

Date	July 31, 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 ~8 Members of the Public
Purpose	Local Planning Committee Meeting #3

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 work undertaken since LPC Meeting #2, shared further highlights from the Downtown profile and Assessment, and provided an introduction of the projects that were received through the Open Call for Projects.

Meeting Agenda

- Code of Conduct
- Engagement / Work Update
- Downtown Profile & Assessment – Part 2
- Preliminary Review of Projects
- Next Steps
- Public Comment Periot

Meeting Summary

The following is a high-level summary of the information that was presented at LPC Meeting #3. 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 provided an overview of work undertaken since LPC Meeting #2, which included:
 - Finalization of the DRI Vision and Goals
 - Hosting the Open Call for Projects
 - Initial meetings with project sponsors
 - Ongoing work on the Downtown Profile and Assessment
 - LPC survey to get feedback on the Draft Revitalization Strategies
 - Initial review of 18 project applications

Downtown Profile & Assessment

The broader consultant team, including Urban Strategies, Bero Architecture, and 4ward Planning, provided further highlights from the ongoing Downtown Profile and Assessment.

- Bero Architecture shared an overview of Waterloo's historical evolution, with highlights included:
 - The purpose of understanding Waterloo's past is not to 'freeze' it during a specific time period, but to identify, protect, and celebrate what is unique.
 - Transportation had a profound impact of the village's development (Native trails, the canals, and the highways), and linked Waterloo to the world economically.
 - Waterloo had a diverse range of industries and businesses that contributed to economic stability.
 - The village has a rich social history, with strong connections to nineteenth-century social movements such as the Women's Rights movement and Abolition.
 - Downtown Waterloo is a National Register Historic District, and there are other individually listed properties. These designations are symbolic, unless a property owner plans to undertake work using State or Federal funding.
- 4ward Planning shared an overview of Waterloo's demographics and economy, as well as some economic opportunities that the Village is well-positioned to pursue. Highlights included:
 - Projects in the pipeline (adaptive reuse of historic buildings) will lead to more than 50 new apartment units, which are needed by the local/regional workforce and locals looking to downsize.

- New residential units will create new for new businesses and services. New businesses, and especially restaurants and other day-to-day amenities should be recruited.
- The Village has a strategic location along the canal, which can be leveraged through additional programming for both residents and visitors. A water taxi along the canal (which currently by-passes the village) is an important opportunity.
- The Village also has a strategic location within an established tourism region. Cross-marketing with established events in other nearby villages could benefit Waterloo.
- The DRI Area is experiencing flat population growth (-7 people by 2029). There are about 6,000 people commuting into the County for work, including 3,500 commuting from 25+ miles. These could be potential residents, if there were adequate housing.
- In the absence of population growth, demand for retail / services will come from existing population, or from visitors. It is therefore important to understand the demographics of the local population, which provides insight the types of businesses they may support.
- Within the DRI area, educational attainment and median household income are lower compared to the County and Region. Household sizes are declining, due to the growth of non-family households (a national trend), which is higher compared to the region (46% non-family households compared to 40%). Non-family households tend to have more discretionary spending.
- Housing in Waterloo is relatively affordable, which could make the Village attractive for those looking to move to town.
- Despite significant job loss in the Finger Lakes Region since 2011, the DRI area has remained stable in employment and the Village of Waterloo has gained 242 jobs.
- Urban Strategies shared further observations on Waterloo’s physical setting, with highlights including:
 - Downtown Waterloo, particularly Main Street, retains a strong urban character, with many historic buildings intact. On the shoulders of Main Street, the building fabric becomes more “tattered”, with several large vacant and under-developed properties that could be transformed into public spaces and new commercial and residential uses. Some of these are publicly owned, which makes them strategic opportunities for the Village to pursue over longer term.

- Urban Strategies then presented an overall summary of downtown Waterloo’s advantages and disadvantages, which are summarized in a table at the end of this document.
- Urban Strategies concluded with an “Opportunities Map” which demonstrated how longer-term development and placemaking opportunities situated around the Four Corners of Downtown and extending towards Oak Island could be advanced by the Village and its partnership to enhance downtown as a vibrant and successful place.
- 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.

