

# **MID-HUDSON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE TEMPLATE**

## **BASIC INFORMATION**

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

**Municipality Name:** City of Poughkeepsie

**Downtown Name:** Main Street Downtown Corridor

**County:** Dutchess

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

The historic City of Poughkeepsie is poised to reawaken from a long, debilitating slumber. The city's Main Street corridor, stretching from the Hudson River to its eastern border with the Town of Poughkeepsie, is the key to this resurrection. The Main Street corridor represents Poughkeepsie's civic and commercial backbone, providing definition, services, and connectivity to neighborhoods clustered both to the north and south. This critical thoroughfare has been slowly but steadily rebounding from the ill effects brought on by Urban Renewal initiatives of the 1970s, including the construction of two east-west arterials that further exacerbated the loss of nearly 20% percent of the city's population and effectively cut Poughkeepsie into three distinct sections. After decades of decline, the city has been working diligently to lay the groundwork for renewal, receiving numerous state investments in planning, infrastructure, recreation, housing and private sector developments. Redevelopment of the corridor's vacant commercial real estate has begun and, in recent years, the city has begun to experience a wave of entrepreneurship that is bringing exciting new hospitality venues and innovative tech businesses into the corridor's underutilized buildings. Meanwhile, larger scale redevelopment and expansion projects at some of Poughkeepsie's anchor institutions are generating diverse job opportunities that, in turn, are increasing demand for urban housing options. This and easy access to the Metro North and Amtrak Railroad lines at the Poughkeepsie Train Station on lower Main Street has catalyzed the development of more than 700 new housing units within the city's boundaries. The city's waterfront is undergoing an exciting period of renewal, sparked notably by the opening in 2009 of the world renowned Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park, which attracts nearly 500,000 visitors annually and has led to the creation of a vibrant new regional trail network with Poughkeepsie at its epicenter. A new mayoral administration that is stressing collaboration and innovation has brought a palpable sense of optimism to the city and its many partners in business, government, philanthropy and the nonprofit community. Poughkeepsie is a few catalytic investments away from turning a corner it has long been approaching and, in so doing, becoming a model of successful urban transformation for all of New York state.

## **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.

The Main Street Downtown Corridor (Downtown Corridor) begins at Bridge Street and traverses due east to the intersection with Cherry Street. Included in this area are the mixed use commercial and residential structures found along streets running parallel to Main Street and one block to the north (Mill Street) and one block to the south (Cannon Street). This stretch of roughly three-quarters of a mile defines the city's traditional commercial core, along which can be found historic and attractive multi-story structures that feature diverse restaurant options, former department stores that now house commercial interests with upper floor apartments, government buildings such as those of Dutchess County (Poughkeepsie is the Dutchess County Seat), professional offices, retail shops, and popular entertainment venues such as the Bardavon 1869 Opera House, Mid-Hudson Civic Center, and The Chance. This area includes over 8 acres of publically owned and underutilized surface parking that could support re-development needs.

- 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.

The Downtown Corridor already provides a well-defined and central core serving both the City of Poughkeepsie and the surrounding Town of Poughkeepsie. With its interwoven blend of urban and suburban features, this greater Poughkeepsie metropolitan area is comprised of more than 75,000 residents who, in their day-to-day lives, look to the diverse supply of goods, services, employment and attractions found in the corridor. Another 25,000 residents live in close proximity in the bordering "satellite" communities of Fairview (in southern Hyde Park) and the towns of Lloyd and Marlborough directly across the Hudson River, with many of these people venturing daily to Poughkeepsie to shop, work or commute to employment elsewhere. This pronounced catchment area—all within a five-mile radius of the Downtown Corridor—includes an impressive variety of businesses, nonprofit agencies, educational institutions, government agencies, public transportation services, and cultural amenities. Major institutional employers include IBM, Vassar Brothers Medical Center, Mid-Hudson Regional Hospital of Westchester Medical Center, and Central Hudson Gas & Electric. Four thriving institutions of higher learning—Marist College, Vassar College, Culinary Institute of America and Dutchess Community College—are all located just beyond the city limits and provide substantial employment and economic contributions to the local and regional economy. Furthermore, employees of these anchor institutions tend to reside within the greater Poughkeepsie metropolitan area. For example, Health Quest, the parent company for Vassar Brothers Medical Center, reports that over 1,100 employees live within the city or town—providing a robust customer base within the commercial core and, of late, contributing to the low vacancy rates for apartments that have spurred new rental housing development within the catchment area.

- 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.

