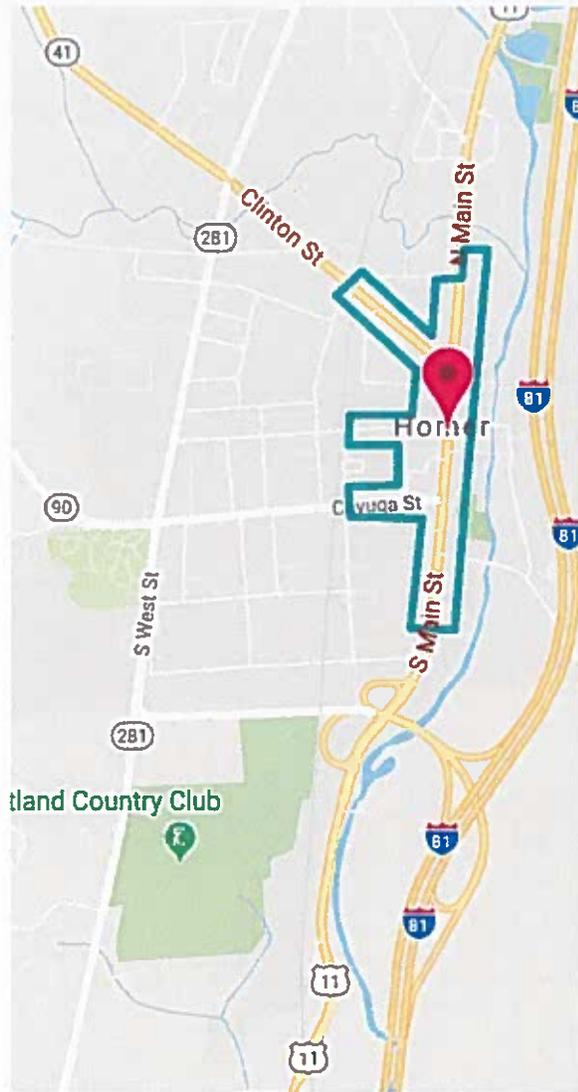
- 1) **Boundaries of the proposed DRI area.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted downtown area or neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the area should be concentrated and well-defined. Neighborhoods beyond traditional central business districts are eligible if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment. Include a map that clearly delineates the area to be included in the downtown revitalization area.

Village of Homer Comprehensive Plan 2010



Map Created: 4 November 2009

**THOMA**  
Development Consultants  
1100 W. 11th Street, Homer, Alaska 99615



Downtown catchment area for DRI impact

- Downtown Homer is compact, with a boundary well-defined by geography, transportation corridors, building types and traditional development pattern. The village of Homer occupies approximately one square mile.
- Downtown Homer is a designated Walk Friendly Community.
- Downtown Homer is the tradition central business district and includes a National Register Historic District. The boundary for Downtown Homer encompasses [fill in] acres with a highly concentrated collection of commercial and residential buildings on {fill in} parcels. The downtown neighborhood is well-defined by (1) geography, (2) transportation corridors, (3) the presence of traditional building types and (4) a compact development pattern. This historic boundary has been reinforced through modern zoning districts and parcel boundaries. Each of these is described below.

1. *Geography.* The natural boundary is formed along the West Branch of the Tioughnioga River and north of the city of Cortland in one of the seven valleys connecting at the junction of the east branch of

the Tioughnioga River. The oldest existing building in the village was built in 1799. The village was settled by Revolutionary War soldiers from Connecticut who were given tracks of land in payment for their service in the war. The first settlers arrived in 1791. The early settlers set aside a village green owned by the First Religious Society and they still own the green to this day. The village was chartered within the Town of Homer in 1853 to provide zoning and administration to the village residents.

**2. Transportation.** Downtown Homer has been a major transportation hub for regional highway travel because NYS Routes 11, 90 and 41 intersect Downtown. Historically, the railroad also played an important role in shaping and defining Downtown Homer and today the CSX Railroad Cuts through the Center of the village. The tram that used to run up main street has long been discontinued. It ran from Cortland to Little York which is the next hamlet north of the Village. The historic local and regional travel patterns that led to the development of Downtown Homer over a century ago are still very strong and continue to help define its character and boundary today.

**3. Building Types.** Downtown Homer is differentiated from other neighborhoods in the Village by the prevalence of multi-story mixed-use turn-of-the-century buildings that are typical in traditional downtowns and main streets throughout New York. Many of these three and four story buildings are in



need elevators to provide access.



Three potential building requiring elevators to access upper floors

**4. Development Pattern.** Along Main Street in Downtown Homer many buildings were built close together and close to the street. Streets are relatively wide and block lengths are small. These characteristics created a downtown that is efficient, compact and scaled for people. Due to the closeness of the buildings, parking considerations of automobiles were not factored in to the design of

spacing of the modern automobiles. Due to the vibrant business district downtown parking is an issue. Adequate handicap spaces and overflow parking for cultural events causes some difficulties on occasion.

5. *Zoning.* Like most main streets and downtowns Downtown Homer has experienced the negative effects of the loss of historic buildings to fire (Duane Block building) and neglect. Fortunately, downtown Homer retains much of its character and fundamental qualities because it is so well defined by the overlapping characteristics described above. Since 1853, the Village of Homer has made efforts to reinforce the boundaries and characteristics of Downtown Homer through zoning district boundaries and zoning regulations. Downtown Homer has its own zoning district. Due to the natural constraints from surrounding hills and waterways and its development prior to widespread use of the automobile Downtown Homer is very compact. It has a maximum length of approximately 1 mile and it averages ½ mile in width. The village in total forms a square with a narrow tail along the TF the Oberoi River pointing towards Cortland. The average pedestrian can walk the entire length of downtown in less than 15 minutes. 50% of all jobs in the Village of Homer are in Downtown. 34% of employees who work in the Village work Downtown. All in an area that makes up 25% of the land area of the Village. The compact and mixed-use nature of the buildings within Downtown make this neighborhood the most economically productive area within the village. In other words, based on a per acre calculation, more businesses, jobs, and tax revenue are generated Downtown than anywhere else in the Village.

