

**DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – Staten Island Economic
Development Corporation (SIEDC)**

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BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: Staten Island

Downtown Name: Downtown Staten Island

County: Richmond

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

St. George is the historic central business district and government hub for Staten Island. St. George and the adjacent neighborhoods of Tompkinsville and Stapleton form the centerpiece of the development effort on the North Shore and are generally considered to be “Downtown Staten Island.”

The neighborhoods serve as the gateway to the borough from the Staten Island Ferry and Bay Street and the area is undergoing a \$1 billion redevelopment thanks to public and private investment in major capital projects. The New York Wheel, Empire Outlets and Lighthouse Point along the St. George waterfront and the residential and mixed use development at Urby in Stapleton are known as the “Core Four” and have paved the way for a renaissance on the North Shore.

These four projects have led to proposals and actual implementation of a variety of spin-off efforts including the creation of the National Lighthouse Museum, a mixed-use development at the Jersey Street sanitation garage, the installation of the Culture Lounge at the renovated ferry terminal, significant road infrastructure improvements along Bay Street and the MTA’s study of the North Shore Bus Rapid Transit line among many others.

However, the work that is needed to transform Downtown Staten Island into a truly inclusive and expansive destination is far from over. The Staten Island Economic Development Corporation (SIEDC) has submitted this Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant application in hopes of securing funding to guide strategic intellectual and financial investments in the area.

By creating a cohesive development strategy for the three neighborhoods, DRI funding will promote the creation of vital linkages between the large scale projects along the waterfront and the residential and small business community both in upland St. George and in Tompkinsville and Stapleton. SIEDC proposes that DRI funding be used to:

a) Create a **Business Improvement District (BID)** within the Downtown Staten Island to guide smart development and provide inclusionary strategies for local businesses and residents. Additionally, the BID will provide for long-term and reliable funding for a variety of marketing, beautification, business development and community organizing efforts;

- b) Promote **public and open space opportunities** including the development of “pop-up” retail via a kiosk program along the St. George waterfront esplanade, improvements to streetscapes and informal uses of non-traditional public spaces such as the potential closing of Bank Street to vehicular traffic and creating a pedestrian plaza;
- c) Develop wholesale **transportation improvements** to provide vital linkages between the three neighborhoods including the creation of the North Shore Bus Rapid Transit line, expanding ferry access points – both public and private – to diversify commuting options, supporting the proposed SI Aerial Gondola to connect Staten Island with various locations throughout New York Harbor and ground level improvements including bikepaths and better access to mass transit for low-income residents;
- d) Leverage the BID to not only market the area to tourists but to encourage **diverse and robust retail opportunities** for residents including addressing food desert issues, balancing new businesses focused on young professionals with essential services for long-term residents and communicating more effectively with developers to create a holistic approach to planning for all residents. Additionally, the BID will help all sectors of the population better interface with City and State agencies involved in planning the future of land use and transportation in the district;
- e) Support existing and future **cultural and arts institutions** including the Staten Island Museum, Staten Island Art’s Culture Lounge at the ferry terminal, the St. George Theater, Staten Island Artist Building, Staten Island Makerspace and emerging recreational spaces including the 50/50 skate park in Stapleton;
- f) Propose and support **strategic site development** throughout the district for investment and overall public benefit. According to a recent New York City Office of Environmental Remediation (NYCOER) study, there are at least 16 strategic sites in Stapleton alone with a significantly more in Tompkinsville and St. George as well. These sites represent a strong opportunity for private investment in residential, retail, restaurant and hotel space as well as public benefit projects such as affordable and inclusionary housing, recreation spaces, grocery stores and medical facilities. To better direct the future development of these strategic sites, DRI funding will be utilized to promote and sustain a comprehensive planning/zoning endeavor to avoid haphazard development and disconnected and unsupported uses. Strategic site development can be enhanced through DRI funding by establishing efforts not traditionally linked with planning work put forth by City agencies. Potential non-traditional improvements include beautifying street walls, prioritizing development on a lot-by-lot basis or strengthening storefront vitality through marketing and access to new funding sources for business owners.

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 positive impact of the “Core Four” projects is reaching across the borough. Significant media attention has been afforded to the borough and retail and industrial corridors on the

east, west and south shores have all begun to benefit from the news of the major projects. While this distinction is beneficial for Staten Island as a whole, Downtown Staten Island still requires significant real world planning and project implementation if it is going to truly transform itself into a true central business district.

Smart planning dictates that we incorporate more than just St. George's waterfront into long term decision making. Therefore, this funding would support a macro-downtown radiating from St. George to include Tompkinsville and Stapleton as well. The western boundary of the district would be Jersey Street in St. George while the eastern boundary would be Canal Street in Stapleton. The general radius of the downtown district is between $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in the west (St. George) to $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles in the east (Stapleton).

