



The \$100 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest \$10 million in one community in each region ripe for development to transform them into vibrant communities where tomorrow’s workforce will want to live, work and raise families. The program emphasizes using investments to reinforce and secure additional public and private investments proximal to, and within, downtown neighborhoods, and in doing so will build upon growth spurred by the REDCs. Each REDC will nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

The NYC Regional Economic Development Council (NYC REDC) is currently soliciting interest in the program from communities in the region using the enclosed template. After applications are received, the NYC REDC will consider how interested communities meet the proposed criteria, and request certification by the State of the one downtown that the NYC REDC determines is best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

Applications are due by **5:00 p.m., Friday, June 3** and should be submitted to the following e-mail address: [NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov](mailto:NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov).

## **DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – Sheepshead Bay – Emmons Avenue**

### **BASIC INFORMATION**

**Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region:** New York City

**Municipality Name:** City of New York

**Downtown Name:** Sheepshead Bay – Emmons Avenue

**County:** Kings

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

*Sheepshead Bay is a coastal community located in the southern section of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. Two commercial corridors anchor the community and differ in nature and purpose. Sheepshead Bay Road contains primarily small retail establishments catering to neighborhood residents. Emmons Avenue, located along the scenic Sheepshead Bay waterfront, has both retail stores and larger restaurants catering to a wider clientele, including visitors from other parts of Brooklyn and tourists. In 2012, Sheepshead Bay was deeply impacted by Superstorm Sandy. The area experienced extensive flooding which devastated many businesses. The storm also exposed many deficiencies in how such communities are protected in disasters. The Sheepshead Bay waterfront is the community's greatest asset. However, it is currently underutilized even though there are a number of boats both for fishing and recreational dining and cruising. There are also many scenic attractions, which bring people to the waterfront on Emmons Avenue. In order to capitalize on the beauty of Sheepshead Bay, streetscape*

*improvements are necessary along Sheepshead Bay Road and Emmons Avenue that will improve the pedestrian, bicyclist, and motorist experience while making it easier for retail and hospitality businesses to thrive. This must be done in concert with resiliency measures that will protect businesses and residents during flood and storm events while helping this community recover from natural disasters.*

## **DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION**

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines.

- 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 area closest to the bay has two primary commercial corridors: Sheepshead Bay Road and Emmons Avenue. The boundaries for the business district follow Sheepshead Bay Road from Avenue Z to Emmons Avenue and then Emmons Avenue from Sheepshead Bay Road to Knapp Street.*

- 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.

*In 2010, the total population in the study area was 14,095. In New York City, the total population was 8,175,133 and the total population of Brooklyn was 2,504,700. From 2000 to 2010, the population in the study area shrunk by one percent, losing about 100 residents. Age distribution is well-balanced in the study area. However, an equal age distribution typically suggests slow and sustained development. There are a large number of children and senior citizens in the area. The age distribution also suggests that the birth rate may be exceeding the death rate.*

*Though the neighborhood has low density, the potential exists to provide infrastructure upgrades in order to foster the tourism market given the natural attraction of the Bay.*

- 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.

### **Past and Proposed Investment**

*The neighborhood has a number of parks with recreational facilities, courts, and fields. There is a small park along East 24th Street with a playground and handball courts. There is also a Holocaust Memorial Park on West End Avenue, built in 1993 after a three-year campaign by community residents. Names of Jewish resistance fighters are engraved on the granite monuments in honor of the many local residents who survived the Holocaust.*

*The waterfront along Emmons Avenue lacks a large park. There is one small waterfront park in Sheepshead Bay, Driscoll Tucker Place; however, this park does not have enough space to serve a large community, let alone tourists and other visitors. Thankfully there are already plans in place to build a passive recreation park called Brigham Park, located on vacant land south of Emmons Avenue at Brigham Park extending to the water. The park has been designed and will be open green space with waterfront access. There are currently construction delays occasioned by clearing up issues with a right-of-way easement that the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)*

*had with an area where one of their boats docked occasionally, at the eastern end of the zone and would connect the parks from one end to the other.*

*Currently, there are several yacht clubs present in the neighborhood, including the Sheepshead Bay Yacht Club and Varuna Boat Club. Additionally, there are a few small-scale marinas located in Plumb Beach channel.*

