

Date	May 8, 2024 (6-8pm)
Project	Waterloo Downtown Revitalization Initiative
Location	Waterloo Middle School - LGI Room, 65 Center Street, Waterloo, NY
Attendees	Local Planning Committee, Urban Strategies Inc., Department of State, and ~20 Members of the Public
Purpose	Local Planning Committee Meeting #1

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### **Overview**

As the steering body of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) process, the role of the LPC is to brainstorm ideas, provide direction to the consultant team, review planning products, discuss, evaluate, and recommend projects, and act as ambassadors to the program. The LPC meets regularly over the planning process, with the following dates tentatively scheduled:

- Wednesday, June 12 (5-7pm)
- Wednesday, July 31 (5-7pm)
- Wednesday, September 11 (5-7pm)
- Wednesday, October 9 (5-7pm)
- Wednesday, October 30 (if needed) (5-7pm)

*LPC Meeting #1 was the first official meeting of the Local Planning Committee and a key milestone event. The work session provided an opportunity for the group to further familiarize themselves with the DRI program and their role as LPC members, refresh their understanding of Waterloo's DRI Application, and make suggestions for future engagement activities. The meeting concluded with a visioning exercise facilitated by Urban Strategies to understand downtown's opportunities and challenges and to draw out the LPC's desired outcome from the DRI. This early input will inform the development of the draft vision and goals for Waterloo.*

### **Meeting Agenda**

- Welcome and Introductions
- Code of Conduct Refresher
- DRI Program Overview

- DRI Planning Process
- Your Role as the LPC
- Public Engagement
- Waterloo's DRI Application
- What's Next?
- Visioning Exercise
- Public Comment Period

## ***Meeting Summary***

The following is a high-level summary of the information that was presented at LPC Meeting #1. The presentation slides that were used at this meeting are available on the project website: [WaterlooDRI.com](http://WaterlooDRI.com).

- Opening remarks were provided by Sam Aldrich (DOS), followed by a round of introductions of the LPC members and the consultant team.
- DOS delivered a presentation, which included:
  - A reminder of the Code of Conduct and the process of documenting conflicts of interest.
  - An overview of the DRI, touching on:
    - Program goals, with examples of DRI projects that have been implemented in other communities.
    - The roles and responsibility of the State team, consultant team, and the LPC.
    - The planning process and key tasks (process phases and timeline, eligible/ineligible project types, matching requirements, identifying projects, project evaluation, and recommending projects for funding, and project implementation)
- Urban Strategies presented the overall engagement process and the specifics of upcoming events. This included:
  - A description of the range of engagement activities that would be held (public comment periods, public workshops, info sessions, stakeholder meetings, online surveys, etc.)
  - An overview of the activities planned for later in May, which included Public Workshop #1 as an introduction to DRI and an opportunity to solicit input and feedback from the community; an info booth/storefront display to promote participation in the workshop; an Open Call for Projects info session aimed at potential project sponsors, which will include

opportunities for one-on-one meetings; and meetings with downtown stakeholders and community leaders.

- Urban Strategies also provided an overview of the Open Call for Projects, explaining the purpose of the Open Call (being to cast a broad net for revitalization projects and ensure everyone can submit) and the types of projects that should be submitted (e.g., well-defined projects that are ready for implementation in the short term). Urban Strategies also provided a brief overview of the information that needs to be submitted as part of the project application.
- LPC Co-Chair Mayor Walter Bennett provided an overview of the Waterloo DRI vision and the DRI boundary, noting that the DRI committee refined and shrank the DRI boundary since previous applications to the DRI program to create a compact area where revitalization efforts can be concentrated, while still capturing strategic opportunity sites. LPC Co-Chair Julia Hoyle, a Council Member of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (REDC), shared why the Village of Waterloo's application was successful, noting that the projects were well-connected, activated the canal as a major asset, and created opportunities for people to meet up and slow down, and that there was excitement in the community about the DRI and the projects.
- Urban Strategies facilitated a visioning exercise with the committee. LPC members were presented with the visions set out in the Village's DRI application and Comprehensive Plan, and were asked to respond to three questions:
  - What is the biggest challenge facing downtown Waterloo today?
  - What type of project do you think is most needed in downtown Waterloo?
  - What outcome of the Waterloo DRI would you be most proud to see?
- Urban Strategies will review and synthesize the input from the LPC to refine the DRI vision and goals, which will be presented back to group to confirm, and shared with the public for input. Input included:
  - *Biggest challenges:* attracting visitors / getting people to stop; run-down buildings and empty storefronts; a lack of foot-traffic and vibrancy; a lack of parking/welcoming parking areas; challenges in business development; limited things for kids to do; not enough community connection.
  - *Most needed projects:* façade improvements and beautification; more shops, restaurants, places to hang out, and other activity (e.g., a brewery); new development and rehabilitation (mixed-use, residential); more canal amenities; green space; more connections to the downtown.
  - *Outcomes that would make the LPC proud:* a revitalized southwest corner; building improvements; better connections to the canal so that it becomes part of the downtown; empty spaces that become developed; happy locals

