

Governor Cuomo's Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Governor Andrew Cuomo recently announced his Downtown Revitalization Initiative, which will provide up to \$10 million to one downtown in each of the state's ten economic development regions. This Jamestown Renaissance Brief makes the case for Jamestown's selection by the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council by outlining 1) a rationale for Jamestown's selection based on its strategic importance and momentum, 2) a strategy for investing \$10 million in ways that will result in the biggest possible boost to downtown vitality and regional competitiveness, 3) measurements that will be used to track progress, and 4) collaborative partners. Although it is understood that the NYS Department of Housing and Community Renewal and third party planners will ultimately be employed to develop and detail specific projects and approaches, this brief provides a rationale and some preliminary concepts for consideration from the local perspective.

Part A: Rationale for Jamestown's Selection

Among the downtowns in the territory covered by the Western New York REDC, we believe Jamestown is the most logical choice for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative for the following reasons:

- 1. A Downtown with Regional Significance and Growth Potential:** The vitality of downtown Jamestown is critical to the health and competitiveness of the city itself – but also to a much wider region that has relied upon it as a hub for commerce and culture for over a century. It is well-positioned to be a key component of attracting new business and new talent to Chautauqua County and the western portion of the Southern Tier through sustained investment in its urban environment and the quality-of-life characteristics that entrepreneurs and skilled workers now demand:
 - Downtown Jamestown is the urban core for a Greater Jamestown area (the city and its adjacent towns) that has 55,000 residents. Jamestown is the largest urban center in Chautauqua County (pop. 129,000) and the western Southern Tier (pop. 264,000), and **the largest urban center in Western New York outside of the Buffalo-Niagara Falls metropolitan area.**
 - With over 100 buildings comprising a core 30-block area, downtown Jamestown has the **second largest development footprint of any downtown in Western New York.**
 - Downtown Jamestown houses some of the region's largest entertainment venues, including the Jamestown Savings Bank Ice Arena and the Reg Lenna Center for the Arts. It is slated to welcome the National Comedy Center in 2017.
 - Based on a recent survey of downtown businesses conducted by the Jamestown Renaissance Corporation, **Jamestown's urban core is home to approximately 260 businesses with more than 2000 employees. The downtown housing market contains approximately 400 apartments that house more than 500 residents.**
- 2. A Decade of Strategic Investment to Leverage:** Since the adoption of the City of Jamestown's Urban Design Plan in 2006, a combination of private and public resources have been invested in implementing recommendations from the plan. These initiatives have noticeably changed market perceptions of downtown Jamestown and have primed an environment for new investment:

- **36 façade enhancement projects** were stimulated by a combination of local foundation funding through the Jamestown Renaissance Corporation, CDBG allocations from the City of Jamestown, and property owner investments. This initiative helped to address chronic weak market conditions that had discouraged private reinvestment in downtown properties for years and produced a very tired-looking central business district.
 - **Public spaces increased and improved:**
 - 7 city alleys reconstructed
 - Blighted theater converted into a multi-use outdoor performance space, plaza, and urban park
 - Installation of a public art collaboration that uses building walls as outdoor exhibit space
 - Jamestown Riverwalk system expanded
 - **Over 60 market-rate apartments** have been completed (including 44 in the Wellman Building), diversifying a downtown residential market that was previously dominated by subsidized housing for seniors. This new residential component has been popular with doctors, engineers, and other professionals who have relocated to the area.
 - **Over a dozen restaurants opening or expanding since 2014** has created a growing cluster of new food-related businesses.
 - **National Register of Historic Places in 2014** listed Downtown Jamestown as an historic district, creating instant value in the downtown real estate market by making historic preservations tax credits a financing option for the owners of the district's 101 component properties.
- 3. Sustaining Momentum:** New public and private sector investments in the downtown have been occurring for over a decade and amount to nearly \$100 Million, including the Jamestown Savings Bank Ice Arena (\$22 Million project), BWB Center (\$7.25 Million project), Gateway Rail Depot (\$13.5 Million project), Best Western (\$3 Million project) and the Wellman Building (\$7.4 Million project). When coupled with the careful assemblage of tools to support downtown development, there are serious signs that the private sector is willing to invest in downtown Jamestown in a substantial way, adding to a growing list of projects that have garnered recent state and philanthropic support:
- **M&T Bank Building:** The largely vacant M&T Bank Building is undergoing the final phases of a \$2.5 Million redevelopment project that included the relocation and expansion of Digitel, Inc., which brought over 60 high-paying positions to the center of downtown Jamestown. This has been made possible by a combination of private equity from the developer (GPatti Development), historic preservation tax credits, a New York State Main Street Grant, and grants from the City of Jamestown and Jamestown Renaissance Corporation.
 - **Brewery/Restaurant:** The former W.T. Grant Department Store, which has been largely vacant and underutilized since the late 1970s, is slated to become a combination brewery and restaurant in 2016-17, to be operated by the McClelland Group in Buffalo. This \$2.4 Million redevelopment project will utilize a combination of owner equity, a