Despite its inherent strengths and significant public and private investment in Downtown over the last several years there are several areas that remain underutilized or vacant. These areas represent an opportunity for development and will accommodate much of its future growth. These areas are all identified as priorities in previous planning initiatives but all remain underutilized. The priority area for redevelopment are identified as the James Street soap factory building, Soy oil factory site, North Main housing lots and Route 11 corridor leading to Cortland.

As described above, Downtown Homer is well-defined by overlapping and reinforcing characteristics. These characteristics have allowed Downtown to retain much of its unique qualities even during a time of strip malls and suburban sprawl.

- The population of the catchment area for Downtown Homer is 45,567 plus ~3000 college students and seasonal residents. This number is made up of the county population. Although the area is within about a 3-hour drive to New York City or to Buffalo, it was decided to use the county as a good representation of who is closest to and will most likely use the facilities and visit the stores and cultural event on a continuing basis. People from outside the county will also come to the area especially to see the cultural events that ongoing.
- Most of the anchor institutions (SUNY, Guthrie Hospital, Cortland Lines, Natrium Products, Albany International, Marietta Corporation) are within 3 miles of downtown Homer.
- Regionally, Homer has a complete downtown providing amenities that support and enhance downtown living and quality of life. Restaurants, clothing stores, village market, hairdressers and barbers, post office, two banks, radio station, bistros, healthcare providers, Internet-based businesses, town and village office building, financial services companies, religious facilities, Center for the arts building, ice cream and pizza businesses, American Legion building and a fire department.

Downtown Homer is the bedrock of the community for the 3750 residents of the Village and is part of the town of Homer which has 3500 additional residents.

Downtown Homer's catchment area is not limited to the Village boundary. The catchment area is identified in the Homer Area Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to be between 15- and 45-minutes driving distance depending on the product, activity or service being sought by customers and where the customer originates from. Homer and Cortland are located adjacent to Route 81. Distance to Syracuse is 26 miles north of Homer and to Binghamton which is 44 miles south of Homer and to Ithaca about 22 miles Southwest of Homer. Auburn, Skaneateles and Norwich are all within 1 to 2 hours' drive of Homer. Due to Homer located on exit 12 on Interstate Route 81. The village is approximately 3 ½ hours' drive to New York City. Four hours to Toronto, three hours to Buffalo and two and a half hours to Albany. Homer's Center for the Arts facility has attracted guests who attend concerts formed in the village from all of that you above named cities. That definitely indicates the ease and willingness of people to travel to Central New York to enjoy the amenities and culture of the area. The estimated total population of the Cortland/ Homer area in 2018 is about 35,000 and is expected to hold steady through 2020. The catchment area also includes seasonal residents who have higher incomes, higher levels of education and have an affinity for arts and cultural attractions, and who are not captured in these population estimates.

Downtown Homer's estimated population is 1754 consisting of a mix of professionals, blue collar workers and low-income residents living in an approximately 459 housing units out of a total for the village of 895 units. In addition, downtown have 20 businesses with nearly 100 employees. There are several major businesses located in the village but not on the downtown Main Street. These residents and employees add a steady rhythm of street life and activity to downtown throughout the day and contribute to the presence and success of a grocery store and other goods and services businesses that other small communities and downtowns struggle to attract and retain.

An additional 2423 residents live within a 5 minute (¼ mile) walk from Downtown. These residents enjoy the benefits of stable residential neighborhoods and the amenities of downtown. Most of the Village's residents live within a 10 to 15 minute walk from downtown.

Four of Homer's anchor institutions,



Albany International makes monofilament line for specialty

paper



Homer Central School District,



Farm Credit East,



And Farm Credit East are within one mile from downtown.

Both residents and visitors want interesting places to explore and downtown Homer offers just that. Downtown has a rich concentration of commercial, cultural, and recreational assets which makes this area the social and economic hub of the community. Regionally, Homer has the A complete downtown providing amenities that support and enhance downtown living and quality of life: 12 new market rate apartments are being developed currently downtown. These additional tenants will help keep downtown vibrant with activity. This will encourage others to come downtown also.

**Healthy foods.** In Homer, one can find, one full-service grocery store and a Farmers Market that operates May- October two days a week. As the Farmers Market is on the Village Green when the concert series is held in the summer, attendance at both events is increased. The Farmer's Market allows for convenient for parking and access.



Village green with gazebo facing South Main street Route 11

Some restaurants in Homer focus on providing healthy eating options. Three Lil Birds provides Gluten free options. Sinfully Sweet also provides healthy options beyond the average low calorie drink.

**Accessible recreation opportunities.** Durkee Park, Calale, Briggs Field, Newton Park and the waterworks Park are all within 10 minutes of walking from downtown Homer. Central New York bike trail goes through downtown Homer. A planned Riverwalk along one and a half miles of the Tioughnioga River once installed should bring additional tourist to the village. A kayak rental and input station is planned for Durkee park entrance to the Tioughnioga River. Dance studio, martial arts, yoga studios, are located downtown in the center for the arts building.

The Village has entered into an agreement with Seven Valley Coalition to provide individuals with low cost means of bicycling. Lime Bikes can be rented for \$1 plus \$.15/minute for the electric and \$1 for 30 minutes of pedal only powered bikes. Allow individuals to bike between Homer and Cortland. Motorized bikes are available for those needing extra help in bicycling. A program exists to help low income individuals rent bikes, making this transportation easily affordable for workers with no car to commute to Cortland.

**Arts & cultural.** Downtown Cortland has several well-known potters, painters and is well known in the Central New York area for the Center for the Arts facility. Many events are held at the Center for the Arts weekly through the fall and spring season. Summer activities at the center involve locals mostly.



Center for the Arts capable sitting 400 for concerts.

**Medical services.** Chiropractors, physical therapist, acupuncture, rheumatology Associates are located downtown. Other medical services are located within the village. Although not a medical service we do have several senior citizens homes. The most picturesque is the Brewster House located on S. Main St. which in the turn-of-the-century was a hospital.