Preliminary Review of Projects

- The second half of the meeting was dedicated to introducing the project applications received through the Open Call. This began with an overall summary of the projects:
 - 18 Projects total
 - 9 Renovation/rehabilitation projects
 - 2 New development projects
 - 5 Public improvement projects
 - 1 Small grant fund
 - 1 Branding / marketing strategy
 - Total Project Costs of **\$23.5M**
 - Total DRI Funding Request of **\$16.3M**
- Next, a high-level overview of each project was provided, including:
 - A description of the project and its location
 - The project sponsor and property owner
 - The project cost and DRI funding request, and whether the minimum match requirement/match goal of 35% / 40% was met
 - The expected outcomes of the project (e.g., positive impact on the public realm, new residential units, new retail space)

- Initial considerations (e.g., missing information, initial market-related considerations, project readiness, etc.)
- Full details on the 18 projects can be found on slides 57-90 in the LPC Meeting #3 Presentation Slides, available at WaterlooDRI.com
- In addition to these 18 projects, Urban Strategies presented information on a potential project that might be submitted yet, which would entail the redevelopment of the Village Hall property as a mixed-use building including municipal offices, a police station, and residential units above. The LPC was asked whether this project should be considered alongside the other projects. While the application is late, its potential to be transformative could make it worth considering. The LPC decided to allow the project sponsor a month to prepare an application for presentation at LPC Meeting #4 on September 11, at which time they would decide whether to include it.

LPC Questions and Discussion

Following an overview of each of the 18 projects, the LPC was asked to contribute any early thoughts or questions they had. Where possible, Urban Strategies provided further detail based on their preliminary understanding of the projects. Otherwise, comments and questions were noted to guide further discussion with project sponsors and project development. Questions and comments from the LPC are summarized below, by project.

- *Renovate the American Legion and Enhance the Entrance to the Historic District*
 - A member of the LPC mentioned that, given Waterloo is the birthplace of Memorial Day, this would be a good project to support.
 - A member of the LPC asked whether other funding sources had been considered, despite being eligible for 100% DRI funding. The consultant team mentioned that they would follow up with all project sponsors on their funding sources and encourage the use of other non-DRI sources.
- *Renovate 39 West Main Street into a Multi-Functional Building*
 - A member of the LPC asked whether there was a rear entrance to the building. Another LPC member confirmed that there it, though it is lower than street level given the grade change down to the parking lot.
- *Unlock the Third Floor of 10 West Main Street and Improves its Façade*
 - A member of the LPC asked whether there was market demand for office space, noting that they know of office space that is sitting vacant, but also recognizing that perhaps it is not the same quality that people may be looking for. The consultant team noted that 4ward Planning had advised that

there is generally demand for small-scale office space along main streets, but that we would have them confirm.

- An LPC member asked whether the project sponsor would consider having the childcare facility on the 2nd and 3rd floor (instead of 1st and 2nd) both for security reasons and to have a more dynamic use at grade. The consultant team will bring this suggestion to the project sponsor.
- An LPC member asked whether an elevator was planned, which would make the office space more attractive and ADA compliant. This will also be suggested to the project sponsor.
- An LPC member asked whether there was space being the buildings on the northwest block to accommodate the building's parking requirements. The consultant team noted that the building occupies most of the property and that the childcare facility currently has an informal relationship to use parking spaces on an adjacent property, but a more formal relationship may be required. This will be discussed with the project team.
- *Restore Kendig House Servant Quarters as a Short-Term Rental*
 - An LPC member asked whether there was any zoning issues or other regulations around short-term vacation rentals. Don Northrup, Village Administrator, noted that there is a permitting process. The consultant team noted that in some communities there are concerns about the impact of short-term rentals on the local housing market, but that this may not be a significant concern given it is a single unit within a currently vacant space.
 - An LPC member noted that short-term rentals also contribute to tourism promotion through a short-term rental tax, which is a percentage of the rental rate.
 - An LPC member noted that this project is something that is needed for the community.
- *Renovate the Street of Shops and Achieve Full Building Occupancy*
 - An LPC member asked whether the existing restaurant within one of the retail spaces would be displaced through the rehabilitation process. The consultant team noted that their understanding (to be confirmed with project sponsor) is that the restaurant is interested the improvements to their unit.
 - An LPC member suggested that the project sponsor be asked to meet the minimum match requirement. This will be raised with the project sponsor.
- *Build the Grange Hall Food and Entertainment Hub*

