

MID-HUDSON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: *Village of Port Chester*

Downtown Name: *Downtown Port Chester*

County: *Westchester*



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

The Village will celebrate its 150th Anniversary in 2018 with the theme of “Old Village, New Downtown” by recognizing its long history while embracing a new course for the downtown. Governor Cuomo, the Mid-Hudson Region, the people of the State of New York, and the residents of the Village of Port Chester have a unique opportunity to partner on a traditional, yet out-of-the-box downtown revitalization initiative. Downtown Port Chester has a long history as a job center and maritime community, focused on the Byram River and the railroad. This is reflected in the history of the name of the community, which originally was Saw Pit (reflecting its industrial beginnings) and transitioned to Port Chester (reflecting it as a major seaport) when it incorporated as a village in 1868. Participation in the DRI is the perfect mechanism to implement the Old Village, New Downtown theme, by infusing new life into the historic downtown area through rebranding and rethinking downtown Port Chester with millennials and the creative class in mind, regulatory reform to promote transit-oriented private development and public-private partnerships, creation of new mixed-use spaces that provide a range of housing options and promote job growth and economic development, and infrastructural investments in the public realm. To that end, the Village nominates Downtown Port Chester and the Old Village, New Downtown initiative for the \$10 million DRI award to accomplish the following four items:

- 1. *Downtown Zoning Code Re-Write and Build Out Analysis***—Chapter 345 of the Code of the Village of Port Chester is a typical post-suburban zoning code – a hodge-podge of sometimes contradictory zones and regulations that reflect the age of the automobile and single-family homes. As part of Old Village, New Downtown, the Village proposes re-writing the Zoning Code as a form-based code in order to promote future development that is appropriate, well-designed, co-mingles with the public realm, and incentivizes mixed-use transit-oriented development around the train station through mechanisms such as micro-units, density bonuses, and community benefits. The zoning re-write would include review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), which would be the platform to quantify and evaluate the potential build-out of downtown and what impact that could have on important resources such as traffic, transit, parking, schools, and infrastructure. Such rezoning and build out would look to streamline the approval process for prospective developers to invest and obtain results quickly with minimum additional costs and approval risks and would allow the Village to evaluate such proposals in a holistic way and not on an ad-hoc basis. These changes will improve accessibility, provide job growth, and increase attraction to the downtown.
- 2. *“Artistspace”***—Port Chester aspires to be the restaurant, arts, and entertainment capital of the Region. It already is known as the restaurant capital, is the location of the Capitol Theatre (one of the County’s premier entertainment venues), and is home to

many artists. In order to help leverage these resources and nurture the burgeoning artist community, as part of Old Village, New Downtown, the Village envisions the creation of live/work spaces for artists. Such spaces would not only affordably house artists and their families, but would provide space for their work and venues to share with the community at large, providing yet another art and cultural resource. The Village proposes to engage an organization (such as Artspace – see Patchogue, East Harlem, or Buffalo) to conduct feasibility studies and, eventually, construct such spaces.