Brewster House

**Restaurants & pubs.** A variety of styles and flavors are available to appease the full range of tastes.



Dasher's Pub

Sherman House restaurant

Our Chinese, Pizza and Soft ice cream stores are not pictured but draw many happy users .

**Civic buildings.** An intact central business district means that Town Hall, Village Offices, Adult Center, elementary schools, preschools, Public Library, and post office are all located downtown.



**Town/Village hall**



**Elementary school on the green**

**Diverse retail/shopping.** A diverse range of locally owned businesses provide residents and visitors with unique gifts, high-quality women's clothing and a nationally known men and boys store.



**Village market and Homer Men and Boys store**

**Events for all ages.** Downtown is the center for an array of community events including Winter Fest, Music on the Green outdoor concerts, First Night, Friday night movies at the Center for the Arts, parades, Summer Fun Runs and many smaller events.

**Unique Architecture.** Downtown boast a National Register Historic District with over 86 listed buildings. There is ongoing work to add to the historical district with several unique homes located adjacent to downtown.

Analysis of retail sales and potential for the catchment area shows unmet local demand for housing. Housing in Homer has traditionally been sought after. Supply of available homes is usually limited and is turned over quickly. The realtors in the area claim that demand for homes in the Homer Village area is high.

Homer, including Downtown, benefits from tourism. Comments from people attending arts events and cultural events in the village have consistently over the years commented on the beauty of our downtown and central green which is very attractive.

Buildings are being renovated and new businesses are opening in Downtown, including the historic Keeter Opera house. The success of these business and property owners corroborates what the data show - that Downtown Homer will not only continue to survive, it will thrive. There are many exciting development projects and new businesses that are just on the verge of coming to fruition. Many of these developments could capitalize on the availability of underutilized buildings and properties within downtown. An infusion of economic development funding would accelerate these projects in a way that would be transformational for downtown Homer.

- 2) Past investment, future investment potential.** Describe how this DRI area will be able to capitalize on prior private and public investment and catalyze future investments in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. Describe recent planning efforts that support public and private investment in the proposed DRI area.

Homer is uniquely positioned to capitalize on prior investments and catalyze future private and public investment in downtown. Homer is experiencing a downtown renaissance that has been fueled by a concentration of creative individuals and thoughtful public planning. Steady, incremental changes have been implemented over the last 5-6 years. The renovation of the Keeter Opera House and upgrades to storefronts through a Community Block Grant program has sparked new interest and investments in downtown. The many years of dreaming about the possibilities for downtown and creating plans to bring those dreams to life are finally being rewarded.

A local realtor with the help of a block grant will complete in the summer of 2019 a new three-story office and apartment building on Main Street. A fire had gutted an historic building leaving a cellar hole our main street which is now being redeveloped as a modern interior while keeping an exterior faithfully to the turn-of-the-century architecture of the village. Keeping our main street built up has encouraged other businesses and business owners to rehab buildings in our historic Main Street. A developer has converted a defunct laundry facility into a vibrant storefront with several new businesses moving to Homer. The same developer as rehabbed a closed funeral home into a restaurant with apartments on

the second floor has brought new life to a neglected portion of Main Street. Grants helped these developers to invest in Homer.

#### **Future Investments**

In preparing this application we have identified 10 projects planned in the village that represents over \$23 million in potential investments. There are so many great ideas which could come together to create the next big step in the evolution of Homer. Homer has and will continue to make small, incremental improvements in Downtown. But a \$10 million public investment through the DRI would catalyze transformative changes that we could not accomplish on our own.

**Local Plans** Over the past 5 years, public funding has been invested in local initiatives. Funding has been awarded by various state agencies, including Department of State and Council on the Arts as well as the NY Preservation League.

Each plan builds off of previous plans and has guided downtown revitalization efforts. Many of the proposed DRI projects are recommended in these plans. All of the local plans represent continuity with the Central New York REDC's vision by focusing on arts and cultural amenities, transportation options, tourism, attraction of entrepreneurs, and enhancing overall quality of life.

#### **Recent Investments**

Over 6 million has been invested in downtown projects over the past 10 years, with the majority of the investments occurring in the last 5 years. These investments were made to improve mixed-use buildings, create new businesses, expand existing businesses, improve downtown housing units, and improve parks and public infrastructure.

#### *Building & Facade Renovations*

\$6 million has been invested in downtown buildings. Nine buildings have been renovated to create improved commercial spaces, new and improved residential units on upper floors, office space, and restored historic facades. The most significant and highest profile renovation project was restoration of the historic Keeter Opera house. This is Homers downtown anchor, which provides upscale apartments, ladies fashions and unique gifts. It is the crown jewel of downtown and a source of great pride for residents. This building had once operated as a theater and had Mark Twain known as Samuel Clemens entertained there. Many plays, acts and movies were brought to entertain the residents of Homer and surrounding communities. Now the major entertainment arena is now located very close by on Main Street in the Center for the Arts facility.

The former Homer laundry building had closed was empty and in falling in disrepair after many years of neglect, but Tom Neiderhoffer LLC purchased the building and has already invested nearly \$1 million to bring the mixed-use building back to life. His company also purchased an empty funeral home and associated outbuildings which he has renovated and turned into mixed-use offices and stores. Once complete, this project represents several million of investments in downtown.



Former laundry complex

Old car dealership conversion

Funeral home conversion

The Homer village was awarded a New York Main Street grant for facade and building renovations in Downtown several years ago. The facades of 5 mixed-use buildings in the Historic District were restored, which represents a public-private investment in the area adjacent to the Keeter Opera house.

Continuing improvements and facade renovations are in our list of proposed DRI projects.

*New & Expanded Businesses*

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Homer as evidenced by renovations on the Keeter Opera house, Duane Block building, Brain Freeze ice cream, Exchange Building, Sherman House Restaurant, Sinfully Sweet, Origins Chocolate, Patti's Upholstery. Millions invested in new and expanded businesses in the past 5-6 years New Main Street businesses were created and several downtown businesses expanded. Dasher's Pub added outdoor seating and facade improvements.