The City of Poughkeepsie is uniquely positioned to capitalize upon demographic trends that favor redeveloping urban centers and recent opportunities brought on by institutional innovation and expansion. As the last stop on Metro North's Hudson Line, Poughkeepsie is easily accessible to millennials who, unlike previous generations, favor urban conveniences and public

transportation. Tech-savvy and well-educated members of this demographic are increasingly occupying apartments in the Downtown Corridor, enjoying the relatively low rents to be found in Poughkeepsie while maintaining access to jobs, clients, and cultural amenities in New York City. They are dining out in the many new restaurants dotting Main Street, such as Brassiere 292, Schatzi's Pub, the Rabbit and Turtle, and Morty's deli. Many are also engaging in bi-monthly Hudson Valley Tech Meetup gatherings held at the Indotronix building, a large former department store on Main Street that now houses various professional, food- and tech-related businesses including Poughworking, a co-working space for digital entrepreneurs which opened in 2016 purposefully downtown to be part of the city's renaissance. Reinforcing the impact of these trends and helping Poughkeepsie to retain area local college graduates has been the significant strides, particularly by Marist, in creating new centers of innovation in evolving fields that are attractive to millennials. The completion of the Cloud Computing and Analytics Center at Marist College and the impending development of its Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, both supported by MHREDC grant awards, have helped create the innovation infrastructure necessary to pave the way for promising new tech start-ups in the Poughkeepsie area. This, combined with exciting new developments in teaching and implementing advanced manufacturing that are now taking root in nearby communities such as New Paltz, promises to inspire even more tech-related start-ups. Poughkeepsie is approaching a critical mass among established institutional employers, cultural amenities, housing availability, and new business development necessary to catalyze a sea change in its traditional downtown corridor. Since 2009 Hudson River Housing, a local community development and affordable housing nonprofit, has spearheaded the Middle Main Initiative, a focused effort within the DRI area. By celebrating Main Street's many assets and deploying dynamic strategies in coordination with the city to build upon them, HRH's Middle Main Initiative is a model for sustainable, inclusive redevelopment of small cities. HRH has received \$1.45 million from the NYS Main Street Program over the past 7 years to support the various projects created by this important community initiative. Middle Main is a multifaceted effort including a community leadership program, a nationally recognized neighborhood branding strategy, Made-In-Middle Main small business alliance, and monthly community meet-ups. The largest project to result from this effort is the \$7.2 million adaptive reuse of the former Poughkeepsie Underwear Factory, a 22,000 square foot, three-story brick building to be transformed into a mixed-use project containing workspace for budding social enterprises alongside artist studios and rental housing. This project has received over \$4 million in state and federal funds. Meanwhile, the Downtown Corridor is well positioned to accommodate future growth and business development. A 2014 survey indicated that approximately 35% of the corridor's building stock contained some level of vacancy. That, combined with ample surface parking and numerous vacant developable lots, will enable the city to absorb new businesses and their employees seamlessly. Furthermore, current city investments include a \$22 million city-wide sewage and water infrastructure upgrade that is expected to be completed in 2017, and the \$4.5 million replacement of street lights with LED bulbs to improve energy efficiency and enhance security. And lastly, the Downtown Corridor has access to high-capacity fiber optic cabling, making downtown well suited to accommodate growth in the tech industry.

- 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.

