

MID-HUDSON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

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

Municipality Name: City of Yonkers

Downtown Name: Yonkers Downtown Waterfront

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 Yonkers downtown waterfront is the urban center of the Mid-Hudson Region's largest city and the state's fourth largest city. The target area includes the city's central business district, known historically as Getty Square, and the central core of Yonkers' 4.5 miles of Hudson Riverfront. Following decades of disinvestment and the relocation of industry and retail, today Yonkers' downtown is experiencing a renaissance, transforming into a vibrant example of transit-oriented development anchored by the Metro North Yonkers train station. Recent improvements in the downtown, which total more than \$1 billion in public and private investment, include roughly 1,000 new waterfront apartments or renovated lofts, a state-of-the-art Riverfront library, the restoration of the Yonkers train station, a revitalized City Pier, two public parking garages accommodating 900 cars, a 1 mile long Hudson River esplanade, the uncovering or "daylighting" of the Saw Mill River and a mix of new restaurants and businesses, including high-tech companies.

The future of the Yonkers downtown waterfront looks promising, as an additional 3,500 apartments and mixed use spaces, totaling more than \$1 billion in additional investment, are under construction, approved or planned. Under the leadership of Mayor Mike Spano, the most recent phase of downtown resurgence has been coupled with an emphasis on fostering artistic, creative and innovative initiatives and positioning the downtown waterfront as a destination for young professionals seeking a vibrant urban setting just minutes from Manhattan. In 2014, Yonkers began investing in a successful marketing campaign, *Generation Yonkers or GenY*, which positions Yonkers as the next urban frontier highlighting the downtown's urban vitality, accessibility and the creative companies, aspiring entrepreneurs and visionaries who found opportunity and success as part of a new generation of investment in Yonkers. (visit <http://www.generationyonkers.com>). The revitalization efforts and mix of restaurants, bars, shops and galleries popular with millennials, helped Yonkers earn the title of *Hippest Town* in a poll conducted by the Journal News site, LoHud.com.

Despite many successes and building momentum, downtown Yonkers still faces severe economic challenges. According to the 2010 Census, there are 12 contiguous Census Tracts within the downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods where 25 percent or more of the population is below the national poverty level. These areas also suffer from higher unemployment rates than the city, state and national average. As a result of the chronic distress, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designated this area a Community Development Block Grant target area in 1974 in order to focus annual allocations and spur revitalization. This area is also a federally designated Empowerment Zone and a former State Empire Zone, both of which were established to infuse tax relief and stimulate the local economy. A DRI award will help Yonkers plan and implement the continued revitalization

efforts that are critical to the delicate recovery process. The continued growth, capacity for development and accompanying urban vibrancy of this well-defined downtown community makes Yonkers an ideal candidate not only to be selected for the \$10 million award, but to provide the greatest return on the dollars invested in accordance with the objectives of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

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 Yonkers Downtown Waterfront encompasses the traditional central business district surrounding Main Street and New Main Street, known locally as Getty Square, and the adjacent waterfront areas west of the Metro North Hudson Line centered on the iconic City Recreation Pier (see attached map). The DRI target area will include the compact areas radiating approximately 1/3 of a mile north, east and south from the Yonkers train station. This area has historically been the heart of Yonkers, from its agricultural beginnings in colonial days, to its industrial based economy spanning from the mid 1800's through the early 1900's, and most recently as a retail hub. Now, after decades of decline and disinvestment, this area's dramatic revitalization is leading the way for a resurgence throughout Yonkers. The Yonkers Downtown Waterfront is bordered on the west by an approximately one mile stretch of the Hudson River, on the north by Ashburton Avenue, on the east by New School Street and on the south by Prospect Street inland and the Domino Sugar Factory along the waterfront. The Metro North rail tracks bisect the area with limited vehicular access at Main Street, Dock Street, Wells Avenue and Ashburton Avenue.

- 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.

As the Mid-Hudson Region's largest city with a compact, transit-oriented and growing downtown, with thousands of new residents, a thriving mix of new restaurants and businesses and more than \$2 billion in recent, on-going or planned development, Yonkers Downtown Waterfront has become a vibrant, year-round downtown district. The target area is a very compact and walkable area. The area is a shining example of transit-oriented development as more than 1,000 new apartments have been built since the early 2000's. These units vary from modern luxury waterfront units to renovated loft spaces with high ceilings to new affordable units. Nearly 700 more units are currently under construction and approximately 2,900 additional units are approved for construction or being proposed.