Dasher's Pub. Been a pub since the 1890s



*Duane Block Building under construction. Replaces a historic building that burned down in 2015. Two business and 6 market level apartments being added to the community.*

### *Housing*

Homer has struggled for many years with substandard housing conditions. Very few of the upper floors of mixed-use downtown buildings had been renovated until recently. Many of the building renovations mentioned above included upgrades for residential units. The renovation of 6 affordable units in historic Keeter Opera House in downtown are expected to be completed in the summer of 2019.

Several areas within the village are available for housing development. Due to the slow economic growth in the county, developers are leery of investing significant dollars in expensive housing. They will need government assistance in order to make the investment attractive.

### *Parks & Infrastructure*

The Village of Homer is prepared to invest over \$400,000 in the construction of the Homer Tioughnioga Riverwalk, a linear park that follows the Tioughnioga River through downtown. Planning for the Riverwalk began in 2010 and completing it has been a community priority ever since. The Village is in the process of securing grants from DOS for the design and construction of a section of the Riverwalk that will bridge a gap between the River Street and the I-81 bypass. Additional sections of the trail will be pursued in future years through grants and village investment. Homer has several parks that are used extensively and have been maintained. The residence use and are very proud of the open space and walking and recreational activities these parks allow.



Durkee park on the Tioughnioga

Griggs field park

Not shown is Calale and Newton park

The Village of Homer has made significant investments in downtown infrastructure in recent years. A current matching grant has been awarded to the village to reconstruct sidewalks.

Water and sewer upgrades have been ongoing. A major multiyear Million dollar upgrade of the current water and sewer system is in process.

Verizon has invested in fiber-optic cable for high-speed internet in downtown and the rest of the village. The village has signed contracts to replace all our streetlights with LED. The plan is to have the LED streetlights connect with 5G wireless communications in the near future. Expectations are the savings from the LED conversion may allow for free or reduced price Wi-Fi in the village to all residents. If possible this will encourage entrepreneurs to develop IT type of jobs.

Improved signage throughout downtown is envisioned with the RI funding. New modern signs at the entrances to the village are being procured.

The Village has plans to invest to replace sidewalks in downtown this year. Local gas company has been upgrading gas lines in the village. Because of the construction on the sidewalks and some of the streets, this is an opportunity to implement streetscape enhancements. The Village has been working diligently to ensure that the public realm in Downtown is attractive and can support exciting new private developments.

**Development/Redevelopment Opportunities**



**The James Street empty Soap factory property is available for redevelopment.**

**This factory has been empty for approximately 10 years. Local developers have purchased the property in hopes of turning it into a business incubator. It needs significant change in order to be economically viable. The DRI funding is identified for this project.**

**Homer Soy Oil factory has been closed for 20 years and is now demolished. Environmental cleanup has been accomplished. The site is now ready and available for housing development.**

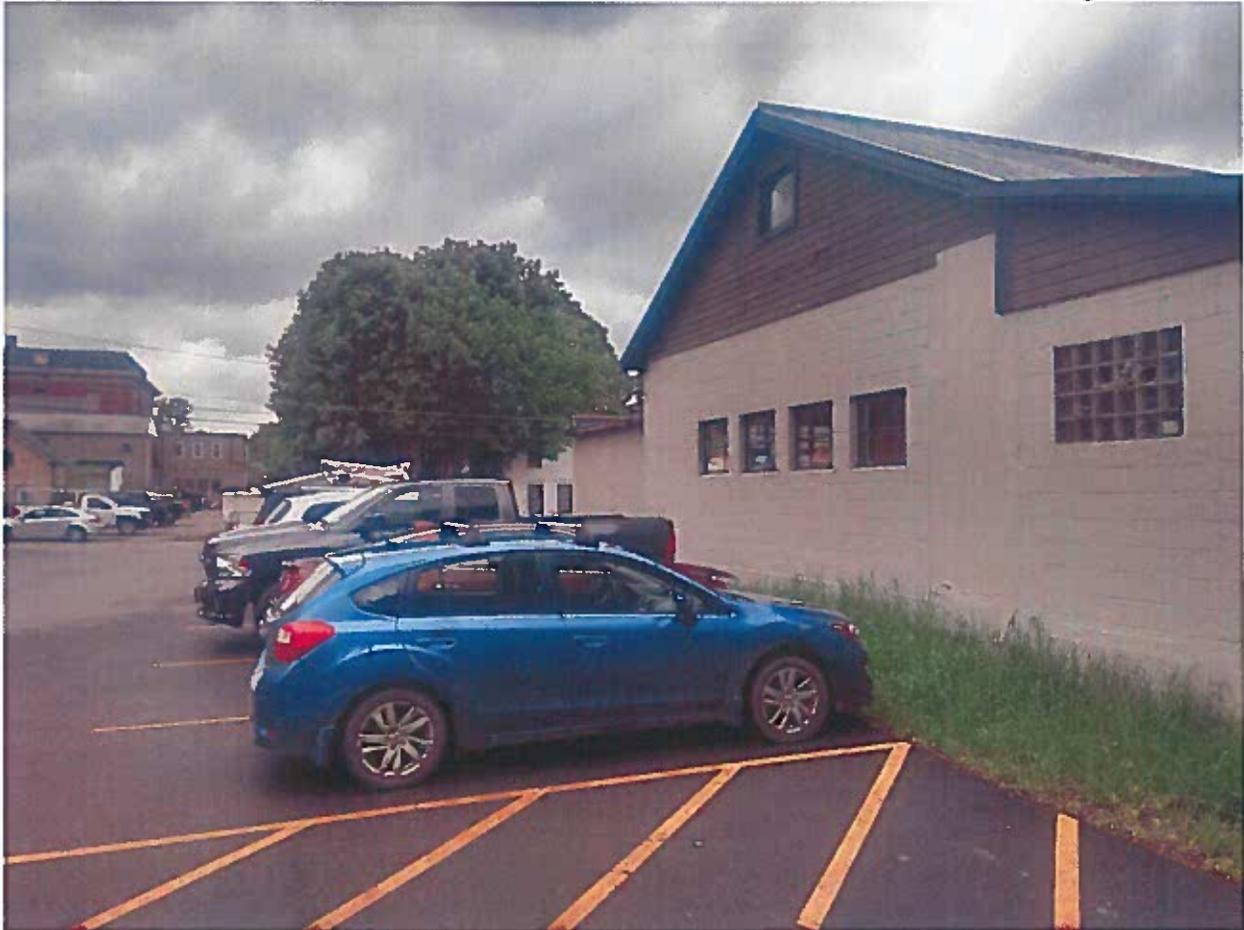


A 6 potential home development property on N. Main St. in Homer has been on hold due to the previous owner passing away. Development of new homes in Cortland County is rare due to the economic slowdown and high unemployment in the area. New housing builds are very slow due to general low value of existing homes. Developers are leery to build without a firm contract in hand.

