



Downtown Revitalization Initiative

APPLICATION

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Hudson Valley

Municipality Name: City of Mount Vernon

Downtown Name: Downtown Mount Vernon

County Name: Westchester County

Applicant Contact(s) Name and Title: Chantelle Okarter, Planning Commissioner and William Long, Planning Administrator

Applicant Contact(s) Email Address: cokarter@cmvny.com and wlong@cmvny.com

VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

Mount Vernon's inclusive vision, as identified by its citizens, is to grow the City's Downtown by providing a greater mix of shopping, entertainment, entrepreneurship, small business and employment opportunities constructed around the City's main transportation hub that foster business growth and tap into the City's underemployed, "hard to employ" and unemployed labor pool.

Mount Vernon is uniquely poised to emerge as a model revitalized community. Characteristics that set Mount Vernon apart include:

- Affordability – available land and buildings at highly favorable prices.
- Accessibility – the only municipality in the Mid-Hudson Region that has (3) three Metro North Railroad train stations, as well as close proximity to New York City subways, bus lines and major highways.
- Diversity – a richly talented, educated and multicultural workforce.

All of these factors combine to make Mount Vernon a place where investment will pay the greatest dividends in terms of business growth, job creation and community enrichment.

JUSTIFICATION

We nominate the City of Mount Vernon's Downtown to the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council (MHREDC) for consideration of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) designation because Mount Vernon has the unique potential to become a model regional city to live, work and play.

Mount Vernon is 4.4 square miles, has approximately 70,000 culturally diverse residents with origins from over 96 different countries, and is the eighth largest city in New York state. Revitalization of the downtown area is essential to Mount Vernon's development particularly due to the City's high poverty rate of approximately 16%.

According to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), the Hudson Valley will have the highest rate of growth (18%) by the year 2045 in the NYMTC Region consisting of New York City, the lower Hudson Valley and Long Island. As a result, Downtown Mount Vernon is well poised to become *the* economic engine of the Southern Hudson Valley to accommodate this increased growth with the infusion of a DRI investment. The DRI will further expand Mount Vernon's

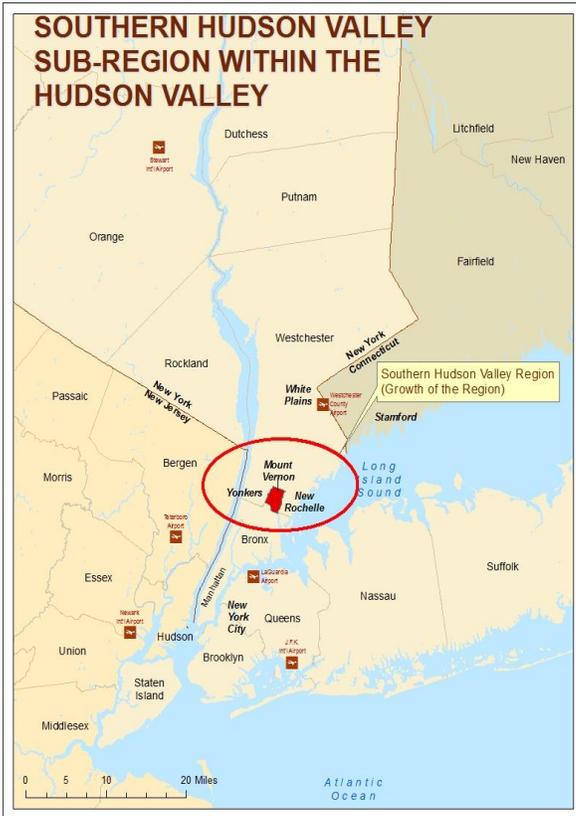


Figure A: Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region Within the Hudson Valley

application of smart-growth, resilient, transit-oriented development, environmentally friendly and sustainability principles. These principles are inherent in the fabric of the City and provides Mount Vernon with its competitive advantage.

Historically, the Hudson Valley has had only one major economic engine, the City of White Plains. The City of White Plains has provided jobs and housing while serving as *the* economic port for goods and services from the New York City Region into Upstate New York and further into New England. An economic engine for the sub-region located between the City of White Plains and New York City has never existed. Consequently, three inner first ring suburban cities emerged whose economies were semi-dependent on the economy of New York City -- all three of which are located within the Hudson Valley. Namely, Mount Vernon, Yonkers and New Rochelle.

This sub-region, called the *Southern Hudson Valley Region*, is characterized by very dense municipalities in terms of both population and compact land use with inherent transit-oriented development and associated infrastructure, all of which support increased population and economic growth. Together this region would amass the 2nd largest city (352,726 total population) and the third most densely populated city in the State of New York (over 10,391 people per square mile/4,243 housing units per square mile) and Mount Vernon lies at the center of this region. Mount Vernon is the 2nd most densely populated city (after New York City) in New York State and its Downtown lies at the heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Region.

Currently, the Southern Hudson Valley Region does not have an economic engine to support the growing population, housing and employment markets. Polycentric regional development is the only way in which the New York City Metropolitan Area, Hudson Valley Region and New York State can retain its competitive advantage in the current world's economy. It is also evident through the DRI that New York State, in conjunction with the MHREDC, is seeking to establish an economic heart for the Southern Hudson Valley Region. Downtown Mount Vernon currently embodies and exhibits, as indicated in Figure A, everything that is needed to become the Southern Hudson Valley Region's economic heart.

Downtown Mount Vernon offers a variety of attributes that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Unique transportation options found nowhere else in the Southern Hudson Valley Region; Mount Vernon is the only municipality with 3 Metro-North Stations on 2 different lines, is adjacent to 2 New York City subway lines and is surrounded by 6 major highways;
- Office space for commercial growth and business friendly policies;
- Available vacant space at affordable prices to attract back office growth. Additionally, Mount Vernon does not tax business corporations, unincorporated businesses, or banking corporations nor is there a tax on net income or utilities to name just a few;
- Inherent Transit Oriented Design (TOD);
- Several hundred affordable and market housing unit developments being constructed near the 3 Metro-North Stations which will create a critical mass for retail, business growth and business to business transactions to be developed within walking distance of these residences for the labor force;
- Compact nature;
- Walk-ability with a “WalkScore” ranking Mount Vernon fifth among New York State’s 111 largest cities; and
- Bike friendly.

To leverage and maximize these attributes, the City has expended countless resources since the early 2000s to:

- Conduct relevant planning studies;
- Complete a Comprehensive Plan update;
- Make public infrastructure and capital improvements;
- Implement zoning code changes; and
- Engage public/private ventures.

These initiatives seek to: (i) restore and revitalize Downtown Mount Vernon in the areas of job creation for the unemployed, underemployed, “hard-to-employ” and veterans; (ii) revitalize the City’s Central Business District; and (iii) facilitate the effective improvement of mobility for commuters and goods within Downtown Mount Vernon while providing workforce development for not just the City’s existing labor pool but also the Region’s.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

1) Boundaries of the proposed DRI area.

Downtown Mount Vernon is compact, easily accessible, transit oriented, dense and well defined. Its northern boundary consists of the only park found within Downtown called “Hartley Park.” Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital marks the western border of Downtown, while the Fulton Avenue Bridge denotes its eastern boundary. Its southern end is a recently rezoned one block industrial zone.

Downtown Mount Vernon constitutes 96 acres (4%) of the City’s total acres. It contains less than 1% of vacant land. Four distinct districts combine to make that which is considered Downtown Mount Vernon.