Several significant commercial, light manufacturing and residential projects are bringing the promise of new job creation in and around the Downtown Corridor. These combine with many smaller but cumulatively impactful enterprises to provide optimism for substantial and sustained job growth serving those seeking employment at all education and training levels. One example is Fourth State Metals, a metal fabricating firm concentrating in art, architecture and furniture making, which recently relocated from Brooklyn to an industrial building on Poughkeepsie's north side. Another example is the Mill House Brewery expansion, a historical nod to Matthew Vassar's 19<sup>th</sup>-century brewing operation. The popular downtown brewery and restaurant, which opened in 2013, has expanded brewing operations to a wholesale manufacturing facility in a vacant industrial building on the city's north side while still maintaining its taproom on Mill Street. Indoor Organic Gardens of Poughkeepsie (IGOP) recently began to repurpose vacant building space in the heart of downtown for farming microgreens, which have found their way into many local restaurants, stores, schools and hospitals. IGOP hires hard-to-place workers from Poughkeepsie and is currently looking to expand its operation within the city. On a larger scale, the recently approved \$466 million expansion of Vassar Brothers Medical Center, located in the City's south side neighborhood, will reinvent this major regional health care facility's long-established campus by expanding and modernizing existing services and adding a range of new medical capabilities designed to provide area residents with local options that do not require travel to other regions. This investment will retain 1,650 jobs along a broad spectrum of titles. Less than five miles north of Poughkeepsie, two major mixed-use developments in the planning stages promise to provide several hundred jobs once they are completed. Bellefield at Hyde Park is a \$94 million resort, hotel, and commercial enterprise to be located across from the entrance to the Culinary Institute of America. Supported in the 2015 CFA round with an ESD award, Bellefield projects the creation of 375 full time equivalent jobs. And Hudson Heritage represents an ambitious redevelopment of the long vacant and sprawling former Hudson River Psychiatric Center located near the Marist College campus. Currently undergoing regulatory approvals and brownfield remediation supported by recent NYS legislation, the nearly \$200 million project is expected to result in new commercial and housing development that will create hundreds of new jobs, easily accessible to Poughkeepsie residents. A future planned rail trail connection to the city's north side will enhance accessibility to this major new development. On the technology front, the Marist College Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship will renovate and equip the new Fulton Technology CrossRoad just north of the city. Once fully developed, the 45,000 square foot building will include offices designed for small and medium technology-based businesses, high-speed network connections to Manhattan, and an interoperability data center to promote community economic development. This \$15.8 million project, which received a \$1.5 million 2015 ESD award and is expected to generate up to 140 jobs, will leverage advanced technologies to provide the local economy with much needed space tailored to the needs of tech-based businesses. Through the Fulton Technology CrossRoad, Marist will position the Mid-Hudson region as a center of connectivity for advanced technology, analytics based companies, cybersecurity research, and commercialization, and will allow the region to attract and grow jobs in the IT industry.

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

The Downtown Corridor is comprised of the classic, compact urban form historically dictated by the primary modes of transportation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: walking and transit. Poughkeepsie's downtown is an eminently livable place that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Improvements are needed, but the city embraces this vision and is working toward its realization through complete streets practices, enhanced transit services and form-based zoning. The Poughkeepsie Train Station, home to the city's first Zip cars as of May 2016, serves the city and region as a major commuter hub with both Metro North and Amtrak trains providing daily service. The central Poughkeepsie Transit Hub, located near the intersection of Main and Market streets, provides riders with connections to destinations across the Hudson River as well as to shopping and jobs north and south of the city. Thanks to the opening in 2009 of the immensely popular Walkway Over the Hudson, the city has become a national and international destination for nearly 500,000 visitors annually. Recent efforts aimed at drawing many of those tourists from the towering former railroad bridge and into the city to experience its cultural and hospitality venues are starting to bear fruit. Those efforts include the construction of a high speed 21-story elevator that links the Walkway with the recently opened Upper Landing Park, allowing visitors to easily access the city's waterfront, along with the implementation of the [Greater Walkway Experience branding and marketing initiative](#). This effort, supported by a 2014 ESD Market NY grant, has created on-the-ground wayfinding signage in the City of Poughkeepsie designed to connect visitors with the many attractions and services found in the city's neighborhoods. Combined with complementary digital branding infrastructure and outreach, this promises to help define the city as a welcoming destination. Meanwhile, the city is exploring efforts to augment its impressive network of waterfront parks by linking Waryas Park with the southern waterfront development by creating a promenade around Kaal Rock promontory. This project, supported by a 2015 DOS planning grant, will create a continuous greenway along most of Poughkeepsie's waterfront. This shoreline trail will connect with the Dutchess County Rail Trail via the Walkway, providing hikers and bicyclists with an incredible trail network that stretches throughout Dutchess County and well west into Ulster County, with Poughkeepsie at the center. The city is also rich in cultural amenities and attractions that not only serve Poughkeepsie residents year round but beckon to hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. They include the Bardavon 1869 Opera House, Cunneen-Hackett Art Center, Barrett Art Center, The Chance Theater, and Mid-Hudson Children's Museum. Furthermore, an impressive variety of new housing units—more than 700—are in development or under construction to accommodate an expected wave of renters. These projects range from the higher end Water Club, a 136-unit \$27 million project under construction along the city's southern waterfront, to One Dutchess Avenue, a 303-unit \$65 million mixed-use project planned along the city's northern shoreline, to the Queen City Lofts project, a 70-unit \$22 million mixed-use, mixed income development on lower Main Street designed to accommodate artists and highlight their work. While interest in living and working in the City of Poughkeepsie has increased, access to fresh and affordable food has been a challenge. Poughkeepsie Plenty, a cooperative community effort has shown significant progress in recent years. The Market Fresh supermarket opened on upper Main Street in April 2011, followed by Tropical Fresh in 2013, which offers fresh and affordable produce and fish to address the diverse tastes of city residents. These offerings are further supported by Poughkeepsie Plenty's Mobile Market, a mobile farmer's market that began operation in 2015 and brings fresh and affordable produce throughout the city's neighborhoods. Building on these successes is First Friday, an initiative begun in April 2016 to encourage downtown employees and residents to stay in the city after work and enjoy the wide variety of

restaurants and activities the city has to offer. Close to 1,000 people have attended the first two First Friday events.