New York State Main Street Grant, historic preservation tax credits, and other forms of public and private assistance.

- The **National Comedy Center** (\$20 Million project that has been awarded \$3.75 Million from NYS in the 2014 & 2015 CFA rounds) will build on the success of the **Lucille Ball Comedy Festival**, a high-quality annual event that attracts over 10,000 visitors and the legacy of Lucille Ball to build a center that celebrates comedy. When the Center opens in 2017 in the refurbished Jamestown Gateway Station, it will initially draw an estimated annual attendance of 114,000 and will be configured in a way that maximizes downtown pedestrian traffic to help support downtown businesses and amenities, as well as access to the Chadakoin River and its sundry amenities. It is essential that we be ready for this substantial influx of visitors to our downtown so we can maximize the economic potential.
 - The **Reg Lenna Center for the Arts** has a master plan to improve its facilities and make it a strong eastern anchor to downtown development (\$5.5 Million project), with the National Comedy Center and the **Jamestown Savings Bank Ice Arena** (completed before the UDP) anchoring the western end.
 - **Greater Jamestown Riverwalk** investments will link the northern and southern neighborhoods of the city with the construction of two pedestrian bridges across the Chadakoin River. The Riverwalk improvements offer greater public access to the previously “invisible” river, creating an environment where private development of restaurants, boutique hotels, market-rate apartments, and water-related activities are possible.
- 4. Evidence of Need for the Governor’s Initiative:** Recent gains cannot conceal the fact that signs of disinvestment and deferred maintenance – which accrued in the decades after 1950 – still remain and serve as inhibitors of downtown vitality:
- The City of **Jamestown has a high poverty rate (28%, rising to over 50% in the downtown census tract)**, a high local tax burden due to the suburbanization of most of Greater Jamestown’s commercial and industrial functions to modern space in adjacent towns, and a proliferation of tax-exempt entities locating the downtown core, which all contribute to the fact that the City of Jamestown is rapidly approaching its constitutional taxing limit. These factors put the city in a highly tenuous financial position and make it difficult to sustain high levels of local public investment.
 - Downtown Buffalo has benefitted over the past several years from the Buffalo Billion program and the work of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation. Downtown Niagara Falls has been stimulated through millions of dollars invested by the state at Niagara Falls State Park and through the USA Niagara Development Corporation. While it is great news that Northern Chautauqua County was recently informed that Athenex, a cancer pharmaceutical manufacturer, will be building a new plant in the Town of Dunkirk, this is expected to have a minimal positive impact on Jamestown. While projects in Jamestown have recently been approved for some state support (National Comedy Center, New York State Main Street Grants, and Riverwalk pedestrian bridges), **Jamestown has lacked the sustained and focused support received by its regional peers.**

- Although downtown Jamestown is compact and walkable, **its streetscapes are of a decidedly uneven quality**. Some streets are far too wide for the automotive traffic they currently handle; others haven't had major improvements to street furnishings and lighting since the 1970s. This needs to be addressed for downtown to be a pleasant and safe place for visitors and residents to walk – and to instill further confidence in the downtown real estate market.
- Several **large and underutilized structures** loom over downtown's streets, serving as dead spots to street life and sources of considerable uncertainty. Prime among them are the large Furniture Mart Building, the shuttered Ramada Inn Hotel and unused space in several other buildings in the downtown core.

