

# *Authentically* **Oneonta:**



**A City on the Rise**

A CITY ON THE RISE





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May 20, 2016

Mr. Ken Tompkins  
Mohawk Valley REDC  
207 Genesee Street  
Utica, NY 13501

Dear Mr. Tompkins:

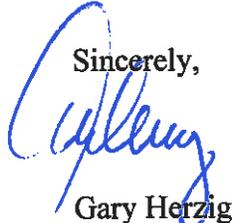
“Oneonta is a quintessentially classic urban center where people join together as community to work, play, celebrate, honor, and live” – An observation by a recent visitor to “The City of the Hills”.

This document before you, outlines the bold vision of a Mohawk Valley city at the tipping point. A city whose spirit and energy is matched only by its unique resources - two fine colleges, an authentic historic downtown surrounded by remarkable natural beauty, a railroad, an interstate highway, a major river, and a redeveloped municipal airport.

The hard work, planning, and investment which has brought the City of Oneonta to the tipping point includes a new zoning code designed to both encourage smart development and stabilize neighborhoods; recent significant private investment in both market rate and affordable housing, a new state of the art center for the performing arts, and real plans for both the development and reclamation of downtown Oneonta and the creation of quality jobs.

I am proud to present this application for Governor Cuomo’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative and I thank all the sectors of the Oneonta community who have worked to build this vision.

Sincerely,



Gary Herzig  
Mayor

# Acknowledgements

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The City of Oneonta and Otsego Now would like to gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance provided by the community in preparation of this nomination to the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, particularly the following individuals and organizations:

Dr. Nancy Kleniewski, President, SUNY Oneonta

Dr. Margaret L. Drugovich, President, Hartwick College

Kathy Clark, Chair, Otsego County Legislature

Craig Gelbsman, Otsego County Legislature

Robert Wood, Supervisor, Town of Oneonta

Elizabeth Horvath, COO, Otsego Now

Alexander R. Thomas, Ph.D., Chair, SUNY Oneonta Department of Sociology

Kirsten Oehl, Internship and Employer Relations, Hartwick College

Carolyn Lewis, Economic Development Coordinator, SUNY Oneonta

Karen Sullivan, Director of Planning, Otsego County

Deborah Taylor, Tourism Director, Destination Marketing Corp for Otsego County

Barbara Ann Heegan, President and CEO, Otsego County Chamber of Commerce

Rebecca Morgan, Executive Director, Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE)

Foothills Performing Arts Center

Destination Oneonta



# Basic Information

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**Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region:** Mohawk Valley

**Municipality Name:** City of Oneonta

**Downtown Name:** Historic Downtown Oneonta

**County:** Otsego

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

Oneonta, the “City of the Hills”, was devastated by economic retrenchment in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Faced with job loss, disinvestment, and high poverty rates, the community has overcome its struggles and is on the verge of great success. Persistence and careful planning has positioned the Oneonta Downtown to solidify its role as the center of culture and commerce in the southern Mohawk Valley and northern foothills of the Catskill Mountains. Governor Cuomo’s bold Downtown Revitalization Initiative is matched only by Oneonta’s bold plans, and will provide the financial resources to bring the community’s transformational strategies to fruition, elevating Downtown Oneonta from good to great. With this knowledge, the City of Oneonta, in partnership with Otsego Now, is proud to nominate Historic Downtown Oneonta for participation in the Governor’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

Historic Downtown Oneonta is nestled between the Susquehanna River and the hills for which it is named. The Downtown provides big city amenities with a small town feel. It is compact, walkable, and filled with many historic mixed-use buildings that are home to shops, restaurants, and apartments. These uses include restaurants, bookstores, banks, clothing stores, a jewelry store, a theater, a performing arts center, convenience stores, a healthy grocery, the public library, the YMCA, and medical, professional, and governmental offices. There is ample parking including a multi-level parking structure. The narrow, tree-lined Main Street provides a unique sense of place that is “Authentically Oneonta”. Oneonta is “centrally isolated” with other major cities located 60 miles away. Its remote location at the far southern end of the Mohawk Valley means that, unfortunately, the City does not directly benefit from the exciting economic development efforts being undertaken along the Thruway corridor. It also means, though, that Oneonta’s downtown serves as the primary urban center for communities within a 30 mile radius (a catchment area of over 2,800 square miles), perhaps one of the largest for a city of its size in New York.

The Governor’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative appears to be custom fit for Oneonta. The City has accomplished much in recent years to create an exciting, vibrant Downtown with a healthy economy. The community is now primed to move beyond merely fixing buildings and planting trees: now is the time to capitalize on the City’s transformational plans to truly change the direction of the local and regional economy. The City’s Economic Development Planning Study for the Downtown is nearing completion, and has developed ambitious plans to reclaim the Market Street area as a Food and Craft Beverage Innovation District. This multi-faceted concept builds on the inherent economic strengths of the region, and will result in new development, new private investment, new jobs, and an enhanced sense of place that will appeal to the next generation of employees and employers. The City is also embarking on plans to redevelop the now-vacant Rail Yard (adjacent to downtown) into a manufacturing and intermodal transportation hub capable of generating hundreds of new jobs. Our past successes are testament to our team’s ability to collaborate and bring these initiatives to fruition.

We encourage readers to visit [www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta](http://www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta) to learn more about the community’s exciting plans and to download copies of referenced documents.

As our proposal will demonstrate, Oneonta is primed for success with bold plans ready to go, including private developers interested in partnering with the City to make these plans a reality. The DRI will transform the Downtown area into one of the most successful in the State, and by extension, will bolster economic development efforts throughout the southern half of the Mohawk Valley Region. If given the opportunity...Oneonta will rise.



# Downtown Identification

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- 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.*

Oneonta's urban core has well defined boundaries encompassing a traditional city downtown with a core of mixed use development on Main Street, ample public open space, and higher density traditional city housing along the periphery of the mixed-use corridor. With a total of 230 acres in the DRI focus area, it is the largest downtown within a sixty-mile radius. The historic downtown includes the entirety of the Downtown Mixed-Use zoning district; two blocks of the Traditional Residential district, each to the east and west of the Downtown district; a block of the Moderate Density Residential district to the north of the Downtown district; a section of the Gateway district to the southeast of the Downtown district; and 64 acres of public open space at Neahwa Park, immediately south of the Downtown district, and Huntington Park to the north. The Downtown accounts for \$68,029,552 in assessed value, 10% of all taxable properties in the City.

Although the City's Downtown encompasses portions of multiple zoning districts, the selected area maintains well-defined boundaries. At the core of the City's Downtown is the Downtown Mixed-Use district along Main Street. The eastern and southern boundaries of the downtown are firmly defined by the James F. Lettis Highway (NY-23) and the Senator Warren M. Anderson Expressway (I-88), respectively. To the north, the downtown reaches its boundary along Walnut Street where the Moderate Density Residential district begins. The western boundary of the downtown follows the north-south running roads of Church Street, Academy Street, Mosher Avenue, and Harvey Street, which roughly separate downtown mixed-use development from the adjoining residential neighborhoods and the Oneonta Rail Yard. Please see the attached maps showing the boundaries of the downtown area in relation to the City.

- 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.*

Centrally located between Binghamton and the Capital Region, on the banks of the Susquehanna River in south central Otsego County, the City of Oneonta is affectionately known by many as the Southern Gateway to the Mohawk Valley Region. In addition to the 14,000 residents who call the City of Oneonta home, within a 30-mile drive in any direction, you will find nearly 150,000 people who regularly visit the city as their primary urban downtown. The City's catchment area is over 2,800 square miles.



In contrast with many cities in upstate New York that have slowly recognized a declining population, as of the recent census, the City of Oneonta is the fastest growing city in the Mohawk Valley Region. Specifically, the City has seen its population increase by over 4.6% between the two most recent census years – a testament to the positive local attitude and the City's recognized potential.

Immediately adjacent to, and within walking distance of Oneonta's downtown core, are the higher education institutions of SUNY Oneonta and Hartwick College. Oneonta's downtown is the primary downtown destination for approximately 7,500 enrolled students and thousands of faculty and staff members at the colleges.



Of unquestionable importance is the downtown's proximity, a short 30-minute drive, to Cooperstown, New York and the Baseball Hall of Fame, a nationally known tourist attraction. An estimated 300,000 individuals visit the Hall of fame on an annual basis. Additionally, one cannot speak of tourism in the Mohawk Valley without mentioning the Brewery Ommegang, the Nation's first farmstead brewery to be established in the last 100 years. Brewery Ommegang employs 80 people fulltime, year-round, and welcomes nearly 70,000 visitors annually. Brewery Ommegang is located a short 20-minute drive from downtown Oneonta. With its prime location along the Interstate 88 corridor and close proximity to Cooperstown and Brewery Ommegang, it is undeniable that a large percentage of visitors make downtown Oneonta a destination along their voyage to these two nationally known attractions.