The village of Homer only has a few undeveloped properties available for residential. There are several lots and businesses that are available for rehab for commercial activities. Getting a DRI investment in the village will certainly drive developers to focus on new development in the village.



One of the issues facing the village is a lack of additional parking. The Center for the Arts brings in over 400 people for its musical events, during the day the elementary school located on our village green doesn't have enough parking for its teachers and assistants who use our Main Street to park all day. The teachers parking on Main Street takes away from parking for our businesses. Turnover of customers for businesses is important for economic success. Having additional apartments being built will add to downtown parking issues. Having a small parking garage located close by the school and the Center for the arts would allow for distribution of vehicles. It would also have high speed electric charging stations which are not available currently. Having easy parking and access to our village downtown will help bring tourist to the walking trail and the current attractions that are located within the village.



Building (former Durkee Bakery building) to right of current parking lot would make a conveniently located parking garage. Stores could be located on the ground floor and parking above. Currently the building is used to store old cars and miscellaneous surplus material.

In summary, revitalization of Downtown Homer is firmly underway and a number of community plans are being used to guide future development and leverage private investments. The groundwork has been laid, interest is high, the momentum is here and the time for a \$10 million investment from the DRI is now.

Downtown Homer is ready to complete its transformation.

- 3) **Recent or impending job growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within or near the DRI area will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

There are over new and expanding small businesses in Downtown Homer.



- Three Little Birds deli/bakery recently opened creating 2 new jobs in Downtown.
- Sinfully Sweet coffee shop opened in a vacant liquor store creating 3 new jobs.
- Upstate Medical Hospital opened a rheumatology practice in a vacant car dealership garage on Main Street. Creating 5 new jobs.



Upstate medical building



The James Street Incubator Project will develop the skills of emerging entrepreneurs in Homer.

Homer and its partners recognize that downtown is both an economic center for quality jobs and a recruitment tool for drawing jobs and investment to the community. We have long realized that our quality of life, resulting from the historic urban character of the community combined with our location in the heart of Cortland County is our greatest asset in terms of attracting and retaining employers and jobs. Homer offers the perfect combination of amenities and nature that support a unique lifestyle. The lifestyle is what attracts and retains employers, investors, entrepreneurs, students, visitors and residents.

Outside the downtown area we have the following employers: Homer School District, with 242 Employees, Albany International, with 126 employees, Farm Credit East, with 46 employees and Family Health Network business office, employing 34.

These institutions rely on a vibrant downtown for employee retention and to provide confidence and interest in future investments. A thriving Downtown is a recruiting tool for these anchor institutions and will likely contribute to future expansions.

**4) Attractiveness of physical environment.** Identify the properties or characteristics that the DRI area possesses that contribute, or could contribute if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown for a diverse population of varying ages, income, gender identity, ability, mobility, and cultural background. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, varied housing types at different levels of affordability, walkability and bikeability, healthy and affordable food markets, and public parks and gathering spaces.

Perhaps the most striking feature of downtown Homer is the interplay between trees covered streets, hereby mountains, access to the Tioughnioga River and the downtown mid 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. The junction of picturesque downtown against the natural vistas of being in a valley with mountains on each side. The Tioughnioga River winds through downtown intersecting with River, Pine and Albany Street. The river flows into the East branch of the Tioughnioga River. This River goes downstream to tie into the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers ultimately arriving in the Chesapeake Bay. This River was used by our

ancestors to ship goods to Baltimore. All of the mountains have open pastures and forested hillsides making for extremely photogenic vistas.

#### **Academic, Cultural, and Entertainment Amenities**

When we build a place worth experiencing, we are building a place that has enduring wealth. The happenings in downtown are perhaps the district's greatest strength. There are weekly concerts and musical performances during the summer in the centrally located Homer Green that coincide with the farmers market. Having overlapping times for the concerts in the farmers market increases the numbers of attendees.

One of the most-loved downtown events is the annual Holiday in Homer during July, where the sidewalks are overflowing with hundreds of spectators. It is an event that showcases and encourages people of all ages to display their creative side. The 2 acre green is filled with vendor's tents, food and entertainment. Another favorite annual event is Winterfest, a celebration and early February featuring a parade down Main Street with entertaining events held at the school's auditoriums. The very popular event and people from all around the region come and attend. A variety of events take place at the numerous public gathering sites in downtown almost monthly. Additional events take place at the two churches located on the green. The Center for the Arts is a major music venue hosting local, regional and national bands. The Center for the Arts also host Opera, plays and has an event call that charities and others can use. It has a kitchen which allows for catered events.

An ongoing activity is a historical walk through the village that talks about important people who have grown up here and lived here and also on occasion they do a ghost walk. A couple of our buildings are said to be haunted. Lots of fun. Architectural tours are common to look at the many different styles of architecture the village.

Downtown Homer also owes much of its attractiveness and livability to its rich history as a cultural and commercial district. Most of the downtown buildings were built in the traditional multi-story mixed-use style. There is a National Register Historic Districts within downtown, which has been nominated for expansion. This concentration of 86 Historic buildings provide a rich architectural heritage and contributes to the aesthetically pleasing urban character of Downtown. The landmark Society hosts a small museum with changing displays and an office front on Main Street. They also provide local information on events and businesses in Homer. The museum hosts changing exhibits, talks, and special events for thousands of visitors, year-round.

The arts community has grown over the last 15 years and has been a catalyst to the revitalization accomplishments which have led to abundant choices for creative outlets in the downtown area.