There is the Central Business District (CBD) which covers 66 acres and approximately 69% of Downtown Mount Vernon. This compact yet dense core hosts a variety of land uses including Westchester County’s third busiest bus terminal and one of Metro-North’s busiest train stations as commuters seek to reach Connecticut and Mid-town Manhattan. This area is also the main entry point for people who are employed in a light industrial area which lies directly adjacent to Downtown Mount Vernon’s CBD. The CBD hosts approximately 8 acres of the most underutilized publicly held land within the City.

Downtown Mount Vernon’s CBD was recently expanded to include one additional block of South Fourth Avenue between East Third Street and East Fourth Street. This block of light industrial uses consists of 7 acres and 54 parcels. It is surrounded on three sides by residential uses and because of its location has lost its competitive edge for industrial use. Accordingly, the City placed an urban renewal zoning overlay on the block to prevent the further decline of the block and to transform its economic energy.

The “main street” or core of the City’s Downtown is a two block stretch along South Fourth Avenue between East First Street and East Third Street. These two blocks consist of 9 acres with a commercial vacancy rate of approximately 18%. These two blocks are home to national name brand stores intermingled with local “mom and pop” style stores. Shoppers throughout the region are attracted to this location for the unique “buys” and shopping experience which is not found in any other place within the region.

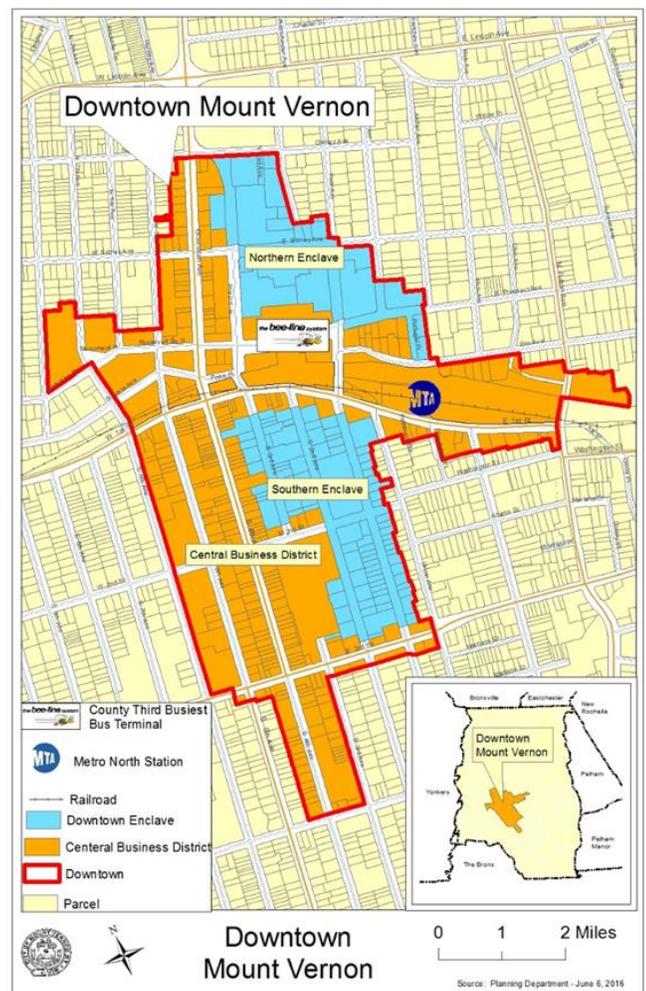


Figure B: Downtown Mount Vernon

Lastly, Downtown Mount Vernon provides “downtown living” within its two enclaves. There are approximately 29 acres of “apartment style” living whether co-op or apartment in mid-rise structures in the northern enclave while its southern enclave affords “brownstone style” living in traditional “walk-ups.” The southern enclave also hosts many of the City’s historic institutional uses such as a Carnegie Public Library, Post Office and the tallest office tower in Downtown Mount Vernon.

With all these micro-economies so close together, Downtown Mount Vernon is well poised to accommodate the proposed growth in a manner that will allow it to expand its competitive advantage into the future. Accordingly, the boundaries of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative are coterminous with Downtown Mount Vernon as shown in Figure B.

Within Downtown Mount Vernon’s boundaries are walkable, bikeable, pedestrian friendly, transit-oriented, dense, compact areas that experience all of the high-class challenges that other major cities experience within the United States. One key difference is Mount Vernon experiences these challenges within the 96 acres that comprise its downtown. Accordingly, Downtown Mount Vernon is poised to undertake the role of the economic engine and driver of the Southern Hudson Valley Region.

Its boundaries are located 4 miles from Getty Square/Downtown Yonkers; 2 miles from the Cross-County Mall; 3 miles from Empire City Casino which was recently purchased by MGM Resorts; 19 miles from Midtown Manhattan; approximately 4 miles from Downtown New Rochelle/New Roc City; approximately 11 miles from White Plains; 4 miles from the Shoppes at Pelham Manor, and 20 miles from Stamford, Connecticut.

Downtown Mount Vernon’s ability to serve as the economic heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Region stems from the following demographics:

Downtown Mount Vernon Revitalization Initiative Demographics

Radius From Downtown Area	Total Population	Average Household Income	Annual Household Income Growth (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Educational Attainment (% of population with Bachelor’s Degree Minimum)
1 Mile	68,505	\$65,680	3%	11.4%	25.1%
3 Miles	398,156	\$76,424	2.3%	12%	29.4%

All numbers are approximates. Source: Mount Vernon Market Demand Study – 2011. See Figure C below.

According to the market demand study conducted in 2011, in Mount Vernon alone, there are approximately 26,054 households with a retail spending potential of \$16,150 per household/year. This coupled with the 21,564 workers who have \$3,200 per year in spending potential equates to \$475 million in potential retail for the City of Mount Vernon, not including surrounding areas. These figures only grow when the surrounding three-mile radius is included.

Accordingly, there is approximately \$285 million in retail spending in Mount Vernon presently. This affords a 40% opportunity in resident and worker spending not just in the downtown but throughout the entire city.

Downtown Mount Vernon has an estimated \$23 million of unmet retail sales potential which translates into 730,000 square feet of additional retail within the Downtown alone. Mount Vernon, including the Downtown, has \$205 million of retail potential which is currently unmet. When Southern Westchester County and the Bronx’s Community Board 12 are added, the total population is 529,315 people in a land area of approximately 60 square miles.

Mount Vernon has the *only* downtown where one can access the other downtown areas located in the Southern Hudson Valley Region within a 3-mile radius as indicated in Figure C.

Mount Vernon has a daytime population of approximately 60,000 people which is very close to the City’s total population. Approximately 17,000 people commute into the City of Mount Vernon for work which includes the Downtown. 61% of Mount Vernon’s total population is between the ages of 20-64, which is considered the prime working age. These numbers explode when the population of three-mile radius is considered.

The City of Mount Vernon is built as a transit-oriented developed (TOD) community. Mount Vernon’s mass transit stations, nodes of transit activity and transit transfer points are considered prime locations to develop new commercial, shopping, living, entertainment and cultural facilities for the City. New developments around these transit nodes only adds to the City’s inherent TOD and encourage both daytime and nighttime activities while encouraging structures designed to emphasize access to and between these developments by walking, biking, bus use, train ridership and other forms of mass transit.

