

Bridge District Revitalization Initiative

2019 DRI Application – Western New York



City of Niagara Falls



Downtown
Revitalization
Initiative



Paul A. Dyster
Mayor

City of Niagara Falls, New York

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May 28, 2019

Amanda Mays
Regional Director
Empire State Development Corp.
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, New York 14203

Dear Ms. Mays:

The City of Niagara Falls has undergone massive transformation during my time as Mayor. Through thoughtful local planning and continued support from the many important community stakeholders we have developed a strong blueprint, implemented by my administration, that continues to improve the quality of life in Niagara Falls for residents, business owners, and visitors. Taken together with the State-led investments in the Core City, including the North Main Street business district, it has created a unique opportunity for transformative private sector investment.

I am firmly convinced that implementation of the Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative will ensure leveraging recent public investment, which includes the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway, construction of the International Amtrak Railway Station, and ecological restoration of the Niagara Gorge sets the stage for the private sector to fuel the community's vision of a 'vibrant downtown' in the Bridge District.

The Bridge District is aptly named to combine the legacy of the Suspension Bridge and the current Whirlpool Rapids Bridge crossing. The District is in a critical location for connecting neighborhoods to each other and to international communities:

- The DeVeaux and Highland residential neighborhoods - two very different areas that currently lack a neighborhood shopping and dining district
- Niagara Falls State Park and Niagara River Gorge
- Multiple Niagara Greenway tourism amenities and adjacent visitor economy
- Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

In addition, the District features one of the most important transportation hubs in Western New York with the ability to move people in and out of the region, while providing a distribution point for local multi-modal transportation.

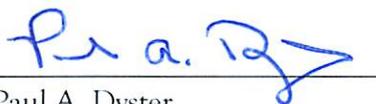


The projects and strategies we have developed as part of our Downtown Revitalization Initiative are forward thinking and impactful. They are also just the beginning of the complete transformation of the Bridge District and surrounding areas. Multiple investors and developers have zeroed in on the Bridge District as the key for private sector investment, and the area that has the most potential spin-off value.

In summary, the City of Niagara Falls takes an aggressive, yet thoughtful approach to economic and community development. This approach, combined with our partnership with New York State, has had and will continue to produce real, tangible results. Niagara Falls' 2019 Downtown Revitalization Initiative represents an important inflection point for the City and is the essential next step in capitalizing on past results. It is also the best chance for creating a vibrant, desirable, and welcoming Bridge District we can all be proud of, an active mix of commercial, residential and recreational uses with a unique, important, and palpable heritage. When visitors to the Falls ask, "where do the locals go?" they will hear "the Bridge District."

As always, thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Dyster

Mayor

City of Niagara Falls



Western New York - Downtown Revitalization Initiative

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. Applicant responses for each section should be as complete and succinct as possible. Additional information is available in the 2019 DRI Guidebook, available at www.ny.gov/DRI. Applicants should make every effort to engage the community in the development of the application. Prior to submission, applicants must have held a minimum of one meeting or event to solicit public input on the community vision and potential projects and should demonstrate that any input received was considered in the final application.

BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: City of Niagara Falls

Downtown Name: Bridge District

County Name: Niagara

Applicant Contact(s) Name and Title: Paul A. Dyster, Mayor

Applicant Contact(s) Email Address and Secondary Email Address: Paul.Dyster@niagarafallsny.gov
(Thomas J. DeSantis) desantis@nfez.org

VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

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

The following is excerpted from the 2001 Main Street Business District Revitalization Study (attached as appendix material). Every aspect of the vision for North Main Street, currently identified as the Bridge District, holds up. The difference between 2001 and now is the potential to make this vision a reality:

The Master Plan strives to create Main Street as the best business district possible but also improve the quality of life for the citizens and act as a magnet for tourists, who often seek “local flavor.”

The master plan includes enhancements to the public realm that preserve the traditional “scale” of the Main Street Corridor, establish gateways, improve pedestrian circulation and walkability,” improve vehicular circulation and safety, create a unified signage and way-finding system, new street trees and planters, new site furniture, and improved street and sidewalk lighting. In addition to the actual streets, the plan seeks to increase other open space and passive recreation opportunities along Main Street.



The plan calls for the incorporation of traffic calming measures along Main Street to slow down the north-south traffic flow and make the corridor more desirable for shopping and office uses. It is envisioned that Main Street's primary function is that of a walkable, "pedestrian friendly," retail and mixed-use street.

The plan calls for promoting the strength of diversity, ethnicity and variety in the area, cater to everyone by providing variety of activities and entertainment throughout the day and evening, for the young and old and year-round.

JUSTIFICATION

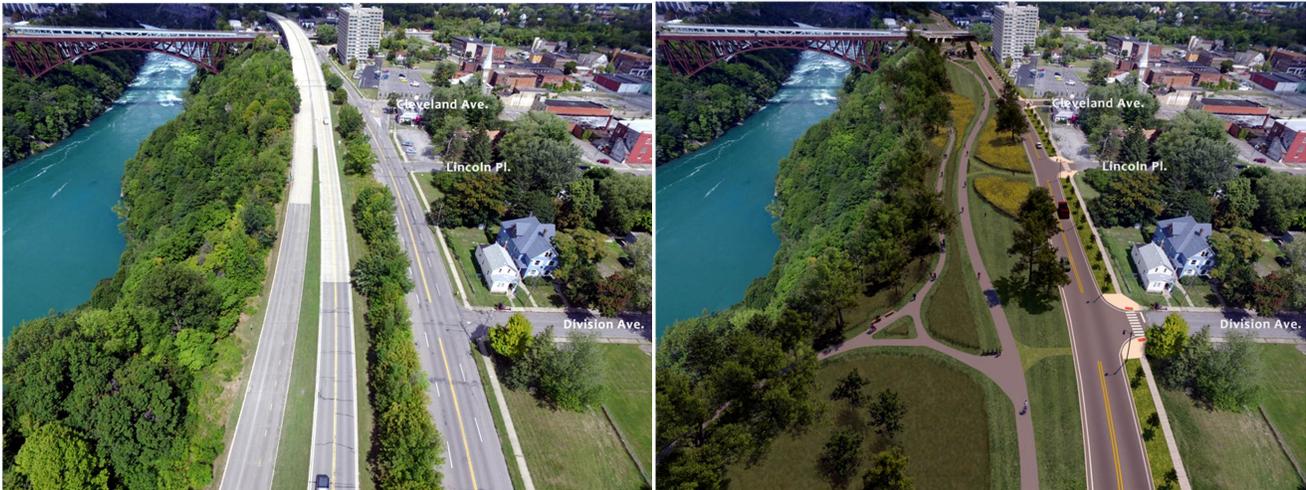
Provide an overview of the downtown area nominated for the DRI program, highlighting the area's defining characteristics and the reasons for its selection. Explain why the downtown is ready for Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) investment, and how that investment would serve as a catalyst to bring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

The Bridge District is perfect for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative due to its location, proximity to natural and man-made resources, unique and important history and heritage, the long-term visioning and planning for the area, substantial recent public investment in the area, and the opportunity presented by a significant number of properties on Main Street recently becoming available for purchase and redevelopment. This is the ideal time to "tip" the Bridge District with targeted investments that support and leverage private sector involvement in the implementation of the District Vision.

North Main Street was once everything a downtown could and should be. The corridor serviced the day to day needs of a large swath of Niagara Falls. Unfortunately, in the 1960's, the construction of the Robert Moses Parkway proceeded to separate Main Street from one of the region's greatest natural assets while also creating a vehicular 'bypass' that moved traffic off Main Street and damaged the economic viability of the District. Subsequently Main Street saw decades of movement in a negative direction with businesses closing, buildings falling into disrepair or being demolished, crime increasing, and critical mass slipping away.



Recent positive developments are providing a chance to reverse that narrative of decline, and a number of indicators show that the Bridge District has the potential for unprecedented investment in the near term. Notably, the mistakes of the past are being undone as the Robert Moses Parkway is being removed in order to reconnect Main Street to the natural wonder of the Niagara Gorge, which will feature new hiking and biking trails, easily accessible from the Bridge District.



Before and after removal of the Robert Moses Parkway: Lincoln Place and Division Avenue provide short, direct connections between the Niagara Gorge and Main Street. The Bridge District DRI Urban Design Plan will improve those connections and the intersections on Main Street.

Additionally, the construction of the new Intermodal Train Station was one component of a three-part project, which included the renovation and rebuilding of infrastructure along Main Street, including the construction of a new rail bridge, and the renovation of the 1863 U.S. Customs House, which has been transformed into the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center. The Intermodal Station also serves as a transfer station to the Discover Niagara Shuttle and the home to a Reddy Bikeshare Station, meaning that the Bridge District has the opportunity to serve as a true multi-modal transportation hub.

Recognizing the redevelopment potential, the City of Niagara Falls applied for and received designation for the Bridge District as an Opportunity Zone. Investors quickly took note and there have already been steps taken to create an investor pool to fund development consistent with the community vision for the District. Another incredibly important factor in the heightened interest in the Bridge District is that a massive portfolio of privately held properties recently became available for purchase. Incredibly, **one owner is in the process of disposing of 38 long-held properties within the Bridge District** and we have attached some representative letters of interest from the development community. This is an unprecedented opportunity to completely re-make and improve one of the most meaningful commercial corridors in the region.

These circumstances could potentially lead to a free for all of haphazard investment where projects are developed in silos and in a manner that may or may not benefit the District and community as a whole. The City has taken steps to avoid such an outcome by strategically planning for District redevelopment as far back as the 2001 Main Street Revitalization Plan. The ambitious plan holds up incredibly well and is more relevant than ever because, thanks to the massive investments in the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway and the creation of the Intermodal Train Station, Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and Discover Niagara Shuttle, the plan goals are more achievable than ever.