Oneonta's urban downtown offers city residents, the college population, and visitors numerous amenities, which include but are not limited to, market rate housing in the Bresee Building/Parkview Place [see (3) below], off-campus student housing; arts and entertainment at the state-of-the-art Foothills Performing Arts Center; access to healthy food options at the downtown health food market and farmers market; the Public Library, parks, Damashke Baseball Field, and a lively restaurant and nightlife scene on Main Street. Located conveniently in the downtown core, Oneonta is also home to a multinational hotel chain, the Clarion Hotel.

"Centrally isolated" between Binghamton, Utica, and the Capital Region, with no cities exceeding 10,000 residents within 50 miles, the City of Oneonta has had to strategically plan for success. As a result of the City's planning efforts and private partnerships, the downtown is capable of, and successfully attracts, patronage from afar as the only traditional city downtown within reach for thousands of individuals residing in a predominantly rural area of New York State.

**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 Oneonta, Otsego Now, and other partners in the City's efforts to elevate Downtown Oneonta into the top tier of New York downtowns, have worked cooperatively to stimulate development in the Downtown and build the foundation to maximize future investment potential. Below is a summary of Local and Regional Plans, Past Investment, Future Development Opportunities, and Redevelopment Strategies and Projects.

**LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS:**

**Focus on the Future of Main Street: An Economic Development Planning Study** – The City was awarded a \$75,000 ESD Planning grant in 2013 to conduct a comprehensive economic planning and development study for the Downtown. This study can be downloaded at [www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta](http://www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta). The Study focused on potential redevelopment sites of vacant and underutilized properties, and a needs assessment of available housing types and market rates within the Downtown. In addition, the study looked at the Downtown's impact on the local economy. The plan notes the high occupancy rates on Main Street, the unique mix of niche businesses, related initiatives such as streetscape improvements, and plans for the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation District, as assets from which the Downtown can continue to grow. This plan sets a framework from which the community can take the Downtown to the next level, and is the basis for much of the City's DRI application.

**Mohawk Valley REDC Strategic Plan and URI Plan** – The Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) clearly articulated its vision for the Mohawk Valley Region in the REDC Strategic Plan and the URI plan: *the Mohawk Valley REDC Upstate Revitalization Investment Prospectus*. Two of the major regional development opportunities that are identified in both the REDC Strategic Plan and the URI Plan for the Mohawk Valley are the need for future investment in downtowns and Main Street corridors, and investment in agribusiness and agritourism.

In its plans, the REDC identifies the creation of vibrant communities and downtowns as important development drivers for targeted investment. Specifically, the Strategic Plan and URI Plan identify strategies such as Brownfield redevelopment, adaptive reuse of vacant buildings and facilities, and investment in downtowns and Main Street corridors to achieve its vision for the Mohawk Valley. As



further detailed below, the City of Oneonta has vehemently supported and furthers these strategies and initiatives through past and future projects such as the City's Microenterprise Assistance Program; the New York Main Street Program; the mixed-use redevelopment of the Bresee's Building; the impending redevelopment of the Stevens Hardware Building; the recent expansion of the Foothills Performing Arts and Civic Center; the City's ongoing downtown streetscape, water, and sewer improvements; potential redevelopment of the D&H Rail Yard; and plans for the adaptive reuse of numerous buildings and the parking structure on Market Street for the development of a downtown Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area / entertainment district, all of which are further described below. Oneonta's downtown has recently made significant strides in development of the downtown and is currently staring down the barrel of numerous exciting and impending downtown developments.

As alluded above, the REDC has also identified the opportunity for the region to capitalize on the ever-emerging industries of agribusiness and agritourism. In the Upstate Revitalization Investment Prospectus, the REDC indicates that the region should capitalize on the emerging agribusiness market by modernizing agricultural marketing and distribution infrastructure, investing in craft brewing and food processing opportunities, and creating an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship in agribusiness. In its 2015 Progress Report, the Mohawk Valley REDC further discusses the positive impact that the creation of "industry clusters" in the agribusiness and tourism markets can provide to the region. As discussed further below, the concept of a Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area on Market Street is directly in line with the REDC's initiative to support innovation and expansion in the agribusiness and agritourism markets.

### **PAST INVESTMENTS:**

Oneonta, like most upstate New York Cities, has suffered from long-term stagnation and decline. As the region declined, so did the downtown. The community, however, has never felt that its best days are decades past, but that they lie ahead. The City has worked hard to leverage available resources to address its needs, and to position itself for success. As a result of coordinated and concerted efforts from a variety of partners, the City is now on the cusp of reclaiming its past while boldly creating a modern, desirable, 21<sup>st</sup> Century community. Now, as in the past, the downtown is at the core of these efforts.

Physically attractive, and economically growing, Downtown Oneonta is today the center of commerce, culture, entertainment and government in the region. This vibrancy is not an accident, but the direct result of concentrated efforts to revitalize the Downtown as the centerpiece of a strong community with a high quality of life. Some recent investments and efforts that have led to this success include:

**Bresee's Building Redevelopment** – The Bresee Building, a former department store, is one of the Downtown's most prominent buildings. After the store's closing in 1994, the building sat vacant and eventually became a blight on the downtown. In 2009 the City identified a developer, and secured \$2,200,000 in Restore NY funding to incentivize its redevelopment as "Parkview Place". After several years piecing the project together, the original developer eventually walked away. Undeterred, and with the knowledge that the downtown could not succeed without this key building, the City worked to secure another developer and guide the project through completion. In total, the City leveraged over \$3.4M in outside funding, and contributed \$529,000 in community development funds towards the \$6.18M project. The newly restored Parkview Place now houses three commercial businesses on the first floor and market rate, loft-style apartments on the upper floors. These are some of the best quality rental units in the City, and the waiting list for the units, even prior to completion, speaks to the pent-up demand for quality downtown rental housing. This project is testament to the community's perseverance, in addressing a serious community development need, its ability to secure funding sources, and its capacity to partner with the private sector to bring a project to fruition. The City, and its partners, will bring the same level of commitment and expertise to the Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

**Stevens Building Redevelopment** – In 2015, the Stevens Building Redevelopment, a Regional Council Priority project, received \$120,000 of public funds through the Regional Economic Development Council to support redevelopment of the Stevens Hardware Building, which has been vacant since 2013. The Stevens Building is an anchor building on Main Street located immediately adjacent to the recently redeveloped Bresee's building. The proposed redevelopment project involves approximately \$800,000 in renovations to create upper floor market rate housing and a potential main street



grocery. Klugo Enterprises, a principle developer of downtown buildings in Oneonta, and the same developer responsible for the successful redevelopment of the Bresee's Building, will complete the planned renovations.

**Affordable Housing** – Despite successes with revitalizing the Downtown, the fact remains the approximately 32% of all City residents live in poverty. The City believes that it must ensure that all residents, regardless of income, have an opportunity for success, and that starts with a decent, safe, affordable home in which to live. The City has regularly accessed CDBG and AHC funding to renovate owner occupied and income properties in the City and to provide homeownership opportunities. More significantly, the City has partnered with Housing Visions, Inc., a non-profit, Syracuse-based housing developer, to undertake a major housing project that will substantially renovate and construct seven buildings with 60 affordable housing units at a total cost of just under \$16,000,000. The City worked with the developer to package numerous funding sources for this undertaking, including CDBG, HOME, NYSEDA, City loan funds, and the Housing Trust Fund Corporation. This project is yet another example of the City's experience in partner with the private sector to undertake complicated development project.

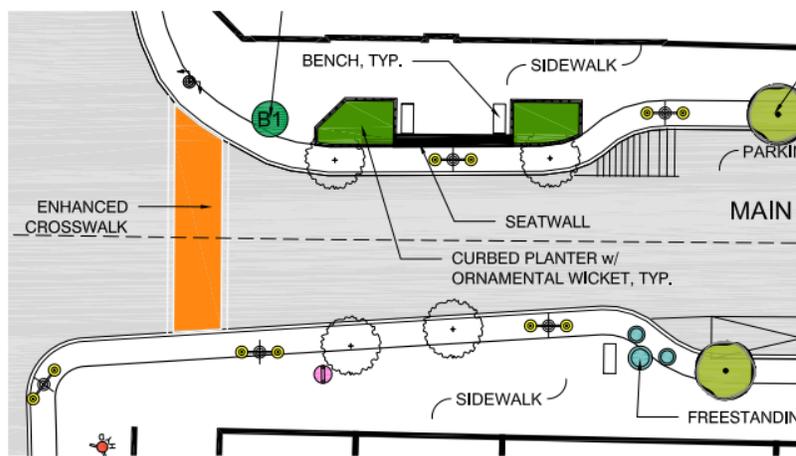
**Microenterprise Assistance** – Today, as in the past, small, locally grown businesses are the heart of a downtown. With 32% of all residents living below the poverty line, starting a new business is out of reach for many residents. To address this problem, the City has secured three CDBG awards to provide Microenterprise Assistance to lower income residents wishing to start or grow businesses. Grant funds were available to allow recipients to purchase equipment, expand capacity, and otherwise improve and expand their business. These programs have resulted in 20 new businesses, 14 expanded businesses, and over 80 new jobs. The programs provide the dual benefit of creating new downtown businesses while improving the socioeconomic standing of its residents. Oneonta will be submitting an application in the 2016 CFA funding round to continue to create new, small, locally owned businesses.