Promoting growth around Mount Vernon’s TOD locations provides opportunities through incentives such as zoning amendments to permit mixed-use developments. It also creates new commercial space for “start-up” companies as well as major name brand establishments while allowing for business to business transactions to be conducted. Increasing development around Mount Vernon’s TOD locations will help to bring Mount Vernon’s tax base closer to equilibrium and bring the City’s and the Region’s jobs to housing ratio closer while improving the Regions’ Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Mount Vernon’s density of development, compact pattern of land use, vehicular corridor arrangement (street grid) and plentiful mass transit options allow people, freight, goods and services to move easily around and throughout the City. Accordingly, the City has the basic infrastructure to accommodate and facilitate greater usage for maximization. While motorized vehicles are currently the dominant mode of transport within the City and its Downtown, the redevelopment goals for enhanced mobility are geared toward reducing the percentage and duration of motorized trips. The City seeks to increase the amount of non-motorized trips (bikes and walking) to improve air quality, the environment and personal health and wellness.

Furthermore, the City of Mount Vernon is well poised to serve as the economic heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Region because of its transportation access. The Bronx River, Cross County and Hutchinson Parkways traverse Mount Vernon and Interstates 87 and 95 are each less than a mile from the City’s borders. The City is also well served by a network of mass transit options that allows every resident in Mount Vernon to be within a seven to ten-minute walk of a bus, subway or train line. Midtown Manhattan, Downtown White Plains and Downtown Stamford, Connecticut are less than a one-half hour express trip by rail from Mount Vernon’s three Metro-North Railroad Stations. As indicated in the transit map (Figure D), two (2) New York City subway lines, the #2 and #5 trains, terminate and/or commence within three City blocks of the

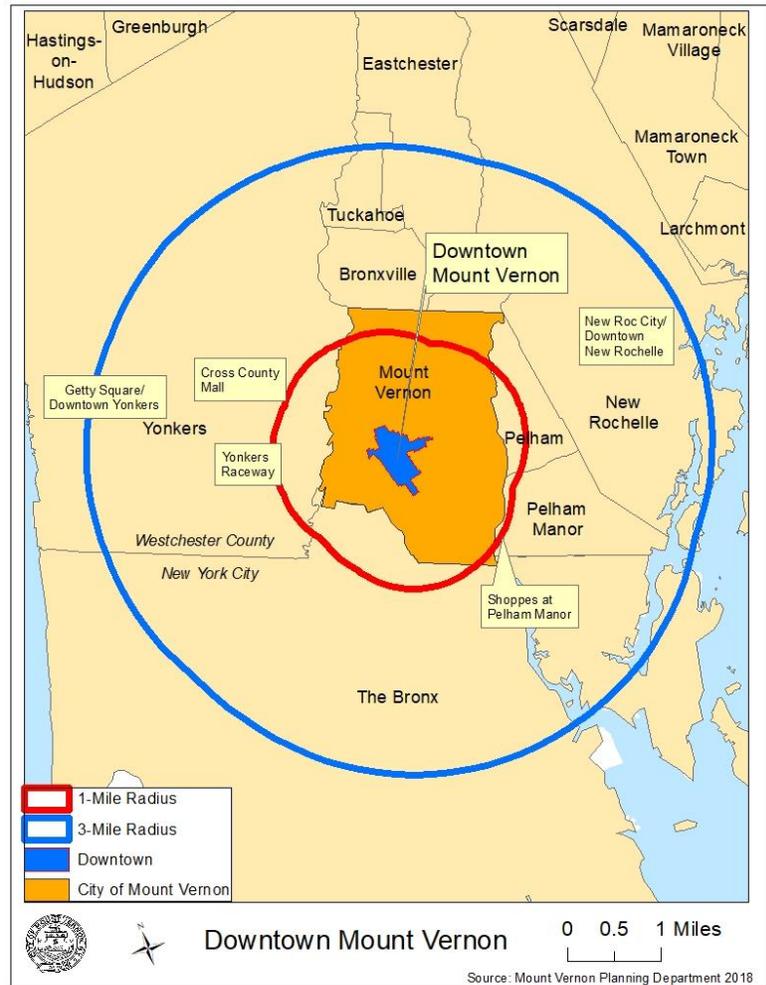


Figure C: Downtown Mount Vernon Radius Map

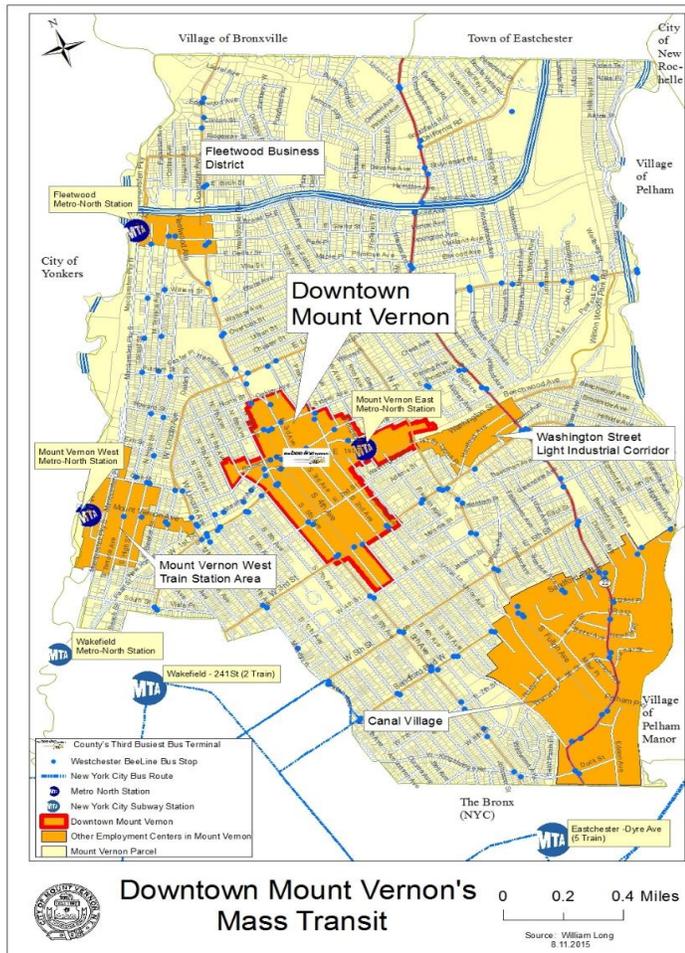


Figure D: Mass Transit Within Mount Vernon

at Petrillo Plaza (the County’s Third busiest bus terminal) in 2006. In 2010, Metro-North reconstructed the first of its bridge reconstruction projects within the Downtown. The Park Avenue Bridge was rebuilt at a cost \$10.5 million. Metro-North is currently designing the reconstruction of three other bridges within Downtown. Construction on the first bridge is scheduled to begin in June 2019. The total investment of these bridges is \$22 million. The City of Mount Vernon invested in pedestrian improvements throughout the Downtown including pedestrian signals and crosswalks.

To further reinforce Downtown Mount Vernon’s economic stronghold, several planning studies have been being completed to facilitate the orderly growth and development of the City’s Downtown. The planning studies consist of a parking management workshop that was conducted in 2009 to determine ways to best use the parking infrastructure and facilities which the City owns within Downtown. A market demand study was completed in 2011 and it determined that approximately \$205 million of monetary leakage occurs annually within the City’s Downtown due to regional economic market pressure. The study suggested ways to appropriately capture this revenue. The City is currently implementing a planning study of the Mount Vernon East Train Station Area. This \$354,607 in Brownfield Opportunity Area funding allows the City to study the publicly owned land around the train station to determine its highest and best use.