The Yonkers train station provides convenient commuter rail service along Metro North's Hudson Line within 30 minutes to Grand Central Terminal and connecting to neighboring communities up to Poughkeepsie. The station also provides Amtrak service to Albany and Montreal. Lastly, the downtown is serviced by 20 different routes of Westchester County's Bee Line bus service and express MTA commuter buses to Manhattan.

- 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.

Yonkers will build on the momentum of economic development through the \$1 billion in public and private investment in the downtown in recent years, and more than \$1 billion of on-going or proposed development in the near future.

Past Investments

Past investments include the construction of 1,000 new apartments and with it thousands of new downtown residents that contribute to the local economy. Paramount among these was Collins Enterprises constructing the Hudson Park Apartments along the waterfront with Phase 1 (266 units with 1st floor retail and restaurants) opening in 2003 and Phase 2 (294 units) opening in 2008. Inland at 66 Main Street, Metro Partners constructed 177 units in a 10-story structure with 1st floor retail including a successful gym and two bank branches. This development firm also renovated the former Trolley Barn into 40 loft apartments with high ceilings and service retail. L&M Partners constructed 102 units of affordable housing at 49 North Broadway, while renovating the adjacent row of historic buildings at 44-54 Warburton Avenue into 10 more units and 7 storefronts with the assistance of an Empire State Development grant. Other developments included the Library Lofts (former library adaptively reused for 22 units & retail), Philipsburgh Building (28 renovated units) and 45 Hudson Street (24 units)

Public investments were crucial in creating this downtown revitalization. The first catalytic project that will continue to be an anchor institution was the construction of the \$53 million Riverfront library, a state-of-the-art, multi-purpose cultural space that opened in September 2002. Metro North conducted a \$43 million restoration of the Yonkers station and platforms in 2004, including the construction of a western entrance to accommodate the new waterfront residents. The City has built a continuous Hudson esplanade that now stretches nearly a mile long, providing public access and enjoyment of the River and views of the majestic Palisades. Yonkers also renovated the 1903 steel City Recreation Pier where large vessels can once again dock while adaptively reusing the second floor to house X2O restaurant. With the growth of the densely developed downtown, the City also created two parking garages to accommodate more than 900 cars.

Daylighting the Saw Mill River

In the summer of 2012, Yonkers completed its most exciting and catalytic public project by transforming Larkin Plaza, a 2-acre urban plaza and municipal parking lot opposite the Yonkers train station, into an urban riverwalk. After many years of planning, the City finished the uncovering or “daylighting” of the Saw Mill River, which flowed in an underground concrete flume for nearly a century, making this into a very unique, water-themed ecosystem with passive recreation along the edges of the exposed river. Since its completion, the daylighting has become a regional attraction, a shining example of green infrastructure and a catalyst for future growth in the City’s downtown waterfront area. This model project has spurred hundreds of millions in a new wave of development and businesses coming to downtown. Building on the success of this nationally and internationally acclaimed project, the City is completing the daylighting of a second phase of the River on the adjacent block to create the Mill Street Courtyard, an exciting piazza-style area nestled within the central business district. Yonkers has acquired and demolished several parcels to make way for a third phase of the Daylighting at New Main Street. Currently under design, this phase will be

a dynamic gateway park for those entering the downtown from the Nepperhan Avenue arterial and the regional parkways to the east.

On-Going and Future Investment

Transit-oriented development is continuing with three major residential developments currently under construction and several others approved for construction or being proposed, thereby continuing to transform the downtown. Collins Enterprises has begun constructing its \$85 million third and final phase of Hudson Park Apartments, a 230,000SF, 16-story building with 222 additional units. At the southern end of the Hudson esplanade, Mill Creek Development is investing \$115 million to create 600,000SF of residential space within 324 units at Palisade Point. At the I-Park complex, owners National Resources are building 100 UNO micro units atop an existing loft building, which will create smaller spaces targeted to millennials. They are now proposing to create an additional 200 micro units. Mere steps from the Yonkers station and along the southern edge of the Saw Mill River Daylighting Park, RXR and Rising Development will build a \$200 million project consisting of a 25-story and 17-story tower with 40,000SF of 1st floor retail and restaurants. At the nearby Teutonia Hall, a former German opera hall, Metro Partners will build a 360 unit, 24-story tower estimated at \$149 million. Avalon Bay and Extell Development envision repurposing vacant properties and industrial buildings along the northern waterfront to make way for developments of 600 and 1,300 units respectively.