and more community interaction; a clear sense of local identity; new jobs; a bustling Main Street.

***LPC Questions and Discussion***

- A member of the LPC asked a question of clarification around conflicts of interest where an LPC member is involved in a project. DOS responded that they would need to declare the conflict and recuse themselves, and refrain from advocating for that project; however, they are able to provide factual information about that project.
- A member of the LPC asked whether Urban Strategies had previous experience working in the context of small places like Waterloo. Urban Strategies works in communities of all sizes, and has been involved in two previous DRIs, including in Perry, a village of 3,600 residents.
- A member of the LPC asked whether members of the public could contact the consultant team as well. The public is welcome to reach out to Urban Strategies through the project website: [WaterlooDRI.com](http://WaterlooDRI.com).
- A member of the LPC asked whether the minimum project cost of \$75,000 was inclusive of the private matching. DOS confirmed that \$75,000 is the minimum total project cost (i.e., DRI funding + other funding).
- A member of the LPC asked whether a project sponsor considering applying for the Small Project Grant Fund (SPGF) would have to submit at the same time as a stand-alone application. Project sponsors are welcome to submit their project as a stand-alone application for DRI funding, though the LPC may decide that it is more suited to the SPGF based on the nature of the project and its overall budget. Potential applicants to the SPGF may also submit a SPGF Interest Form (which will be made available later) to demonstrate there would be demand for the SPGF. Eventually, potential applicants to the SPGF, if the SPGF receives DRI funding, would need to submit a separate application through that program.
- A member of the LPC asked whether the submitted projects would be posted to the website. When the time comes, a new “Projects” page will provide details on the applications and will be updated as projects removed from consideration or evolve.
- A member of the LPC asked how robust the project application form is. Urban Strategies provided an overview of the various components of the form and required information. The application will be made available once the Open Call for Projects is officially launched (end of May / early June).
- A member of the LPC asked for clarification on the matching requirement. Private project sponsors must provide a minimum match of 25%, though the LPC may choose to increase this amount to extend the DRI investment and ensure that project sponsors have “skin in the game”. There is no matching requirement for public / non-profit sponsors. The pros and cons of various approaches to matching

requirements will be discussed at LPC Meeting #2 and the LPC will decide at that time.

- A member of the LPC asked how much total project funding can be expected to come about through the Open Call in a place like Waterloo. DOS/Urban Strategies shared the example of the Perry DRI, where a total of 25 applications were received, representing total project costs of \$38M and a total DRI request of \$24M.
- A member of the LPC asked about the timeframe for identifying, vetting, and recommending projects. The Open Call is expected to be launched towards the end of May or early June, with applications due in mid-July. Projects will be introduced to the LPC at LPC Meeting #3 in July. The LPC would likely recommend a slate of projects at LPC Meeting #5 or #6 in October.
- A member of the LPC asked why the LPC recommends \$12-15M in projects. DOS explained that there are reasons why a project sponsor might not make use of DRI funding that they are awarded. Recommending \$12-15M of projects ensures that there can still be \$10M in projects if one falls of the list.
- A member of the LPC asked what level of technical or financial assistance is available to project sponsors for project development. DOS/Urban Strategies explained that projects are expected to be well-defined and ready for implementation in the short-term. The consultant team cannot help to create a project from scratch, but can provide guidance and support (e.g., reviewing plans, budgets, and *pro formas*, assisting to refine concepts, etc.). The consultant team can't help you find financing or develop a business plan; however, DOS has contacts and resource booklets that can be provided.
- A member of the LPC asked for clarification that DRI funding is a reimbursable grant. This is correct. A project must be complete before DRI funds are released, meaning that bridge financing might be required.
- Urban Strategies asked the LPC for recommendations on stakeholders who should be engaged in the process. Suggestions included: Rotary and Kiwanis; the Waterloo Recreation Director; an emerging merchants association; Celebrate / Commemorate; the developers of LaFayette Apartments. Urban Strategies will connect with these and other groups.
- A member of the LPC asked if there would be a social media presence for the Waterloo DRI. Public notices will go through the Village's Facebook page, and LPC members are encouraged to help spread the word through their networks. Another LPC member suggested that events be announced on the radio through Public Service Announcements.
- A member of the LPC asked whether potential project sponsors are made aware of contracting requirements in advance. Some information is included in the project