The City received a \$20,000 grant from the Land Economics Foundation to conduct a comprehensive study of the City’s historic main street in the City’s Downtown (the “South Fourth Avenue Study”). The South Fourth Avenue Study found that Mount Vernon residents spend approximately \$396 million on retail outside of the City. Mount Vernon also received a \$40,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to complete an Arts and Cultural Master Plan. This grant allowed the City to understand whether artist lofts and other artist type ventures and businesses can be enhanced and expanded within the City’s Downtown. The City also received a \$1.6 million grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation to repair and upgrade the City’s sewer infrastructure.

Mount Vernon/Bronx border. The Westchester County Bee-Line System operates nine bus routes in Mount Vernon that provide bus transit throughout Westchester County and into New York City. The City of Mount Vernon is less than one fifth of a mile from the Wakefield, Bronxville and Pelham Metro-North Train Stations. Mount Vernon’s transit network makes the City one of the best models of a walkable community in the Hudson Valley and New York State.

2) Past Investment, future investment potential.

Downtown Mount Vernon’s economic sustainability goals are directly aligned with that of the MHREDC. These goals consist of increased jobs and training, more business to business transactions and business creation, attraction and retention. To accomplish these goals, Downtown Mount Vernon has received heavy investment over the past ten years, some of which are still in process while other projects have been completed. The DRI is the last step needed for Downtown Mount Vernon to secure its status as the economic engine of the Southern Hudson Valley Region.

To solidify the competitive advantage that Downtown Mount Vernon offers, the City has aggressively sought public infrastructure projects to ensure that future development has an attractive arena in which to conduct and grow business, industry and/or commerce. These public infrastructure investments began with \$2.5 million from Westchester County to make pedestrian improvements

The City also invested \$120,000 to update its Comprehensive Plan. This endeavor married public opinion and insight through stakeholder meetings, public survey and public meetings with public policy to determine the best way the City should grow overall. A major outcome of the Draft Comprehensive Plan was the need for a downtown plan to ensure orderly development in the City’s Downtown – receipt of the DRI would accomplish this goal.

Investment in the City’s downtown also includes two public/private partnerships. A private investor invested \$5 million to create an Urban Renewal Plan for the southern portion of Downtown. This public/private partnership allowed for the planning and revitalization of a deteriorating light industrial block to be converted into a viable mixed-use block. The other public/private partnership was the sale of a City owned property to be converted into a job training center. Another public/private partnership is a \$23 million collaboration to construct mixed use development where underutilized city land contains two separate municipal parking lots and a municipal owned former YMCA building. These planning efforts are indicated in Figure E.

The City was also successful in obtaining a New York State Opportunity Zone which is in the heart of the City’s Downtown. In fact, the Opportunity Zone covers approximately 55 percent of the City’s Downtown as indicated in Figure E. The City intends to leverage the Opportunity Zones Program over the next 10 years to attract private capital and has already designated a potential development project. The City is working on a major mixed-income development and this program will be instrumental to incentivize private capital investment. The census tract covers an underserved, low income area we refer to as *Library Square*, where environmental and social justice are required. It is also located within close proximity to the Mount Vernon East Metro North Railroad Station which makes it ripe for TOD.

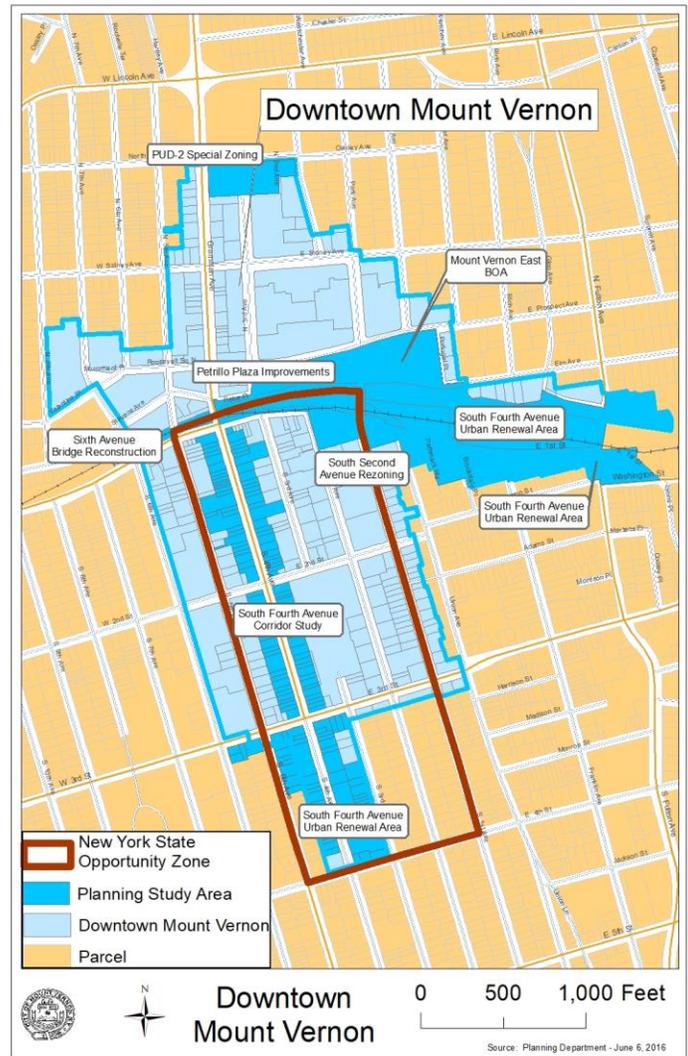


Figure E: Downtown Mount Vernon Planning Initiatives

Downtown Mount Vernon has two supermarkets, both of which have undergone major storefront renovations within the past few years. Additionally, the property owner of a major commercial strip within Downtown has made significant improvements to attract named brand stores such as Popeye’s, Little Caesars Pizza and Rite Aid. Montefiore Mount Vernon hospital that is located at the western border was also aesthetically renovated.

The City of Mount Vernon is making significant investments in the technology industry and developing strategic partnerships with tech companies. The current Mayor, Richard Thomas, is the first elected official in the City’s history to live broadcast public meetings. Project Bright Knight, the City’s partnership with Microsoft has led to improved police-community relations with business owners able to work together with law enforcement to provide a safer community. Additionally, the City’s economic development arm is developing a local tech and start-up incubator called “The BeeHive” and the City is in talks with Google, Tesla, Zoox and other prominent tech firms. Mayor Thomas also recently secured an \$82 million investment into Mount Vernon with Hollywall Development Company, LLC to deliver police radios and a 5G City-wide fiber optic broadcasting and communications network.

To further attract and/or increase the City’s green economy and reduce the City’s carbon footprint, the first market rate high-rise building to be constructed in over 20 years will contain Passive House certification which will achieve a 90% reduction in overall energy consumption of buildings as compared with other similar neighboring structures.

In greater pursuit of and to capitalize on the City's growing tech industry, the City of Mount Vernon was proud to have Aris Energy Solutions relocate to the City's Downtown this year. Aris is an industry leader in innovative energy technologies and solutions for a wide range of industries. Aris also adds to the green economy by offering renewable and resilient wind/solar off-grid streetlights and fuel cells. The City seeks to enhance and grow this industry and its supporting industries to increase not only Mount Vernon's share of the technology market but the State's share as well.

Another significant investment includes the City's partnership with New York Power Authority to upgrade and convert its 4,500 plus outdated streetlights with Energy Efficient LED cobra heads utilizing the Smart "CityTouch" Node. With the recent completion of this initiative, the City is now the first and only 100% SmartCity. "CityTouch" will provide full visibility and control of the City's streetlights from a centralized dashboard allowing the City to securely monitor light points, set schedules, and adjust light levels. The streetlights are also equipped with sensors to allow the City to capture data regarding parking patterns, noise detection and pedestrian traffic.