Homer also benefits from its academic institutions. Thompkins Cortland Community College is located 10 miles from Downtown Homer. SUNY Cortland College is a 5-minute drive from the center of downtown. Many students and professionals from both institutions make their home within downtown or the adjacent neighborhoods. Homer has three distinct schools in the village. And excellent high school located on the southwest corner of the village, and intermediate school located in the north central portion of the village and an elementary school located on the green. The elementary school is located on the location of the first Homer Academy grounds developed around the turn-of-the-century.

#### **Housing Affordability & Type**

Downtown Homer is a traditional mixed-use neighborhood with over 24 businesses and 637 residential units. There are a total of 985 residential units in the total village.

Housing is available in historic buildings with residential units on upper stories, residential neighborhoods include both single and multi-family housing.

The variety of housing in Downtown supports a diverse residential population including students, low- to moderate-income families, seniors and professionals. The development of market rate housing downtown and rehabilitation of existing housing in village neighborhoods is a top priority for the Village. The Village recognizes availability of new and improved housing is essential to attract additional professionals and families to Homer. The tax revenue generated by these purchases will help decrease the property tax burden on existing property owners and generate revenue for further infrastructure improvements that –in turn – will improve the quality of life for all residents.

### Multi-modal Transportation

Downtown is the epicenter of Homer's transportation network. NYS Routes 11 and 90 and 41 intersect in downtown where several small village parking lots plus on-street parking are available for vehicles. An electric vehicle level 2 charging station is installed in one of the village parking lots.



Usage of the charging station has been spotty due to its slower charging rate. It is used and is appreciated by the users. Having a faster charger is being planned.

Cortland County Transportation provides bus service between Homer and Cortland with additional connections to Ithaca. Bus service beginning in Syracuse travels into Cortland and onto New York City. Homer residents have to get to downtown Cortland to access the bus service. Even though a train runs through the center of the village, it is for freight only. In the past provided passenger service between Binghamton and Syracuse.

Downtown Homer is very compact and walkable which means most errands can be accomplished on foot. Homer has an impressive walk-to-work mode share, excellent planning efforts and Safe Routes to School program. Neighborhoods are well connected to Downtown. Its size, compact development pattern and existing infrastructure make Homer a bikeable community. There are planned bike lanes or shared lane markings on all major roads through the Downtown. Homer has recently initiated Lime bike rentals in the village. These are pedal or electric assist bikes that can be accessed using a phone app. Cost to use is minimal. Initial responses been very positive in their use.



### Recreation & Public Spaces

Homer developed many public parks that today enhance village life. The Village as for significant parks within walking distance of each other offering a range of recreational amenities. One of the village parks are along the waterfront. Durkee Park as a swimming pond and for billions with rest facility access on the Tioughnioga River. The Tioughnioga River runs through the heart of downtown. The homer Riverwalk is a planned linear park that follows its banks. The river trail when completed will be the initial section of the trail that was planned to go from Homer to Marathon. New York. The trail will provide kayak and canoe access along the bank. An entry in midpoint and exit station

are being planned. Fishing in the river is excellent and is encouraged. Canoeing or kayaking is possible to go all away to the Chesapeake Bay starting right here in Homer. Turn-of-the-century scholars loaded with goods from Syracuse in Homer made springtime floats all away to Baltimore for years. Railroads and highways have obviously negated its use as such. Recreational use is still done and encouraged.

#### **Access to Health Care**

Homer residents and visitors have access to a dedicated team of skilled healthcare professionals and quality services that are unique for a region so large and rural. The continuum of healthcare at Guthrie Hospital in Cortland incorporates a complete range of healthcare services. A variety of other medical services are offered in the Homer/Cortland community, many of them located within the village.

**5) Quality of Life policies.** Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, comprehensive plans, complete streets plan, transit-oriented development, non-discrimination laws, age-friendly policies, and a downtown management structure. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

The Village of Homer is acknowledged as a driver of economic development in the community. Quality of life made possible by the interplay between the urbanity of the community and the surrounding Finger Lakes forests and lakes. The Village has a long history of proactively developing plans and policies to protect and enhance quality of life, with past focus on downtown. Although enhancing downtown is important the rest of the village needs attention also. It is getting it from the administration.

Plans do not sit on shelves. They have been incrementally implemented over the years. Recent plans build on prior plans so that goals are complementary creating a synergistic impact. The result is a community that is functional and aesthetically pleasing while being decidedly different from downtown cities. Homer's future as a sustainable Finger Lakes community is guided by existing progressive policies focused on continually improving livability and quality of life.

#### **Village of Homer Comprehensive Plan (2010)**

The Comprehensive Plan is the culmination of over two plus years of planning with interactive, dynamic and sustained outreach throughout the process. The comprehensive plan sets forth needs, goals, planning initiatives and strategies for the Village. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of the downtown as a commercial center for the village and the region. The projects proposed in the DRI application are based on the vision and goals contained in the Comprehensive Plan.

#### **Village of Homer Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, LWRP CFA request for 2019**

The Village of Homer has water resources that pass directly through the center of the village. The goals for waterfront revitalization primarily focus on improved public access to water resources, stimulating tourism and economic development in downtown, protecting natural resources, and improving pedestrian safety to and from waterfront areas. The Village has been aggressively pursuing LWRP funding. The goals in our LWRP request will if funded guide all subsequent planning and infrastructure projects undertaken by the Village and serve to inform all land use decisions. The LWRP funding requested along with village resources will ensure the protection and enhancement of downtown and waterfront areas.

#### **Village of Homer Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Master Plan (2010)**

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan includes inventories, programs, priority projects, design guidance, and a plan for implementation that will enhance community livability through alternative transportation options, a network of open spaces, and promotion of healthy active lifestyles. The Village has made significant progress implementing the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Improvements in downtown infrastructure include reconstruction of sidewalks, improved crosswalks, and shared lane markings for bicycles, wayfinding signage, and intersection improvements.