SIEDC recognizes the importance of spreading the benefits of the St. George waterfront investments to other parts of the North Shore and across the borough. The creation of a macro-downtown in St. George, Tompkinsville and Stapleton has the ability to enhance large-scale and long-term benefits for all of Staten Island. As such, the theme of SIEDC's 18th Annual Business Conference held this past April was "Beyond St. George" and featured speakers working on projects beyond the boundaries of the civic district.

- 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 Staten Island macro-downtown is a rapidly growing area with remarkable potential to support a year-round commercial, residential and cultural destination. The robust economic indicators in the area include 31,000 residents, 4,000 daily workers, 70,000 daily ferry riders, 5,000 daily tourists and the potential of 4.5 million new visitors once the New York Wheel and Empire Outlets are completed over the next 18 months.

Downtown Staten Island has seen an unprecedented surge in new housing units in the last few years. Major transformative projects include the 115 units at Lighthouse Pointe, the full development of the five buildings at Bay Street Landing including the 101-unit "Accolade", "The Pointe" at 155 Bay Street with is a 57-unit luxury development," a major planned development at the former Fish's Eddy building at 139 Bay Street and nearly 300 units being built along Bay Street in Stapleton.

With approximately two-thirds of the area's housing stock comprised of rental units, Downtown Staten Island's housing market has more in common with New York City overall than with the rest of Staten Island, where owner-occupied housing is the norm. This is especially beneficial when considering the appeal that a short commute to Manhattan and affordable rents can be found in the district when compared to other boroughs. Median family income in the area averages over \$61,000 and this is expected to grow even higher as new developments come online.

An important factor to consider when planning for the future of the macro-downtown is that because St. George today is centered on government offices, the area shuts down at 5:00PM. There is virtually no entertainment or commercial activity once businesses close for the day. While the New York Wheel and Empire Outlets will bring an increase in commercial activity, strategies and tools for expanding investment and foot traffic beyond the waterfront is critical. DRI funding to study how to make the entirety of Downtown Staten Island more vibrant and alive will help link the three neighborhoods as one critical organism.

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.*

Over 15 years ago the first serious investment in Downtown Staten Island occurred with the construction of the Staten Island Yankees' home – Richmond County Bank Ballpark. The gem of minor league stadia was built adjacent to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal but sat alone on nearly 14 acres of often under-used parking lots.

Later, in 2005, the City of New York invested in a \$130 million renovation of the ferry terminal which included floor-to-ceiling glass that reveals panoramic views of the harbor and incoming ferries. Today, the terminal offers 29,000 square feet of retail space for residents and visitors. However, the majority of investment, money and foot traffic has remained within the walls of the terminal. Tourists never reached businesses in Downtown Staten Island, thus creating the need for comprehensive and strategic catalytic investment.

Thanks to support from local elected officials, the City of New York and Empire State Development, there is currently \$1 billion being invested into Downtown Staten Island via the “Core Four” projects. Future investments above and beyond the specific functions of the “Core Four” include significant upgrades of public spaces, improvements to the promenade along the waterfront and environmental innovations include a five-acre publically accessible green roof and a large playground at the New York Wheel.

The DRI funding for comprehensive planning and improvements will allow the previous successes and current construction to connect with Downtown Staten Island's residents and businesses. By creating a downtown with a specific identity, commercial and land use plan and a fruitful resident engagement policy and organized business community, Downtown Staten Island will be inclusive and beneficial for all stakeholders – not just those building major projects along the waterfront.

The waterfront and the macro-downtown are both physically and intellectually separated. While capital construction will create roads and connections, an entity such as the BID will allow for an organized, multi-disciplinary and clear long term plan for all three neighborhoods. This financially supported effort will provide Downtown Staten Island with a true advocate – and at a most crucial time in its history.

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.*

According to the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), Staten Island experienced a 32% increase in private sector employment between 1990 and 2010, compared to only 4% citywide. With thousands of square feet of commercial office space, Downtown Staten Island can offer businesses a more affordable option than many other business districts, easy access to Manhattan, Brooklyn, New Jersey and the rest of Staten Island, and broadband connectivity that is among the best in the country, making it especially attractive to tech companies.

Downtown Staten Island offers a farmer's market, numerous restaurants and bars, a craft brewery and new unique retail shopping opportunities which are catering to a diverse community with emerging needs and interests. The Race for Space program which was initiated by NYCEDC awarded a total of \$425,000 to seven retailers who opened up in the area and which are catering to a new and younger market including Verrazano Crossfit, Exercise My Mutt and Flagship Brewery. Like other neighborhoods in New York City, the demographic change in Downtown Staten Island is being reflected in the new types of businesses that are opening up.

- 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 waterfront is the key to this neighborhood. As stated earlier, the Bank Street promenade will be a favorable characteristic in creating an attractive waterfront. Without vehicular traffic, this large waterfront space can be activated with vendors selling food and art, nightly parades, bike paths, and public gathering spaces.