- An LPC member asked whether the existing building would be expanded. The consultant team clarified that the proposed uses (restaurant, kitchen, catering space, retail) would be within the existing building, and that plans would be requested to help visualize the improvements.
- There was brief discussion of this unique building and the gathering space within, and how it is available for rent for different events, though the acoustics aren't great.
- An LPC member noted that this type of project (event space, catering, BBQ restaurant) would be good for the community and also draw visitors.

- *Rehabilitate 1 East Main Street for Four New Apartments*
 - An LPC member noted that this building has no parking area, and that the various rehabilitation projects would compound the parking supply issue. The consultant team noted that the 2021 CAP Study identified a 20% utilization rate for on- and off-street parking, which indicates that an undersupply of parking is more perception than reality, which could be improved by increasing access to and awareness of parking areas. Nonetheless, this project would require an off-site parking solution, which may require coordination and agreements with nearby property owners.
 - An LPC member noted that four additional units may compound infrastructure concerns within the downtown. The consultant team will follow up on this.

- *Renovate 30 Virginia Street for Three Apartments*
 - An LPC member noted that the project sponsor may not be aware of the environmental constraints related to the property's past use as a laundromat.
 - An LPC member suggested that the project sponsor be encouraged to include building façade improvements as part of the scope of work.
 - An LPC member asked how the ground floor unit would be laid out, and whether there would also be a ground floor commercial unit. The consultant team flagged a potential issue with the proposed ground floor residential unit (not permitted in the Zoning Code), though if this unit is separate from a retail unit fronting the street, a variance from the Zoning Code could be justified. This will be raised with the project sponsor.

- *Renovate 3, 5 and 7 West Main Street for Commercial and Residential Units*
 - An LPC member noted that the improvements to the rear facades of these buildings would have a significant visual impact on the downtown.

- *Expand and Enhance the Waterloo Recreational Center*
 - As the project sponsor, Walt clarified that the building would be located on the Village-owned properties located north of the current recreational center building.
 - An LPC member noted that this would a great project for the community.

- *Continue the Main Street Public Realm Improvements*
 - An LPC member noted that the median shouldn't be included in this project, as this hasn't been successful in other communities. The consultant team confirmed that the median has not been included.

- *Enhance Washington Street as a Gateway to Downtown*
 - No significant discussion.

- *Establish a Multi-Modal Hub and Gathering Place on the Southwest Block*
 - An LPC member asked how long it would take to construct and whether there was a parking strategy for the interim. The consultant team will follow up on this.
 - There was general discussion around the conceptual design of the space, with some LPC members noting that the promenade space would be better if situated on the south side of the parking lot, rather than right against the buildings; others held the opposite opinion, noting that it would feel like you were gathering in a parking lot. Another LPC member noted that this would generate lots of noise for the residential units within the buildings along Main Street. The DOS representative noted that the exact design of the space would eventually be refined in more detail, but the LPC should focus more on the concept put forward.
 - An LPC member mentioned that it would be help to walk this area, which the consultant team will arrange for the next LPC meeting, if the logistics of timing and other considerations allow.

- *Improve the Connection between Oak Island and Main Street*
 - An LPC member asked whether this project was part of the improvements to Oak Island; Walt Bennett clarified that these improvements are above and beyond.

- *Transform Huff Street into a Pedestrian-Bike Zone along the Canal*
 - No significant discussion.

- *Develop Marketing Materials to Promote Downtown Waterloo as a Place to Visit and Invest*
 - An LPC member asked whether this project would be better administered by, or in collaboration with, another agency that specializes in marketing and branding. The consultant team mentioned that in previous communities, project sponsors have partnered with branding agencies to help develop the content on their behalf.