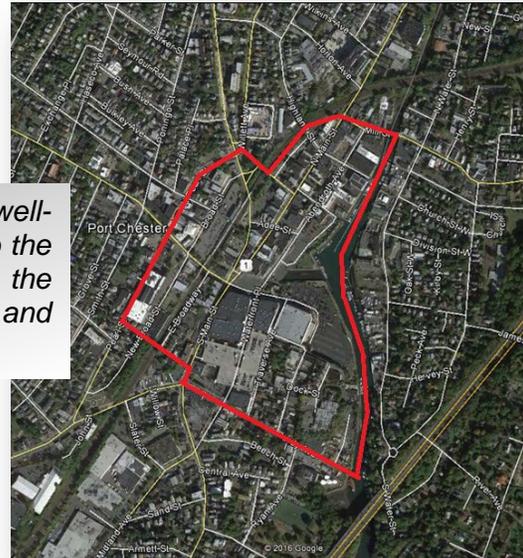
3. **ReTHINKing Port Chester**—A major component of Old Village, New Downtown is the transformation of the Village—its image, its organization, and its way of thinking—to emulate the 21st Century focus on creativity and ingenuity. The Village not only wants to be home to the creative class, but wants to be a government of and provide services at the most efficient and lowest cost to the public, and needs to be able to convey its resident-friendly and business-friendly atmosphere as a “brand”. To that end, the Village would engage a leading third-party design and consulting firm that will be co-funded by a non-profit foundation or philanthropic organization to help re-think Port Chester to create and market “experiences” for millennials and investors that focus on lifestyle and amenities that will create jobs and a vibrant downtown.
4. **Waterfront Public Space Creation and Bulkhead Reconstruction**—Downtown Port Chester lacks public open space. In addition, as a result of Hurricane Irene, portions of the bulkhead along the Byram River waterfront collapsed. Out of fear for the public’s safety and welfare, the waterfront, notably the promenade and walkway, was closed, leaving Downtown Port Chester without public access to the water. The Village has been working through a grant from NYSDOS to develop design and construction drawings for the reconstruction of the collapsed bulkhead. The completion of the final design will facilitate the replacement of the failed bulkhead, which is pivotal to the resurgence of the waterfront. As part of Old Village, New Downtown, the Village proposes to construct the new bulkhead, create a waterfront public space where people gather to sit and engage in outdoor activities, and provide access to the Village from transient watercraft such as small boats. As a part of this, the Village would also incorporate charging ports in order to increase public availability and accessibility of Wi-Fi.
5. **Infrastructural Investments**—As a suburban community, the automobile still plays an important role in the Village’s economic sustainability. The Village and IDA are sponsoring a study to evaluate the Village’s mobility and parking conditions. As part of Old Village, New Downtown, the Village proposes to implement the recommendations of the mobility and parking evaluation, including the design and building of a parking structure. As an older, established downtown, much of the Village’s infrastructure is in poor condition. This includes the Village’s existing sanitary sewer system. In response, the Village has begun a five year program to scope, clean, and repair the whole sewer system. In addition, much of downtown has overhead wires, which obscure the aesthetic beauty of the downtown’s buildings and present a safety hazard during intense storm events. As part of Old Village, New Downtown, the Village proposes to evaluate the feasibility of burial of the overhead wires in the downtown area. Taken together, support to these imperative infrastructural investments would not only provide amenities to all Village populations, but would help lower the tax burden on property owners, and help spur economic development and reinvestment.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines. **Answers to each question are limited to one page each.**

- 1) **Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment.

Downtown Port Chester is the compact, well-defined area bounded by the Byram River to the east, Purdy Avenue/Boston Post Road to the south, Pearl/North Pearl Street to the west, and Mill Street to the north.



- 2) **Size.** Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown.

Downtown Port Chester, as defined above, is approximately 65 acres and is already a year-round downtown. Not only are there approximately 1,500 people living in this downtown, but it acts as the primary downtown for all of the approximately 30,000 Village residents and is easily accessible via public transit (Metro-North Railroad, Westchester Bee-Line, CTransit). One of the primary goals of the Village's participation in the DRI would be to enhance the waterfront and restore transient access to the downtown via the water.

- 3) **Past Investments & Future Investment Potential.** Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

Downtown Port Chester has seen a tremendous amount of previous investment and seeks to capitalize on this investment to catalyze future private and public investment, both that which is currently known to be coming down the pipeline and that which is yet untapped. Downtown Port Chester has the past history and momentum that will be necessary to leverage public and private resources to create a truly successful DRI community. The previous investment has been a mix of public investment and private investment and is a result of partnerships that the Village has developed with the public and private sectors.