**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.

Poughkeepsie has initiated several planning studies and zoning updates aimed at guiding future development in certain key areas of the city. The recently adopted Waterfront Redevelopment Strategy (Strategy) and attendant Waterfront Transit-Oriented Development (WTOD) zoning establishes the foundation for transformational change in close proximity to many of the city's biggest assets, including the Metro North train station, Hudson River and Walkway Over the Hudson. The Strategy and WTOD zoning are designed to activate the waterfront and attract residents and visitors back to its former industrial heart that is now playing a crucial role in the city's renaissance. As part of the transformation, the city is working with Metro North to redevelop city- and MTA-owned parcels in the WTOD district for mixed-use development, soon releasing a Request for Expressions of Interest. The WTOD district, which surrounds the city's train station, utilizes a modern form-based code that encourages a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use environment with building-form and urban-design requirements that clearly establish the city's vision for the district, making the approval process more predictable and streamlined for developers. The city implemented a similar form-based zoning code in the Walkway-Gateway district in 2013, which has attracted new interest to the commercial area along Parker Avenue adjacent to the Walkway. Recently, an architectural robotics professor and co-founder of a design-research collaborative focused on robotic fabrication within art, architecture and industrial design established a laboratory in a long-vacant former factory building, citing the zoning district's allowable flexibility of uses as the site's main attraction. With funding from the Dyson Foundation, the city is currently developing a form-based zoning district within the downtown to similarly induce a mix of uses while promoting pedestrian-friendly urban design and infill development. Related efforts during the past several years include developing strategies to reduce vacancies and rejuvenate downtown, and the development of the Poughkeepsie City Center Revitalization Plan. This plan enjoys broad public support and was endorsed by the Common Council in 2014, and identifies key goals for improving downtown including the introduction of frequent transit along Main Street from the waterfront to Vassar College; implementing complete streets policies along Market Street, the city's downtown civic corridor; working with NYSDOT on pedestrian-friendly improvements along the city's arterial highways; and redeveloping the city's underutilized downtown surface parking for transit-oriented housing and mixed-use development. Meanwhile, the city is exploring new policies to handle tax delinquent properties, moving away from the short-sighted strategy of tax lien sales and instead taking title to properties for future redevelopment. The City is also restructuring its Industrial Development Agency (IDA) benefits and administrative structure to appropriately incentivize critical investment based on the city's challenges and opportunities, and to make sure the IDA process is business-friendly while ensuring compliance with state regulations. The city's quality of life has historically been, and continues to be, energized by new immigrants. More than 20% of the city's residents are of Hispanic or Latino origin. Poughkeepsie is unofficially known as "Little Oaxaca" and is rumored to have the largest concentration of Oaxacan natives

outside of the Mexican State of Oaxaca. This concentration adds energy to the city's already diverse population, and broadens cultural offerings through events such as the annual La Guelaguetza Festival.

- 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.