#### **Parks Vision Plan**

The village of Homer won a grant program to develop a linear park along the Tioughnioga River several years ago. The village is progressing with contractual issues with current landholders to purchase three properties that were previously agreed to. The Route 11 linear park will be included in the 2019 CFA LW RP River trail Park plan. The removal of two blighted properties along the river will encourage terrorism to the river and expand opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop other properties for economic development.

#### **Downtown Plans**

Plans for Downtown Homer were prepared in an effort to keep downtown competitive with other shopping centers and the increased sophistication of corporate and chain stores. Downtown improvements have been made over the last decade; however, some buildings and infrastructure are still in need of revitalization and have been identified as priority areas for the DRI.

#### **Zoning**

In 2015 the Village of Homer initiated a complete review and update of our Code book that implements recommendations from New York state, residents, businesses and the Comprehensive Plan. The code revisions will encourage development and redevelopment of the village and downtown that includes mixed-uses, enhances walkability and leads to the adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

#### **Transportation Policies**

The Village of Homer has policies to ensure the safety of pedestrians of all ages and abilities. The policy includes a checklist that to be completed during the planning phase of all infrastructure and transportation projects to ensure consistency with the Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan and that opportunities to fill gaps in the network are not missed.

#### **Other Policies**

The Village of Homer has passed a local law that prohibits heavy vehicles in downtown except for Commercial. The Village has won two recent micro enterprise grants. These grants are very successful and have encouraged businesses to grow and expand within the village.

#### **Sustainability**

The Village of Homer is a Clean Energy Community after completing four high impact actions. The Village Board recently adopted the Climate Smart Communities Pledge and appointed a local Coordinator and The Village has installed its first dual-port electric vehicle charging station in a public parking lot and in the process of converting to LED Street light fixtures. LEDs or other high-efficiency lighting has been installed in all municipal buildings. Current plans include having a power plug to initiate 5G transmitters on each of the village light fixtures. The goal is to provide free or reduced cost 5G Wi-Fi to all the residents and businesses in the village. Having access to high-speed Wi-Fi can and should allow entrepreneurial activity to expand and flourish.

**Downtown Organization**

The Homer Business Association(HBA) is active in the village. The purpose of HBA makes recommendations to the Homer Village Board of Trustees regarding policies to undertake actions that improve economic vitality by enhancing the experience, image and lifestyle of Downtown Homer.

National Trust of Historic Preservation, has provided a framework for community-based downtown revitalization. Four transformation strategies are being implemented through comprehensive work in four broad areas: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. In addition, the Village's local HBA has become an effective organizational force for stimulating and achieving downtown revitalization.

All of these forward-thinking policies share a common objective of creating a thriving, sustainable downtown that enhances livability and quality of life in Homer.

**6) Public Support.** Describe the public participation and engagement process conducted to develop the DRI application, and the support of local leaders and stakeholders for pursuing a vision of downtown revitalization. Characterize the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to preparing and implementing a strategic investment plan.

The Village will submit this DRI submission in 2019. It has been indicated that initial requests usually need additional thought and work. This submission is our initial request for help and consultation with the DRI decision-makers. It is the hope of the village mayor and trustees that this submission will be looked on favorably and that help and encouragement will be forthcoming to make future submissions better and more acceptable.

The village of Homer has implemented an ongoing economic development team made up of residents and administration personnel. Their job has been identified as coming up with strategies to provide economic development, sustainability of what we have in the village now and to think about how the village will operate and look in the future. Reports from these committees will be made available to the public. The public is always invited as usual to any meeting. Transparency is absolutely mandatory in any activity the village pursues.

The DRI committee relied on adopted Village plans, which were created with strong public input, to synthesize a vision, goals and strategies for downtown revitalization that would influence this application. Many of the proposed DRI projects come directly from those plans.

The DRI committee has conducted a community engagement process and will continue to engage the community. A preliminary list of projects that is included in this DRI Strategic Investment Plan. Committee members have conducted meetings and presentations to stakeholder groups and engaged individual business owners, property owners, developers and investors in discussions about potential downtown projects. Surveys have been sent to all the village residents. Input on projects that they would like to see pursued are implemented in this DRI submission. Public meetings have been done where participants were introduced to the vision and had the opportunity to comment on the needs and proposed projects.

Support for revitalization has been conveyed in meetings and also the local news organizations. The village has received many letters commenting on the scope of the DRI request and the preponderance of the comments has been addressed in this DRI submission.

**7) Transformative opportunities:** Describe opportunities to build on the strengths described above by providing a list of transformative projects that will be ready for implementation with an infusion of DRI funds within the first one to two years (depending on the scope and complexity of the project). Identify potential development opportunities, such as municipal-owned property that may be appropriate for redevelopment. Projects may be public or private, and could address economic development, transportation, housing, and community development needs. It should recognize that if a DRI award is made to the downtown, the projects identified here along with any others that may arise during the DRI planning process, will ultimately be embedded by the local planning committee in the state to determine which projects receive DRI grants.

#### **\$.5M Upper stories elevators and apartment development (20 temporary jobs)**



downtown Homer has several multistory buildings that have vacant third and fourth stories. One building is currently being redeveloped using a block grant. To remaining buildings could use elevators to have tenants reach the third floor. These are reasonably large size buildings so many apartments could be built. External elevators could cost about \$100,000 each. Upgrades to the infrastructure of the buildings would be required. Many contractors would be employed for a period of time. Tenets could either be market value or subsidized housing depending on how the grants are awarded.

#### **\$.2M Facade improvements**

Recent downtown block grants have helped façade improvements on some buildings but there are additional buildings that could use a visual upgrade.



### **\$.2M Store and village signage improvements**

Having coordinated signage for downtown businesses having street map posted on the sidewalk identifying all the different businesses in the downtown area would encourage shopping. Tourist can find their way to the businesses of their choice easily. Using a standard or common design practice for signage makes the village more visually appealing.

### **\$3.0M Parking garage**

Currently there is overcrowding when our events or downtown parades are held. The elementary school does not have enough parking for its teachers and parents who visit. Cars block the public library and stifle parking for use for shopping. A recent parking study has indicated that the village does not have enough handicap parking spaces as would be required by current law. Parking was not a problem back when the village was designed and built due to being not designed for automobiles. Having a small parking garage would not detract from the downtown area. It would also provide adequate parking for cultural events and also house a high-speed electrical charging station. The ground floor could be used for business development if desired and a developer were found. A location just to the rear of our main street has been identified.