*The first push to revitalize the area took place in the 1930s when the city widened Emmons Avenue and provided funding for the restoration of neighborhood buildings. By the 1950s, as a result of more highways and suburbanization, Sheepshead Bay was no longer as popular as it once had been a resort destination. Still, fishing boats employed a large number of Sheepshead Bay residents who went out each morning and helped provide the fish for all of New York City. In 1973, the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) created the Special Sheepshead Bay District to attract more tourism. Yet another city-sponsored revitalization was planned in 1985 when the city announced a \$33 million investment to redevelop the waterfront as The Wharf at Sheepshead Bay. The revitalization focused on renovating the piers for commercial use and increasing tourism. The project was never fully realized, in part due to resident pushback. Sheepshead Bay struggled throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as 15 years of various development plans failed to bring any material changes, notably a promised parking lot and down-zoning to protect the neighborhood's character. The neighborhood began a push for another revitalization effort after the reopening of Lundy's Restaurant, a neighborhood icon. The Bay Improvement Group, a local community organization, prepared a planning document that envisioned a waterfront development like San Diego, Vancouver and Boston with quaint stores, retail kiosks, and signs denoting special crossing areas for fishermen. Community Board 15, the DCP, and local real estate developers disagreed, arguing that the fishing village vision had not panned out well in the past, some believed that conventional retailing, including bigger box stores like Loehmann's would be the path toward improvement. Eventually, Loehmann's did move into Sheepshead Bay, as did many more commercial chain retail establishments and small-scale shopping malls. Following the national economic downturn in 2008 and 2009, many of the new high-rise housing developments have faced difficulty finding tenants.*

### Future Investment

*It seems that there might be a market for a marina in the area and Sheepshead Bay would be an ideal location. A marina would act as an anchor attraction in a revitalized Sheepshead Bay, and attract visitors for both inside and outside the immediate neighborhood. Besides piers and docking spaces for boats, the marina could include a number of small retail stands. These could be managed by businesses already existing within the neighborhood, or used as an opportunity to bring in new businesses.*

*To reactivate the waterfront is to increase activity along the waterfront. While a marina will create a reason to come to the area, waterfront activities will create a reason to stay for visitors who do not own a boat. This will allow people to stay near the waterfront for longer periods of time and increase patronage to the surrounding businesses. Also, some of these activities can be implemented rather quickly and can thus be considered a short- to medium-term recommendation. For instance, non-motorized boating is an easy addition to make the waterfront more attractive. Many of these types of businesses already exist throughout New York City and, because the waters in the Bay are protected, such small boats and vessels could thrive in the area. Also, BBQ grills and picnic tables are low-hanging fruit to be easily added to the area. Such family activities will enhance the activity along the waterfront and can make a livelier scene in the Bay, particularly along Emmons Avenue. On a different note and within the water itself, Sheepshead Bay has the potential for a floating pool,*

*floating restaurants, or temporary piers in the short term created by a floating barge-like structure. Thinking outside the box, these floating attractions can draw even more visitors to the area and create a unique atmosphere not found in other places in New York City. Furthermore, there are seals and other wildlife in and around Sheepshead Bay. The community should take advantage of such assets. For instance, seal watching tours in the winter could be a great attraction for the area.*

*The current sidewalk along Emmons Avenue is not performing to its full potential. Though it provides scenic views, there are few attractions and activities to make it a thriving area. A landscaped esplanade connecting to the Belt Parkway trail, with an active greenway for bicyclists, will enhance the character of the bay and the surrounding neighborhood. A beautiful esplanade also has the potential to attract visitors who wish to walk along the water, with more pleasant surroundings than those currently in place. Indeed, an appealing esplanade in Sheepshead Bay will not be difficult to implement, and will add much value for the future of the neighborhood.*

*Fishing has a long history in Sheepshead Bay. However, in recent years, the fishing has been in serious decline. Unfortunately, fishing is not allowed on the piers or walkways because it is a hazard for pedestrians walking. People casting their rods have hit people. New piers in the marina for recreational fishing use would offer a unique opportunity for people interested in fishing in New York City to come to the bay. There could also be a fish market in Sheepshead Bay. Many of the restaurants serve seafood and many of the local residents have expressed interest in a fish market. In fact, this could be a successful seasonal activity on the new boardwalk or marina.*

