

City of Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI)



Local Planning Committee (LPC) Meeting #2
May 29, 2024, 6:00-7:30 PM



City of
Tonawanda

Downtown
Revitalization
Initiative



**Downtown
Revitalization
Initiative**

Welcome & Introductions

Co-chairs

- Honorable John White, Mayor
- Paul Brown, WNY Regional Economic Development Council
- Marty Grunzweig, City of Tonawanda Local Development Corporation
- Skip Johnson, Historical Society of the Tonawandas
- Nhi Kha, Sativa Remedy
- Debbie Jaeger, Erie Heights Apartments
- Alice Roth, City of Tonawanda Planning Board
- Michelle Lockett, Niagara River Greenway Commission
- Mark Saltarelli, Tonawandas Gateway Harbor, Inc.
- Joan Horn, City of Tonawanda Board of Visual & Performing Arts
- Jeffrey Ross, Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas
- Bob O'Brocta, Boys and Girls Club of the Northtowns
- Suzanne Zuchlewski, Resident

Welcome & Introductions

Name

State Partners

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Ben Bidell | NYS Department of State |
| Angela Keppel | NYS Department of State |
| Erin Corrado | Empire State Development |
| Mo Sumbundu | Empire State Development |
| Leonard Skrill | NYS Homes and Community Renewal |

Name

City of Tonawanda

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Sharon Stuart | Administrative Assistant to the Mayor |
| Judy Kurtzworth | Executive Secretary to the Mayor |

Today's Agenda

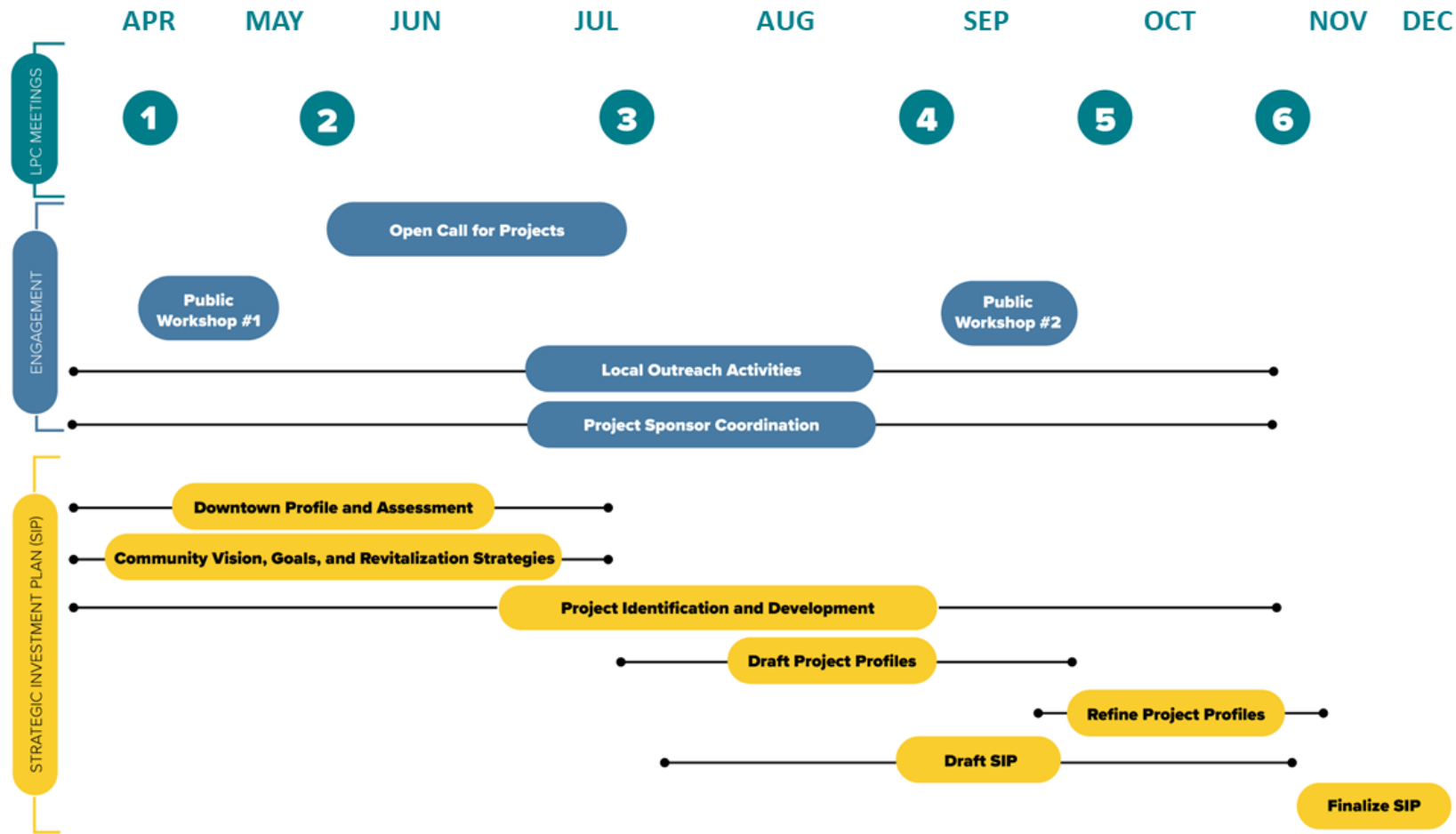
- Planning process and engagement updates
- Summary of past plans and recent investment
- Characteristics of strong DRI projects and project slates
- Project evaluation criteria
- Vision and goals
- Open Call for Projects



