

Date	June 12, 2024 (5-7pm)
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 ~6 Members of the Public
Purpose	Local Planning Committee Meeting #2

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.

At this work session, the consultant team provided an update on the various streams of work underway (e.g., public engagement, stakeholder conversations, and the open call for projects) and shared initial highlights from the ongoing Downtown Profile and Assessment. The LPC then discussed and made key decisions on the Vision & Goals, Evaluation Criteria, and the Match Requirement for privately sponsored projects.

Meeting Agenda

- Code of Conduct
- Engagement / Work Update
- Downtown Profile & Assessment – Part 1
- Draft Vision, Goals, and Evaluation Criteria
- Matching Requirement – Comparing Options
- Next Steps
- Public Comment Period

Meeting Summary

The following is a high-level summary of the information that was presented at LPC Meeting #2. The presentation slides that were used at this meeting are available on the project website: WaterlooDRI.com. Key questions / points of discussion by the LPC are also

summarized. A summary of key decisions is included at the end.

Code of Conduct

- The Code of Conduct was read by LPC Co-Chair and Mayor Walt Bennett

Engagement / Work Update

- Urban Strategies then provided an overview of work completed since LPC Meeting #1, which included: launching the website; hosting a workshop with the Village to discuss their public improvement projects; hosting the Open Call for Projects Information Session; holding office hours with project sponsors; ongoing work towards the Downtown Profile and Assessment (DPA); meeting with stakeholders; and refining the draft vision and goals.

Downtown Profile & Assessment

- Following a reminder of the purpose of the DPA and its components, Urban Strategies provided some initial highlights from the work, focusing on the trends and development patterns that have shaped downtown Waterloo. Specifically, these materials described how population growth, rising car ownership levels, and changing preferences for where people want to live has led to the decentralization of housing, commercial activity, and community facilities, which in turn has led to disinvestment in the downtown.
- Urban Strategies provided a high-level overview of various studies and reports that aim to support downtown revitalization, including: the Circulation Accessibility and Parking Study; the Complete Streets Ordinance; the Downtown Market Study; the Village's Comprehensive Plan; the Downtown Needs Assessment; and the Finger Lakes REDC Strategic Plan. Together, these documents provide an analysis of downtown Waterloo's opportunities and constraints, and in many cases identify specific projects that would contribute to positive change in the downtown.
- Urban Strategies then provided examples of recent investment in downtown Waterloo that can build momentum for downtown revitalization. This included improvements to Main Street, new housing units, building improvements / restoration, and new community services and facilities.

Vision, Goals, and Evaluation Criteria

- Urban Strategies facilitated a discussion on the draft vision and goals, with the objective of confirming these in order to launch the Open Call for Projects. Materials were circulated in advance for the LPC to review.

- Urban Strategies described how the LPC would use evaluation criteria to review projects, including the based evaluation criteria set out by the State.

Match Requirement – Comparing Options

- Urban Strategies facilitated a discussion on the options for the match requirement for privately sponsored projects, with the objective of confirming this in order to launch the Open Call for Projects. Materials were circulated in advance for the LPC to review.
- The two base options were to maintain the minimum 25% match requirement for privately sponsored projects or to increase the minimum requirement. The pros and cons of each were discussed, including how much additional funding each option leveraged and whether a higher match requirement might limit the projects that come forward.
- Ultimately, a minimum match requirement of 35% and a goal of 40% was determined.

Next Steps

- *Before opening the floor to public comment, Urban Strategies provided an overview of next steps, which included ongoing work on the DPA, stakeholder meetings, the Open Call for Projects, and preparing for LPC Meeting #3, scheduled for July 31.*

LPC Questions and Discussion

- Discussing the DPA, a member of the LPC mentioned that street trees can block storefronts and reduce visibility. Different species grow to different canopy heights to mitigate this. This input was forwarded along to Trowbridge Wolf Michaels for consideration.
- Discussing the DPA, a member of the LPC mentioned that building improvements would ultimately lead to increased property taxes. While it is true that property taxes would increase as improvements are made to buildings, DRI funding would be invested incrementally over time, and property values and taxes would gradually increase, which may be more manageable for building owners.
- The LPC provided the following feedback on the Vision and Goals. This input is reflected in the Final Waterloo DRI Vision and Goals, which is included at the end of this document.
 - *The Vision Statement needs a strong opening line that reads almost as a marketing/branding slogan. This should reference both the Erie and Cayuga-Seneca Canal and Route 20.*