The Village itself has been willing to do the analysis, and, ultimately, spend the money to create a vision and implement that vision. In 2012, the Village completed a five-year process to update its 1968 Comprehensive Plan. The 2012 Plan overall vision retains the qualities of Port Chester that its people have come to cherish, including a diverse cultural population, quality homes at relatively affordable prices, a vibrant downtown, and its proximity to key employment centers in the region. At the same time, the vision addresses the challenges confronting the Village, including changing socio-economic conditions, unpredictable growth

and development patterns, physical constraints limiting waterfront access, and underutilized non-residential properties. This Comprehensive Plan establishes the framework for turning these challenges into opportunities and provides strategies for capitalizing on the Village's physical, social, economic and human capital. The result of the 2012 Plan has been a number of follow-up items that have included partnerships with the public sector.

The Village has worked and continues to work with State agencies such as the Department of State (on the marina bulkhead design and LWRP update), DHCR (on the New York Main Street grant), NYSDEC (on the marina bulkhead design), and Market New York (150th Anniversary marketing grant), among others. The Village has worked and continues to work with Westchester County, not only through required referrals, but as a partner to promote the County as an economic development engine and alternative to New York City as a destination and place to live. The Village has worked and continues to work with the Federal Government including FEMA (storm recovery), United States Army Corps of Engineers (Byram River, bulkhead), EPA (sewers), and USDA (applied for a Farmer's Market grant). The Village has also worked with the private sector to spur development and create jobs. This not only includes streamlining the approval process for residential, commercial, industrial, office, and mixed-use development applications, but working with property and business owners, including the Port Chester-Rye Chamber of Commerce.

Restaurants (food services & drinking places) in downtown Port Chester account for approximately \$45 million in annual sales, which represents a significant portion of the overall dining related sales in the immediate region. Taken together with the arts and culture environment led by the Capitol Theatre, Port Chester has earned the title the "Restaurant and Entertainment Capital of Westchester County". This has led to an overwhelming amount of interest in the private sector to invest in the community. This investment interest ranges from developing mixed-use tower-style blocks near the train station to creating pop-up restaurants and becoming a home for micro- and nano-breweries, distilleries, and other micro-alcohol establishments.



Welcome to The Restaurant and Entertainment Capital of Westchester County!

On more than one occasion the Village has been described as a "hidden gem". It has all the qualities to be a true diamond for the County, Mid-Hudson Region, and State, but needs an infusion of additional funding to capitalize and catalyze investment. A DRI award would allow the missing pieces of the past and future investment to be filled and would allow that investment to be completed and the vision to come to fruition.

- 4) Job Growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

As noted above, Port Chester is among the new generation of suburban communities that are providing an alternative to urban life in New York City. The Village is desirable because it has become a place to not only play (e.g., restaurants, entertainment), but live and work as well, especially with a railroad station at its center. This "triple bottom line" of live-work-play is integral to the sustainability of the growth of a community.



A number of transit-oriented projects have recently been constructed, have been approved, or have been discussed conceptually that are anticipated to result in local job growth, including 120 North Pearl Street (50 residential units), the Castle (83 units over 1,444 square feet of retail), the Mariner (100 residential units), and Retail “D” (79 units over 12,000 square feet of retail). The largest of these projects, the proposed redevelopment of the United Hospital site on the southwestern portion of the Village, is anticipated to create 736 jobs (324 indirect and 412 induced). While such a project has been designed as a regional mixed-use center, there are obvious synergies with Downtown Port Chester, especially the restaurant and entertainment options in the downtown area.

Old Village, New Downtown and the DRI award would solidify Downtown Port Chester as an attractive, active downtown as follows:

