



City of Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Project Feedback Form Summary

October 10, 2024

Public Feedback Form Summary

BACKGROUND

The City of Tonawanda was selected to receive \$10 million through New York State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), a cornerstone of the State's economic development program. The DRI transforms downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and are magnets for redevelopment, business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity. The funding will be allocated to public, private, and/or nonprofit projects that will contribute to the City's ongoing revitalization.

Public engagement is a key component of the DRI planning process. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders in the community, including municipal government, key employers and institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the public are invited to attend LPC meetings and public workshops to learn about the DRI process and its intended outcomes; to pose questions; to comment on findings, goals, and recommendations; and to contribute project ideas.

Project sponsors were invited to submit DRI funding proposals during an Open Call for Projects held from May 30 to July 12, 2024. The Open Call resulted in the identification of 20 potential projects, 15 of which advanced for funding consideration. A critical aspect of the DRI engagement approach was a Project Feedback Form which allowed members of the public to rate projects based on alignment with the DRI Vision and Goals, potential to transform the downtown area, and overall level of support. Results from the Project Feedback Form were used by the LPC to help guide their own project evaluations, alongside other reference materials. Results from the Project Feedback Form are summarized in this report.

PROJECT FEEDBACK FORM METHODOLOGY

The Project Feedback Form was hosted online on Survey Monkey and in physical format from August 6 to September 11, 2024. There were 320 responses received. Paper copies of the survey were available at three locations in the City of Tonawanda: Tops Market on Niagara Street, City of Tonawanda Public Library, and City Hall. The survey was promoted through the Tonawanda DRI website, social media, local news media, a public meeting, and several pop-up events. Public Workshop #2 focused heavily on the Project Feedback Form, encouraging participants to learn about proposed projects and provide input through completion of the form.

The survey asked four questions for each of the proposed projects, outlined below:

1. Does the project align with the Tonawanda DRI Vision and Goals?
 - Yes or No
2. Will the project transform downtown Tonawanda?
 - Yes or No
3. What is your overall level of support for the project?
 - On a scale from 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest
4. Additional comments
 - Open ended responses

Project support was evaluated based on the percentage of affirmative (yes) responses to the first two questions and responses to level of support. Projects were grouped into ternaries based on their score for each question as “low” (bottom 5 projects) “moderate” (middle 5 projects) or “high” (top 5 projects). The results are summarized below in Table 1 - Alignment with DRI Vision and Goals, Table 2 - Transformative Potential, and Table 3 - Level of Support. Figure 1 shows level of support graphically, ranking each of the projects by level of public support. Qualitative feedback from the “Additional Comments” question is summarized at the end of the report.

Table 1. Alignment with DRI Vision and Goals

Low	Moderate	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Outdoor Seating to Joey's Place Restaurant • Redevelop the Former Church at 116 Broad Street into Six Apartments • Construct a Mixed-Use Waterfront Building at 77 Young Street • Construct the Mixed-Use "Elli" building at 20-40 Fillmore Ave • Renovate the Tonawanda Castle to Reignite the Event Center and Introduce Commercial Spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate 98-100 Main Street into a New Restaurant and Bar • Preserve the Historical Society of the Tonawandas Museum • Enhance the Historic Long Homestead • Replace and Enhance City Docking Facilities on the Erie Canal • Replace the East Niagara Street Pedestrian Bridge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelop 60 Main Street into an Event Center and Overnight Suites • Build a Natural Playground Behind the Long Homestead • Convert the Former Rite Aid into a Multi-Story Mixed-Use Building • Improve Downtown Access and Waterfront Connections • Create a Small Project Fund

Table 2: Transformational Potential

Low	Moderate	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Outdoor Seating to Joey's Place Restaurant • Redevelop the Former Church at 116 Broad Street into Six Apartments • Enhance the Historic Long Homestead • Preserve the Historical Society of the Tonawandas Museum • Renovate 98-100 Main Street into a New Restaurant and Bar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate the Tonawanda Castle to Reignite the Event Center and Introduce Commercial Spaces • Construct a Mixed-Use Waterfront Building at 77 Young Street • Replace and Enhance City Docking Facilities on the Erie Canal • Construct the Mixed-Use "Elli" Building at 20-40 Fillmore Ave • Improve Downtown Access and Waterfront Connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the East Niagara Street Pedestrian Bridge • Build a Natural Playground behind the Long Homestead • Redevelop 60 Main Street into an Event Center and Overnight Suites • Convert the Former Rite Aid into a Multi-Story Mixed-Use Building • Create a Small Project Fund

Table 3: Level of Support

Low	Moderate	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Outdoor Seating at Joey's Place Restaurant • Enhance the Historic Long Homestead • Redevelop the Former Church at 116 Broad Street into Six Apartments • Construct a Mixed-Use Waterfront Building at 77 Young Street • Renovate 98-100 Main Street into a New Restaurant and Bar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate the Tonawanda Castle to Reignite the Event Center and Introduce Commercial Spaces • Preserve the Historical Society of the Tonawandas Museum • Replace and Enhance City Docking Facilities on the Erie Canal • Replace the East Niagara Street Pedestrian Bridge • Improve Downtown Access and Waterfront Connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelop 60 Main Street into an Event Center and Overnight Suites • Construct the Mixed-Use "Elli" Building at 20-40 Fillmore Ave • Convert the Former Rite Aid into a Multi-Story Mixed-Use Building • Build a Natural Playground behind the Long Homestead • Create a Small Project Fund

Themes from Additional Comments:

- Ensure that project funds are used to benefit Tonawanda as a whole and not used to exclusively benefit private project sponsors.
- The downtown area needs more businesses, especially retail.
- Improvements that increase the use of public spaces are needed.
- Any projects proposing a new building should adhere to a high standard of architectural quality and aesthetics.
- Ensure that projects are accessible to a wide range of ages and physical mobility.
- Projects that build a high number of new housing units will transform the downtown area but should not take away from improvements that benefit existing residents.
- Project sponsors with greater financial capacity should lower their DRI requests.