- *The Vision should reference the Village's history or historic character.*
- *The Vision should reference housing.*
- *"Create" vibrancy and prosperity.*
- *Reference "accessibility" in the goal about the parks and open space network.*
- *In the goal about housing, clarify that new housing could be both within existing and new buildings (this will also be further clarified in the revitalization strategies).*
- *In the goal about quality of life and social interaction, there is a preference for opportunities for day-to-day social interaction / recreation as opposed to things that require resources for operation, programming, etc.*
- A member of the LPC noted that housing is important, but asked whether it should be a goal if there are no known housing projects coming through. Housing should still be a goal so that those projects are looked at favorably if they are submitted.
- In discussing evaluation criteria, a member of the LPC asked whether there was a threshold for "transformative". While there is technical a minimum total project cost of \$75,000 for a stand-alone project cost, whether a project is truly transformative is more qualitative and can be discussed and debated when projects are reviewed.
- In discussing evaluation criteria, members of the LPC suggested the economic impact and the impact on municipal servicing should be considered as evaluation criteria. DOS mentioned that these would be looked at carefully by the consultant team or the State team, and the LPC could focus more on the community benefit.
- A member of the LPC suggested that the sponsor's capacity to implement a project and the cost or ability of a project to be maintained should be considered.
- The LPC elected to incorporate "transformative potential" and "sponsor capacity to implement and maintain" as additional evaluation criteria. The final evaluation criteria will also include "public support" and "estimated costs / need for DRI funding", as these will be considered heavily through discussion.
- In discussing the match requirements, LPC members held various perspectives and shared a range of thoughts:
 - Some LPC members were concerned that a match requirement much higher than the minimum of 25% would be a major barrier for people to submit projects, especially with rising costs (e.g., materials, labour, borrowing, taxes).
 - A member of the LPC suggested that the match requirement be on a sliding scale or tiers based on the overall project costs, with larger projects being required to contribute more as they have greater access to capital. However, if a project has a solid business case behind it, it should be able to access the necessary funding, regardless of the total project cost.

- A member of the LPC asked how other grant funding is applied as a funding source. This would be considered non-DRI funding and contributing towards the match requirement.
- One member of the LPC noted that the minimum 25% match requirement is reasonable as many other grant programs have a much higher match requirement.
- It was suggested that a match goal be considered, rather than a match requirement, to provide some flexibility based on what a sponsor is able to bring to the table. It was added that, in those cases, project sponsors should be questioned on what they can/can't provide, including other funding sources that they could potentially consider.
- However, a member of the LPC noted that a commitment letter from a bank wouldn't provide insight into the maximum funding a project sponsor could access, but simply whether the bank would approve a loan for the specific amount that was requested. It was noted that only so much can be requested of project sponsors.
- Following general discussion, each member of the LPC was asked to share their opinion the match requirement. Ultimately, a minimum match requirement of 35% and a goal of 40% was proposed and agreed to, on the basis that project sponsors would be strongly encouraged to maximize their contribution.

Questions/ comments from the Public

- A member of the public shared the following thoughts:
 - Property taxes shouldn't be raised when someone is bringing a building up to a liveable condition.
 - The overarching goal should be full occupancy, creating a critical mass of people to generate foot traffic on the streets, support local businesses, etc.
 - There is a difference between investing in a business that will benefit a business owner and investing money in rehabilitating buildings, as buildings are infrastructure. This should be reflected in the match requirement.
 - Efforts needs to be made to recruit and retain tenants downtown.
 - Waterloo is well-positioned for tourism given its location on the canal and the tour boats that run along it. There's not a whole lot on offer in Waterloo, there needs to be more gathering spaces, activities that draw people up to the downtown. This could even be an iconic feature (e.g., public art) that everyone wants to visit and take pictures with.

- A member of the public asked a member of the LPC what attracted him to Waterloo as a restaurant owner. He mentioned that he found a well-maintained historic building on a good Main Street, and that there was not a lot of competition in the area at the time.

Summary of Key Decisions

Match Goal

The minimum match requirement for privately sponsored projects is 35% of total project costs, with a match goal of 40%. Project sponsors are highly encouraged to meet the match goal and will be asked to demonstrate that they've explored other funding sources.

Vision & Goals

<u>Vision</u>	<u>Goals</u>
<p><i>Downtown Waterloo will harness its remarkable location on the Erie and Cayuga-Seneca Canal and Route 20 to attract residents, visitors, and entrepreneurs. Well-maintained historic buildings, occupied storefronts, and a critical mass of residents living downtown will create vibrancy and prosperity. Downtown's unique range of shops, restaurants, and amenities will cater to residents while also enticing visitors to stop and explore. New and improved public spaces will make it easier to get around downtown and to Oak Island, which will be renewed as a recreation asset and focal point for community life.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Provide a diversity of housing options downtown to attract and retain residents, and generate foot traffic to support local businesses.</i> 2. <i>Enhance the appeal and vibrancy of downtown by improving and rehabilitating buildings to accommodate a range of businesses and services.</i> 3. <i>Create an attractive, well-connected, and accessible network of streetscapes, trails, parks, and open spaces.</i> 4. <i>Foster a high quality of life by providing opportunities for day-to-day social interaction and recreation for people of all ages, interests, and abilities.</i> 5. <i>Celebrate and promote downtown's historic assets and distinct history to foster local pride.</i>

Evaluation Criteria

<u>State Evaluation Criteria</u>	<u>Local Evaluation Criteria</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alignment with DRI Goals• Catalytic Effect• Project Readiness• Cost Effectiveness• Co-Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transformative potential• Sponsor capacity• Public support• Estimated costs / Need for DRI Funding