In its most recent plan, the Regional Plan Association recommended that the entire New York City Metropolitan Area link all of its transportation modes to increase the region's growth. In particular, it mentions a subway-like link into Downtown Mount Vernon from the #2 subway line. This connection would provide a green and easy form of transportation which would attract a larger pool of potential employees and tourists to Mount Vernon.

Lastly, Mount Vernon is investigating the use of automated parking within the Downtown. This would expand the City's ability to accommodate parking and achieve its parking goal of implementing a "Park-Once" strategy within Downtown. This strategy ensures that shoppers, visitors and/or tourists could "park -once" and use mass transit or walk throughout the Downtown to conduct business instead of needing to use their cars to reach various destinations.

These investments make the Southern Hudson Valley Region a more attractive place to live, work and play while retaining its competitive edge in the global economy. These efforts have advanced Downtown Mount Vernon; yet, it still struggles to gain an economic foothold in the market. DRI will remedy this situation.

3) Recent or impending job growth.

According to a market demand study conducted in 2011, Downtown Mount Vernon has underdeveloped industry clusters and unexplored markets which could potentially translate into jobs. The DRI would allow the Downtown to expand its business clusters and satisfy 80% of the City's public survey respondents and general public participants who stated, "employment opportunities are very important," during the Comprehensive Plan update process.

The Mount Vernon market demand study also showed there are well-paying jobs in the Manufacturing or Wholesale Trade industry and in the Construction industry. Since 2000, job growth has been the greatest in two of Downtown Mount Vernon's smallest office activities: (i) Professional, Scientific and Technical Services; and (ii) Administrative and Support Services. While these jobs more than doubled in employment opportunities over the decade, they still presently comprise less than one-tenth of all private sector jobs.

Mount Vernon, including its Downtown, has over 20,779 public and private sector jobs. Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest sector with nearly 3,400 people working in 150 separate facilities, led by Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital as the City's major private employer. There are 3,300 jobs within the Private Construction industry of which 210 are Mount Vernon based firms. The Manufacturing Sector has 2,300 jobs in 100 firms and Private Educational Services has 2,000 jobs within 32 institutional sites. Wholesale Trade, Transportation and Warehousing provide 1,450 jobs and Manufacturing and Construction provide 1,200 jobs. Collectively, 42% of Mount Vernon's private sector employment can be considered "goods handling" versus 58% "service providing." Accordingly, these sectors reveal that Downtown Mount Vernon can support a greater number of these types of jobs.

A DRI investment will further enhance the City's relationship with the Mount Vernon City School District to support demand-based learning for in-school youth, the under and unemployed, Veterans, as well as the difficult to employ and re-entry populations. The School District is committed to contributing to the growth of the lower Hudson Valley economic engine through the provisions of job training and the prevention of "Brain Drain" which will increase the region's vibrancy and gross domestic product ("GDP").

Downtown Mount Vernon has a thriving arts and cultural industry. Mount Vernon has produced many artists, athletes and the like who are world renown and well respected. Presently, Downtown Mount Vernon has the infrastructure to support rising stars. According to the New York State Department of Labor, there are 84 jobs within this industry; however, this number is probably much higher when considering there are 4,800 jobs within this industry throughout Westchester County according to the Arts and Economic Prosperity Calculator. While the total number of jobs within this industry is not clear, Downtown Mount Vernon possesses the infrastructure to further cultivate, grow and refine this industry as identified by the MHREDC’s objectives.

Downtown Mount Vernon is home to an emerging film industry due to its business-friendly policies and diversity of site locations. Many film and television shows are being taped and/or filmed in Downtown Mount Vernon. As the cost of filming in Manhattan becomes more expensive, the television/film industry has found Mount Vernon to be a suitable place to film NYC scenes because of the historic buildings and urban feel. In 2016, revenue from film permits increased 91% to over \$200,000. Shows such as but not limited to “Blue Blood,” “Orange is the New Black,” “7 Seconds” and “The Left Overs” have been filmed and continue to be filmed in Downtown Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon is also home to the highly demanded Haven Studios which is a 68,000 square foot production facility which brings jobs and other secondary economic investment into the City. Accordingly, the City seeks to deepen its partnership with the film industry to provide internship opportunities for Mount Vernon students as production crews continue to find Downtown Mount Vernon more and more attractive.

Downtown Mount Vernon is further aligned with the MHREDC’s goals in that tourism is an untapped and underdeveloped market for employment and support services. Downtown Mount Vernon has many historic resources which the City seeks to preserve to attract tourist into the Downtown. Opening the tourism market will provide jobs that currently do not exist within the Downtown while increasing the number of jobs in support services and increase the historic structure inventory of the Hudson Valley.

New York State’s commitment is required to grow Downtown Mount Vernon as the economic core of the Southern Hudson Valley Region. Currently, Downtown Mount Vernon imports more goods and services than it exports. This economic indicator means Downtown Mount Vernon is not meeting its economic potential. Therefore, Downtown Mount Vernon continues to export labor and intellectual capital as opposed to retaining it. A DRI investment into the City’s Downtown would reverse this economic trend and allow Downtown Mount Vernon and the Southern Hudson Valley Region to retain its competitive advantage in the global economy. This is in direct alignment with the MHREDC and New York State’s vision.

4) Attractiveness of physical environment.

Downtown Mount Vernon is very attractive because of the unique opportunities it provides within the Southern Hudson Valley Region.

Mount Vernon offers the unique opportunity to totally transform the City’s Downtown because of the 8 acres of highly developable publicly owned land. These 8 acres are currently located above the transit hub in the center of Downtown Mount Vernon. The transit hub consists of the Mount Vernon East Metro-North Train Station, Petrillo Plaza and Westchester County’s third busiest Bus Terminal. The underutilized land

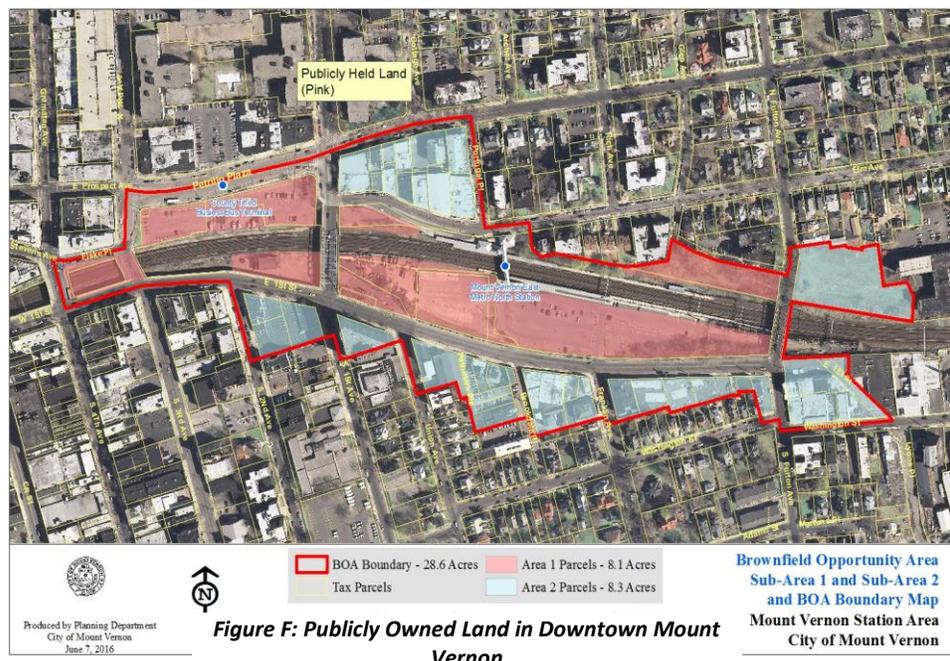


Figure F: Publicly Owned Land in Downtown Mount Vernon

requires two governmental (Westchester County and City of Mount Vernon) entities and one quasi-governmental entity (Metro North Railroad) to work together to achieve the highest and best use of the land. All three entities own adjacent contiguous plots of land as indicated in Figure F. In the Southern Hudson Valley Region, there are very limited opportunities for this type of coordination.