To take that next leap forward and truly remake the District, the City is looking to the possibilities created by the Downtown Revitalization Initiative. The potential for funding and technical assistance has lead Niagara Falls to undertake a public outreach program for the District while developing a new Urban Design Plan. DRI funding and technical support will allow for badly needed public improvements that the development community is already responding to favorably, while also helping to directly assist exciting private sector possibilities including the







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.*

The Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Area has been the site of transformative public investment over the past several years.

In 2016, the City of Niagara Falls opened a state-of-the-art \$43,000,000 International Intermodal Train Station on Main Street within the DRI Area. Built primarily with Federal and State funds, the new transportation center serves as a new transportation hub for intercity rail between New York City and Toronto. The station is serviced by Amtrak, along the Empire Line, and provides continuing service into Canada by Via Rail along the Maple Leaf Line. Located along the U.S.-Canada board with accommodations for both U.S. and Canadian federal customs agencies, this significant public investment has resulted in expedited cross-border travel. The two-story glass and stone structure constructed adjacent to the newly renovated former customs house has become a focal point of North Main Street, welcoming visitors from across the country and from around the world to Niagara Falls.

The construction of the new Intermodal Train Station was one component of a three-part project, which included the renovation and rebuilding of infrastructure along Main Street, including the construction of a new rail bridge, and the renovation of the 1863 U.S. Customs House, which has been transformed into the new Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center. The Heritage Center opened on May 4, 2018 and is a project of the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission, in cooperation with the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, a program of the National Park Service. The Heritage Center is an experiential museum that reveals authentic stories of Underground Railroad freedom seekers and abolitionists in Niagara Falls. As the first new cultural attraction developed in Niagara Falls in over 35 years, the Heritage Center represents a significant investment in the City's historic heritage.

The Intermodal Train Station is also a transfer station for visitors to board the Discover Niagara Shuttle. A 2017 independent study of the Shuttle's economic impact in Niagara County conducted by Tripp Umbach, a nationally recognized consulting firm, found that operation of the Discover Niagara Shuttle injected \$35 million into the Niagara County economy during the 2016 season alone. With increased partnerships, funding, and marketing, the Tripp Umbach study projects the Discover Niagara Shuttle will have a potential \$70 million economic impact by 2020.

The Intermodal Train Station and the Underground Railroad Heritage Center are bringing people into the Bridge District in droves. Many of the projects proposed as part of the Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative, including the development of a hotel and redevelopment of properties along Main Street to create entertainment and event venues, and the creation of a fund to encourage private investment in historic properties within the District, will capitalize on this significant public investment by providing additional destinations for visitors while enhancing the look and feel of the neighborhood, inviting visitors to linger along North Main Street. The proposed public art, including statuary which ties into the



history of the City as the terminus of the Underground Railroad and the gateway to freedom, will complement the Heritage Center and bring the storytelling into the neighborhood.

Also, of critical importance to future investment and development in the Bridge District is the Robert Moses Parkway Removal project, a \$42 million investment by the State of New York. Completed in the early 1960's, the Robert Moses Parkway has effectively cut off City neighborhoods, including the Bridge District, from the Niagara Gorge for over 50 years. The project includes the demolition of the Robert Moses Parkway; reconstruction of City streets to absorb the rerouted traffic; restoration of the landscape and habitats along the reclaimed Niagara Gorge rim; the construction of a pedestrian/bicycle trail network along the Gorge rim connecting adjoining neighborhoods, including the Bridge District, to the Gorge; and the installation of sidewalks, lighting and other infrastructure. The Downtown Revitalization Initiative will capitalize on and complement the Robert Moses Parkway Removal project by supporting the creation of green space and the planting of trees and the construction of streetscape improvements, such as lighting and traffic calming measures, which will help unify the neighborhood with the Gorge. In addition, the development of bike share facilities and amenities for bikers will tie in directly with the proposed development of a bicycle trail network and will enhance connectivity between the Bridge District and the Gorge.

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.

Much of the current employment base in and around the Bridge District are jobs related to institutional or public operations. Within the District the Public Safety Building, Public Library, and Harry F. Abate Elementary School comprise the prime public facilities, while the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center is a major institutional employer in close proximity to the District. Generally, employers of this type are relatively stable, while featuring the added benefit of providing important services. Recently, there has also been job growth within the District thanks to development of the Intermodal Train Station and the Underground Railroad Heritage Center, as well as an expansion of DiCamillo Bakery. That said, the Bridge District is well below its optimal employment and optimal critical mass.



The good news is that this is the ideal time to leverage investment in the District, and the proposed Downtown Revitalization Initiative is the ideal tool for fostering entrepreneurship, developing vibrant mixed-use buildings, improving the looks and feel of the District, and creating new public spaces with amenities that appeal to young professionals. With so many buildings newly available for investment

along the Main Street Corridor, the District's location within an Opportunity Zone, and developer interest in the area at an all-time high, the stage is set to grow the residential, commercial, and retail markets concurrently.

The Bridge District is also well situated to become a residential and entertainment hub for members of the tourism employment sector and the jobs created through new development at the Highland Avenue Brownfield Opportunity Area to the east. The Bridge District includes many of the key characteristics needed to attract both employers and new residents including:

- Proximity to Deveau Woods State Park and the Niagara Gorge with its newly developing hiking and bicycling trails
- Multi-Modal Transportation opportunities highlighted by the Inter-Modal Train Station featuring direct train access to both Canada and Buffalo, and the Discover Niagara Shuttle
- Unique heritage and essential history that is being highlighted and interpreted throughout the District
- Affordable housing options both in mixed use buildings along the Main Street Corridor and in residential properties in the surrounding blocks
- Historic and Iconic buildings primed for redevelopment
- Regular live entertainment options; most notably at the Rapids Theater

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.*

The Bridge District has all the essentials needed to be a downtown for a diverse population. While the district features some iconic structures that are natural hosts to mixed-use developments that will command higher residential rents, the general demographics of the area maintain a demand for a mix of affordable and market rate housing. In short, the building stock perfectly corresponds with the need for that diverse mix of housing options. There are also a number of vacant parcels that can be easily enhanced and converted to gathering places or pedestrian and bicycle routes into and through the District.

Unfortunately, Main Street suffered for years after being separated from the Niagara Gorge and the result was disinvestment and a loss of character. Many of the public spaces and amenities are outsized for the neighborhood feel Main Street used to engender. The right of ways are wide, yet barren, and Main Street itself became more of a transportation route than a District. However, the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway and the reconnection of the Bridge District to the Niagara Gorge, provides tremendous opportunity to “rightsize” the transportation routes and the public spaces. Additionally, the relocation of the Amtrak Station and creation of an Intermodal Station that provides an “International Gateway Center” and an opportunity for visitors to transfer to the Discover Niagara Shuttle, leads to a Main Street that is much less dependent upon high speed vehicular traffic and more accommodating to all modes of transportation.

The Bridge District Urban Design Plan that was developed as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative process, works to improve connectivity, improve District aesthetics and character, create more usable and



accessible space, and increase critical mass through new commercial, retail, and residential uses that appeal to people from all walks of life.

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 that support livability and quality of life in downtown are not currently in place, describe near-term efforts by the municipality to create and implement such policies.*

The City of Niagara Falls has taken a number of recent steps to improve the Quality of Life throughout the City and specific to the Bridge District. Implementation of the Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative Urban Design Plan would be a significant and highly visible step forward for many of the policies articulated in this section.

Formation of Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC)

In 2017, the City of Niagara Falls joined with the Cities of Lockport and North Tonawanda and Niagara and Orleans Counties to incorporate a land bank under the name Niagara Orleans Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC). As a municipal partnership, NORLIC is working with its constituent communities to acquire vacant and abandoned properties to facilitate rehabilitation or, where appropriate, demolition, in order to return abandoned properties to productive use, creating a better community for future generations. NORLIC received a \$500,000 grant through Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. and is working proactively with the City of Niagara Falls and other communities to identify properties for acquisition where rehabilitation or demolition would have the most positive impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

NORLIC has included a commitment in their 2019-2020 workplan to specifically target property rehabilitation and demolition activities that support the Bridge District downtown revitalization programming and the DRI Vision.

Complete Streets Policy

On January 31, 2018, the Niagara Falls City Council adopted a resolution creating the Niagara Falls Complete Streets Policy. The policy will improve bicycle and pedestrian friendliness through the implementation of consistent public realm design standards to revitalize mixed-use neighborhoods, making Niagara Falls safer and more accessible. The policy acknowledges that streets that integrate multiple transportation choices for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit, with special consideration for children, the elderly and people with disabilities, contribute to the public life of a community, sustainable economic development, and efficient movement of people and goods. In adopting the policy, the City of Niagara Falls has committed to creating a comprehensive, integrated, connected, transportation network for the City that balances access, mobility, as well as, the health and safety needs of all its residents. The Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative Urban Design Plan proposes utilizing funding for public infrastructure improvements that advance these policy goals.



Niagara Falls Bike Master Plan

To advance implementation of the Complete Streets Policy and the City's commitment to improve bicycle and pedestrian friendliness in the City, the City of Niagara Falls, Empire State Development and GObike Buffalo are developing a City of Niagara Falls Bicycle Master Plan. The objectives of the Bicycle Master Plan are to:

- Provide an inventory of existing and planned bicycle infrastructure
- Support the goals of the Complete Streets Policy
- Make bicycling a safe, accessible and affordable transportation choice by enhancing bike network infrastructure and by eliminating gaps in the bikeway network
- Annually re-evaluate capital improvement and maintenance projects to encourage implementation of bicycle improvements identified through the planning process and citizen engagement
- Guide future complete streets projects and establish baseline metrics to annually evaluate and measure progress.