In addition to the City's Microenterprise Program, the Otsego IDA received a \$200,000 grant from the Office of Community Renewal to establish a microenterprise grant fund specifically targeting farmers and agribusiness operators in the County. Nine producers have been awarded grants. Growth among area agribusinesses and farm producers could have an impact on both the Oneonta Rail Yards Project and the Oneonta Food and Craft Beverage Innovation District project (see below), as increased capacity among value-added agribusinesses may translate into tenants for the food hub or users of rail freight transportation.

**New York Main Street** – The attached, multi-story commercial blocks that line Main Street, most of which are over 100 years old, provide the Downtown with a sense of authenticity that cannot be replicated. The City has captured \$500,000 in New York Main Street funding to renovate and restore these buildings. By partnering with property owners, nearly \$800,000 of private funds have been leveraged to renovate over 10 buildings. The City is currently seeking additional NYMS funding to build upon its success.

**Streetscape** – The public realm in a downtown (including the roadway, medians, and sidewalks), contribute significantly to the character and sense of place in a community. With this in mind, in early 2014, the City completed an "Oneonta Downtown Main Street Streetscape Assessment",

which can be downloaded at [www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta](http://www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta). The goal of this plan was to assess existing conditions, and identify opportunities and improvements for the downtown core based on community input and professional recommendations. In addition to aesthetic improvements to enhance Oneonta's unique sense of place, the plan called for improved ADA compliance, way finding,



and use of sustainable materials and construction methods. Construction on this \$550,000+ project commenced in the early spring of 2016, and when completed will dramatically transform the Downtown's public realm. The City leveraged \$400,000 in CDBG-CRF public infrastructure funds along with City dollars, to undertake this project. This significant investment of public funds in the downtown is testament to the City's commitment to its urban core.

**Infrastructure** – The City of Oneonta has a rolling five-year capital plan to ensure that important City infrastructure is properly maintained. In 2016, the City has budgeted approximately \$1.3M for public infrastructure, including \$75,000 for sidewalk replacement and upgrades. In addition to local funds, in recent years the City has captured CDBG Public Facilities funding to ensure a safe, reliable water supply including development of a second well water source and relining the primary water main to the treatment plant. Municipal leadership is also currently in the process of seeking additional funding to improve the dams to the City reservoirs.

Often, a limiting factor to downtown development is a lack of sufficient public water pressure to support upper floor sprinklers. Without sprinklers, upper floor development can be limited. Sufficiently sized mains and a well maintained system in Oneonta provides adequate water pressure to meet sprinkler needs throughout the Downtown and any potential new development.

Due to the ability of the City to carefully plan and budget for needed infrastructure improvements, and to leverage outside resources, the downtown is well served by public infrastructure, including water, sewer, and storm water sewers, and has sufficient capacity to serve new planned development as detailed subsequently.

### **DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:**

These and other efforts have created a strong, vibrant downtown of which the community is proud. Building facades have been renovated, storefront vacancies are low, a new streetscape is being installed, and the Downtown is the hub of community life. City leaders are cognizant, however, that in order to compete in today's national and global economy, a downtown must meet or exceed the highest of standards. Much more is needed than simply fixing some facades, attracting some new businesses, or laying new bricks in order to create a truly great downtown. In order to support the continued growth of the Downtown economy, the City must possess opportunities for development. The City is fortunate in that it can accommodate new growth in a number of ways.

**Existing Building Stock** – Unlike many downtowns ravaged by urban renewal, fires, or demolition, the core of Oneonta's Main Street is a largely intact collection of attached late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mixed use commercial blocks. This historic architecture, much of which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, gives Oneonta an authentic sense of place and a connection to its past that many other downtowns lack.

While many of these building have been renovated and are fully occupied, vacant spaces remain that provide opportunity for redevelopment. Five downtown buildings are currently wholly vacant. While some of these structures can be renovated to accommodate a mix of uses, others may be better suited for removal and reconstruction. All provide opportunities for the community to implement its goals.

There are an additional 8 vacant storefronts than can accommodate new business growth. This is a relatively low (5%) vacancy rate, and indicates a healthy downtown economy. In order to continue this success and grow the economy, the City will need to create new opportunities for businesses. As detailed below, Market Street, one block south of Main Street, provides an exceptionally unique opportunity for significant business expansion and job growth in the community.

The vacancy rates on upper floors are far higher than first floor commercial spaces, and oftentimes these spaces have been vacant and unused for many years. A downtown building cannot be economically viable if only generating income on half or a third of its square footage. It is imperative that, for both the building and the downtown, these structures are fully occupied. There is an estimated 65,000 SF of unoccupied vacant space in at least eight buildings. This space can be repurposed for needed residential units, offices, or other uses. As detailed elsewhere, Oneonta suffers from a dearth of market rate housing options, and new residents, whether they are college faculty, hospital employees, or other professionals, often end up finding housing outside the City. Market rate



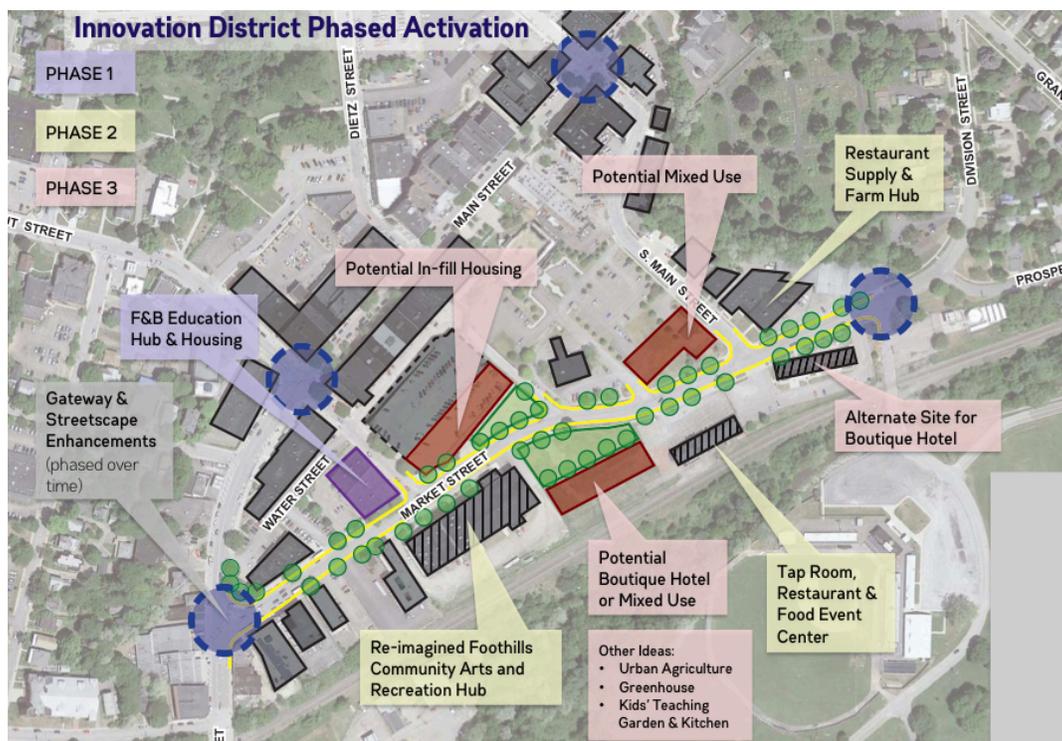
downtown living units have proven exceptionally popular in the community, (see Bresee's Building above) and this vacant space provides the opportunity to address this unmet need. The City hopes to assist private developers in accessing historic tax credits and other sources to support redevelopment.

**Developable Land** – The City realizes that the existing building stock, even if fully developed, will not allow the Downtown to achieve its full potential, and that new construction must also be a major component in efforts to expand the Downtown economy. Although the City is nearly built out, and Main Street is largely intact, the City is fortunate in that it also has vacant properties to accommodate new development. The City has mapped these sites to assist in marketing them to private developers. These include infill sites along Main Street, vacant sites along Market Street, and air space above surface parking lots. There is at least 3 acres of land, not including the parking structure that can accommodate new construction. These sites do not include at least one lot currently occupied by a building slated for demolition.