application, but ultimately it will depend on the contracting agency, which is different depending on the project type (DOS, HCR, ESD).

- A member of the LPC asked whether the DRI boundary could be modified and whether it was considered to go farther east along Main Street. The LPC may decide to make minor adjustments to the boundary, but the area should continue to be a compact area to focus revitalization and create synergies between projects. Previous applications included a larger DRI boundary, but it was refined and reduced, which ultimately was part of the reason Waterloo was selected.
- A member of the LPC asked whether projects change through the process. Some projects do continue to change. For example, a project sponsor may pivot their project based on findings from the downtown profile and assessment. Urban Strategies will keep the LPC posted on the evolution of projects.
- A member of the LPC asked when it would be determined how much money would be reimbursed by DOS. DOS clarified that project sponsors would indicate a DRI funding request for the LPC to consider. In some cases, the LPC might ask a project sponsor whether they would be able to increase non-DRI funding. Funding doesn't have to be fully in place. A letter of intent from a bank could indicate, for example, that bridge financing of a certain amount could be provided subject to DRI funding of a certain amount. The consultant team can point project sponsors to other sources of funding (e.g., Restore NY).
- A member of the LPC asked about the capacity of municipal infrastructure necessary to support the projects that come forward. The consultant team may be able to identify high-level servicing constraints and issues but can't undertake a full analysis. Below-grade infrastructure projects are not eligible for DRI funding.
- A member of the LPC asked whether Waterloo would be eligible to apply for the NYF the following year. The Village would be eligible, but they would need to apply for a different area of downtown.

### ***Questions/ comments from the Public***

- A member of the public asked whether the grants are taxable. The State advises all project sponsors and prospective applicants to consult with a tax advisor.
- A member of the public asked whether projects that are currently underway are eligible for DRI funding. DRI funding cannot be used towards costs expended prior to the award announcements (anticipated around Spring 2025), but later phases of work on a project that is underway are eligible.
- A member of the public asked for clarification on how contracting works. Recipients of DRI funding contract with different agencies depending on their project type, typically DOS, ESD, or HCR.

- A member of the public suggested that the LPC apply the minimum matching requirement consistently across all privately sponsored projects, rather than allowing some project sponsors to provide less. While the LPC may choose to apply either a matching goal or requirement, a role of the consultant team will also be to identify other potential funding sources for project sponsors to tap into (e.g., Restore NY).
- A member of the public asked if a building owner who has a couple of related ideas (e.g., façade improvements and a mural on the side of the building) should submit one or two applications). They can be submitted a single project.

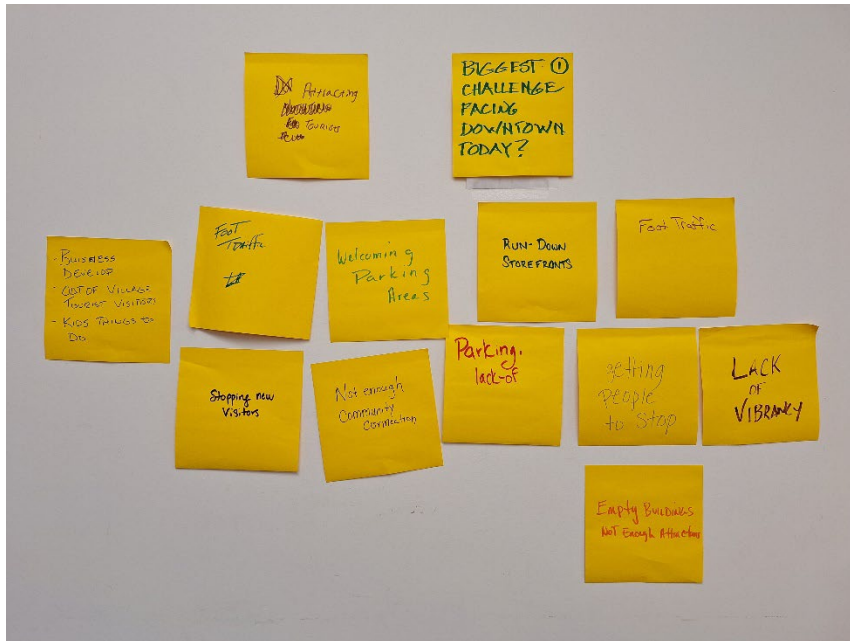


Figure 1: Output from Question 1 - What is the biggest challenge facing downtown Waterloo today?