With the introduction of more units and thousands of new residents, there will be a greater demand to create more service retail, restaurants and other businesses.

In 2014, the City closed and sold the former Waterfront Jail to noted architect, Maya Lin and her famous husband, art collector Daniel Wolf, to renovate and adaptively reuse for housing his extensive collection and serving for semi-public programming. The building is now on the tax roll and will be an integral part of Yonkers' burgeoning art scene.

Chicken Island Site Development

One major potential site for future development and job growth is the Chicken Island parking lot located immediately east of City Hall. This 5 acre parcel, long sitting vacant and underutilized, is ready for redevelopment. The City is currently designing the third phase of the Saw Mill River Daylighting on the adjacent property to begin construction later this year. As with the first two Daylighting Phases, this new river-themed park will spur future development. The City's intent is to request proposals from developers in the coming weeks on how to redevelop the area. Yonkers vision is to create a mix of uses that includes a government campus. This campus will consolidate various Yonkers departments at a "one-stop shop", helping make government run more efficiently while eliminating the costs of renting unnecessary office space throughout the City. The project also aims to further rejuvenate the area and spur additional private investment with the addition of hundreds of workers and new office space. To this end, the City is willing to commit \$10 million of capital funds to make infrastructure improvements and this entire project feasible.

- 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.

Vibrant Tech Environment

The revitalization efforts have spurred key tech companies to relocate to downtown Yonkers, creating hundreds of professional and creative jobs. In 2013, the City took a major step forward as hi-tech giant, IAC Search and Applications, moved its headquarters to downtown Yonkers. The parent company of Ask.com, creator of Tinder and a host of other companies and web applications moved 185 young talented workers to I-Park, a 750,000 sf office and innovation park immediately north of the Yonkers Metro North rail station and the Saw Mill River Daylighting Park. Biotech and research company, Contrafect, also relocated to the I-Park complex in 2010 and has now grown to over 100 employees. The Energy Project, an innovative company focused on how to improve employee productivity, also recently moved to the downtown.

Recently, area businessmen and stakeholders created YONY, a monthly “meet-up” where a mix of the area’s tech, creative and artistic-minded individuals come to network and share ideas. The YONY meet-ups have included renowned guest speakers such as Seth Godin, bestselling author, blogger and marketing guru who provided expert insight and advice for startup companies; Tony Schwartz, founder of The Energy Project with Fortune 500 clients, a regular keynote speaker at events like The World Economic Forum and 99u Conference, weekly columnist, blogger and best-selling author including Be Excellent at Anything who provided valuable insight into the myths of the overworked creative and how to expand your energy; and Joey Levins, CEO of IAC Search & Applications, who provided insight into his cutting edge company and their move to the Yonkers downtown waterfront.

With convenient transit options and significant private investment, there is a potential for further growth that will be sustainable in the long term. The I-Park complex, which was the former Otis Elevator complex where the modern elevator was invented and built, will continue to attract and sustain tech companies and other office-type jobs. I-Park’s largest tenant and local employer is the Kawasaki Rail Car, which assembles and installs HVAC systems in trains, including a recent contract for new MTA subway cars. Many restaurants, bars and service retail establishments have opened in the downtown and will continue to do so as more residents, workers and visitors come to the area.

Hollywood on the Hudson

Hollywood has taken notice of Yonkers as an affordable, convenient, and beautiful City in which to film its movies and TV shows resulting in new jobs, a boost to the local economy and a potential for future growth. With its interesting architecture, close proximity to New York City and inviting Mayor’s Film Office, Yonkers has become a hot spot for feature films, television series, commercials and print photography. Hundreds of productions have either been filmed in two Yonkers stage sets or on location throughout the city including 150 shoots in 2015. Since 2012, the film industry has created \$1 million in economic activity. Some noteworthy shows that have recently been produced on-location include NBC’s hit show The Blacklist starring James Spader, Law and Order, Dead Boss, HBO’s Boardwalk Empire and Bar Rescue featuring the makeover of a downtown bar. More than 30 feature films have been produced in Yonkers including A Beautiful Mind, Catch Me if You Can, Still Alice, Breakable You, Big Daddy and Mona Lisa Smile. Photo shoots for print ads have included Martha Stewart Living, Vogue and GQ. Television commercials include BMW, Samsung and Sprint. Throughout history Yonkers has also been home to dozens of international entertainers from Art Carney to Sid Caesar, Ella Fitzgerald, Steven Tyler and Mary J. Blige. Independent film making has begun to flourish in Yonkers with the upcoming fourth annual YoFi Film Festival held at the downtown Riverfront library that brings

renowned filmmakers and thousands of attendees to the City. As the film industry continues to grow in Yonkers, so too will the rise in the downtown economy.