**Market Street Parking Structure** – The City's only structured parking, located just south of Main Street on Market Street, was built in the 1970's. Despite its age, it remains in good condition and continues to serve the City. Nevertheless, this is a valuable site that must be used to its full potential. This building/site is considered integral to the larger efforts to reclaim the Market Street of Downtown as detailed fully below.

### **REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS:**

**Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area** – Market Street, one block south of Main Street, and adjacent to the D&H rail line and Neawha Park, was once an integral part of the Downtown. Over time, traffic patterns changed, buildings were lost, and focus was shifted to Main Street. Market Street become physically and economically disconnected from the Downtown. In addition to the overall Downtown Economic Development Planning Study, Otsego Now (aka the Otsego County IDA) and the City area now reclaiming this area with plans to create a *Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area*, an exciting new concept that builds on the strengths of the Mohawk Valley Region and the local community. Upon completion, it will be an exciting mixed-use neighborhood unlike any other in Upstate New York. This initiative melds the concept of a food hub, entrepreneurial innovation area, and arts and entertainment district into a bold vision to transform a large swath of the Downtown, and will stimulate private development and creating new jobs. Developed with significant public input, the interconnected components of the initiative include:



*Food Hub and Entrepreneurial Center* – Otsego Now is planning a new multi-purpose agribusiness facility centered on a food hub, craft food and beer, and research and development connected to value-added production. This facility is proposed to be located on the corner of Market and Chestnut Street and will also serve as an Entrepreneurial Center beyond the Food/Ag business sector, and be a center for workforce training, and entrepreneurial support. Tenants may include some or all of the following: value-added agribusinesses, a workforce-training center, an ag-centered business incubator with a commercial kitchen, or one/two local craft brewers. The new building may also provide housing tied to its mission, including the potential for live/work spaces or cooperatively living similar to the nationally acclaimed “Common Space” concept in Syracuse.

Investments toward this vision for downtown Oneonta include:

- Otsego Now received a \$150,000 grant from Empire State Development (\$15,000 IDA match required) to help fund a feasibility study and economic development plan for the food hub. The IDA has retained a top-notch team headlined by Karen Karp & Partners and Elan Planning to conduct the study; preliminary results can be downloaded at [www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta](http://www.oneonta.ny.us/city/government/authentically-oneonta)
- In the most 2015 CFA funding round, Otsego Now was awarded \$700,000 to support acquisition and preparation of the property for the facility.

This concept builds upon regionally identified strengths and strategies. Agricultural Sciences and Technology is an identified STEM-related industry identified in Mohawk Valley’s URI plan and this market is also identified in the Industry Cluster Plan.

*Hotel* – The City has secured \$19,000 in CDBG Panning Funds to undertake a market analysis for a second flagship or boutique hotel in the Market Street area. Oneonta, located in the foothills of the Catskills and a short distance south of Cooperstown, is an ideal location to benefit from the tourism market. Even before the market analysis is complete, the community has already identified a potential developer. The development of a new downtown hotel as part of the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area could leverage upwards of \$2M in investment.

*Market Street Parking Structure Redevelopment* – This structure provides valuable parking for the Downtown, but can be leveraged to have a much greater economic impact. These may include:

- Developing new commercial space. Redeveloping a portion of the street level of the garage, or building in front of the structure could create new commercial space oriented to Market Street. This space could be used for farm and micro-breweries, restaurants, and retail shops. It would also have the added benefit of improving the appearance of the structure and better integrating it with the surrounding architecture.
- Developing an intermodal transportation hub. Part of this structure currently serves as a bus station for both Trailways and Greyhound. Part of Main Street serves as the main hub for the City’s bus service. Creating a single location for the City, County, and private bus service to connect, would improve the community’s overall intermodal transportation system. This facility would also provide other amenities, such as public restrooms, bike racks, and electrical vehicle charging stations, to be a truly intermodal center. The proposed intermodal transportation hub will be across the street from the D&H rail line, and could connect to passenger rail services should it ever be developed.
- Developing new housing. The air space above the garage could be developed to accommodate new mixed-income housing.

*Craft Beverage Innovation Area* – In 2012, Governor Cuomo came to the Mohawk Valley to sign legislation to strengthen and help grow New York State’s craft beer industry. At the time, Governor Cuomo said, “In addition to producing some of the finest beer in the world, New York’s craft breweries are creating jobs, supporting our state’s farmers and hops growers, as well as bringing in tourism dollars in local communities across New York.” Otsego Now and Oneonta are in full agreement. With Brewery Ommegang, one of the foremost craft brewers in the Country, as well as other craft beverage producers such as Cooperstown Distillery, Roots Brewing Company, and Butternut Beer and Ale all within or near Oneonta, Hartwick College’s Center for Craft Food and Beverage, and the Center for



Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship economic development leaders believe that Oneonta can be a center for craft beverages in the area. This may include development of shared brewing facility, R&D facilities, and tap/tasting rooms. Combined with new restaurants grown from the Food Hub, Market Street will be a regional center of food and drink, drawing in tourists, and creating jobs.

*Foothills Performing Arts Center* – The Center (<http://foothillspac.org/>) was constructed on Market Street within the past 10 years. With its 600+ seat theater, it is a center of arts and culture in the community. It provides a wide array of performances, educational programs (including the Orpheus Children’s Theater) and event space. The Destination Marketing Corp for Otsego County is promoting the Greater Oneonta area as a conference and meeting destination for groups of up to 400 – 500. With the Foothills Performing Arts & Civic Center as the meeting destination. Limited additional investment in equipment and facilities is needed to allow the Center to move beyond a local facility to a regional draw. Nevertheless, the Center’s location in the heart of the Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area will make this area a true Arts and Entertainment District.

Once the concept of the Market Street Food and Beverage Innovation area is realized, it will be mixed use neighborhood with new, young entrepreneurs, cultural attractions, residences, restaurants, craft breweries, and hotels, making it one of the most unique, exciting downtown areas in the region. This creative, urban area is specifically seen as attractive to Millennials and tomorrow’s employees and employers, allowing Oneonta to compete with much larger communities for new development and jobs. In total, the Food and Beverage Innovation area provides upwards of \$52M in investment potential. DRI funding will allow the community to move this initiative forward at a quicker pace than it would otherwise.

**D&H Rail Yard Redevelopment Project** – A top priority for the Otsego Now and the City of Oneonta is the re-development of the Oneonta Rail Yards, a major site with significant infrastructure within the City of Oneonta. The site is located immediately adjacent to the Downtown area (see attached map). Otsego Now will be working closely with Norfolk Southern, owners of the Rail Yard, to develop the site for such industries as light manufacturing, distribution, and warehousing. Related uses such as worker’s housing are also being considered. Sustainability, include LEED building certification, would be a centerpiece of the redevelopment. If successful, the Rail Yard could transform Oneonta into an important secondary freight transportation and distribution hub with easy access to both the I-88 trucking corridor and the Norfolk Southern rail freight lines. The site would be one of the most significant industrial development locations in this area of the State.

To date, the Otsego Now will take or has taken these incremental steps toward development of the Rail Yard with the following state and federal support:

- An Office of Community Renewal Grant in the amount of \$47,500 (with a \$2,500 match) to support a feasibility study and economic development plan for the site, conducted by Clark, Patterson & Lee;
- A Federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to cover some of the costs associated with constructing crucial bridge access from I-88 to the Rail Yards site (application pending); and
- In the most recent round of CFA funding, the Otsego IDA received \$500,000 to support the SEQRA and local approval process, as well as pre-engineering and design needs.

There is a strong nexus between the Rail Yard Redevelopment, the Downtown, and the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area. A vibrant, active downtown is crucial to attract new industrial development into the community. Conversely, attracting new industry and jobs to a site adjacent to the Downtown will bolster the downtown economy, and create a demand for new housing and commercial development. The implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative in Oneonta will significantly further the job-creating potential of the Rail Yard Redevelopment. The Rail Yard project is estimated to have an investment potential of \$115M.

**Foreign Trade Zone Designation** – Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ’s) are secure areas under U.S. Customs and Border Protection supervision that are generally considered outside CBP territory upon activation. They are the United States’ version of what are known internationally as free-trade zones. Otsego Now



and the City of Oneonta are working with U.S. Senator Charles Schumer to designate an FTZ in Oneonta, most likely at the Rail Yards. This will significantly boost the economic and job creation potential of the area.

**College Presence** – Oneonta is fortunate to be home to two institutions of higher education: SUNY Oneonta with approximately 5,900 students and Hartwick College with 1,500 students. In addition to contributing to the City's quality of life and unique sense of place, the colleges are also an integral component to the community's economy and potential for growth. For the academic year 2015/2016, SUNY Oneonta will generate over \$114M in revenue, which in turn will support \$177.1M in direct spending by College for wages, benefits, goods & services, capital and equipment expenditures. Additional student, visitor and employee spending, is estimated to contribute \$50M to the local economy. These institutions are clearly an important driver in the local economy, and are key to the continued success of the community and the downtown.