The plan is being developed and implemented with grant funding from the Oath/Yahoo Community Fund for Niagara-Empire State Development and is further evidence of the City's commitment to making Niagara Falls a vibrant, safe space for residents, visitors and tourists to walk, bike and recreate.

Additionally, the City is working in collaboration with the State, the Nature Conservancy and the Niagara River Greenway Commission on the Robert Moses Parkway Removal Project to build major elements of the proposed bike network in order to specifically enhance Quality of Life in the Bridge District.

Bridge District Property Disposition Program

The City of Niagara Falls has pledged to dispose of any and all surplus properties in its ownership within the Bridge District that can be utilized in support of project development proposals consistent with the goals and objectives of the Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

Marketing of Federal/State Historic Tax Credits

The City of Niagara Falls has inventoried and identified historic resources in and around the City and actively promoting the use of federal/state historic preservation tax credits amongst the programs in its toolbox to advance revitalization efforts. The City recently advanced a federal/state tax credit-based reuse of the former South Junior High School on Portage Road (south of the Target Neighborhood), which was adapted into a mixed-use project now known as "Niagara City Lofts Apartments." The City's Historic Preservation Commission remains active and actively seeks to promote designation and appropriate rehabilitation and reuse of historic and heritage structures, many of which reside in the Bridge District.

Memorial Park Neighborhood Revitalization Plan

First included as an element of the City's Strategic Plan, the revitalization plan comprises neighborhoods east and south of the Bridge District and provides a reasonable framework for leveraging its strategic location near NFMCC, the NACC, Niagara City Lofts (historic restoration and residential reuse) Project, and the planned extension of John B. Daly Boulevard. Similar to the Bridge District, both revitalization plans



involve a combination of preservation, rehabilitation, and new infill development to revive and support the community. Memorial Park is anchored by medical employment at NFMMC, while the Bridge District will be anchored by the Transportation and Education related employment.

2005 Strategic Plan, 2009 Comprehensive Plan, and Zoning Ordinance Update

Initiated through a focused Strategic Plan involving a series of “Big Moves” to evolve the perception and potential for revitalization of key areas of the City, a full update of the City’s Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Niagara Falls City Council in 2009. This document sets forth the City’s key policies to improve the quality of life here, including advancing regional efforts for waterfront access, neighborhood/downtown revitalization, improvements to housing stock, and the restoration of the City’s dense, compact, mixed-use development pattern. These policies are being facilitated through a new zoning ordinance that sets forth standards/requirements for mixed-use development, higher-density downtown uses, and design standards for infill development and street-level uses to encourage active urban settings.

Moving Forward: Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative

The City is eager, through the DRI process, to refine the Main Street zoning in order to ensure that new investment will deliver ‘good urbanism’ coupled with appropriate urban design and economic guidelines to expedite transforming the area into a major welcoming “gateway” for visitors, a competitive district for commercial investment and employment, as well as, an attractive neighborhood to live in.

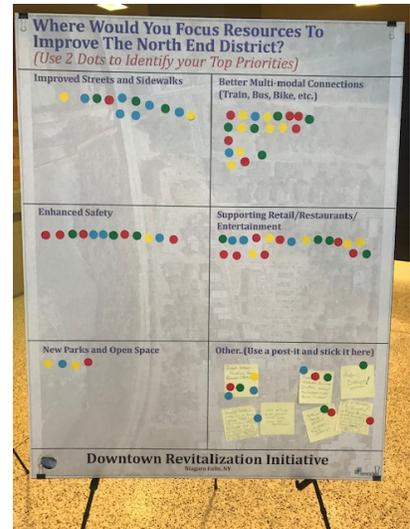


From the economic standpoint, this area deserves to see new development aiming at the highest and best uses. To ensure that outcome: the city zoning should allow, even encourage, a denser, more compact and mixed-use development form that maximizes the potential for this location. One specific example to consider would be evaluating ‘intersection density’ against other benchmarked cities and the Development

Code / Zoning Ordinance. There is a willingness to consider ambitious targets for street intersection density at least 125% of historic norms in the Target (District) Neighborhood.

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.

As part of the development of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative application, the City of Niagara Falls participated in a series of public discussions under the title Imaging A More Livable NF: Exploring Solutions for the Future of the City. Sponsors for the weekly events, which were held in the new Intermodal Train Station within the DRI Area, included Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, Partners for a Livable Western New York, the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Society, Niagara University, TM Montante Development, Niagara USA Chamber, and Grassroots Garden WNY. Each session had a specific topic addressing a range of issues, including “Setting the Goals”, “Better Mobility for Everyone”, “Housing for Everyone”, “Making Better Places”, and “Government and Developers Working Together”. Speakers, panelists and participants included representatives from government and the public sector, including Congressman Brian Higgins, Amanda Mays of ESD, Jeff Belt of WNY Regional Economic Development Council, and Mayor Dyster, Tom DeSantis, Seth Piccirillo and Anthony Vilardo from the City of Niagara Falls; representatives from the development community including Rocco Termini, Christian Campos of TM Montante, Nirel Patel, and Bernice Radle of Buffalove Development; and from academia and public interest and community groups, including Niagara University, Buffalo State, the Congress for New Urbanism, Partners for a Livable WNY, the Street Plans Cooperative, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Buffalo Transit Riders United and GOBike Buffalo.



As part of these forums, public input was sought on such topics as “Where would you focus resources to improve the North End District” and “What is the defining identity, place or character of the North End area.” The largest number of respondents wanted to see resources focused on better multi-modal connections (train, bus, bike, etc.), followed by supporting retail/restaurants/entertainment, and improved streets and sidewalks. In defining the identity or character of the area, most respondents focused on the buildings, architecture and history/heritage of the North End, followed by the Niagara Gorge and natural amenities.

The topics explored in the Imagining A More Livable NF series and the public input on both the allocation of resources and the true character of the Bridge District have been embraced as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, which reflects the unified vision of the various stakeholders and the public. The projects proposed address connectivity, including better bike access within the neighborhood and to the Gorge; support the development of entertainment venues and the revitalization of the commercial district, including the preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures; create streetscape improvements to enhance the appearance and functionality of the area; and highlight the rich history and heritage of the North End. This application reflects the collective vision for the future of the North End District, as a place to live, to work, to visit, and explore.

7) Transformative opportunities. Describe opportunities to build on the strengths described above by providing a list of transformative projects that could 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 municipally-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 be recognized 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 vetted by the Local Planning Committee and the State to determine which projects receive DRI grants.

If awarded, the Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative will not lack transformational projects. City officials have been working with urban designers and members of the development community to identify an initial sampling of the transformational projects that can be undertaken with DRI funding along with the knowledge that investment in these large undertakings will occur concurrent to other public and private investments with a shared vision.

The projects have been grouped into:

- Strategic Investments in Public Spaces
- Urban Design Plan Signature Projects
- Strategic Investment in Private Projects

Strategic Investments in Public Spaces within the Bridge District

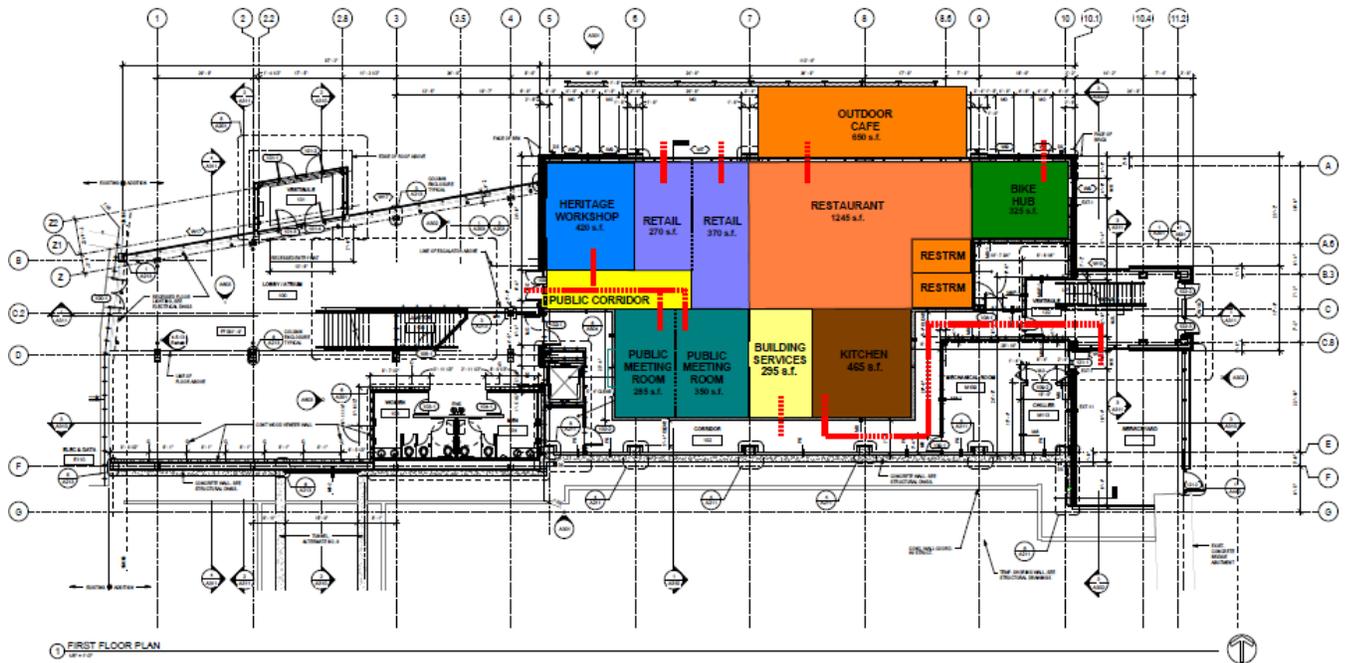
Activate Leasable Space at Niagara Falls Train Station

Potential DRI Funding: \$250,000

The Niagara Falls Amtrak Station was a tremendous public investment in the region's transportation infrastructure. The City and the project developers recognized the potential positive impacts the new transportation hub could have on the Bridge District and took the opportunity to create unique space and programming, most notably celebrating the rich history of the District by developing the Underground



Railroad Heritage Center. Additionally, the Train Station became a destination stop for the Discover Niagara Shuttle. With so much traffic and activity it was always envisioned that commercial activity could thrive within the Train Station footprint. Space accommodation was made in the form a 4,500 square foot, street-level shell, but additional investment is needed to truly prime the space for commercial use. Plans have been developed, along with a corresponding budget and the City has identified a need and DRI funding to upgrade and activate the space will provide a critical missing piece to the entirety of the Train Station and Underground Museum development.