*The existing streetscape of Sheepshead Bay is not welcoming to visitors and residents. Besides the presence of trash and lack of greenery, there is also a lack of public amenities which would make the commercial corridors an attractive destination to visit. In order to achieve its vision of becoming a new Brooklyn destination, Sheepshead Bay needs to create a more welcoming environment by adding more streetscape amenities. Increasing the amount of seating available on commercial corridors is an excellent way to encourage customers to linger and enjoy the neighborhood. Having ample seating would also draw groups such as seniors and families with young children, who may have previously avoided coming to the area on foot because of a lack of places to sit and rest. Upgrading the existing street lighting is another useful investment which can improve the streetscape in Sheepshead Bay. Well-lit streets are safer and more welcoming, while poorly lit streets can create a sense of foreboding and insecurity which may drive away potential customers. Displays of public art are a creative way to enliven the streetscape. Distinctive pieces can often become symbols of the neighborhood and foster community pride. Murals, for example, often prove a useful tool to create a more welcoming space in an otherwise foreboding or uninteresting street environment. (e.g., Shore Boulevard underpass and the Atlantic Avenue underpass). Such pieces of public art can often be created in conjunction with local community organization. For example, an organization called Groundswell oversaw a program in the summer of 2013 which painted eight murals in neighborhoods affected by Superstorm Sandy, including neighboring Coney Island.*

*A seasonal shuttle bus system would be an excellent way to increase connectivity in Sheepshead Bay, especially during the high tourist season. Although the public transit options in Sheepshead Bay are relatively robust, the current system is not designed to help visitors reach attractions on Emmons Avenue from the Sheepshead Bay subway station. This shuttle bus service could be implemented with a new parking structure helping to centralize parking away from the commercial corridors and the Bay while relieving parking demand. The route would be supplemental to existing MTA service, rather than replacing any existing lines. Shuttle buses could be an excellent sponsorship opportunity for local businesses or organizations and these groups could supplement any fare charge by buying advertising space on the buses, or even leasing naming rights for the shuttle lines. The B44 Select Bus*

*Service (SBS) route launched in fall 2013 provides a valuable transit connection to neighborhoods such as Flatbush, Crown Heights, and Williamsburg at a faster speed. However, the route misses an opportunity to be more useful by not connecting to other forms of transit.*

*To prevent flooding during future storms, we recommend that the neighborhood create a stormwater management plan. This plan would survey existing stormwater management conditions and identify areas where improvement is needed. The plan would describe specific improvements in detail. However, possible improvements include upgrades to the existing sewer system, addition of permeable surfaces such as bioswales or stormwater planters, and building of a flood barrier.*

- 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.

*The greater Sheepshead Bay area, which also includes Brighton Beach, Homecrest, and Madison, provides approximately nine percent of all jobs in Brooklyn. Nearly half of the area's jobs are in health care. Of the 11 large employers with more than 500 employees there, ten are in health care. Coney Island's amusement parks, aquarium, beaches, boardwalk, restaurants, and other attractions draw millions of City residents and tourists each summer. Many of the area's businesses were hit hard by Superstorm Sandy and are still rebuilding.*

*During 2010, the area began to recover from the recession, which had cost it one out of every ten jobs. Private sector employment rose to 27,530 jobs, a gain of 7.1 percent—a much faster rate of job growth than in the City overall (0.9 percent), and more than twice the rate for the rest of Brooklyn. Though jobs expanded in many sectors, two sectors accounted for two-thirds of the gains in 2010: transportation and education services. Importantly, employment stabilized in the health care and social assistance sector (the largest sector in the area) after large losses in 2009.*

- 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.