- 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.

Art Scene

A key factor in the downtown's attractiveness and livability is an emergence of the arts and a destination for artists, young professionals and creative minded individuals as evidenced by:

- The commission of several dozen sculptures and murals throughout the downtown by both the City and the local arts group, the Blue Door Art Center, which has created a walkable outdoor museum.
- The City's recent partnership with the Fashion Institute of Technology to set up a permanent gallery in downtown called FIT Urban Studio Unbound.
- In October 2015, the City partnered with SUNY Purchase to create the Purchase College Center for Community & Culture (PC4), occupying 4,000 square feet in the downtown, with the intent to drive social impact and relevance focusing on how artists, designers, scholars, students and local organizations can act as agents of urban recovery and community empowerment.
- The recent investment of property by famous artists David Hammons and Robert Zakanitch in Yonkers.
- The third annual Yonkers Arts Weekend, a city-wide art event held May 14 and 15, 2016, featuring the works of over 200 artists, several pop up galleries in the downtown and a fashion show at the beautiful Untermeyer Gardens.
- The City in partnership with its premiere cultural institution, the Hudson River Museum, won a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant to sponsor a light installation designed by Erwin Redl, internationally recognized for his light installations of large scale outdoor spaces and a sound installation composed by John Morton, providing an intimate connection to Yonkers stories and history. Each artist worked with local youth with the production of their art that are now installed at the Saw Mill River Daylighting Park.
- Yonkers recently commissioned world renowned muralist, Nick Walker to produce 7 murals throughout downtown.
- The "Gateway to the Hudson" murals of Yonkers history on three buildings by world renowned muralist and Yonkers resident, Richard Haas.
- The sale of the former Waterfront Jail to noted architect, Maya Lin and her famous husband art collector Daniel Wolf to renovate and adaptively reuse for housing his extensive collection and serving for semi-public programming.
- The Yonkers Downtown Waterfront Business Improvement District sponsors an annual concert series along the Hudson, a musical series at the new daylighting river park and a series of visual and performing art programming throughout the year.
- Each September since 1992, the City sponsors Riverfest, a free day-long festival of music, art, multi-culturalism and environmental awareness spreads throughout the downtown waterfront area.
- A noteworthy initiative outside of the downtown that will help grow the downtown art scene is the YOHO artists' lofts, including workspaces for more than 80 artists at the

historic Alexander Smith Carpet Mills. The cooperative of property owners successfully lobbied the City to create the Carpet Mills Arts District that will permit more art-related businesses throughout this 2 million sq.ft. complex.

Mass Transit

The downtown is served well by mass transit. The Yonkers train station provides convenient commuter rail service along Metro North's Hudson Line within 30 minutes to Grand Central Terminal and connects to neighboring communities northbound up to Poughkeepsie. The station also provides Amtrak service to Albany and Montreal. The downtown is serviced by 20 different routes of Westchester County's Bee Line bus service and express MTA commuter buses to Manhattan.

Walkability and Bikeability

The downtown waterfront is a compact area with crosswalks at each intersection, making it very walkable. The target area's topography, unlike much of Yonkers, is fairly flat and therefore making it both walkable and bikeable. There are interpretive plaques and maps along the Saw Mill Riverwalk, which orient visitors to explore the downtown categorized by art installations, historic landmarks and recreation assets. The mile-long Hudson Esplanade is conducive to taking in the peacefulness of the River and the majestic Palisades on the western bank.

Community and Park Assets

The Downtown is blessed with many indoor and outdoor points of interests. As discussed above, there are dozens of new sculptures and murals as well as older monuments to explore. The Riverfront Library has an art gallery, Yonkers History Room, a tech center, free movies and a host of activities and special events for children and families. The 1682 Philipse Manor Hall is a state run historic site that interprets Yonkers past colonial life. With the growth of more restaurants and bars, downtown Yonkers has a burgeoning nightlife. There is a mile of Hudson River esplanade and three segments of the Saw Mill Riverwalk. The Science Barge run by local environmental organization, Groundwork Hudson Valley, is an educational site visited by thousands of visitors annually that demonstrates wind and solar energy to power a hydroponic greenhouse. The Center for the Urban River at Beczak, run by Sarah Lawrence College, provides educational programs focused on the ecosystem of the Hudson River.