Interpretive Art and District Signage

Co-Sponsored by the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area

Potential DRI Funding: \$200,000

The City of Niagara Falls is already partnering with the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center to develop a walking trail running between the Heritage Center and the Gorge Trails. The project includes funding for murals within the Bridge District as well as requisite streetscape improvements and crosswalks along the newly developed “Freedom Walk”. Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding would allow the partnership to extend further to include the coordinate development of additional public art in the District such as statuary, as well as new wayfinding and interpretative signage and coordinated replacement of dated and weathered signage. With the NFNHA developing the public art and signage program, the City is confident in realizing an authentic and informative program that provides creative visual arts and clear signage for pedestrians and hikers, users of the Discover Niagara Shuttle, Reddy Bike users and other cyclists, and users of all modes of transportation encouraged within the Bridge District.



Reddy Bikeshare Amenities, Signage and Community Outreach Events

Potential DRI Funding: \$20,000

Reddy Bikeshare reached an agreement with the City of Niagara Falls to deploy a new bikeshare system throughout the city as a new shared mobility option for both residents and visitors. Bikeshare has been proven to be an effective transportation option and increases personal mobility for its members. The Reddy Bikeshare team will deploy 145 bikes at 25-30 stations throughout the city. This system is set to be deployed every April-November with the first full season set for 2020.



With its launch in Niagara Falls, Reddy Bikeshare committed to providing an affordable, efficient, and environmentally friendly transportation option to all city residents. If the City receives DRI designation and funding, the Reddy Bikeshare team proposes to provide additional amenities that will enhance its service to Main Street’s Bridge District and compliment the deployment of two bikeshare stations in the neighborhood at the Niagara Falls Amtrak Station and at 1902 Main Street in the heart of the district.

Two bikeshare stations that are set to be deployed in the project’s target area will be affixed with informational panels, one large and one small panel respectively. These panels will provide information about the bikesharing system, instructions on how to sign up and use the bikes, safe bicycling tips, a local wayfinding map, and details on suggested routes and attractions in the area. The deployment of these panels offer an enhanced user experience for bikeshare members and are helpful for visitors during their time in the city. With the removal of the Niagara Scenic Parkway and the addition of a new multi-use pathway leading into the Main Street Business District, the Community Station Panels presence will enhance the experience for all users.

Reddy Bikeshare will work with project partners to plan and host three events after the program is launched throughout 2019 and the following 2020 season. The focus of these events will be to educate and instruct participants on how to sign up for membership, answer questions about the program, and demonstrate first-hand how to utilize the bikes by allowing participants to ride the bicycles themselves. Specific target audiences will be determined in the event planning phase but, broadly speaking, recruitment and marketing efforts will focus on Niagara Falls residents ages 18+ in the immediate surrounding neighborhoods. Goals will include to recruit new members of the bikesharing program, identify potential bikeshare ambassadors and champions for the neighborhood, as well as to promote the area as a desirable place to visit, gather, and connect with other community members and leave a positive lasting impression on participants who attend.

Additionally, Reddy Bikeshare will work with Bridge District property owners in order to find a suitable location for a base of operations for the program that will include office space and a bicycle repair shop. A number of Main Street properties appear suitable, for example 1908 Main Street, and development of the appropriate space may fit in well with potential Downtown Revitalization Initiative capital investments along Main Street.



With its expansion launch in Niagara Falls, Reddy Bikeshare has pledged to offering city residents a significantly reduced price for annual memberships. Since its launch, Reddy has used this community-centric business model to grow its system and expand to transportation disadvantaged communities. The Reddy Bikeshare team has committed to using bikesharing as an equity tool to uplift underserved neighborhoods in the City of Niagara Falls. Funding for system usage will allow members who reside in the project's target zone to have their usage of the system subsidized alongside a reduced-membership cost. Bikeshare systems help residents better access essential services, employment, and recreation opportunities which can have an uplifting effect in low-income communities. Making sure that everyone who lives in the area is able to access the service will be key to making deeper social impacts.



Reddy Bikeshare's Niagara Falls expansion launch will be an innovative, mobility-focused project with a substantial social-equity component. If this project is selected for funding, it will only allow a larger impact to be felt by residents, visitors, business owners, and community stakeholders alike.

Bridge District Urban Design Plan Signature Projects

A central component of the Public Investments proposed in the Bridge District is the implementation of the Urban Design Plan that was developed through a partnership including representatives from the development community, city planners, planning consultants, community stakeholders and local institutions. The Urban Design Plan is intended to create more of a 'sense of place' in the District, improve the aesthetics, calm traffic while providing ample opportunity for alternative forms of transportation, and improve the connectivity between Main Street and the Niagara Gorge trail system as well as between Main Street and the surrounding residential areas. The Plan Map appears on the following page, and some of the feature investments are detailed.



Develop the Main Street Plaza and Event Space

Potential DRI Funding: \$175,000

When the Public Safety Building was constructed on Main Street, the plans included the creation of event space in front of the building. Unfortunately, due to budget limitation, this one aspect of the project was cut, and the result is a vacant, grassy area on Main Street.

The City proposed to utilize DRI funding to finish the plans and create a safe, visible, and vibrant plaza for outdoor events within the Bridge District. The plaza will become the home of a variety of events, including a City-sponsored seasonal open-air market. Additionally, the plaza is an ideal location for at least one signature installation of public art as part of the Niagara Falls Heritage Area's Interpretative Art and District Signage Program. The Urban Design Plan Focus Area graphic attached to this application provides the initial concept for the Plaza.

Reconfigured Intersections to calm traffic and create a sense of place

Potential DRI Funding: \$3,000,000

Six (6) Main Street intersections have been identified for reconstruction to include new signage, bump-outs, decorative pavement, and new crosswalks. The goal is to provide physical definition for the intersections, create a unified design theme along Main Street, calm traffic, provide identifiable and safe opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists. The intersections include:

- Main Street and Ontario Avenue - adjacent to two featured redevelopment sites
- Main Street and Niagara Avenue - adjacent to a featured redevelopment site
- Main Street and Cleveland Avenue - adjacent to the site for the proposed academic building, the Main Street Event Plaza, and 1902 Main (mixed use featuring Food Hall, outdoor patio, 2nd floor co-working space, and 3rd floor residential)
- Main Street and Division/Union Avenue – the City is planning to change the name from Division Avenue to Union Avenue to send a more representative message. Union will become a featured connection between the Gorge Park and Main Street. The intersection with Main Street is adjacent to the Jents Building, Rapids Theater, and the proposed Barrel House.
- Main Street and Linwood Avenue – adjacent to the DiCamillo Bakery and a featured redevelopment site
- Main Street, Lockport Street, and Willow Avenue – in front of the Niagara Falls Public Library

Connectivity Improvements

Potential DRI Funding: \$1,500,000

Much of the Downtown Revitalization initiative is focused on connections and connectivity. The removal of the Robert Moses Parkway is imperative in that it allows for better connections from Main Street to the



Niagara Gorge Greenway. The Urban Design Plan highlights the improved connectivity to the Gorge, as well as improved intersection from Whirlpool Street at Cleveland Avenue, Lincoln Place, and Division (soon to be Union) Avenue.

The Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative and Urban Design Plan take full advantage of these new opportunities by converting Lincoln Place to a pedestrian only connection and reconstructing Division to narrow the vehicular route through streetscape improvements and the development of a pedestrian and bicycle friendly lane. As noted above, the intersection of Division and Main will also be reconstructed. On the east side of Main Street, the City proposes closing South Avenue to vehicular traffic to create a safe pedestrian connection (located between the Public Safety Building and Rapids Theater) from Main Street to Highland Avenue and the neighborhoods to the east of downtown. In addition to the connection to an existing neighborhood, the street closure increases the appeal of multiple blocks earmarked for housing infill and rehabilitation programming as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