These institutions have participated in the development of this application, and will play a significant role in the growing success of the Downtown. Several college initiatives that have the potential to integrate and support the community's efforts include:

**Center for Community Collaboration and Innovation** – Hartwick College has allocated \$100,000 in seed money to develop the *Center for Community Collaboration and Innovation* (CCCI). The CCCI is a platform, drawing upon an analogy to an operating system from which multiple applications may be run, to facilitate mutually beneficial current and yet unimagined future partnerships between the College and the communities in which they operate, partnerships that are born at the grassroots level out of shared passion, common need, and entrepreneurial initiative. The CCCI serves all constituencies, increasing the quality and quantity of engagement that takes place by lowering the barriers to collaboration among college and community members. The CCCI is also the platform, through its component E-hub, from which curricular and market-based innovation may be developed and tested and through which an entrepreneurial spirit may be nurtured within and beyond the campus confines. The potential to physically locate a future CCCI in the Oneonta Downtown, perhaps with the proposed Food Hub, will further enhance the Downtown's growth potential and leverage College resources for economic development. In addition, discussions are advancing on structuring a program that would utilize business students to provide much needed small business support. Initial ideas have placed the program as a CCCI initiative.

**Center for Craft Food and Beverage** – The Center is a resource for testing, business development, and education that supports small and mid-sized breweries, malthouses, farms, and other craft food and beverage producers. The Center offers laboratory testing services for beer and brewing raw materials such as barley, malt and hops. It provides technical assistance and business planning services as well as professional development opportunities and education. The Center is partially funded by a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Hartwick College was also awarded an incentive from Empire State Development Corporation through New York State's Consolidated Funding Application process.

Hartwick has also participated in wide ranging and repeated discussions focusing on student regional business incubators, summer courses open to the community, downtown art installations, and the desire to hold lectures and performances off-campus (at primarily downtown locations) – engaging and partnering with a wider public audience.

**Startup NY** – SUNY Oneonta is the local participating college in the Governor's Start Up NY program. This program includes sites Downtown Oneonta and could potentially be tied to both the Rail Yard Redevelopment and/or the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area.

**Student Innovation Challenge** – The 2015 Innovation Challenge NY is a "Big Ideas" competition to solve complex regional economic and social challenges. The challenge topic for 2015 was "Re-envisioning Oneonta". The Challenge engaged students in a creative place-making project that seeks to enhance Oneonta as a lively, beautiful, and resilient place. The focus of Re-Envisioning Oneonta is to create components of an intentional downtown that reflects individual and communal preferences and nurtures a public spiritedness to sustain the place across generations. Leveraging the intellectual capital of both students and faculty through project such as this provides significant benefits to college communities such as Oneonta.



## DEVELOPMENT INTEREST:

Significant discussions, expressed interest, including visits to specific developmental sites, have occurred by and with private developers in the City of Oneonta. The specific downtown projects generating enthusiasm for private investment includes the Market Street Food and Beverage Innovation District and the re-development of the Oneonta Rail Yards. The Main Street area and its related opportunities and charm also has drawn attention and development interest.

Specific private developers who has expressed interest in the potential projects, and who are supportive of the Cities Downtown Revitalization Initiative application, includes the Krog Group based in the Buffalo/Orchard Park area in Western New York, KCG Development in Carmel, Indiana, and Green Force Energy from Glens Falls, New York.

The types of local and regional projects gaining significant interest includes, mixed use affordable and market housing, commercial, Industrial, hospitality, agricultural/food processing, craft beverage brewing, and brownfield re-development. There is great potential for private and public partnerships as these projects are advanced while building on the work of Otsego NOW and the Industrial Development Agency in conjunction with the City of Oneonta and Otsego County. NYS funding, in partnership with local investment, has contributed to the advancement of these identified projects and will continue to be a valuable source of financial support moving forward as projects mature with anticipated federal investment added as a valued resource as well.

#### **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.*

Downtown Oneonta is fortunate to be in close proximity to thousands of jobs, including many well-paying, professional jobs such as doctors, college professors, and tech jobs. The City of Oneonta and its partners realize that not only does a downtown need a strong economy and good jobs to support it, but that a good downtown helps to draw new jobs, affordable and market rate housing, and overall new private investment into the community. More and more, a good quality of life, sense of place, and a vibrant community is important to both employers and employees, particularly with younger professionals and the creative class. Investment in the core of the community will yield economic benefit City-wide and in the surrounding area, with a key component being a significant increase in working people living downtown. Below are highlights of the recent job growth successes and impending/potential job growth opportunities:

### RECENT JOB GROWTH:

There has been some recent economic development success in, and in proximity to, the Downtown which has created jobs in many different sectors, from retail, to food production, to manufacturing, and high-tech. These jobs range from entry level to highly skilled, well paid positions. However, the community needs significant investment to truly impact the local economy and support the vital initiatives such as the Rail Yards redevelopment and the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation District, to add the jobs needed in the community. Some recent examples include:

- Downtown – While downtown businesses tend to come and go, and employment numbers are difficult to track, the number of businesses and jobs in the downtown has increased over the years due to concentrated revitalization efforts. Today Downtown Oneonta has nearly 200 businesses employing 1,800 people, cumulatively the largest employer in the community. The missing link has been housing development on the second and third floors of the historic buildings along Main Street. One initial project has proved to be very successful: the Bresse's project has demonstrated that loft and historic apartments on Main Street can be successful.
- Microenterprise Programs – The City's Microenterprise programs have resulted in 20 new City businesses, 14 expanded businesses, and the creation of over 80 new jobs. Clearly significant investment in this area can be beneficial, and a more significant small business



support structure and leadership on marketing and branding, will accelerate small business growth.

- Loxus – A leading developer and manufacturer of ultracapacitors and energy storage products renovated the former National Soccer Hall of Fame to accommodate expansion plans and created 57 high-tech manufacturing jobs. While working hard to compete in the market, a vibrant downtown is required to attract and retain the top talent this company demands.
- Northern Eagle Beverage Distributors – New construction and expansion of a new building resulting in seven new jobs. This business is important to the Oneonta area as it ties into the food and craft beverage sector the City wishes to expand.
- Apple Converting – This company, which designs and manufactures flexible packaging products, including packaging for the food, medical device and pharmaceutical industries, is always looking to expand. The overall ability to attract talent to Oneonta largely depends on the quality of life in the community and the overall vibrancy of the downtown. The need to bring the City to the next level is the centerpiece to attracting the talent needed to grow jobs, grow existing business and attract new commercial opportunities.
- Brooks BBQ and Brooks Bottling – A \$1.1M expansion of this locally grown food business and icon that resulted in at least 4 new jobs.
- Marriott Hotel – The newly constructed Courtyard Marriott, located near the Downtown, resulted in new jobs and employment opportunities. Other hotel projects, including a designation hotel/waterpark are considering sites in the greater Oneonta area. The growth of this sector is dependent on the expansion of the economy from summer, to shoulder seasons, and into the winter. The investment this downtown grant would provide, with projects already underway, can make these goals a reality.
- United Health Services and other medical growth at Bassett and Fox hospitals showcase a promising health care sector. Again, attracting talent to these potential positions and supporting expansion will be dependent on the vibrancy of the City's downtown and housing options.

Additional details on major employers mentioned above that are within walking distance to downtown include A.O. Fox Hospital (Bassett Healthcare) with 796 area employees; SUNY Oneonta with over 1,200 employees (430 are faculty); and Hartwick College with 420 employees (187 are faculty). All of these major employers have a wide range of positions for varying income levels and skills, from entry-level jobs, to physicians and PHD's. As aforementioned, the City needs to continue to create new market rate housing to ensure that it can attract these residents to reside in the City.

Clearly, there are varied employment opportunities in and around Downtown Oneonta to sustain a flourishing downtown economy. This is evident by a low commercial vacancy rate, increasing downtown investment, and waiting lists for new downtown living units. As equally important, however, is the ability of downtown development projects to attract and support new development and create new jobs.

#### NEW JOB GROWTH:

Question 3 of the DRI detailed the redevelopment initiatives currently under development by Otsego Now and the City of Oneonta. These initiatives are projected to create many employment opportunities, and build upon existing industry cluster and job creation priorities for the Mohawk Valley Region. The Downtown Revitalization Initiative will be the impetus to create these jobs much sooner than would otherwise be possible under existing incentive programs.

Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area – The effort, including creation of the Food Hub, construction of a new hotel, development of new craft beverage manufacturers, as well as new



restaurants and retail shops, will directly create 250 jobs, with additional ancillary jobs. These jobs will range from entry-level positions such as housekeeping and food service, to new entrepreneurs, managers, and technology jobs. The estimated \$52,500,000 project is anticipated to leverage \$42,500,000, in private investment. Included with the letters of support (Attachment 2) is a letter of interest from a developer interested in investing in components of this effort.

Rail Yard Redevelopment – Reclaiming and redeveloping over 150 acres of rail-supported commercial real estate into a multi-modal, transportation-driven sustainable, mixed use commercial park will directly create an estimated 500 to 700 jobs. The projected \$115,000,000 initiative cost will leverage \$88,000,000 in private investment.

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

Downtown Oneonta provides big city amenities packaged in small town feel. And when it comes to being “cool”, Oneonta is one of the coolest in the country. In February, 2015, the Matador Network, the world’s largest independent travel publisher, noted Oneonta on its list of “the 20 Coolest Towns in the US”, along with places like Asheville, North Carolina; Laguna Beach, California; and Sun Valley, Idaho. The site states:

*“It’s home to Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta, but Oneonta manages to have an identity beyond just being a college town. The town puts a big emphasis on sustainability – both environmental and economic – and is in an absolutely beautiful setting in the Catskill Mountains. Amazing food, a progressive, sustainably minded populace, a yearly hot air balloon festival, and nearby access to some of the best ski mountains in the Catskills. Nuff said.”*

This designation is not surprising given Downtown Oneonta’s many assets that contribute to a unique sense of place and the type of liveable and creative community that younger generation employees and entrepreneurs expect. Some of the most noteworthy assets that make Oneonta a great place to live, work, and play, include, but are not limited to:

- Housing Choices - Many mixed use buildings provide a variety of housing options for all market segments, including student housing, entry level units for young millenials, and higher end units for professionals and baby boomers. Subsidized and public housing is located within or in close proximity to downtown, ensuring that all have access to decent, affordable housing. However, a large demand for new, quality rental housing remains. In recent years, the lack of housing choices for young professionals has meant that new residents to the community often find housing elsewhere. The creation of new Downtown housing is seen as a significant opportunity to support the growth of City businesses, aid in their recruitment efforts, and entice a greater percentage of this population to live in the City. As detailed previously, additional buildings are ripe for redevelopment, and provide the opportunity to develop needed downtown housing for all income levels. With the aforementioned 60 new Housing Visions units coming online, the City is now turning its attention to the Oneonta City Housing Authority’s James Lettis Apartment Complex, located immediately adjacent to the Downtown. The 30 unit apartment complex is nearing the end of its life, and the City is looking for foster a collaboration between the Authority and a private developer to replace the facility with a new, mixed income development. The historic Armory Building, across the street from the complex and owned by the City, is also being considered for mixed income housing redevelopment.
- A variety of restaurants, coffeehouses, and taverns meet the varied needs and desires of all ages and incomes, from simple pizza parlors and artistic cafes, to fine dining and bars providing a vibrant nightlife scene.



- Abundant recreation space. Neahwa Park is located at the southern edge of the Downtown, off of Market Street. At 64 acres, it is the City's primary recreation destination, with ball fields, walking trails, a pond, picnic pavilions, and a host of other amenities. Historic Damaschke Field, located within the park, is the home field of the Oneonta Outlaws of the Perfect Game Collegiate Baseball League. The park also includes a creek-front walking trail that connects the City sidewalk system and a system of park trails. The City will be seeking 2016 CFA funding to connect this trail system to the existing Susquehanna River Greenway Trail, creating a direct pedestrian connection that brings users from the downtown urban environment to a rural waterfront trail in less than a mile. Although not directly tied into the Downtown, there is a network of nearby mountain bike trails that is very popular, particularly for young adults. Huntington Park is a smaller, passive recreation park located only a block from Main Street. Muller Plaza, located on Main Street in front of the Clarion Hotel, provides a more urban open space for Downtown events and gatherings. Hiking and skiing in the Catskill Mountains is less than an hour away.
- Access to Healthy Food. The Green Earth Health Food Store on Market Street provides a full array of organic, pesticide free eating options. The City is currently working with two different developers with hopes to expand this business to provide a wider array of healthy food options. The Steven's Block renovation, detailed previously, is proposing a location for either this or another downtown grocery. Destination Oneonta sponsors a weekly downtown Farmer's Market (<http://www.oneontafarmersmarket.org/>) on Muller's Plaza from May through October, and at the Main Street walkway from November to April. This provides another venue for local residents to access fresh, locally produced food products and a true farm to table experience. Full service grocery stores are located less than a half mile from the Downtown.
- Intermodal Transportation – Oneonta is well served by an intermodal and interconnected transportation network. It is easily accessible by car from Interstate 88 and NYS highways, and Downtown has sufficient parking to accommodate vehicle use. The City also has one of the best, and most utilized, public bus systems in upstate New York. The hub of this system is located on Main Street, and from there riders can connect to all areas of the City, including major employers such as Fox Memorial Hospital, SUNY Oneonta, and Hartwick College. Otsego County's bus system has connections to the City's system, so that residents in rural areas of the County can commute into the City and travel to their final destinations on the City system. Both County and City buses are equipped with bike racks, providing an intermodal connection and giving residents options. A good network of sidewalks furthers transportation choices. Lastly, both Greyhound and Trailways provide bus service to the community, with stations at the City parking structure on Market Street. Simply, anyone living or working in the City can access all needed goods and services without the need to use a vehicle. As detailed elsewhere, the City has two major goals up improve its intermodal transportation system. One is to continue to implement Complete Street initiatives to encourage more residents to use alternative transportation choices. The second is to develop an intermodal transportation hub at the Market Street parking structure. While not located in the Downtown, it is important to note the City has recently undertaken significant improvements to their municipal airport.
- Arts, Entertainment, and Culture – Regardless of personal tastes, there are cultural and entertainment outlets to suit all needs. As a “college town”, Oneonta has an artistic and cultural presence befitting of a much larger community. While there are far to many amenities to list, the most notable include:

*Foothills Performing Arts Center* - In 2000, leading citizens from various sectors of the City of Oneonta incorporated the Foothills Performing Arts Center, a forum for cultural and civic activity conceived to serve the needs of Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego Counties in Central New York. Following the acquisition of a site on Market Street in the city's historic downtown district, the initial phase of construction was completed with the opening of the Production Center in 2005. Completion of the entire facility, which houses a large theater and considerable civic and exhibition space, was substantially completed in 2009. Foothills is a public, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) charitable institution. Its primary mission is to provide cultural enrichment to the tri-county area (with an eye, eventually, to an even wider radius), not only in terms of arts events, but in educational and outreach initiatives as well, thus stimulating the



economy in diverse ways: attracting and retaining professionals and businesses, and helping to keep young people in the area after college. Foothills Performing Arts Center is emerging as a magnet for many artistic events through collaboration with booking agents and productions by renting organizations (e.g. visiting chamber music groups, rock bands, etc.). Despite its success, some of the current facilities and equipment are in need of expansion or improvement to broaden the range of offerings at the Center and allow it to become a regional arts destination. The Foothills Performing Arts Center is seen as a major anchor in the planned Market Street Arts and Entertainment Area.



*Oneonta Theater* – This historic theater, on Chestnut Street in the Downtown, was constructed in 1898 for Opera and Vaudeville acts. It eventually became a movie theater, and is now operated as a venue for live performances of all kinds. It hosts events on a regular basis, and is available for rentals. The Theater and the Foothill PAC, provide guests with two distinct venues for performances. The City believes that improvements to both facilities, and better coordination between them, will help to further solidify Oneonta as a center of arts culture in the region.

*Catskill Symphony Orchestra* – It is exceedingly unique that a small City such as Oneonta can boast its own symphony. Since 1953, The Catskill Symphony Orchestra (CSO) has provided an unparalleled resource to entertain, educate and inspire audiences of all ages in upstate New York by presenting an ensemble of the highest artistic quality. The CSO typically holds five concerts per season to an audience of over 3,500 patrons. Under the direction of Maestro Charles Schneider, the CSO selects repertoire from the five major musical periods—Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary. Each season includes beloved, familiar works, unfamiliar traditional works and new music. The Symphony is an asset that sets Oneonta’s cultural scene apart from the rest.

*CANO* - The Community Arts Network of Oneonta (CANO) provides opportunities for local artists to showcase their work. Since 1970, the Arts Council has served communities in the greater Oneonta region by creating a cultural, educational, social, and economic environment in which the arts can flourish. They provide or facilitate artistic presentations to thousands of people in the region. This includes concerts, exhibitions, classes and more. CANO partners with many other organizations to further enrich art and culture in the area, including: Oneonta Arts Task Force, The Oneonta Concert Association, Main Street Oneonta, First Night Oneonta, and Oneonta World of Learning.