Perhaps now more than at any time in decades, the City of Poughkeepsie benefits from a confluence of support among stakeholders, government partners, business interests, nonprofits, philanthropic entities and community-based organizations all working toward restoring the Queen City to its former luster. The recent election of Mayor Robert Rolison, the former chairman of the Dutchess County Legislature, has sparked new optimism and real cooperation with many stakeholders. Not only does the new mayor maintain strong bi-partisan support with the city's Common Council, but he has secured meaningful resources from Dutchess County—such as the long term commitment of a full-time County planner to serve as the city's dedicated planner—thanks to the support of County Executive Marcus Molinaro. The County Executive has also committed staff from the County's computer, finance and planning departments to help the city assess and address its critical needs in these areas. Funding was provided to upgrade City Hall's administrative infrastructure through the County's Municipal Consolidation and Shared Services Program. The County and City are looking at opportunities to partner related to the City's transit and water systems and the County has committed to funding a study of youth service needs in the city and \$1 million towards the construction of a youth center. The County Executive is committed to these efforts because, as he regularly says, "Poughkeepsie is Dutchess County's 'front porch' for so many, their first opportunity to experience Dutchess County. We know the prosperity of Dutchess County is directly linked to the City of Poughkeepsie's prosperity." Meanwhile the Dyson Foundation has made significant investments to reinvent Poughkeepsie, including substantial contributions to transform the long abandoned Poughkeepsie Highland Railroad Bridge into the Walkway Over the Hudson, as well as its work in developing the Upper Landing Park along the city's northern waterfront, which provides the community with a new waterfront park as well as access to the Walkway's waterfront elevator. The Dyson Foundation also funded the 2014 Waterfront Redevelopment Strategy for the city. The Poughkeepsie Alliance, a non-partisan advocacy group consisting of the city's major anchor institutions, nonprofits, and private businesses, was incorporated in 2015 and works in close coordination with the city administration to "develop strategies and facilitate action to stimulate transformative growth to enhance the quality of life in the City of Poughkeepsie." Members contribute private resources to advance these transformative projects and strategies. Most recently they are taking the lead on funding the engineering for the Kaal Rock walkway and the creation of a pocket park in the Downtown Corridor. Other organizations and recent partnerships with the city include the Downtown Poughkeepsie Partnership, which focuses its efforts around sanitation and security in the Downtown Corridor, acting as a business improvement district-like organization; Arts Mid-Hudson, which is working with the administration to form an official arts commission; and the bicycle coalition sPOKe, which advocates for bicycle awareness and safety and organizes monthly rides along the city's established bike route network. Additionally, Dutchess Community College has committed to establishing a satellite branch in the downtown Family Partnership Center to offer city residents access to educational and vocational training

opportunities within walking distance of their homes. The local lead for the DRI planning committee will be Paul Hesse, Community Development Coordinator for the City of Poughkeepsie.

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

Perhaps nothing demonstrates that the City of Poughkeepsie is poised for rebirth as clearly as its recent involvement with the [MASS Design Group](#), an internationally acclaimed thought leader in advancing innovative urban design and planning. Of its groundbreaking work in Rwanda, earthquake-ravaged Haiti and other challenging international assignments, former President Bill Clinton said: “All architects should be building more like MASS Design Group.” The firm wants to help Poughkeepsie leverage its nationally respected institutions and historic cityscape to become a center of innovation. Drawing on an international portfolio of community-driven design projects, MASS proposes to open the *MASS Design Lab: Poughkeepsie*, a storefront community design center that will work with local businesses, institutions and social-sector organizations. With the fabrication tools and pedagogical programming to help fellows at the lab develop projects at different scales, the space will encourage investment in a healthy, equitable and entrepreneurial downtown. MASS plans to partner with Hudson River Housing to restore the historic “Trolley Barn” on Main Street for the lab. This unique opportunity has come about due to MASS Design’s co-founder and Executive Director Michael Murphy’s affinity for the city—he is a graduate of Poughkeepsie High School and his father, the late Michael Murphy Sr., once served as Poughkeepsie’s City Administrator. MASS Design recognizes that Poughkeepsie, equipped with all the right ingredients to spark an urban renaissance, stands on the cusp of a major transformation. “The city is positioned at the center of an ongoing creative renaissance and enjoys regional connectivity which encourages the exchange of ideas. [...] Poughkeepsie’s cityscape, with its impressive core of National Register-listed infrastructure, has the potential to form an attractive and dense creative zone with a rich historic narrative.” MASS Design’s interest in Poughkeepsie will be highlighted in Mr. Murphy’s soon-to-be-released TED Talk. The firm has already worked in downtown Poughkeepsie to “reimagine” the Family Partnership Center, a one-stop shop for government and social service agencies located in a former high school. That experience grew to include collaborating with Hudson River Housing to co-host a prestigious Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellow – one of only six awarded nationally – who is already “coordinating community immersion and creative programming to begin to instill a strong sense of place in Poughkeepsie’s downtown.” MASS Design Lab is just one of the opportunities that has been catalyzed in large part due to city’s new leadership. There is a palpable sense of energy and hope permeating the city since January 1. This feeling may be best summed up by Joe Bonura Jr., a developer who decided to break ground on a 136-unit luxury waterfront rental development only after election results were in, saying, “The new leadership in the City of Poughkeepsie has brought a level of energy and commitment to downtown that has been long overdue. Given this major shift in the City’s direction, we are now investing nearly \$30 million.” The City of Poughkeepsie is clearly on the verge, and residents, business owners and visitors are starting to see the city’s potential.