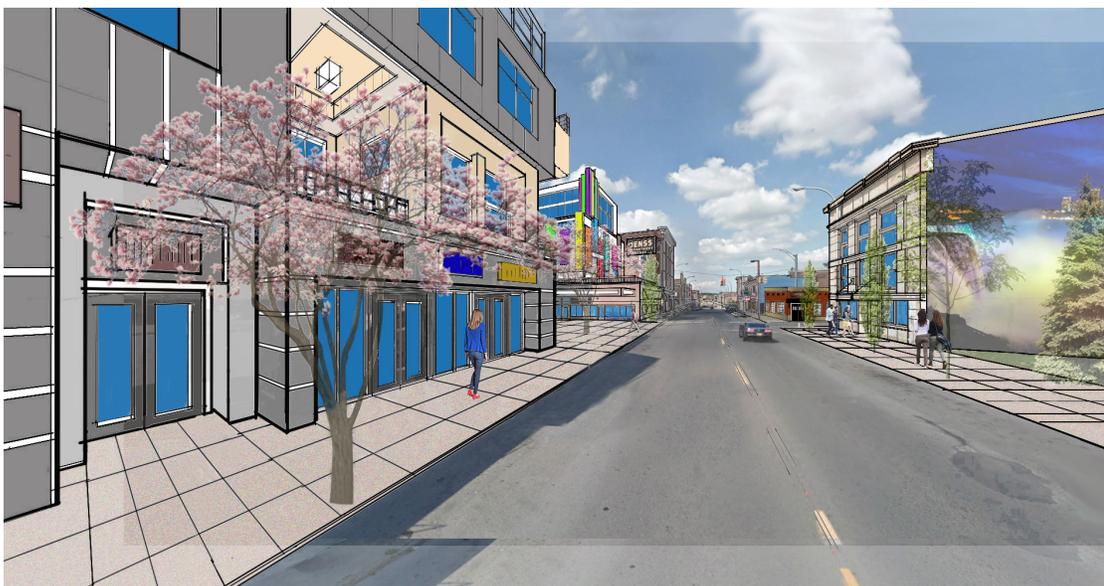
Streetscape and Aesthetic Improvements

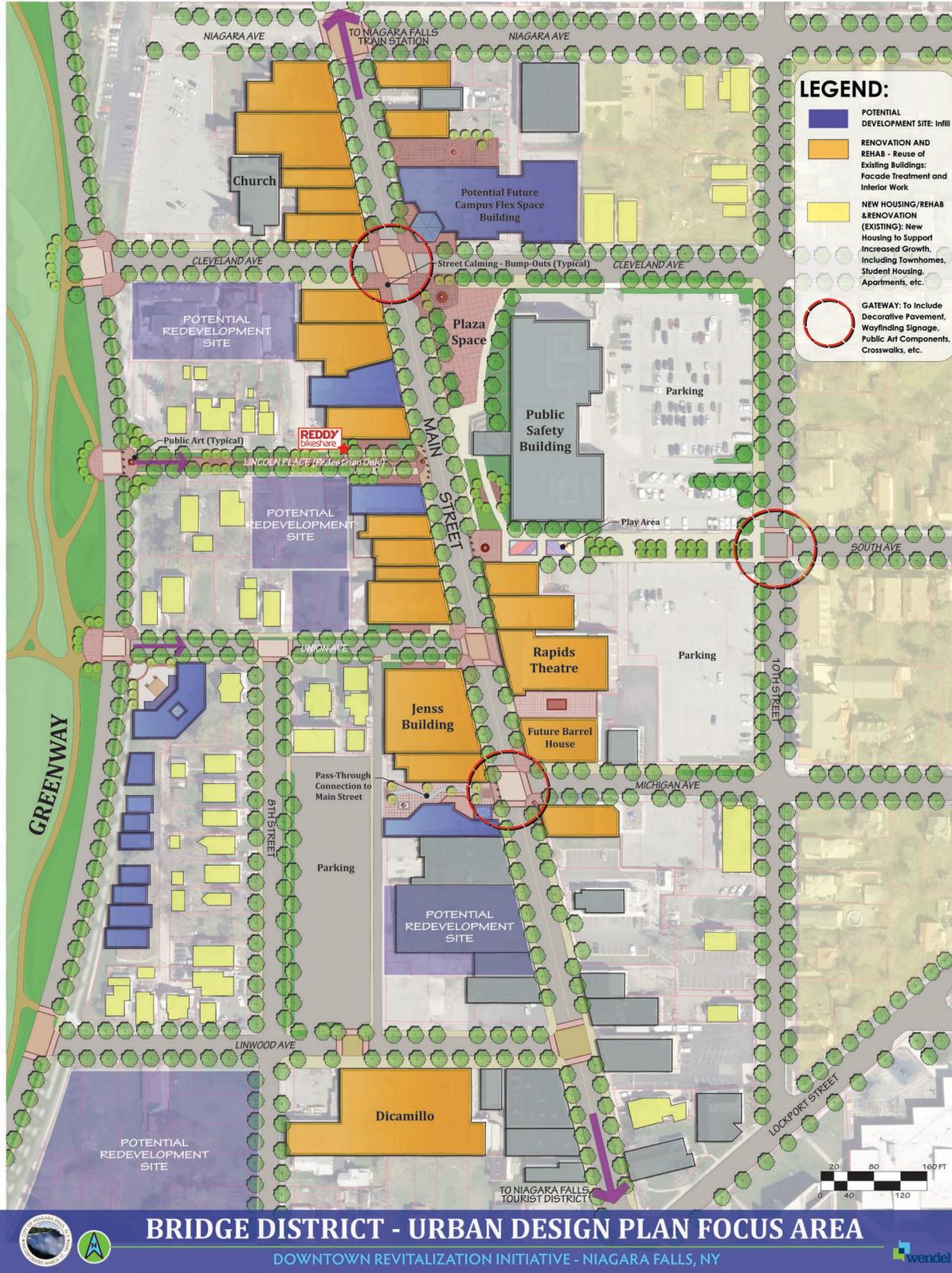
Potential DRI Funding: \$780,000

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative Urban Design Plan includes the planting of new street trees throughout the district and the replacement of light fixtures poles on Main Street as well as the newly pedestrian connections at Lincoln Place and South Avenue.



Main Street currently features a wide street, wide concrete sidewalks with no greenery, and high overhead streetlights. The combination creates an impression of a higher speed corridor and diminishes the character of the street and the buildings. Combined with the intersection improvements that will narrow and define the street better, the trees and lighting will largely change the character and feel for drivers and pedestrians alike.





Bridge District Strategic Investments in Private Sector Projects

Rapids Theater upgrades and Barrel House Development

Potential DRI Funding: \$225,000

The Rapids Theater is the undisputed entertainment hub of the Bridge District and one of the best live entertainment venues in Western New York. Unfortunately, there are a few factors limiting the Rapids Theater success, (i) the lack of nearby places to gather before or after shows, (ii) the need for capital upgrades to the theater, and (iii) concerns about safety when congregating outside the theater at night. Public investments in lighting, streetscape, and public amenities, as well as new investments that increase critical mass in the immediate area are ways that the City, through DRI funding and support, can address the safety concerns. The DRI can also help directly address the other concerns.



The Rapids Theater needs approximately \$300,000 investment in items including carpeting, lighting, plaster work, and upgrading the marquee. Finding the funding to invest in non-revenue generating activities such as these is always a challenge for live entertainment venues, yet if the facility suffers for too long, it will begin to impact the bottom line and diminish the quality of the experience. Additionally, the owners of the Rapids own the large, vacant building next door. A project is on the drawing board whereby the building would be converted to “The Barrel House” a restaurant and pub that can accommodate events that are too small to make sense for the Rapids Theater. The \$850,000 investment will reinvigorate a vacant building, provide increased live entertainment opportunities, and offer people a gathering place with a good vibe and quality food and beverage.

The combined Rapids Theater upgrades and Barrel House Development will reinforce the block as the entertainment hub of the Bridge District. The projects are located directly across from the iconic Jense Building as well as Division Avenue, which is proposed to be reconfigured and rebranded. The investment will be further supported by significant investments in the intersection of Division and Main.



1902 Main Street Redevelopment

Potential DRI Funding: \$300,000

Blue Cardinal Capital has recently purchased 1902 Main Street and proposed to redevelop the under-utilized three-story building. Initial concept drawings are attached and show a dynamic re-imagining of a highly visible historic building in the heart of the Bridge District.

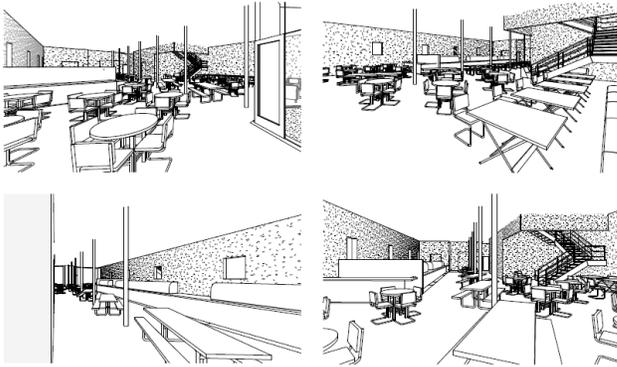
The proposal includes:

- First floor – Creation of a Food Hall and coffee shop with a wraparound outdoor patio
- Second floor – Buildout of co-working office space to incubate small businesses and entrepreneurship
- Third floor – Conversion of eight (8) vacant and rundown residential units into five (5) apartments more in line with the wants and needs of young professionals

This creative, mixed-use proposal will create vibrant curbside presence, provide interesting and evolving culinary options, and provide office and residential options for young professionals that are not currently serviced within the Bridge District.



The Food Hall will include a commercial kitchen and four food kiosks providing rotating offerings. The operators of the Hall propose reserving one of the kiosks to host a competition amongst Niagara University and Niagara County Community College culinary students. The selected students will receive technical assistance and will be able to provide food service out of the kiosk for a set period of time.