Would replace existing building with a multi-story parking garage. Possible shops on first floor.

### **\$.3M Public Art**

Having murals, sculptures, or other public art enhances tourism and reasons to visit the village. There are many artist of high quality in the area that would be available to work on themes that are appropriate for the village. The village has significant history with citizens that were born in Homer that are associated with Lincoln. Brockway trucks were built in Homer. The Cardiff giant

hoax of 1869 had a half owner in Homer. Using the Odyssey and Iliad characters which were described by the Greek writer Homer. These and other themes are all possible that would also attract tourists to the village.

### **3.0M Sports/performing arts complex (100+ jobs)**

The village has access to an 87-acre flat field adjacent to Route 81. Current studies are underway to determine the viability of a large dome sports/performing arts complex. This report will be attached to a 2020 CFA request. Homer is currently well known for its 400 Seat Center for the Arts complex. The Center for the Arts has drawn national acts but in order to take it to the next level a larger venue needs to be developed. Cortland is a significantly underdeveloped sports activity County. Cortland County is also located centrally to all of New York State. There are 25 colleges located within a 50-mile radius of Homer. Attracting baseball or other sporting activities throughout the year needs to be identified. If the study currently underway is positive, the village will need significant help with funding. Once the village has some funding, identifying and getting private investment will be easier. Initial studies have indicated that a domed sporting facility would be successful and not be parasitic on any other sports facilities in the region. Synergy with other sporting activities in the region is expected. A complex of this size would have at least 100 full-time equivalent jobs. On many occasions more people would be hired but only on a part-time basis. Again, this would provide a focus on getting sports tourism and entertainment tourism to Cortland County.



### **\$.3M River trail enhancements**

Homer is in the process of submitting a LWRP request through the CFA 2020 program. Initially, about half of the trail along the river is expected to be built using the CFA L-rippled funds. The

village will share in the cost of developing the trail. The additional point 3 million will be used for signage and improvements to access to the trail. The trail will be accessible by bicycle, walkers, runners and even fishermen. The trail development should definitely show the DRI administration that Homer can manage programs and provide evidence that tourism can be increased in this area.



Durkee Park. Projected trail start going south to the sports Complex/Performing art Complex 1.5 miles away. Kayak, fishing access and trail improvements requested.

#### **\$.4M Farmer's Market development**

Homer has initiated over the past few years a farmers market located on the green two days a week during the summer. During rainy days or in the shoulder seasons a covered location for the market would enhance the viability of the market and the duration of the season for the market. Having the market located on the same property as the dome would enhance the market's ability to draw additional people to the market.

#### **\$.8M C4A improvements**

The Center for the arts was started about 15 years ago from an abandoned Episcopal Church. The center now is capable of seating 400 people in an auditorium using theater seating. The acoustics for a small venue have proven to be excellent. Regional and national acts have expressed amazement at how nice the facility is. The center also provides a dance studio, yoga, music lessons, tai chi, Opera, local plays and supports local charity events. This is an old building that is continually needing refurbishment and rehab. Air-conditioning heating and exterior renovations are necessary.

The Center for the arts would be a key player in the performing arts portion of the dome. The dome would see anywhere from 2500 to 3000 seats. There are very many theaters that seat this many in central New York. The ability to host national acts would bring tourism to Cortland County and Central New York. Once here to attend musical or entertainment activities access to the finger Lakes is easily accomplished for vacationers who organize their trips around these events.



### **\$1.3M Walking trail/bike trail improvements**

Homer is amenable and encourages walking and bicycling. Lime bikes has recently been initiated in the village and then Cortland. The village is in the process of being a part of the Syracuse to Binghamton bike trail. People walk consistently throughout the village which is encouraged. Sidewalk improvements are ongoing to make him safer. Sidewalk snowplowing is done for all the village by village employees. Having adequate signage and marking for trails within the village is in courage by this DRI request. Having benches and occasional shelters are envisioned.

---



### **\$10.0 Million total**

**8) Administrative Capacity.** Describe the existing local administrative capacity to manage this planning and implementation initiative, including the ability to oversee contracts for awarded municipal projects using existing staff and resources.

- The Village of Homer has successfully administered many state and federal grant programs concurrently.
- Village staff have over 20 years of combined experience in grants management.
- Our grants administrator is currently managing state grant funds for 4 different projects.
- The Cortland County IDA and Local Development Corporation are key partners that increase local administrative capacity for downtown revitalization.

The Village of Homer has successfully administered many grants from numerous state and federal agencies over the years, including NYS Department of State, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Empire State Development, NYS Council on the Arts, NYS Attorney General, NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation, NYS Parks, NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal, and NY Preservation League. Village staff is currently managing 4 concurrent contracts worth over 4 million. Five grant projects were completed within the last 6 years. The Village also manages a \$323,000 Community Development Fund. The Village has a proven ability to manage concurrent contracts. The Village's grants are managed primarily by the Grants administrator and Treasurer with administrative support from 2 staff members. This team has over 20 years of combined experience with grants management. The Cortland Development Corporation have also played an important role in assisting the Village with the administration of grant programs to revitalize downtown. Homer has a strong spirit of volunteerism that enables the Village to achieve big goals. The IDA will be a key partner for administering the DRI should it be awarded to Homer and has committed to providing technical and administrative support to the Village as needed. The Village has demonstrated that it is capable of administering a variety grant programs and leveraging private investments. Homer's success in attracting grant funding for community and regional projects is a testament to the community's commitment to thoughtful planning with robust community input.

**SUBMISSION**

Applications from interested communities must be submitted electronically to the relevant Regional Economic Development Council at the email address in the table below. Proposals for areas within New York City must be sent to the relevant Office of the Borough President, which will select two applications for submission to the NYC Regional Economic Development Council.

- Central New York [NYS-CentralNY@esd.ny.gov](mailto:NYS-CentralNY@esd.ny.gov)  
Counties: Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego  
Counties: Nassau, Suffolk