Planning Process



DRI Scope and Schedule



LPC Meeting #1 (Last Meeting)

- Reviewed LPC Code of Conduct and roles and responsibilities of LPC
- Provided an overview of the DRI program
- Outlined DRI planning process & schedule
- Described submission and evaluation procedures for Open Call for Projects
- Shared example projects from around WNY
- Discussed public engagement strategy
- Discussed proposed Tonawanda DRI boundary and vision statement
- Provided overview of proposed projects in Tonawanda's DRI application

LPC Meeting #2 (Today)

- Summary of Tonawanda's Comprehensive Plan and Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan
- Review foundational plans and studies
- Characteristics of Strong DRI projects
- Building a strong slate of DRI projects
- State and Local evaluation criteria for projects
- Revised vision and goals based on Public Feedback
- Overview of process for Open Call for Projects

Next Steps in Planning Process

- **Initiate and promote Open Call for Projects, May 30 – July 12**
- **Hold Open Call Informational Sessions**
 - Thursday May 30, City Hall Community Room, 5:30pm and 6:30pm
- **Promote public survey, open until July 19**
- **Plan pop-up engagement events throughout the summer**
- **LPC Meeting #3, July 25**
 - Planning process and engagement updates
 - Downtown profile key findings
 - Proposed projects and projects to remove from consideration
 - Proposed boundary amendment

Engagement Updates



Engagement at the Senior Citizens Center

- Held May 16 at the Senior Citizens Center, 11am
- ~8 attendees
- Feedback focused on safety, mobility, and quality of life issues in the downtown area.
- Paper copies of the public survey available at the Senior Center



Engagement at the High School

- Met with group of 15 students in grades 8 and 11 recruited by the principal on May 16, 1:30pm.
- Students were provided with pre-read packet on the Tonawanda DRI and local history of economic development
- Feedback focused on the need for activities and places for teens to gather and socialize without having to spend a lot of money (e.g., the closed Pulp 716 Coffee & Comics shop)