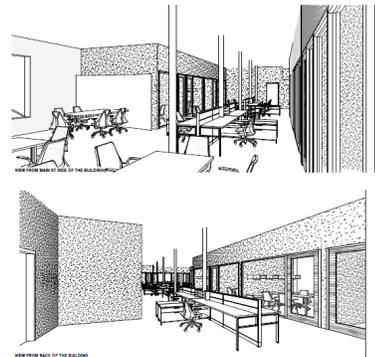


CJS

FIRST FLOOR LAYOUT - OPTION 1
3D VIEWS

BLUE CARDINAL CAPITAL
RENOVATION
100 MAIN STREET
NIAGARA FALLS, NY
14303

BLUE CARDINAL

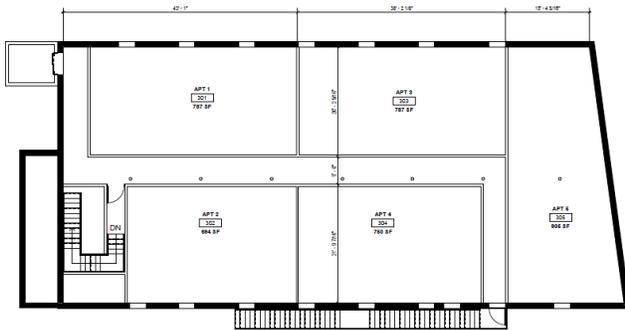


CJS

SECOND FLOOR LAYOUT - OPTION 1
3D VIEWS

BLUE CARDINAL CAPITAL
RENOVATION
100 MAIN STREET
NIAGARA FALLS, NY
14303

BLUE CARDINAL



CJS

THIRD FLOOR APARTMENT LAYOUT
SCALE - 1/8" = 1'-0"

BLUE CARDINAL CAPITAL
RENOVATION
100 MAIN STREET
NIAGARA FALLS, NY
14303

BLUE CARDINAL





Historic Building Preservation Fund

Potential DRI Funding: \$1,900,000

After years of neglect with little to no capital investment, many of the most visible, historically meaningful, and iconic buildings along Main Street have fallen into disrepair. Now many of the properties are either in the process of changing ownership or are on the market for purchase. The problem, however, is that there is a base level of investment needed in order to prime to stabilize the buildings in order to prime them for redevelopment. The City proposes utilizing DRI funding to create a Historic Building Preservation Fund which would provide grants to support the stabilization and/or restoration of historic mixed-use buildings within the DRI area, with a focus on properties that are eligible for historic tax-credits in order to leverage other funding sources to the greatest extent possible. The grant program would contribute to the revitalization of the DRI area, particularly the Main Street commercial core, by encouraging the rehabilitation of street level commercial and retail space and the creation of residential units on upper floors generating activity in an area which is currently dominated by vacant and underused buildings, while preserving the historic character of the downtown area. It is noteworthy that a 2015 Market Analysis conducted by GAR Associates, identified a need for the creation of 110 market rate housing units in the core of Niagara Falls, bolstering the potential for mixed-use redevelopment in historic structures on Main Street.

Where a specific redevelopment project has not yet been identified, grant funds would be available to cover the cost of stabilizing a building, including roof and masonry repairs and other basic improvements needed to preserve the structure and prepare the building for redevelopment. Where a redevelopment plan is in place, grant funds would be available to supplement other funding sources, such as tax credit financing, in an amount up to 20% of the total project cost.

In November, 2018, CJS Architects, working with Syracuse Engineers PC, M/E Engineering, and Sienna Environmental Technologies, conducted a field survey of the 38 newly available buildings within the DRI area, identifying the age and condition of the buildings, whether vacant or in use, and providing general recommendations regarding repairs needed. Based on this survey, Blue Cardinal Capital selected properties within the DRI area which are potential targets for redevelopment through an investment fund they established for area development. Blue Cardinal identified work that could be considered to stabilize the properties in the categories of roof replacement, masonry repair and clean-up and light demolition, and provided rough cost estimates for the suggested work.

This preliminary review and analysis of properties within the DRI area evidenced a need for a funding source which could either be used to set the stage for the rehabilitation of a property or fill a gap in a redevelopment budget. Blue Cardinal's analysis identified over \$700,000 in repairs to eight properties that could be funded through the Historic Building Preservation Fund. It is expected that once redevelopment initiatives under the DRI start, interest among current property owners and potential purchasers in rehabilitating properties in the DRI area, and the demand for grants through the Historic Building Preservation Fund, will grow.

Among the properties recommended for stabilization is the former Jeness Department Store at 1708 Main Street. This 4-story building, constructed in 1919 and located on a high-profile corner, has been consistently identified by the City of Niagara Falls as a critical piece in any redevelopment efforts for the north-central section of Main Street. It is estimated that an investment of around \$186,000 would stabilize the building



and set the stage for the rehabilitation and reuse of this pivotal property. Also identified as targets for redevelopment are neighboring 1930's- era buildings at 1810 and 1812 Main Street, which are both vacant but in varying states of disrepair. It is estimated that the building at 1810 Main could be stabilized with an expenditure of about \$84,420, while the building at 1812 Main has experienced serious structural failure and would require an investment of around \$128,000 to save the building. Blue



Cardinal identified buildings constructed in the 1930's and 1940's on the 2000 block of Main Street (2002 and 2025) which are either vacant or only partially occupied that would likewise benefit from the use of grant funding, with a total estimated expenditure on both properties of around \$119,000.

Another candidate for the program is 2109 Main Street; the former Fusion Nightclub. The City would like to strengthen ties between Niagara University and opportunity in the Bridge District. A proposed Academic Building (see below) may provide some institutional connectivity and new residential opportunities will be aggressively marketed to NU students. In addition, a developer and operator have proposed a Niagara University themed bar at 2109 Main Street; a building with historical character, yet a significant need for capital investment.

As evidenced by these properties, the \$2,000,000 Historic Building Preservation Fund could have a broad impact within the DRI area and would be a key tool in the City's efforts to revive and restore what was once a vibrant commercial district.

New Construction Project Fund and Potential Projects

Potential DRI Funding: \$1,150,000

With significant property now available, there have been numerous discussions regarding new construction projects on highly visible parcels within the Bridge District. Downtown Revitalization Funds can help incentivize some of those projects in order to make them a reality and, equally importantly, the public DRI process and technical assistance provided, can help the City evaluate proposals to determine the most feasible projects that are consistent with the City's Vision.

Some representative new construction projects that are being considered are:

Construction of an Academic Building at 2001 Main Street

A developer has approached the City with the concept of constructing a 60,000 square foot building at on the vacant parcel on the corner of Main and Cleveland (2001 Main), across Main Street from the proposed Main Street Event Space. The building would provide flex academic space where different institutions could

use the facilities on a semester basis and the digital screens and general décor of the building would be customized to the colors and branding of whichever school is utilizing the space at the time. More importantly, the facility would be a strong base of operations for tourism-based curriculum, and cross-border programming.



Looking south on Main Street with a conceptual version of the Academic Building (in yellow) in place of the vacant lot on the corner of Main and Cleveland

Hotel Development Incentive

The City owns a prime development site immediately south of the Niagara Falls Train Station. The site has long been considered a logical spot to construct a new hotel that can service the Bridge District and especially the travelers utilizing the Intermodal Train station. The City is considering developing and releasing an RFP for the development of a hotel on the site and potentially providing grant funding as a match for planning and site preparation.

Residential Capital Improvement Incentive Program

Potential DRI Funding: \$300,000

While much of the immediate focus of the Bridge District Revitalization Initiative is geared toward the Main Street corridor, there is a recognized need to invest in the residential properties in the blocks off of Main Street. The City is proposing capital improvement grant program, similar to commercial programs offered in the past by the N.F.C. Development Corporation, to residents who need to invest in their properties. The grants would be up

to \$20,000 per structure on a matching basis.



Additional Public Assistance available to DRI Projects

The City and the NFC Development Corporation have multiple business and property owner incentive programs that service the Bridge District that are anticipated to provide funding to support Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects. Specifically:

- NFC Direct Loan Program
- Micro-enterprise Assistance
- Commercial Grant Assistance Program
- Mixed-Use Rental Rehabilitation Program
- Commercial Façade Rebate Program
- Commercial Loan Subsidy Program

The Table on the following page provides a summary of the projects described here, including a conservative estimate of additional funding a DRI award could leverage.



Public Projects			
	DRI Request	Other funding	Notes
Activate leasable space at train station	\$250,000.00	\$300,000.00	Other funding from private partner to be identified
Main Street Plaza and Event Space	\$175,000.00		
Reddy Bike Share amenities	\$20,000.00	\$50,000.00	Other funding consists of developer buildout of Reddy Bike office space and bike shop
Interpretative Art and District Signage	\$200,000.00	\$160,000.00	Partnership with Niagara Falls Nat'l Heritage Area
Street lighting			
Main Street	\$200,000.00		120-160 fixtures and poles
Division and Lincoln	\$100,000.00		60-80 fixtures and poles
Street trees - District wide	\$480,000.00		300-400 trees
Intersection Improvements	\$3,000,000.00		Signage, bump-outs, decorative pavement, cross-walks for six (6) intersections
Conversion of short blocks to pedestrian connections			
Lincoln Place	\$700,000.00		
South Avenue	\$300,000.00		
Reconfiguration and re-branding of Division Avenue	\$500,000.00		City to consider renaming 'Union' Avenue
Repair and Maintenance Fund for needed improvements within public spaces	\$100,000.00	\$100,000.00	City will provide in-kind services
Subtotals			
	\$6,025,000.00	\$610,000.00	
Private Projects			
	DRI Request	Other funding	Notes
Main Street Historic Building Preservation and Development Fund	\$2,000,000.00	\$8,000,000.00	20% of redevelopment costs - Jeness Building as 'Downtown Anchor' redevelopment
Residential Capital Improvement Incentive Program	\$300,000.00	\$300,000.00	50/50 grant up to \$20,000/structure
Redevelopment of 1902 Main	\$300,000.00	\$2,400,000.00	Food hall w/ coffee shop & outdoor patio (1st floor) Co-work space (2nd) Five residential units (3rd)
New Construction Project Fund			
Construction of an Academic Building (60,000 sq ft) providing flex space	\$900,000.00	\$9,600,000.00	Featuring cross-border programming
Hotel Development Incentive	\$250,000.00	\$6,000,000.00	City will release an RFP with a matching grant for planning and site preparation
Rapids Theater upgrades and Barrel House development	\$225,000.00	\$1,150,000.00	
Subtotals			
	\$3,975,000.00	\$27,450,000.00	
Totals			
	\$10,000,000.00	\$28,060,000.00	



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.