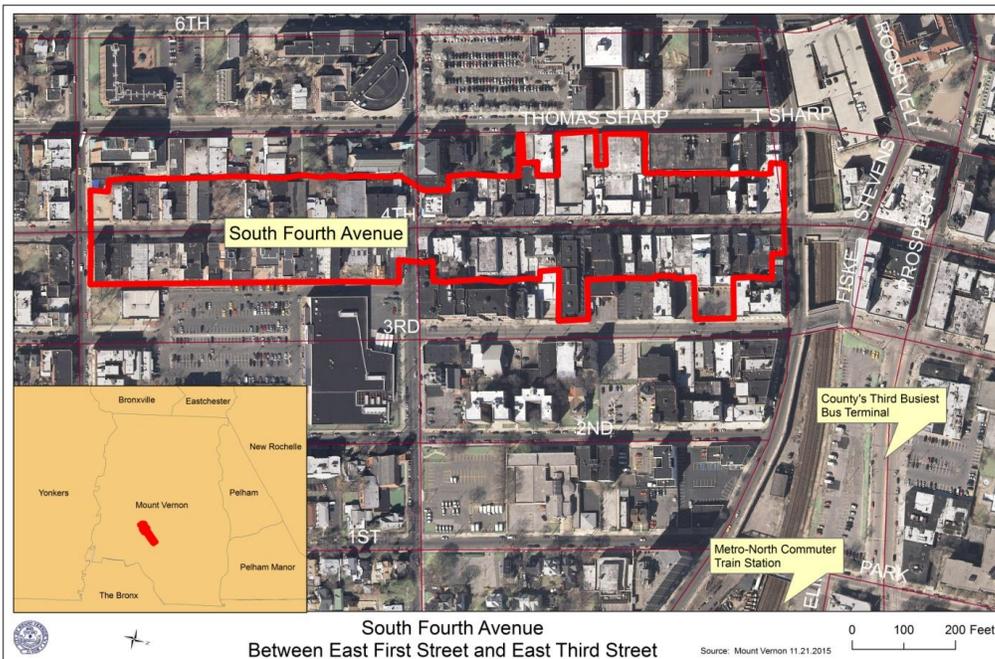


Figure G: Downtown Mount Vernon’s Main Street

Downtown Mount Vernon also offers the opportunity to create land by covering the Metro-North rail tracks that bisect the City’s downtown. Accordingly, the City partnered with the NYU Stern School of Business through Stern’s Signature Project Program to enlist MBA students (with Real Estate or Infrastructure experience) to investigate a cost-benefit analysis and a feasibility study of the economic and real estate impacts of covering and developing the space above the Mount Vernon East Metro-North tracks. Leveraging the space above the rail tracks is a central component of the overall downtown development strategy. The students will provide the findings and recommendations.

Traditionally, Downtown Mount Vernon has been Westchester County’s solution for affordable housing because of the way Downtown Mount Vernon’s Northern Enclave was constructed. This enclave consists of Mitchel-Illama housing which was constructed in the 1960s as part of an Urban Renewal Project. Since then, Downtown Mount Vernon has been the County’s source for low-income and affordable housing.

Downtown Mount Vernon has numerous affordable housing options in its northern region as well as historically, culturally and/or architecturally significant low-rise structures in its southern region. This is coupled with various housing options found within Downtown Mount Vernon most of which is multifamily living but there are many two-family and single-family homes.

As an emerging market, Downtown Mount Vernon offers relatively low rental rates in comparison to other residential markets within the County and the region. This fact is important to note because every DRI funded dollar invested in Mount Vernon will provide the most impactful economic return on investment. This level of residential affordability makes Downtown Mount Vernon attractive to retain millennials, young professionals and/or first responders to live within Mount Vernon. The City works very hard to prevent the continual “Brain Drain”.

Downtown Mount Vernon is very walkable because of its compact and dense size and nature. The City has a WalkScore of 76 comparable to Washington, D.C. A study by WalkScore, a national organization devoted to using data to evaluate urban livability standards, found that the average Mount Vernon resident could walk to an average of four separate restaurants, bars, and coffee shops within five minutes.

Downtown Mount Vernon also affords the opportunity to bike because of its flat terrain. The City seeks to increase the infrastructure for biking which will in turn increase the City’s inter-modal connectivity and provide a new transportation option. Accordingly, Downtown Mount Vernon has room for a Citywide bike share program. The City is working to incorporate "bike specific" infrastructure on City streets to increase accessibility for anyone using non-motorized transportation. The pedestrian friendly nature of Downtown Mount Vernon is very attractive to anyone seeking an urban downtown living accommodation.

Downtown Mount Vernon is also attractive because of its “main street” (South Fourth Avenue). The main street offers unique “buys” in which shoppers throughout the region seek. The main street also offers upper story space for artist lofts, housing and other commercial enterprise which do not need to be at street level to survive economically. Figure G demonstrates Downtown Mount Vernon’s Main Street.

5) Quality of Life policies.

The City of Mount Vernon has many of the same policies aimed at enhancing the Downtown’s quality of life that can be found in most major cities; however, the following merits mention based on their effectiveness, innovation and the priority the City has assigned to them. The first is called the *Mount Vernon Quality of Life Task Force* (“the Task Force”). The Thomas Administration recently launched this major innovative initiative to focus on attacking “crime and grime.” The Task Force uses the information found in publicly available sets of large data and analytics (i.e., “big data”) to evaluate locations in Downtown that represent statistical outliers. These locations receive a significantly higher number of calls for police, fire, and other city agencies. As a result, exorbitant expenses are incurred by the taxpayer. The Task Force travels house by house, neighborhood by neighborhood, and street by street to obtain and report its findings with the overarching objective of changing and improving the environment in order to stop crime and make our community a desirable place to live, work, play, and pray.

The second quality of life mandate is the creation of market rate housing. For decades Mount Vernon has been Westchester County’s “affordable housing program” prior to recent federal intervention, Mount Vernon was the only city in the County where any meaningful affordable housing existed. As a result, Downtown Mount Vernon has suffered from having more than its fair share of affordable housing. This has led to not having a mixed income and diversity in our housing stock thus positioning the City to meet the housing, commercial and retail needs of a wide range of income levels. Accordingly, Downtown Mount Vernon’s job to housing ratio is imbalanced in that many residents are paying more than 30% of their annual household income for their housing costs. As a result, higher end commercial and retail anchors believe Downtown Mount Vernon’s disposable income levels are too low to support their business. Mount Vernon seeks to address this issue by giving priority to market rate housing investments.

The third policy objective is to build over the Metro-North rail tracks, as referenced in the City’s 1968 Adopted Comprehensive Plan. By covering the tracks, the City seeks to increase the amount of buildable land within the Downtown and increase aesthetic appeal through the unification of the physical and visual landscape of the bisected CBD. We also seek to add additional parking facilities on the periphery of the Downtown. The additional parking amenities will encourage and reinforce the City’s “park-once strategy” and reduce congestion within the Downtown. Moreover, the City desires to cover the railway cut to create a park, increase local property values, beautify the Downtown, and enhance the sense of community by utilizing the newly created space to host various outdoor civic events such as “Jazz in the Park” or free outdoor music series.