- *Establish a Small Project Grant Fund to Continue Downtown Waterloo's Revitalization*
 - An LPC member asked for further information on how the Small Project Fund is administered. The DOS representative noted that the eight Interest Forms that were submitted are meant to demonstrate potential demand for the fund, and that eventually, they would need to submit a more comprehensive application to qualify for funding. A portion of the DRI funding for this project (10%) would go towards the administrative costs related to implementing the program.
 - An LPC member noted that this is a good project in that it would encourage a more uniform look in the downtown, which is much needed.
 - An LPC member asked how you can encourage people to make use of this program if people are not motivated to make improvements. The consultant team noted that, sometimes, when property owners reinvest in their properties, it can encourage others to do the same. Also, property owners may be encouraged to take part by the possibility of being able to charge higher rents for retail spaces that are more attractive, inside and out.

- *Relocate and Expand the National Memorial Day Museum*
 - An LPC member who is on the Library/Historical Society board mentioned that the existing museum building on Main Street would eventually be sold.
 - An LPC member mentioned that the current museum does not do justice to the Village's history and association with Memorial Day.
 - An LPC member noted that the DRI funding request is significant – almost half of the DRI award – and that the sponsor should be encouraged to explore other funding sources. The consultant team noted that the project sponsor acknowledges this and is actively pursuing other opportunities to lower project costs and the DRI funding request.

- *Potential Project: Village Hall Redevelopment*
 - An LPC asked for more information on the alternatives for a new Village Hall. Walt Bennett noted that the raising and rebuilding the existing building, or building a new facility, would be substantially more expensive.
 - An LPC member noted that the project cost is very significant, and that should be considered in balance with the other projects coming forward.
 - An LPC member suggested that the project sponsor be given a month to develop their project, and the LPC would consider whether to evaluate the project alongside the other projects submitted before the deadline. The group agreed that this was the best approach.

Summary of Key Decisions

The purpose of this LPC meeting was primarily to receive information about the Downtown Profile and Assessment and the projects that were received through the Open Call. However, the Committee made two decisions:

- The LPC decided to allow the project *Relocate and Expand the National Memorial Day Museum* to be considered alongside the other projects, despite being submitted following the deadline. It was explained that the project sponsor was ready to submit the application by the deadline, but information provided by the consultant team's cost estimator required further consideration from the project sponsor the amount of DRI funding that they should request.
- The LPC decided to allow one month for the project sponsor of the *Potential Project: Village Hall Redevelopment* to advance their project and submit an application leading up to the September 11 LPC Meeting. At this meeting, fuller information about this potential project will be provided, and the LPC will decide whether to evaluate this project alongside those submitted before the deadline.

Public Comments

- A member of the public noted that the CAP Study shouldn't be relied on for the purposes of understand parking supply issues, since it was undertaken three years ago, and since then, there are eight new businesses downtown that generate parking demand.
- A member of the public, and the project sponsor for the project *Renovate the American Legion and Enhance the Entrance to the Historic District* confirmed that, since submitting their project, the Legion had voted to become an open post,

meaning that the Legion is open to the general public and not just members. This was meant to clarify the consultant team’s initial understanding was that the potential improvements might not have a significant benefit to the broader community.

Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages of Downtown Waterloo

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic location along the canal and within an established tourism region. • An intact traditional Main Street, especially at the "Four Corners". • Compact neighborhoods within walking distance to downtown. • The canal and Oak Island are unique recreational amenities. • Downtown property owners who are reinvesting in their properties. • Recent investment including building rehabilitation and restoration and some new businesses. • Forthcoming housing to benefit local businesses. • A strong institutional presence (e.g., administrative, cultural, and civic uses). • Distinct sense of history and local pride. • General housing affordability. • Commuters into the area. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant and underutilized upper floors. • Buildings in need of upgrades. • Vacant lots that detract from the quality of downtown, and particularly the experience of arriving from the north and south. • The presence of brownfields, which constrains developments. • Incomplete connections to Oak Island. • Portions of Main Street that are car-oriented • Lack of wayfinding to connect people to some interesting local destinations.