Since 2007 the City of Niagara Falls Department of Planning and Development has received and successfully managed 63 grants totaling over \$17,000,000 from the State of New York. Our team is experienced and detail oriented. We have spent years laying the foundation for this plan to be successful. During the Dyster administration, the City has compiled a robust record of 'economic development' and city building accomplishments. This past performance proves the City's ability to balance planning, funding, administration, and execution of multiple large development projects concurrently and in sequence. For the DRI, the City will make all necessary staff available from any department that is needed to undertake and complete the projects of the DRI.

Additionally, the City of Niagara Falls has its Urban Renewal Agency (URA) available to implement larger scale development and developments that may require eminent domain and site-assembly and the NFC Development Corporation which remains true to its original mission to provide programs relieving and reducing unemployment, bettering and maintaining job opportunities, providing aid to attract new business and retain business and industry within the City of Niagara Falls.

The City's 2009 Comprehensive Plan, utilizing the URA, Community Development Department, and the NFC Development Corporation, has an established framework for developing and integrating new projects and, most importantly, in executing Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects quickly and in accordance with the City's vision.

Key Team Members Qualifications:

Mr. Thomas J. DeSantis, AICP, is currently Acting Director of Planning, Environmental Services, and Economic Development for the City of Niagara Falls, New York. In that position he is responsible for overseeing municipal land use and transportation planning, Planning Board, Historic Preservation Commission, NF Urban Renewal Agency, N.F.C. Development Corporation, municipal GIS services, and multiple economic and community development projects, in addition to serving as the City's Policy and Coordinating Committee representative on the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council.

Since coming to the City, the Planning Office has delivered seven award-winning planning projects including completion of the comprehensive plan and full rewrite of the City's zoning-ordinance. In addition, Mr. DeSantis manages grants that represent millions in funding for numerous projects, including an International Railway and Intermodal Station (\$43M), the Niagara River Trail, as well as, various planning, park improvement, transportation enhancement, historic preservation, brownfield assessment and brownfield cleanup grants.

Mr. Seth Piccirillo is Director of Niagara Falls Community Development, a department that oversees sustainable neighborhood development strategies for the City of Niagara Falls with a \$2.5M annual budget. The department's primary goal is block-by-block revitalization, focusing on access to equitable housing





Downtown Revitalization Initiative

opportunities and driven by public participation. Since taking over as Director of the department Mr. Piccirillo has overseen the market rate apartment renovation program, commercial facade program and the National Grid Urban Center/Commercial District Revitalization Program.

Mr. Alan Nusbaum is the Environmental /GIS Coordinator with the City of Niagara Falls, NY. Alan provides a multitude of services to the City including Environmental Review, GIS Mapping, Brownfield Project Management (\$19M), Grant Application and Administration, SEQRA review, and Flood Zone Administration.

Mr. Allen Booker was recently appointed to serve as Executive Director of the N.F.C. Development Corp., a not-for-profit corporation whose mission is to provide programs relieving and reducing unemployment, bettering and maintaining job opportunities, and providing aid to attract new business or retain business and industry within the City of Niagara Falls.

Note: Mr. Anthony Vilardo recently left his positions as the Director of Business Development for the City and Executive Director of the NFC Development Corporation to become the President of USA Niagara. The City of Niagara Falls works very closely with USA Niagara and we are pleased to see the organization fill out their staff with a strong leader in economic development who has an excellent understanding of the needs of the City and the resources available. The transition with Mr. Vilardo moving to USA Niagara is a positive one overall, even if it means that the City must re-organize its Economic Development structure.

The City will have multiple major redevelopment projects underway in late 2019 which will require a higher reliance on consultant support and the City has engaged with a number of highly qualified planning, engineering, design, and economic development firms. As a result, the City will implement a short-term reorganization of personnel and duties, which will shift program focus from loans and grants to its re-development initiatives. The reorganization and refocusing of personnel will more than adequately replace capacity diminished by Mr. Vilardo's departure during the search period to find a suitable replacement.

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

In a follow up transmission, we will be submitting additional letters or support, additional graphics, and supporting documentation.

EMAIL SUBMISSION ADDRESS

Please submit your application as a Word Document to the Regional Council for your region.

Western New York NYS-WNY-REDC@esd.ny.gov





BLUE CARDINAL

May 29, 2019

Mr. Jeff Belt
Co-Chair
Western New York REDC
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Re: Niagara Falls Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Mr. Belt:

Our firm is deeply interested in, and committed to, the redevelopment of the Bridge District along the North Main Street corridor in Niagara Falls. We have been working for well over a year and have successfully secured site control to a number of the key commercial and residential properties throughout the District. During that time we have been working closely with the City of Niagara Falls to ensure that our vision for the future of the Bridge District aligns with theirs. Our phased redevelopment plan for the area will have an initial private investment of over \$20,000,000, with multiple larger phases sequenced to follow that initial investment. We have shared our plan with City officials and we believe that vision is complementary to the master plans contemplated by the Mayor, City planners and officials. We see the potential for the Bridge District and see that it can become a vibrant entertainment and shopping district that services the existing residents of Niagara Falls, while creating a destination for visitors, businesses and new residents.

We have established a development fund that leverages private investment and capital gains, utilizing the Qualified Opportunity Zone program, to acquire, redevelop and build within the identified district. In addition, we have maintained ongoing dialog with multiple established and successful Upstate New York real estate developers who have expressed interest from adaptive re-use projects to infill development along the north Main Street corridor. That interest is enhanced by the District's location within an Opportunity Zone and the City's commitment to ongoing planning and investment in the public spaces.



BLUE CARDINAL

We were thrilled to learn about the City's Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative. We believe that the Bridge District is ideally situated to leverage our significant private investment and to make a remarkable leap forward. Major investments to remove the Robert Moses Parkway and to develop the Niagara Falls Train Station and Underground Railroad Heritage Center combine with an underutilized yet impressive building stock to create an unparalleled investment opportunity. The proposed DRI investments are essential to "tip" the district in the right direction by creating the public spaces and connections the private sector needs in order to support our investments.

This is the ideal time for Downtown Revitalization funding in Niagara Falls, and an award will undoubtedly leverage significant private sector investment in the Bridge District that will help turn the corner. We will be proud to be a part of that renaissance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert A Richardson

Managing Partner, Blue Cardinal Capital, LP

Manager (GP), Niagara Falls North Development Fund One, LP



May 30, 2019

Mr. Jeff Belt
Co-Chair
Western New York REDC
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Re: Niagara Falls Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Mr. Belt:

As the President of TM Montante Development, I was thrilled to hear about the City of Niagara Falls's Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative. The Bridge District is ideally situated to evolve into a vibrant, mixed-use area to service residents and visitors alike.

TM Montante Development owns a 33,000 square-foot commercial building on Whirlpool Street in Niagara Falls, NY within the Bridge District that we are looking to redevelop in the future. We are also interested in developing additional projects along Main Street and in the downtown core.

This is the ideal time for Downtown Revitalization funding in Niagara Falls, and an award will undoubtedly leverage significant private sector investment throughout the Bridge District.

Please feel free to contact me for additional information about our plans for future development projects in Niagara Falls.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Campos', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Christian Campos
President, TM Montante Development



NIAGARA FALLS
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

125 TIMON HALL / P.O. BOX 1932
NIAGARA UNIVERSITY, NY 14109
(716) 286-8579

Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

May 28, 2019

Dear Ms. Mays,

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA) strongly supports the City of Niagara Falls' Downtown Revitalization Initiative application for the Bridge District.

Historically, the Bridge District, formerly Suspension Bridge Village, was the City's natural downtown shopping district and hub of commercial activity. After years of neglect and disinvestment, the Bridge District is finally positioned to re-emerge as a vibrant, mixed-use hub of activity for Niagara Falls. The proximity to both world class tourism assets and the most stable residential areas in Niagara Falls has now been enhanced by significant public investment to beautify the area, connect Main Street to the natural wonder of the Niagara Gorge, improve transportation connections and opportunities, and interpret the rich and important history of the District. The table is now set for transformational private sector investment, and developers and investors are taking notice.

Through our partnership with the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission and the City of Niagara Falls, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area has invested into this district through our staffing commitment with the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center and work with the Discover Niagara Shuttle. The Discover Niagara Shuttle presently has a destination stop at the Niagara Falls Train Station, which services travelers coming to Niagara Falls by train, visitors to the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and hikers who utilize the Niagara Gorge trails. In 2018, the NFNHA received a NYS Health Foundation grant to support the development of a walking trail in the North End, going to the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and ending at the Niagara Gorge trails. The \$159,874.00 grant also includes streetscape improvements, crosswalks, and murals. Mural work will begin in June, with Phase 1 being completed by August.

Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding and technical support is exactly what is needed right now to capitalize on decades of planning and investment in order to leverage meaningful private sector investment that aligns with the City's long-held vision for the area and to increase critical mass through a healthy mix of activities and property development.

Simply put, the timing couldn't be better for Niagara Falls to receive a Downtown Revitalization Initiative award. The NFNHA fully supports the City's application and looks forward to continuing to work with the City on important initiatives like this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Capen", written in a cursive style.

Sara Capen

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





May 29, 2019

WNY Regional Economic Development Council
c/o Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Ms. Mays,

I would like to express my strong support to the City of Niagara Falls' Downtown Revitalization Initiative application for the Bridge District (formerly North Main Street).