*Colleges* – Both SUNY Oneonta and Hartwick College offer numerous artistic performances, lectures, and art exhibits that provide cultural outlets for those of all ages. This creates a cultural atmosphere that is unique to college communities.

*Community Events* – The Downtown and greater Oneonta area is host to many community festivals and events for all ages, including a First Night Celebrations to ring in the New Year, a summer music series, balloon festival, holiday parades, and much more. A community events calendar (<http://www.everythingoneonta.com/>) allows residents and visitors to find events to suit their tastes.

**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.*



## **DOWNTOWN PLANS:**

The success of a community is only as strong as its policies and plans. Change is inevitable, and through the careful introduction and use of planning and policy documents, the City of Oneonta has made it their mission to direct that change in such a way as to increase the quality of life for its citizens, and foster the development of a vibrant downtown.

**Comprehensive Plan** – A Comprehensive Plan is the foundational document for a city's growth. It establishes an overall vision for the future of a community. Adopted in 2007, the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Oneonta has been at the forefront of future plans, and continues to provide a vision, guidelines, and standards for the implementation of new, innovative studies and plans.

The Comprehensive Plan of 2007 includes an in depth look at the existing conditions of Oneonta, and considers several high priority action items. These action items focus on policies that affect Oneonta's unique downtown with topics such as destination and image, economic health and revitalization, quality of life, downtown needs, administration and government, arts and culture, and also includes action items concerning the City's relationship with both SUNY Oneonta and Hartwick Colleges.

In recent months, the City has taken steps toward updating the Comprehensive Plan, again ensuring that this document is relevant in the continuously changing economic and developmental progression of the City of Oneonta. The City understands that with each passing year, new topics of concern arise. Baby Boomers are quickly leaving the workforce, making room for younger generations. Millennials are also among the throngs of people who fill the shops and bars of Oneonta, soaking up the unique, authentic experience that only this City can offer. These changes in the workforce, as well as the aging housing stock, movement toward more energy efficient homes, cars, and transportation are exactly why the Comprehensive Plan is being overhauled.

Comprehensive Plan aside, the variety and number of well rounded plans and reports that have shaped what Oneonta is today, are worth mentioning.

**Comprehensive Housing Plan** – The Comprehensive Housing Plan, written in 2013 is intended as a supplement to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. It is completely focused on housing, allowing for a more robust look into the housing situation within the City of Oneonta. The plan, created by a Housing Task Force identified root causes of Oneonta's housing challenges and focused on repairing the underlying causes that have hampered housing development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation in the City. Issues of housing have plagued many downtowns in the Mohawk Valley, and through the Comprehensive Housing Plan, as well as the updated Comprehensive Plan, the City intends on using their resources to continue to make Oneonta an ideal place to live.

**Oneonta 2030** – A report that was also adopted in 2013 was a Sustainability Task Force Document entitled "Oneonta 2030- Growing into a Sustainable Community". This document addressed four key areas in the community deemed to be crucial to the future vitality of the community. Food, Community Environment, Energy, and Transportation. These are categories that all have elements that are impacted by people, and will benefit from the use of sustainable practices.

**Bike Friendly Report** – Another attempt to reduce the City's carbon footprint and maintain a sustainable future for Oneonta, as well as promote multi-modal transportation, is the 2013 Bike Friendly Report issued by City. The focus of this report was to improve the environment, both on and off-road, to help make biking in the City of Oneonta a safer and more attractive activity for the community, and visitors. The report also called out specific goals that have been met in reference to the cycling community. It is a goal of the community to continue to make the community more bike friendly.

**Downtown Main Street Streetscape Assessment** – In 2014, the Downtown Main Street Streetscape Assessment was adopted as a means to identify a series of steps and priorities as well as streetscape improvements along Main Street in Downtown Oneonta. This plan has taken the Comprehensive Plan one step further, focusing on a smaller scale area of the Oneonta, specifically Main Street, and identifies improvements that should be made to the streetscape of the Downtown. It includes recommendations for parking needs, special needs accessibility, as well as other elements that will provide the community with an aesthetically pleasing experience in the Downtown. The changes identified in the project, act as a basis for updates and changes in other areas of the Downtown as well.

**Economic Development Planning Study** – The Economic Development Planning Study is a plan that was completed most recently. This plan consists of a series of strategic actionable steps that are



intended to call attention to the importance of the downtown as both a location of goods and services, as well as expand upon its economic potential as a regional center for entertainment, arts and cultural attractions, community events, dining, and year-round living. With a thorough market and housing analysis, the study is able to identify trends within the City concerning quality of life and livability. It then offers recommendations for the City to follow, as well as strategies for how to achieve these goals. It is an in depth look into the true workings of the City, and is a guiding document for the future of the City.

The creation and implementation of each of these plans show that the City is well rounded and always moving forward. All of these plans, as well as future plans ensure that the focus for the City's future is unique and in the best interest of its citizens.

### **MODERN ZONING AND PARKING STANDARDS:**

The Zoning for the City of Oneonta was adopted in 2011 and furthers Smart Growth principles. The Zoning ordinance contains thorough design guidelines to ensure the City's unique sense of place. The Zoning Ordinance includes Mixed Use Zoning Districts, as well as detailed parking requirements, and parking design requirements for these zones as well. The Ordinance encourages Mixed Use development, and contains helpful guidelines for citizens to follow in order to maintain the authentic characteristics of the Downtown, as well as create a safe and desirable place for people to visit and live. Zoning also requires ADA accessibility, and contains general design concepts that promote sustainability, use integration, streetscape and the pedestrian environment, as well as architectural and massing considerations.

### **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE:**

The Downtown Business Association, "Destination Oneonta" (<http://destinationoneonta.com/>) is a non-profit member-based organization dedicated to the advancement of the local Oneonta economy through attraction of visitors to downtown Oneonta. The organization operates and staffs a welcome center in downtown to provide information about businesses, events, and attractions in the area as well as provide promotional materials. The organization sponsors and supports a number of events in the downtown, as well as Oneonta's downtown farmer's market.

The Comprehensive Plan of 2007 includes language and action items for Downtown Business Improvement Districts (BID). While the city currently has no BID, they understand the importance and benefit of these districts, and have the capabilities and knowledge of how to form and maintain a Business Improvement District.

### **SUSTAINABILITY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY:**

The City of Oneonta has been extremely pro-active in the area of sustainability and energy efficiency projects. Design standards for the downtown area have been addressed extensively in the City's Zoning Ordinance. Within their general design guidelines, it is explicitly stated that new buildings, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings should use green building technologies for mechanical systems, energy needs, and construction materials. It is also stated within the ordinance that climate sensitive, energy efficient, and environmentally conscious design considerations be incorporated to create healthier, more productive, and more sustainable places to live.

An example of the City's desire for energy efficiency include the 2013 replacement of 146 downtown light fixtures. A \$250,000 legislative grant was secured to replace the former high-pressure sodium light fixtures with energy and money saving LED fixtures. These fixtures not only saved the City money and energy usage, but it also maintained the historic integrity of the downtown.

The City hopes to further its leadership in sustainable development and lower carbon emissions by encouraging development of rooftop solar, installing electrical vehicle charging stations (hopefully powered by solar), promoting the development of LEED certified buildings, and reducing vehicle miles traveled by implementing Complete Streets policies and encouraging non-motorized means of transportation. New development initiatives, including the Rail Yards and the Market Street Food and Craft Beverage Innovation Area, will incorporate LEED construction and LEED-ND development standards.



## **LAND BANKS:**

As a way to combat blight and keep properties on the tax roll, Otsego County and the City of Oneonta the Mohawk Valley Land Bank. This land bank was put into place to acquire vacant sites, rundown and abandoned properties, and tax delinquent parcels. The Land Bank also has the power to borrow money to secure sites, and find buyers interested in making these properties productive. The Mohawk Valley Land Bank includes six other counties, and has the potential to make a sizable impact on struggling communities in this region. Specifically for the City of Oneonta, the Land Bank will allow the Downtown to address issues with vacant or abandoned properties, bringing new life to historic buildings, who otherwise would wither away and eventually be torn down. By adaptive re-use of these structures, Oneonta will be able to preserve the authentic character and foster a healthy, livable community.

## **TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT:**

While the City of Oneonta does not currently define its Downtown Center as an official Transit Oriented Development, in the purest definition of TOD, the Downtown does rise to the vibrant, livable, sustainable, and financially secure notions of a Transit Oriented Development. The City has taken great strides to take its downtown from a vehicle dependant core, to one that not only welcomes multi-modal transportation, but encourages it. The regional and local transit hub planned for Market Street will cater to all demographics. With installation of bicycle lanes, and focus on the redevelopment of the Market Street Parking Structure, as well as proposed redevelopment of the Rail Yards, creating housing choices within close proximity to transit and job centers, Oneonta has found it extremely important to encourage a walkable design that not only connects the different modes of transportation, but also initiates a pattern of not relying on automobiles for primary forms of transportation.