- New zoning would allow new construction (leading to construction jobs), new residential (which would be attractive to millennials and professionals), new commercial (leading to permanent jobs and amenities for the new residents), and possibly new office and industrial spaces (leading to permanent jobs). The proposed build-out analysis will quantify the development potential and will allow for measureable goals for new jobs, new businesses, and new residential units.*
- Investing in improving the appearance of the downtown would be one of the best ways to attract new business, stimulate economic development, and attract new visitors. Beauty benefits business, and burying the overhead wires could be a major strategy to beautify and revitalize the area.*
- New live/work spaces for the artist community would provide a direct link between housing and jobs. Given Port Chester’s connectivity via transit and other modes to the region, such live/work spaces would not only be accessible to those who physically live there, but would be accessible by foot and public transit to the larger regional artist community.*
- The waterfront as an active and passive space would create new recreational opportunities that are not currently available in the downtown, would energize the downtown area, provide access for local watercraft and watercraft farther afield, and, as has been evident with the Erie Canal, become a recreational amenity, all of which would create a dynamic downtown that no other regional community offers.*
- One of the objectives of ReTHINKing Port Chester is to make the Village more attractive to millennials and the creative class, the development community, and employers both in and outside of Port Chester. By branding the Village as a place that is friendly and “hip”, physical and economic development will be more sustainable in the long-term.*
- As part of the recent history of prudent fiscal planning and budgeting, the Village created a sewer rent program (which brings in approximately \$1.5 million in revenues annually) to ease the burden on the residential taxpayer of reconstructing the Village’s sewers (estimated at \$15 million). However, businesses have been*

required to pay their share of sewer usage (\$1.420544 per 100 cubic feet). Supplementing or perhaps even eliminating the need for the sewer rents would aid economic development and contribute to investment and job growth.

- 5) Attractiveness of the Downtown.** Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, healthy and affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces.

Downtown Port Chester has many characteristics that contribute to the attractiveness and livability of the community.

- *Port Chester is a diverse community and already provides a range of housing opportunities and types, especially downtown.*
- *Downtown Port Chester is a traditional, walkable downtown, built around the railroad and Main Street (along with the Byram River waterfront). Port Chester is ranked second among the State's largest municipalities in Walk Score's walkability index.*
- *As a traditional downtown, it has a number of extant mixed-use spaces.*
- *In addition, Main Street is lined with commercial and retail businesses.*
- *Port Chester is home to the Port Chester Metro-North Railroad Station, along with stops for a number of bus lines, including the County Bee-Line and CT Transit system, making downtown a multi-modal hub. 2015 Metro-North ridership on New Haven line totaled 23 million, a 1.7% increase over 2014. In addition, Port Chester is one of two municipalities within the County Bee-Line bus system with the highest level of commuters per square mile*
- *The East Coast Greenway runs through the Village and downtown along Main Street, providing bicycle connections between the downtown, regional open space networks and resources, and other regional destinations.*
- *Port Chester has a number of entertainment amenities, led by the Capitol Theatre.*
- *As a traditional downtown with many structures dating from the 19th & early 20th centuries, there is a historic mixed-use characteristic of the buildings and spaces. Apartments exist over many of the spaces in the downtown area.*
- *Downtown Port Chester has a number of health care facilities that serve the community and is well-served by broadband access.*



That being said, Old Village, New Downtown seeks to enhance those existing quality of life characteristics in the following ways:

- *New zoning, especially form-based zoning, would allow the construction of additional, attractive mixed-use spaces in the downtown area, creating a new transit village environment for residents and visitors alike.*
- *Such mixed-use spaces would contribute to the range of housing options and opportunities that could be provided in the Village.*
- *Downtown Port Chester currently lacks a public park and has limited gathering spaces. Access from the water to the downtown and the development of open space along the waterfront would provide a tremendous civic amenity and public gathering space in the heart of the downtown area, especially with increased access to Wi-Fi.*

- *The combination of burying the overhead wires, new public and walking amenities along the waterfront, and form-based zoning that stresses the public realm, along with the Village’s anticipated capital planning and streetscape initiatives, would help to vastly enhance the walkability and bikeability of the downtown.*
- *The creation of live/work spaces for artists would leverage the Village’s already existing cultural and entertainment amenities and solidify the Village as the restaurant, arts, and entertainment capital of Westchester County.*
- *ReTHINKing Port Chester will help to create and market “experiences” for millennials (“singles, mingles, and jingles”) and investors that will enhance to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown.*
- *The Village has applied to the USDA for seed money to create a farmer’s market downtown. Such a farmer’s market would be focused on local farmers, and products would provide healthy options to all Village residents and visitors, including lower income populations (62.94% of residents of the Village are Low-Moderate Income).*