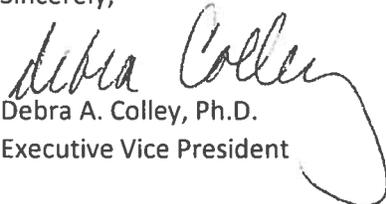
The Bridge District was historically the City's natural downtown shopping district and hub of commercial activity. After years of neglect and disinvestment, the Bridge District is finally positioned to re-emerge as a vibrant, mixed-use hub of activity for Niagara Falls. The proximity to both world class tourism assets and the most stable residential areas in Niagara Falls has now been enhanced by significant public investment to beautify the area, connect Main Street to the natural wonder of the Niagara Gorge, improve transportation connections and opportunities, and interpret the rich and important history of the District. The table is now set for transformational private sector investment, and developers and investors are taking notice.

Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding and technical support is exactly what is needed right now to capitalize on decades of planning and investment. This funding would provide leverage to meaningful private sector investment that aligns with the City's long-held vision for the area and to increase critical mass through a healthy mix of activities and property development.

The timing couldn't be better for Niagara Falls to receive a Downtown Revitalization Initiative award, and I fully support the City's application.

If you have any questions concerning my support of this application, please feel free to contact my office at 716-286-8317.

Sincerely,



Debra A. Colley, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President

May 30, 2019

Ms. Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development Corporation
95 Perry Street #500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Ms. Mays,

The purpose of this letter is to express the Niagara Global Tourism Institute's support for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) application being submitted by the City of Niagara Falls.

The proposed project footprint includes an area that will play a critical role in increasing the diversity and sustainability of the Niagara Falls tourism industry. The DRI plan aligns with the city's objectives – promoting market rate residential housing, energizing commercial space, and encouraging entrepreneurship and workforce development – both complement and enhance our vision for the continued growth of a vibrant neighborhood in the Bridge District of Niagara Falls.

Tourism is the leading economic engine for Niagara Falls and Niagara County. Employing over 14,000 employees and generating traveler spending of over \$700 million towards the local economy in 2017, the industry sustains the area and is the main driver for its future development. (Tourism Economics, 2017)

Tourism is one of the key industries identified by the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council as a main driver for the economy, but growing this industry requires adjoining areas to be vibrant. The Bridge District neighborhoods play a critical role in establishing the tourism sector's image in the eyes of visitors, both current and potential, as well as domestic and international. Revitalized downtown neighborhoods provide a welcoming backdrop to our international consumers, but also serve as a pivotal selling point when converting "drive-through" visitors into overnight guests. The success of the industry and the general area depend on maximizing hotel occupancy. Establishing a clean, welcoming, and developed downtown neighborhood is vital to the area's overall success.

We are fully supportive of Governor Andrew Cuomo's vision to "transform selected downtown neighborhoods into vibrant places for people to live, work and raise a family – which will also help attract new investments and businesses for years to come."

We look forward to partnering with the city of Niagara Falls on this initiative.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Whalen – Director
Niagara Global Tourism Institute



**NIAGARA FALLS
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
HERITAGE CENTER**

Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission

Ally Spongr, Interim Director, Heritage Center
825 Depot Avenue W.,
Niagara Falls, NY 14305

WNY Regional Economic Development Council
c/o Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

May 30, 2019

Dear Ms. Mays,

The Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission strongly supports the City of Niagara Falls' Downtown Revitalization Initiative application for the Bridge District.

Historically, Niagara Falls was one of the most important locations on the Underground Railroad. For some free African Americans, it was home and a safe place to work and live. For others, the city was a crossing point over the last barrier to freedom – the Niagara River. This history is shared at the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center (Heritage Center), located mere steps from where Harriet Tubman and other freedom seekers crossed the Niagara River via the Suspension Bridge during a time when the Bridge District – known then as Suspension Bridge Village – was a bustling hub of commercial activity. In the years following, the Bridge District was the City's natural downtown shopping district and a prospering area, frequented by the community and tourists alike and invested in by local entrepreneurs.

The Heritage Center was in the works for over a decade prior to officially opening to the public in May 2018. The Heritage Center operates inside of the former 1863 U.S. Customs House and is physically connected to the new Niagara Falls Amtrak Station – a critical public space in the City's North End. As a new cultural asset committed to sharing the historic role of the people of Niagara Falls in facilitating freedom for the oppressed, it is our mission to inspire visitors to recognize modern injustices that stem from slavery and to take action toward an equitable society. The NFUGRRHC has invested over two million dollars in the Bridge District with the successful creation of the Heritage Center, which has already served over 14,000 visitors from all over the world. The Heritage Center's cutting edge exhibitions, programs and initiatives continue to support investment in our surrounding communities in this district by connecting visitors to the history that happened right here.

After years of neglect and disinvestment, the Bridge District is finally positioned to re-emerge as a vibrant, mixed-use hub of activity for Niagara Falls. With proximity to world class tourism assets, like the Heritage Center, Niagara Falls is ready for the impact of significant public investment to beautify the area – connecting Main Street to the natural wonder of the Niagara Gorge, to continue to improve transportation with the Discover Niagara Shuttle and similar services, and to expand interpretation of the rich and important history of the District. Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding and technical support is exactly what is needed right now to capitalize on decades of planning and investment in order to leverage meaningful private sector investment that aligns with the City's long-held vision for the area.

The NFUGRRHC fully supports the City's application and looks forward to continuing to work with the City on critical initiatives such as this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ally Spongr
Interim Director



DNFBA
Downtown Niagara Falls
Business Association, Inc.

101 Old Falls Street
Niagara Falls, NY 14303
716.278.2115
Email: info@dnfba.org
www.dnfba.org

May 29, 2019

WNY Regional Economic Development Council
c/o Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Ms. Mays:

On behalf of the Downtown Niagara Falls Business Association, comprised of more than 30 hotels, restaurants, attractions and developers, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my support for the City of Niagara Falls' application for Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding through New York State.

One of our association's main goals is extending the length of stay for our visitors and increasing the number of year-round activities, restaurants and retail shops not only in the Downtown corridor, but throughout the City of Niagara Falls. This \$10 million in funding would be utilized to compliment the revitalization of long-vacant buildings along Main Street, an artery which runs through our business district, therefore attracting new development in the area.

Main Street is already experiencing a renaissance with the addition of the new Niagara Falls Police Station, Niagara Falls Train Station, and the Underground Railroad Heritage Center. The street also welcomes visitors to the very popular Rapids Theatre and is currently undergoing the deconstruction of the Niagara Scenic Parkway North. This will allow for renewed access to parkland and greenway space along the Niagara River Gorge, thus bringing motorists off of a highway bypassing the city and into the Main Street corridor itself. The route also welcomes the Discover Niagara Shuttle throughout the summer season, which transports guests to and from the Downtown core through this area for a stop at the Train Station and points north of the city. Our business association regularly collaborates with all of these entities and looks forward to forging new relationships with new developers and proprietors that this grant would help attract.

Municipal Main Streets are traditionally urban areas which travelers seek out to experience a local flair beyond regular tourist activities. Reinvesting in this area will allow for additional year-round brick-and-mortar development, local and regional activities and ongoing promotions, while encouraging a longer length of stay for guests of the hotels within our district.

I strongly support this application and sincerely hope the City of Niagara Falls be considered to receive a New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative award. I look forward to being a part of the continued momentum of new development in Niagara Falls.

Sincerely,

Chris MacKendrick
Chairperson

DNFBA Mission: To stimulate, enhance & nurture an inviting atmosphere for civic, cultural, social & economic activities in Downtown Niagara Falls, NY.



NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Explore the possibilities!

WNY Regional Economic Development
Council
c/o Amanda Mays, Regional Director
Empire State Development Corporation
95 Perry Street # 500
Buffalo, New York 14203

May 28, 2019

Dear Ms. Mays,

Please accept my heartfelt support of the City of Niagara Falls' Downtown Revitalization Initiative application for the Bridge District (formerly North Main Street).

The Bridge District was historically the City's natural downtown shopping district and hub of commercial activity. After years of neglect and disinvestment, the Bridge District is finally positioned to re-emerge as a vibrant, mixed-use hub of activity for Niagara Falls. The proximity to both world class tourism assets and the most stable residential areas in Niagara Falls has now been enhanced by significant public investment to beautify the area, connect Main Street to the natural wonder of the Niagara Gorge, improve transportation connections and opportunities, and interpret the rich and important history of the District. The table is now set for transformational private sector investment, and developers and investors are taking notice.

Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding and technical support is exactly what is needed right now to capitalize on decades of planning and investment in order to leverage meaningful private sector investment that aligns with the City's long-held vision for the area and to increase critical mass through a healthy mix of activities and property development.

The Niagara Falls Public Library's role in our community (since 1895) is to service our citizens and visitors with cultural enlightenment and educational growth opportunities. Our local history collection is world class, featuring genealogy, artifacts from the Falls, local hotel registries, Dunlap collection of photographs etc. Tourists often visit us to conduct local history research. This revitalization project will translate to an improvement of our economic downtown landscape for citizens and tourists alike, making our downtown vibrant and an economic engine for our community.

The timing couldn't be better for Niagara Falls to receive a Downtown Revitalization Initiative award, and I fully support the City's application.

Sincerely,

Sarah Potwin
Executive Library Director

Earl W. Brydges Library Building
1425 Main Street
Niagara Falls, New York 14305
Tel: 716-286-4911 FAX: 716-286-4912

LaSalle Branch
8728 Buffalo Avenue
Niagara Falls, New York 14304
Tel: 716-283-8309 Fax: 716-283-2020