## **COMPLETE STREETS/LAWS:**

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oneonta became more reliant on the automobile. Bound by the Susquehanna River and I-88 to its south, the City of Oneonta is nestled in a cozy enclave at the foothills of the Catskill Mountains. The City has, however awakened from its long sleep, focusing on a future that is compact and livable, as well as sustainable. Recent development in the Downtown core has pushed the City to create streets that will accommodate all. In the 2014 Downtown Main Street Streetscape Assessment, the City assessed what types of streetscape conditions currently exist along Main Street, and recommended a design structure that has the potential to serve everyone. While this plan is focused primarily on Main Street in the City, it also encourages other areas of the City to follow through with the proposed recommendations, allowing for a more pedestrian friendly, walkable community that allows bicycles, busses, pedestrians and automobiles to co-exist in a harmonious manner. It is the City's goal to foster a true multi-modal community.

## **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR NEW AMERICANS:**

The City of Oneonta prides itself for its inclusiveness of all people, and shows this solidarity by its inception of the "Commission on Community Relations and Human Rights," consisting of seven City of Oneonta residents appointed by the Mayor to promote the ideal that neighborliness and good community relations are one of a City's greatest assets; that prejudice and discrimination against any individual or group menace peace or public welfare; and that promoting tolerance and celebration of diversity is a worthy goal of the City of Oneonta. The Common Council of the City of Oneonta established this commission through which the citizens and employees of this City are kept informed of developments in community relations, and through which individuals and groups in the City of Oneonta are officially encouraged to promote tolerance and goodwill toward all people.



**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.*

Historic Downtown Oneonta is the heart and soul of the community, and its success is due to both the commitment of local leaders to foster its improvement, and to resident's support of its businesses. The projects and initiatives outlined herein, including but not limited to, the City's Comprehensive Plan, the 2016 Economic Development Planning Study, the Streetscape Redevelopment Plan, and the Market Street Food and Beverage Innovation Area concept were not developed in a vacuum, but through robust community-based planning efforts. Both the City of Oneonta and Otsego Now firmly believe that efforts such as these must be built from the ground up with community input and support. As this application demonstrates, local leaders are adept at partnering with the private sector to leverage available resources and bring ideas to reality.

The development of this DRI application was guided and informed by a broad coalition of stakeholders, including City elected leaders and staff, Otsego Now, SUNY Oneonta, Hartwick College, Otsego County elected leaders, Otsego County Planning Department, Foothills Performing Arts Center, Destination Oneonta, Destination Marketing Corp. for Otsego County, CADE, and others. The cooperative relationship of all individuals and organizations, working towards a shared vision of the Downtown, speaks to the community's ability to collaborate to move the community forward and to develop and implement a Strategic Investment Plan that will maximize the impact of State funding, leverage significant amounts of private investment, and create hundreds of new jobs.

Gary Herzig, Mayor of the City of Oneonta, will assume responsibility for overseeing the development of the Strategic Investment Plan, in partnership with Otsego Now. In anticipation of moving forward quickly upon nomination, an initial Steering Committee has been established, including:

Gary Herzig, Mayor, City of Oneonta (Chair)

Sandy Mathes, CEO, Otsego Now (Co-Chair)

Kathy Clark, Chair, Otsego County Legislature

Dr. Nancy Kleniewski, President, SUNY Oneonta

Dr. Margaret L. Drugovich, President, Hartwick College

Carolyn Lewis, ED Coordinator, SUNY Oneonta/REDC Representative

Luisa Montanti, Board President, Foothills Performing Arts Center

Rebecca Morgan, Executive Director, Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship

Dan Maskin, Executive Director, Opportunities for Otsego

Rev. Teresa Sivers, Member, Oneonta Commission on Community Relations and Human Rights

Wayne Carington, Downtown Business Owner

It is anticipated that this Committee will be revised and updated following DRI nomination and input from New York State.

The City has received many letters documenting their support for this endeavor. These letters are included as Attachment 2 to this document



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

In addition to the information above, there are two other issues that set Oneonta apart in securing the Mohawk Valley's nomination for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative. These are:

**Inclusiveness and Poverty Reduction** – 32% of all City of Oneonta residents live in poverty. This is the highest rate of poverty of any City in the Mohawk Valley region. As a result, Oneonta, as one of the top ten most impoverished Cities in New York, was included in Governor Cuomo's 2016 Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative, and was awarded \$500,000 to combat poverty in the City. Oneonta is the smallest City of those included in the Governor's initiative.

Oneonta does not consider its large number of lower income persons a challenge to downtown revitalization and economic development efforts, but does believe that it must work to ensure that its community development and economic development efforts "lifts all boats" and that all can equally share in Oneonta's rising.

Oneonta Mayor, Gary Herzig, has appointed Opportunities for Otsego (OFO) as the lead organization for the Poverty Reduction Initiative. OFO helps alleviate poverty and fosters self-sufficiency through comprehensive and holistic client-centered services. It is a goal of the City to tie the work from the Poverty Reduction Initiative to the Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Therefore, the Mayor has asked OFO Executive Director Dan Maskin to sit on the DRI Steering Committee. The combination of a significant investment in public funds for development efforts (DRI) with a concerted poverty reduction program in a smaller, isolated economy such as Oneonta creates a unique opportunity. It will provide a laboratory for ideas and allow for greater experimentation in order to maximize the impact on those in poverty.

Specific programs or initiatives have yet to be identified, but could include workforce training, perhaps tied to the Food Hub/ Entrepreneurial Center, to prepare lower income persons for jobs, requirements for local hiring for jobs created under the DRI, or establishing pay floors for DRI-created jobs to ensure a living wage. It will, hopefully, provide a template for other communities to better link poverty reduction efforts with community and economic development efforts so that more New Yorkers can participate in the growing economy.

**Tourism** – Oneonta sees tourism development as a "value-added" sector to the Downtown economy. While not a primary driver in redevelopment efforts, it is a secondary component to them. Tourism is the fourth largest industry in New York State, and it continues to grow. In 2014, according to the most recent statewide data available, traveler spending grew 5.4%. Otsego County is behind only Oneida County in the Mohawk Valley Region when it comes to traveler spending (over \$175,000,000 in 2014). This is a 4.8% increase over the previous year. An estimated 400,000 people visit the County annually and those numbers continue to grow. In the first quarter of 2016, room occupancy rates were up 15%. This is largely due to increases in the Oneonta area, as many accommodations in Cooperstown are seasonal.

Oneonta's geographic location provides significant opportunity to benefit from a tourism market. It is located just over three hours from New York City, less than an hour from the Catskill State Park and ski areas, and mid-way between Albany and Binghamton. Major tourist attractions, such as the Baseball Hall of Fame, Brewery Ommegang, and Howe Caverns are just a short drive away. As the largest population center within a 30+ mile radius, it is natural that visitors to the region are drawn to the City of Oneonta as a base.

A 2008 Study on Accommodations and Retail in the Greater Cooperstown completed by Alexander Thomas, Ph.D. (SUNY Oneonta) and Polly Smith Ph.D. (Utica College) states, "The City of Oneonta, for instance, has an infrastructure of eateries, pubs, and other entertainment options that could serve as a foundation for area tourism. Younger visitors (e.g., twenties and early thirties) could start visiting Oneonta and driving to other areas for attractions (such as the Baseball Hall of Fame)". A study completed by the same team in 2007 states, "As the tourism economy centered in Cooperstown expands, Oneonta could develop its own infrastructure to better appeal to those coming in to the area every year. Indeed, as Cooperstown has focused increasingly on baseball tourism during the past ten years, Oneonta is well placed to focus on the arts and crafts tourists who historically have constituted a major tourist population visiting the area."



The unique downtown provides an authentic experience that travelers want. The development of a second downtown hotel, and the Market Street Area, will only enhance Oneonta's appeal to a wide array of travelers, and increase the economic impact of the travel and tourism industry.

## Summary

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The Oneonta community is the epitome of the type of downtown that the DRI was envisioned for:

- It has a good, healthy historic downtown that enjoys a high level of community support
- It has an authentic, interesting sense of place that supports a high quality of life
- It has two colleges and a young population on which to build a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy
- It has a robust and diversified arts and cultural scene with a lively nightlife
- It has a motivated team with a track record of leveraging public funds for private investment and for bringing projects from conception to completion
- It has done the hard work and laid the foundation for substantial growth and new investment
- It has bold plans in place to elevate the Downtown from good to great, and create hundreds of new jobs in the process
- It is ready to go, from day one, and is committed to its success.

If nominated for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, and given the opportunity, Oneonta will rise.



## *ATTACHMENTS*

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Attachment 1 - Maps – provided as a separate document

Attachment 2 – Letters of Support - provided as a separate document