The fourth policy is updating the City’s Comprehensive Plan which began in 2011. This process included public meetings, stakeholder meetings and a public survey; wherein, the City was divided into three planning areas based upon the intensity and level of planning needed for that specific area. Downtown Mount Vernon was identified as a “High Intensity Planning Area” meaning that the City is fostering opportunities for more intensive development and encouraging new growth in terms of markets and industries.

Our fifth policy is to allow for more mixed-use structures within our Downtown to capitalize upon the TOD advantages that the Downtown offers. This requires rezoning Downtown Mount Vernon to allow for use redevelopment to occur. During the public survey, 59% of the respondents recommended that more mixed-use development is warranted thus evidencing local stakeholders support for this policy.

Furthermore, the City of Mount Vernon works diligently to incorporate livability principles into its capital projects and in its planning and economic development policy. These livability principles include smart growth; resiliency; transit-oriented development; environmentally-friendly; social, environmental and economic sustainability practices. These practices are devoted to the City’s systematic and orderly growth and development of not only the City but the region as well.

Finally, the City seeks to create a "Downtown Revitalization Plan" to encompass the various redevelopment studies and outcomes from the Mount Vernon East Brownfield Opportunity Area, the South Fourth Avenue/East Third Street Urban Renewal Plan and the South Fourth Avenue Planning Study to benefit our Downtown.

6) Public Support.

The City of Mount Vernon has increased public engagement in all aspects of its strategic planning for future development. Beginning in 2011, the City began the integration of public sentiment with public policy through its Comprehensive Plan Update process. Through this process, a 7-member steering committee was established to guide the overall direction of the Comprehensive Plan. This steering committee was comprised of the Planning Board and Zoning Board Chairs, and one member of the City's Architectural Review Board to ensure that land use decision making is aligned with the direction of the Comprehensive Plan update. Other members were business leaders, property owners, key stakeholders within the community and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and the Mount Vernon Downtown Merchants Association.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the City followed a similar process to get public input in anticipation of submitting a new DRI application. The City assembled a diverse group of community and business stakeholder who provided their perspective to help the City create and implement a strategic investment plan for Downtown Mount Vernon. The stakeholders ensured that the community's vision and business interest of local merchants and service providers was at the heart of the redevelopment strategy.

If selected as a DRI grantee, the City will continue to secure the public's interest by providing dedicated space on its website for public engagement and education on the City's planning process. The City will further create a public survey both in print and electronic to facilitate greater participation in a variety of different languages such as but not limited to Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, the City will host a series of workshops, interviews and stakeholder meetings to encourage increased public input. The DRI would be the final step to refine planning strategies that the City has explored for redevelopment of Downtown Mount Vernon. Through a series of steering committee, stakeholder and public meetings on the Comprehensive Plan Update, Downtown Mount Vernon was chosen as the area with the greatest need for planning and investment intervention.

Local support comes from a variety of vested stakeholders who are very interested and concerned with the future growth of Downtown Mount Vernon. The groups include but not limited to the general public, the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce, Mount Vernon East BOA (Brownfield Opportunity Area) Steering Committee and the Mount Vernon Downtown Merchants' Association. The Mount Vernon City Council is also a major supporter of a strategic investment plan for Downtown Mount Vernon.

Also, regional planning entities have provided resources to support the economic resurgence of Downtown Mount Vernon. These regional planning resources include the Westchester County Comprehensive Plan, Mid-Hudson Regional Sustainability Plan, Mid-Hudson South Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. Additionally, the City participates in current regional initiatives such as a Patterns for Progress study called "A Regional Plan for Urban Centers." The City is working with the Metro-North's TOD Unit whose "Mt. Vernon East" Train Station is in the heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region. The City is also very engaged with the Regional Plan Association ("RPA") creation of the "The Fourth Regional Plan." The City is highly involved in the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council's "Regional Transportation Plan - 2045". The City is also working with the New York State Department of State to conduct a Brownfield Opportunity Area ("BOA") study around the Mount Vernon East Train Station

7) Transformative opportunities.

The City of Mount Vernon is ripe for a DRI investment and ready to create an investment strategy that fosters the orderly development and growth of the Downtown. Currently, the market is dedicating the location, bulk, mass and density of structures and/or sites within Downtown Mount Vernon. This unplanned and uncontrolled development pattern has led to high taxes and unrestrained density in a City where the downtown is economically underperforming, the infrastructure is deteriorated and fiscal resources are limited. The City acknowledges that the housing development market is desperately

attempting to enter the Mount Vernon marketplace in particular the City’s Downtown areas. For this reason alone, the City is ripe for development.

The City of Mount Vernon’s Downtown is so ripe for the housing development market, that the City has considered placing a moratorium on all development until the planning is in place to comprehensively accommodate the pace of development. The idea of moratorium while considered has never actually been fully adopted because the City’s decision makers did not want to drive the housing development market away. Accordingly, the City is challenged with a fast pace housing development market when the planning for the appropriate infrastructure has not been implemented.

The DRI will allow the City to continue to encourage the housing development market in Mount Vernon, in particular its Downtown, while ensuring that the services, commercial amenities, jobs and infrastructure such as but not limited to parks, sewers and/or mass transit are able to adequately accommodate the population density.

Furthermore, numerous public/private partnerships have emerged. Most of these public/private partnerships resulted in the construction of senior citizen housing so that the City’s aging population can “age in-place.” In addition, there have been many “affordable housing” development projects constructed. Currently, there is a public/partnership; wherein, at least 5 million has been expended so far to transform an economically underperforming industrial block into a mix-used pedestrian-friendly community with commercial amenities and jobs to support the housing units.

The City has also benefited from such public/partnerships not only from the completion of these projects but also because of the adopted comprehensive zoning that ensued. The City has recently adopted a form-based zoning code centered around one its train stations and a Senior Citizen Housing Overlay Zone which perpetuates the orderly development of senior citizen housing throughout the City. The City has also adopted an Urban Renewal Overlay Zone to compliment an Urban Renewal Plan. Furthermore, the City is currently exploring a mix-used zoning designation along one of its major corridors. The intent behind all of this, is to allow the housing development market to construct projects that will spur other transformative, “as-of-right”, contextual development projects in a comprehensive fashion for the orderly growth of the City. Figure H demonstrates the development projects and planning initiatives throughout the City of Mount Vernon.