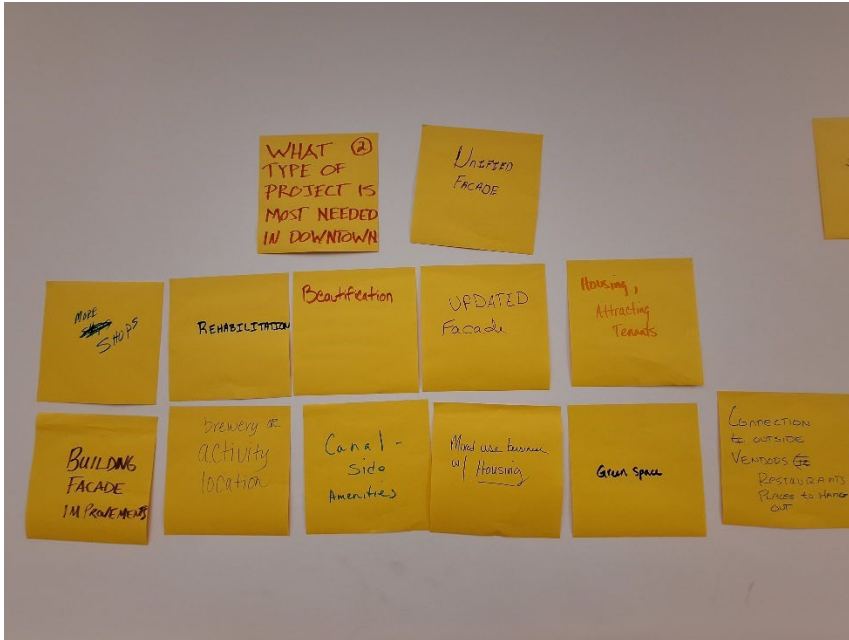


Figure 2: What type of project do you think is most needed in downtown Waterloo?

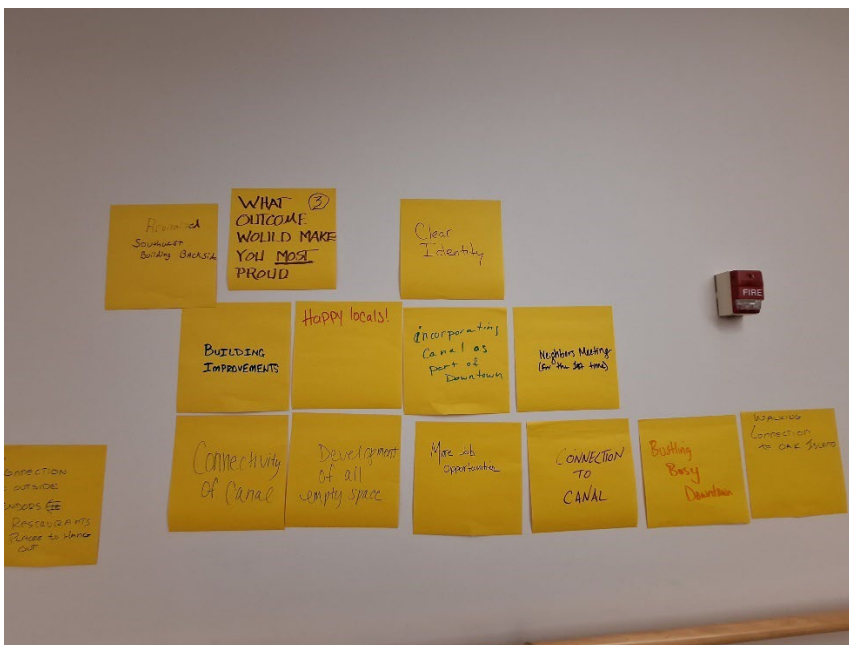


Figure 3: What outcome of the DRI would make you the most proud to see?