*Sheepshead Bay attracts tourists from other neighborhoods in NYC and the surrounding metropolitan area for its seafood. The neighborhood is particularly busy during the warm summer months, and visitors take advantage of the outdoor cafes and seating areas lining Emmons Avenue. Each summer, the community holds the BayFest attracting over 100,000 people with diving and sailing demonstrations, fireboats, live music, parades of historic sailboats, raffle, and rides. There are a few commercial fishing boats still docking in the harbor which go out each day to haul in their catch. Most of the boats, however, offer recreational activities.*

*Sheepshead Bay is served by a number of public and private schools. There are 18 public schools in the area and a number of small magnet schools. Area public schools are consistently strong and the public schools are a vital asset for drawing in new families. The Bay Academy (I.S. 98) has a highly competitive gifted and talented program that accepts only a small percentage of applicants each school year. The Sheepshead Bay Library, part of the Brooklyn Public Library system, was established in 1903. Community nonprofits include the Bay Improvement Group (BIG), a coalition group "dedicated to the preservation, revitalization, and planning of Sheepshead Bay." Sheepshead Bay is served by the B and Q trains, both local and express trains. The neighborhood contains an on-street striped bicycle lane on Bedford Ave stretching south to Emmons Avenue and north to Williamsburg.*

*The Belt Parkway runs parallel to Emmons Avenue, making Sheepshead Bay easily accessible by car. It is bordered by the bay to the south, where the Sheepshead Bay Piers are publicly accessible from Emmons Avenue. Across the bay to the south lies the Manhattan Beach community. Coney Island and Brighton Beach are directly to the west. The bay provides access to the greater New York Harbor just beyond Manhattan Beach. The majority of the housing stock is comprised of 1950s-style low-rise brick row houses, with larger, modern mid-rise condos and apartment buildings concentrated along Emmons Avenue. There are also unique bungalows that face into small courts off of Emmons Avenue. Sheepshead Bay has two New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) projects: Sheepshead Bay Houses and Nostrand Houses to the east of the neighborhood. The majority of the housing stock is one and two-family detached homes.*

- 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.

*Emmons Avenue is zoned R5 with a commercial overlay, which produces three-and four story attached houses and small apartment houses. With a height limit of 40 feet, R5 districts provide a transition between lower and higher-density neighborhoods. Neighborhood commercial uses are allowed on bottom floor. Further west on Emmons Avenue is an R6 zoning district which can range from neighborhoods with a diverse mix of building types and heights to large-scale “towers in the park.” This zoning does not allow for any commercial uses.*

*Sheepshead Bay Road on the other hand is zoned R4 with a commercial overlay, which usually produces buildings with three stories. The commercial overlays allows for ground-level retail businesses. Additionally, there is a C4-2 zoning, which is mapped in regional commercial centers that are located outside of central business districts. In these areas, specialty and department stores, theaters and other commercial and office uses serve a large region and generate more traffic than neighborhood shopping areas.*

*The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has committed to developing Complete Streets throughout New York City. Borough President Adams has also created a Connecting Residents on Safer Streets (CROSS) initiative, in which he has allocated capital funding to build safer streets for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.*

- 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.

*This proposal was part of a fall of 2013 economic vision plan project with graduate students at New York University’s Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service and was initiated by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce (BCC). Through the school’s Capstone program, BCC was matched with a team of students who selected the project from a number of possible options. The final and largest component of the community outreach plan - the community visioning forum - was held in March 2014 in Sheepshead Bay at the Kings Bay Y community center annex. Similar to other marketing efforts, the community visioning forum was advertised by door-to-door canvassing of all the businesses in Sheepshead Bay, email, flyering throughout the community, local media blasts, and telephone reminders. The meeting was attended by approximately 50 community members. It began with opening remarks by Carlo A. Scissura, the president of BCC. The Capstone team introduced the*

*project and reported back on progress and preliminary results. The entire group then did a visioning exercise, helping to frame the forum as a forward-thinking, long-term planning workshop. The community reported that the neighborhood's economic development in the past few decades has been unfocused because of indecision with regard to what the waterfront should look like: a quaint fishing village containing only local retail or a larger, more commercial working waterfront with big box stores. The core of the community visioning forum focused on four smaller breakout workshop sessions: (i) streetscape and waterfront; (ii) transportation; (iii) retail and business development; and (iv) land use and zoning. During each breakout sessions, a capstone team leader provided a brief overview of the topic/ issue and presented examples of what had worked in other communities. The session then consisted of semi-structured activities, including a general SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within a community or a specific project. It analyzes current conditions and helps identify potential roadblocks to success. At the conclusion of the evening, the capstone team did a brief reporting back and wrap-up.*

*Brooklyn Borough Hall and BCC have committed to serve as local co-leads for this initiative in partnership with community stakeholders.*

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

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