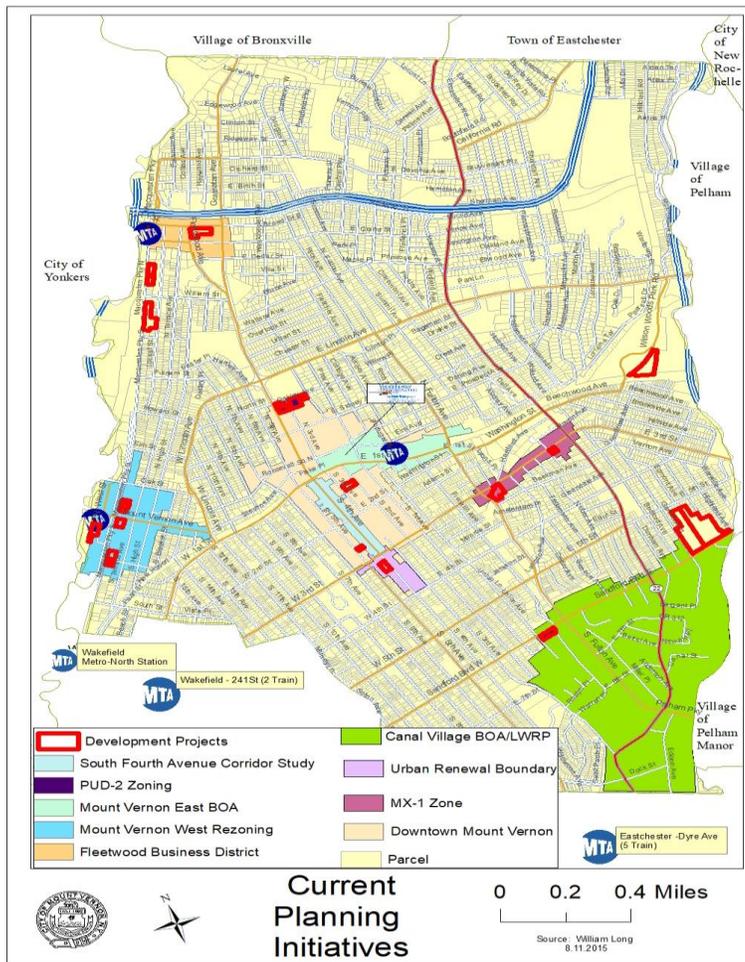


Figure H: City of Mount Vernon Planning Initiatives

Accomplishments by the end of Year One

- **Revitalization of Underutilized Publicly Held Land.** There is approximately 8 acres of land adjacent to the County’s third busiest bus terminal and the Mount Vernon East Train Station. The intent is to investigate the highest and best use of this land.
- **Covering the Rail Tracks.** Currently, the City of Mount Vernon is divided economically by the Metro-North Rail Tracks. The City seeks to investigate the feasibility of covering the tracks in a fiscally appropriate manner that will converge the two economically distinct sections of Mount Vernon in the heart of its Downtown.

- **Establishing Mount Vernon’s Downtown as the Economic Heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Region.** Currently, there is no established economic heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Region. The City of Mount Vernon seeks to determine which industries would find Mount Vernon’s Downtown a good home.
- **Branding Mount Vernon’s Downtown.** Currently, Mount Vernon’s Downtown is not appropriately “branded”, if it is even “branded” at all. After the first year, the City seeks to appropriately “brand” Mount Vernon’s Downtown so that it is inviting to business and industry.
- **Historic Preservation.** Presently, the City of Mount Vernon has a number of historic and/or cultural sites which are worthy of preserving. This preservation will increase the City’s tourism market, add to the Region’s and the State’s historic inventory and further attract the television and film industry into the Hudson Valley Region. For these reasons, the City seeks to adopt historic preservation strategies with its associated inventory prior to these sites being lost to future development.
- **Redevelopment of the Former YMCA Site.** There is currently an unused YMCA building with heavy environmental remediation challenges. This building is slated for demolition provided that public/private partnership can be established to have this City owned site sold and redeveloped. The City seeks to have the DRI assist with the progression of this public/private partnership.
- **Public/Private Partnerships.** The City has engaged various property owners who own property in close proximity to on other in order to develop public/private partnerships where the property owners pay into a fund that allows the City to create and update zoning standards for areas within Downtown.

8) Administrative Capacity.

The City of Mount Vernon’s administrative capacity consists of a team of highly qualified City Officials and staff to manage and provide oversight of concurrent contracts. This team consists of:

- the Mayor as the Chief Elected Official;
- two (2) Members of the City Council’s Planning Sub-Committee as the legislative branch of the City in charge of adopting any policies as result of such an award;
- the Commissioner of Planning who is responsible for making recommendations regarding future policy and ensuring that all contracts are executed within the allocated timeframe;
- the Commissioners of the Department of Public Works and Police Department who oversees that any capital projects are implemented;
- the City’s Corporation Counsel to assess the legality of any policies and/or contracts which derive as result of such an award;
- Planning Administrator who provides recommendations concerning current and future policy trends and ensures that any contract tasks related to planning studies are accomplished; and
- the City’s Engineer who ensures that implemented policies will work.

The extent of the City of Mount Vernon’s administrative capacity to manage these initiatives is demonstrated in the alliance between the City’s decision makers (the Mayor and the City Council). The decision makers from a planning and economic development perspective are aligned. They have both indicated and demonstrated a commitment to the orderly development of the City’s land use policies, procedures and implementation. The Mayor has appointed a Planning Commissioner and land use board members (Planning Board, Zoning Board and Architectural Review Board Members) whom are abreast of land use policy and its comprehensive implementation. The City Council has affirmed its vow to the City’s orderly growth by taking active participation in land use training as well as working closely with the City’s land use board to adopt comprehensive zoning and other land use policies.

To further facilitate the management of multiple planning projects, the City is in the process of hiring two additional planning staff. The additional planning staff will expand the City’s capability and capacity to make needed land use policy changes and facilitate its implementation to improve the City’s quality of life.

9) Other.

The world economy continues to move in the direction of polycentric regions; wherein, there are multiple centers of economic activity to sustain the economic health. The Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region is in dire need of a major economic center to link the New York City Metropolitan Region with that of the Hudson Valley Region. Downtown Mount Vernon is well poised to serve as this link because it is centrally located within both regions. As the economy becomes more global, regional economic centers are needed to retain the competitive advantage of both regions.

In understanding current economic trends, there is a heavy reverse commute between the White Plains (Hudson Valley) – Stamford, Connecticut and Mid-Town Manhattan. Accordingly, the Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region is and serves as the primary growth area of both the New York City Metropolitan Region and the Hudson Valley Region. Downtown Mount Vernon has the infrastructure to support such population growth in a sustainable manner.

While numerous planning studies are either completed or underway for Downtown Mount Vernon, further assistance is required to ensure the orderly growth and development of Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region. Accordingly, Downtown Mount Vernon is in dire need of the Mid-Hudson Valley Economic Development Council and New York State's investment to further foster the orderly growth of the region. The DRI would assist in Downtown Mount Vernon as the economic center of this sub-region. The market pressure is very strong to build housing (that is the strongest market in New York Metropolitan Region); however, the jobs and industry cluster development must be present to provide livable wages to accommodate this growth.

Accordingly, the DRI will be used to:

- Create housing options for various income levels;
- Increase non-motorized transportation (bicycle infrastructure) within Downtown Mount Vernon;
- Create public open space within Downtown Mount Vernon;
- Unify the City of Mount Vernon;
- Enhance pedestrian presence;
- Create a vibrant downtown;
- Invigorate the arts and cultural scene;
- Tap into the tourism market;
- Open opportunity to entrepreneurs.

The market pressure for population growth is upon the Region; accordingly, we as a region are growing. Downtown Mount Vernon resides at the center of this growth; therefore, Downtown Mount Vernon can and should serve as the economic center of this growth but must do so in an economically, environmentally, socially sustainable fashion to build a healthy community in the heart of the Southern Hudson Valley Sub-Region.

The following reports may also be helpful:

- Mount Vernon East BOA Pre-Nomination Study
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/MtVernonEastBOAPrenominationStudy-1.pdf>
- Mount Vernon Action Plan
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/MtVernonEastBOAPrenominationStudy-2.pdf>
- Downtown Parking Management Plan
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Downtown-Parking-Management-Workshop.pdf>
- Citywide Market Demand Study
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/MarketingStudyWeb.pdf>
- South Fourth Avenue Corridor Study
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-Fourth-Ave-Corridor-Final-Report-10.31.2017.pdf>
- Comprehensive Plan Update Progress Report
<http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CompPlanStatusReportJan2011.pdf>