Additional recreation opportunities in Downtown Staten Island include revitalizing/relocating the deteriorated Cromwell Center, finishing the pedestrian esplanade between Bay Street Landing and the ferry terminal, developing community gardens and non-traditional park space in vacant lots in Tompkinsville and Stapleton and developing an outdoor recreation site in proximity and conjunction with the waterfront. Tompkinsville Park, the Van Duzer Street Triangle, Lyons Pool, Tappen Park and Mahoney Playground all represent opportunities for an organized effort for collective park improvements in a portion of the borough which has some of the worst open space access in the city.

An important part to the attractiveness of this waterfront district is the connection of the upland businesses and attractions to the harbor. This whole area is walkable, but the current configuration of businesses makes the waterfront feel cut-off from the rest of the community. DRI funding can be used to draw the community up the hill to businesses along Hyatt Street and Stuyvesant Place among others. Through public art installations directing people upward, historic walking paths, or enticing and directive signage, there is a need for this effort. This work should be coordinated by a local Business Improvement District that works in conjunction with developers and city agencies.

Downtown Staten Island has a variety of housing uses and stocks. There are large apartment buildings, public housing, modern waterfront apartments, older second story living accommodations above stores and historic mansions. It is critical that an effective and equitable housing plan be established that maintains the character of the neighborhoods but also provides for affordable housing opportunities and innovative adaptive re-use of vacant spaces. DRI funding would be specifically allocated to analyze housing development opportunities in Downtown Staten Island – especially those which can be coupled with Transit Oriented Development.

- 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.

Historically transportation issues have hampered development and quality of life in Downtown Staten Island. While it is now beginning to be addressed, transportation development requires significant advances and support through the DRI program.

Effective planning for roads and mass transit, utilizing water-borne transportation and advocating for non-traditional and innovative projects such as the North Shore Bus Rapid Transit system and the SI Gondola are critical aspects when discussing the future of the district.

Other lower-impact transportation improvements should also be incorporated into this plan including activating the waterfront esplanade as an established and maintained pedestrian and bicycle greenway. The greenway would allow for potential future expansion throughout the entire North Shore and the creation of safe and efficient bike lanes on commercial corridors including Front Street in Stapleton. Planning is currently underway for the conversion of Bank Street into a large community walkway along the waterfront. The new Bank Street Pedestrian Plaza will offer vendor kiosks and local artist opportunities through a partnership with Staten Island Arts.

The St George special district promotes retail and walkable streets. Further east, the New York City Department of City Planning (NYCDCP) is currently undergoing a re-zoning study along the Bay Street Corridor with local stakeholders, in order to leverage the transit oriented nature of the area with affordable housing and mixed used high density development including new retail and hotel opportunities.

- 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 local community was naturally concerned about the impact of the various developments, as the projects further engaged businesses, residents and community groups, it became clear that the investment was the best. The developers and the local community are working to jointly tackle future issues and the creation of a BID is a natural extension of this effort.

Additionally, for many years there has been a lack of continuity between government agencies, residents, community stakeholders and businesses in the area. Numerous groups have tried to create a path forward for Downtown Staten Island and all have failed. However, the recent investment in capital projects has promoted strong leadership and a clear vision. Central to this is SIEDC's role through a variety of mechanisms.

Starting in 2005, SIEDC self-funded an economic development analysis of the two parking lots at the St. George ferry terminal due to concerns over highest and best use. This work eventually led to the release of a Request for Proposals from NYCEDC which was won by BFC Partners and Rich Marin who were selected to build the Empire Outlets and New York Wheel respectively. Both entities sit on SIEDC's board of directors and Triangle Equities – the developer of Lighthouse Point – also is an SIEDC member. This close involvement from

a marketing and development standpoint makes SIEDC uniquely positioned to partner with the “Core Four” for a successful long term development in the area.

SIEDC staff also serves on the Bay Street Corridor Technical Advisory Committee assembled by the NYCDPC and NYCEDC as well as the committee for the Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Report for Stapleton produced by the New York City Office of Environmental Remediation.

Furthermore, SIEDC is the local leader in neighborhood development efforts in the borough including managing the West Shore Business Improvement District, launching the South Shore Business Improvement District and organizing five other merchant groups. This unique expertise will be incredibly beneficial for the revitalization of Downtown Staten Island.

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

Staten Island has long been known as the “Forgotten Borough” due to its bucolic and suburban nature. However, with over \$1 billion in private and public funding for one of the most transformative sets of projects in the history of New York City, the borough is turning the corner. It is imperative that Staten Island be allowed to continue this work not only for the benefit of the waterfront but for all of Downtown Staten Island and the economic future of the borough. DRI funding would provide previously unattainable opportunities for the businesses and residents of Downtown Staten Island and provide for the healthy future of the entire district.