Part B: Strategy for Further Investment and Growth

- **Getting the Details Right:** Poor signage, outdated streetscapes, and parking issues hamper the economic impacts of downtown investment. Jamestown has been getting a number of big things right in recent years, but it needs to get the details right to be truly competitive and healthy. These details are all about boosting confidence, creating favorable first impressions, and stimulating demand to grow businesses, create jobs, and increase visitor spending. A potential list of projects for planners to start with and their approximate budgets include the following:

Streetscape/Entry Corridor Enhancements \$

- Improve traffic flow, safety, and aesthetics

Wayfinding/Signage \$

- Short/long-term signage into and around the downtown

Parking – Creation of Additional Spaces/Bus Parking and Shuttle \$

- Incentives for developers to increase/maximize parking
- Conversion of parking meters to electronic meter heads

Job Training in Hospitality Industry – Training of under-employed and unemployed \$
individuals, specifically to become the workforce for employment
in hotels, restaurants, and other tourism service industries

- **Reactivating Priority Spaces:** Stimulating demand is important, but it's equally important to have high-quality supply ready to capture growing demand. This includes hotel rooms of the quality and quantity needed to welcome a wave of expected visitors, and the preparation of dormant (and expensive-to-renovate) space for a mixture of new uses that are compatible with 21st century downtowns.

<u>Waterfront Enhancement</u>	\$
- Waterfront enhancement projects, including acquisition	
<u>Hamister Group Former Holiday Inn Redevelopment Project</u>	\$
- Gap funding (if needed)	
<u>National Comedy Center</u>	\$
- Gap funding/marketing/other	
<u>Downtown Jamestown Pearl City Brewery</u>	\$
- Gap funding (if needed)	
<u>Furniture Mart Building</u>	\$
- Acquisition/redevelopment	
<u>Business Recruitment</u>	
- Based on the Professional Economic Development Strategy Prepared for Jamestown by AECOM, prepare RFP's for key buildings to strategically infill identified types of businesses in downtown.	\$
<u>Downtown Jamestown Small Business Development Fund</u>	\$
- Incentives/grants for redevelopment of underutilized storefronts	

Part C: Measuring Progress

At a minimum, the City of Jamestown and the Jamestown Renaissance Corporation will track the following important benchmarks through use of its existing database, surveys and other means:

- Increase in downtown's assessed and taxable property valuation
- Number and type of businesses and jobs created
- Public and private capital invested in Jamestown
- Number of tourists visiting Jamestown

Part D: Collaborative Partners

One of Jamestown's greatest assets is the willingness of private and public sector partners to sit at the table and work on issues and projects together. A collaborative partnership has been formed to rally around this cause, and includes many of the primary stakeholders in the city and region. The core members, who have been meeting regularly to develop this strategy since the announcement of the Governor's Downtown Revitalization Initiative and before on other specific projects, include:

- Vince Horrigan - Executive, Chautauqua County
- Sam Teresi - Mayor, City of Jamestown/Co-chair Jamestown Renaissance Corporation (JRC)
- Greg Edwards – CEO, Gebbie Foundation
- Randall Sweeney – Executive Director, Chautauqua Region Community Foundation
- Greg Lindquist - Executive Director, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation
- Dave Leathers – Executive Director, Jamestown Board of Public Utilities
- Journey Gunderson – Executive Director, Lucy-Desi Museum
- Tom Benson – Executive Director, National Comedy Center
- Lillian Ney - Co-Chair, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation
- Mark Geise - Senior Planner, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation/Executive Director, Land Bank
- Vince DeJoy - Development Director, City of Jamestown/JRC Board
- Bill Rice - Principal Planner, City of Jamestown
- Jeff Lehman – Public Works Director, City of Jamestown
- Andrea Magnuson – Associate Director, Gebbie Foundation
- George Spanos – Public Works Director, Chautauqua County
- Gregory Szewczyk – NYS DOT Region 5 Representative
- Kristy Zabrodsky – CPA, Buffamonte Whipple and Buttafaro, PC
- Beth Lauren – Development Director, National Comedy Center
- Christopher Rodgers – Jamestown Board of Public Utilities
- Paul Marlinski – President, 4th and Pine Development Corporation
- Andrew Nixon – President, Chautauqua County Visitors Bureau
- Paul Whitford – Chautauqua County Legislator
- Todd Trannum – President, Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce
- Mike Metzger – Chairman, County of Chautauqua Industrial Development Agency
- Alex Singleton – President, El Greco Manufacturing
- Kathleen Eads – Executive Director, Reg Lenna Theater
- Kris Sellstrom – Jamestown Board of Public Utilities
- Andrew Liuzzo – Entrepreneur
- John Centi – President, Inkwells