6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life. Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

The Village currently has a number of policies in place that increase livability and quality of life, especially in Downtown Port Chester. These include:

- *The Village has a long commitment to planning and examination of its downtown. This is evident in the number of plans that have been created focused fully or partially on downtown Port Chester, including: Village of Port Chester Downtown Plan II (2002), Intermodal Transportation Study (2003), Route 1/North Main Street Corridor Study (2012), the Village of Port Chester Comprehensive Plan (2012), and Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP, drafted and before the State).*
- *With a train station in the heart of the downtown area, the Village promotes transit-oriented development. This is evident in the policies and recommendations of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and the new zoning districts that were created in 2013 to promote development in and around the train station.*
- *One of Port Chester’s finest qualities is its diversity and the welcoming and inclusive environment for recent and New Americans. This diversity and environment has made the Village a destination for many to live as well as play.*
- *The Village is constantly looking to be energy efficient and is currently contemplating the creating of a green building and site plan standard within its Zoning Code.*

In addition, the Village and Industrial Development Agency (IDA) currently have a request for proposals (RFP) for a Mobility and Parking Management Study with Recommended Plan of Action. Among the tasks contemplated in the RFP is the creation of a Sustainable Complete Streets Policy and implementing that policy through adoption and the preparation of a Sustainable Complete Streets Plan.

That being said, Old Village, New Downtown seeks to create and implement a number of policies that enhance quality of life. These include:

- *Re-writing the Zoning Code to not only be more modern, but to be a form-based code to better integrate the public and private realms. Such re-write will include design guidelines and new parking standards.*

- *The new zoning will incorporate the green building and site plan standards and new development that occurs would be designed to be energy efficient.*
- *An objective of ReTHINKing Port Chester is to evaluate the local management structure and integrate as many Smart Cities innovations as possible to more efficiently provide local services.*
- *Infrastructural improvements in the downtown area will be constructed to be as energy efficient as possible.*

7) Local Support. Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

While the traditional supporting documentation is not appropriate to include in this application, Old Village, New Downtown has support, not only from local elected and public officials, but from a number of private stakeholders as well. At the May 24, 2016 Board of Trustees' meeting, the Board unanimously adopted a letter supporting Old Village, New Downtown and application to the DRI program. The Village has been meeting with major local civic groups, including the Port Chester-Rye Brook-Rye Town Chamber of Commerce, Port Chester-Rye Brook Rotary Club, and the Kiwanis Club of Port Chester/Rye Brook, and all have indicated that they are supportive. The Village also has great working relationships with Westchester County, as well as the local New York State elected officials, State Assemblyman Steven Otis and State Senator George Latimer, and they have been supportive of the Village's efforts towards revitalization.

This actual support will go a long way to make Old Village, New Downtown a successful DRI community and will be important members of the local DRI Planning Committee. The initial local lead will be Eric Zamft, the Director of Planning & Economic Development for the Village. The Department of Planning & Economic Development not only helps guide applications through the Village Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, but also is the primary support for the IDA and LDC and leads the grant writing and administration efforts of the Village.

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

Port Chester is a diverse village and this diversity is one of its biggest assets. More than half of the Latino-owned businesses in Westchester County are located in Yonkers, White Plains, New Rochelle, and Port Chester. Further, 62.94% of Village residents are Low-Moderate Income (LMI) persons. In fact, HUD FY2015 LMI data shows that the entire Village currently meets HUD's LMI National Objective To that end, an investment in Port Chester, and specifically the downtown area would directly benefit LMI persons.

Port Chester is the most densely settled village in the County at 20.8 persons per acre, or 13,309 per square mile. This compares to the average of 6.9 persons per acre for the other villages in the County overall. This density is key and will be key to strategic investment in the community and the Village's ability to improve the downtown.

Finally, Port Chester is a community of action. With a small but dedicated staff and the tireless work of volunteers and the public, there is tremendous capacity for implementation and the ability to make the DRI investment not only a successful one, but one that can become a case study throughout the State and, hopefully, the Country.