Wi-Fi and Internet Access

Wi-Fi is now available for free throughout the entire downtown making it an inviting place to live, work or visit. The Riverfront Library has created a new tech center that allows residents to use computers and connect to the internet.

Varying Housing Types

The downtown area is a statewide model of transit-oriented development as more than 1,000 new apartments have been built since the early 2000's. These units have varied both in type and affordability including modern luxury waterfront units, renovated loft spaces with high ceilings, newly subsidized affordable units, micro-units targeted to millennials and restored historic walk-up buildings.

- 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.

Zoning

In 2010 and 2011, Yonkers created key zoning amendments in the downtown that fostered more transit-oriented development leading to improved livability and quality of life. These zoning revisions increased the permitted height and density of buildings, spurring the latest wave of development described above. The amendments also eliminated the requirement of parking for developments within ¼ mile of a transit stop, thereby reducing reliance on cars and improving urban design. Lastly, the revisions required that buildings be built without a setback and first floors must remain for retail or office use, which fosters a vibrant street life.

Going Green

In recent years, Yonkers has become a leader in sustainability initiatives. Yonkers Green City initiatives have included energy upgrades at a dozen municipal buildings, including a comprehensive window replacement at City Hall, a replacement of 12,000 street lamps with LED fixtures and a citywide water meter upgrade program. Yonkers recently adopted a Green Building Code, which fosters a more sustainable and healthy form of development being adopted by the newest downtown developments. The City has also drafted a Climate Action Plan, which analyzes and contemplates a series of other sustainability measures.

Planning

The DRI Strategic Investment Plan will draw from preliminary concepts outlined in 2015 by the renowned Ricardo Bofill Firm to reinvigorate the waterfront areas, especially the downtown waterfront, as a mixed-use destination. The firm has extensive experience in transforming urban waterfronts in Barcelona, Moscow, Dallas and Miami. Upon approval of the State, Yonkers will seek to spend up to \$300,000 of the DRI funds to hire Ricardo Bofill to assist the City with the Plan.

- 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.

There is widespread community support for the downtown revitalization efforts that have been going on and will continue to progress over the next many years. Yonkers has a strong network of community based organizations, business organizations, environmental organizations and civic groups that have been steadfastly supportive of the downtown resurgence. Nearly 15 years ago, Yonkers established the Yonkers Downtown Waterfront Business Improvement District that works to promote and improve the area for the downtown owners and businesses it represents.

The City of Yonkers, led by its Department of Planning and Development (DPD), will spearhead the DRI Planning Committee. The City DPD has a long-standing, working relationship with many of these organizations and community leaders and will invite them to be an integral part of the Committee. Through a highly collaborative process, the Committee will work to produce a Strategic Investment Plan that helps Yonkers continue to grow and become economically resilient.

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

The resurgence of Yonkers downtown waterfront has been and will need to continue to be a partnership between all levels of government and the private sector. New York State has generously awarded many grants through various departments including the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Environmental Facilities Corporation, New York State Council on the Arts, the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery and the Empire State Development. The Federal government has also been a pivotal partner through its' Department of Transportation, National Endowment for the Arts and most importantly through Housing and Urban Development's annual allocations of Community Development Block Grant and HOME Investment Funds. The City of Yonkers has demonstrated its capacity to foster successful economic development and has invested tens of millions in capital and operating funds to bring many of these vital projects to fruition. Lastly, a healthy mix of developers have come to Yonkers with their vision and capital, taken their calculated risks, partnered with financial institutions and made these projects happen.

Despite all these revitalization efforts, Yonkers is a big city with many economic needs and urban challenges. The target area includes a low income, economically disadvantaged population with some of the poorest Census Tracts in the state. Downtown Yonkers vitally needs to create and sustain long term recovery. With a Downtown Revitalization Initiative award, the REDC will help build on the momentum of economic development in the Yonkers Downtown Waterfront, complete the Strategic Investment Plan and ultimately implement the various revitalization strategies that will shape the success of the Mid-Hudson Region's gateway and largest city as a regional destination.

Downtown Waterfront Area