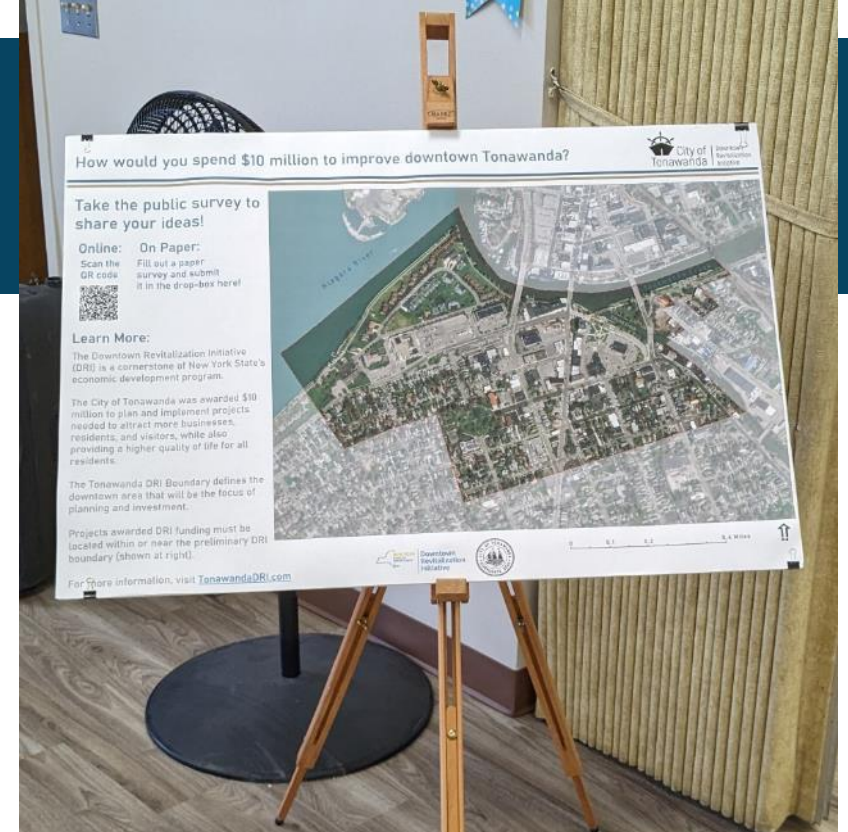
Public Workshop #1

- Held May 16th at the High School Cafeteria, 5:30pm
- ~25 attendees
- Agenda included:
 - DRI Overview presentation
 - Review of the DRI program & planning process
 - Public engagement
 - Project requirements & Open Call
 - Individual visioning & goal-setting exercise
 - Group mapping exercise
 - Next steps
- Note: Activities are available online for those who could not attend



Public Survey

- Public survey will be open until mid-July
- Will help identify community issues, opportunities, and needs to be addressed in the Strategic Investment Plan
- 67 online responses to-date
- Available online at TonawandaDRI.com
- Paper copies of the survey with DRI information boards and drop-off available at:
 - City Hall
 - City of Tonawanda Public Library
 - Tops on Niagara Street
 - Senior Citizens Center



HELLO Tonawanda!



**\$10 million is coming to
the City of Tonawanda
through New York State's
Downtown Revitalization
Initiative(DRI)**



How would you revitalize
downtown Tonawanda?
Please share your ideas in
the survey here!



Find out more at
TonawandaDRI.com

Summary of Past Plans and Recent Investments



Past Planning Efforts

- Complete Streets Action Plan (2017)
- City of Tonawanda Comprehensive Plan (2018)
- Living Niawanda Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) Update (2021)
- Tonawanda Main Street Conceptual Master Plan (2018)
- Economic Development Plan (2018)
- Downtown Tonawanda Parking Study (2018)
- Niagara Street Corridor Improvement Study (2020)



Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (2021)

- Plan promotes:
 - Connection between waterfront and downtown Tonawanda
 - Biking and walking options along the waterfront
 - Shoreline fishing and fishing dock access
- Recommended projects include:
 - Niagara Street Corridor Improvements
 - Development of Public Activity at City Hall
 - Development of Overlooks at Erie Barge Canal and Two Mile Creek
 - Pathway Connection from Veterans Park to the Two-Mile Creek Greenway Trail



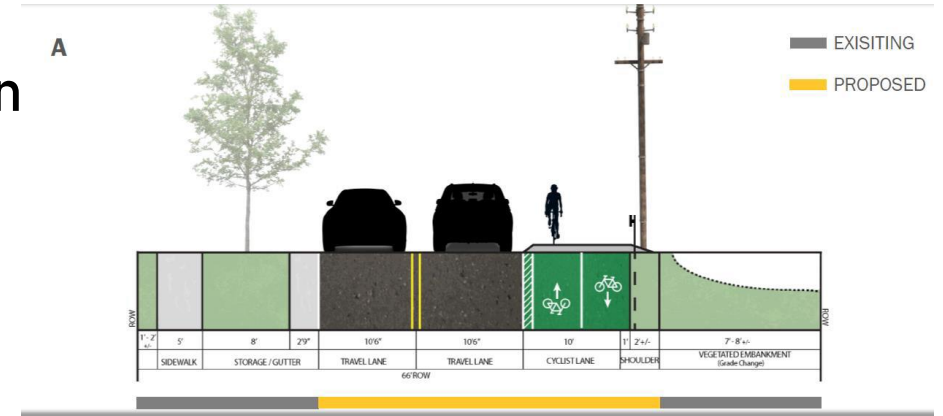
Niagara Street Improvements Study (2020)

Needs Identified:

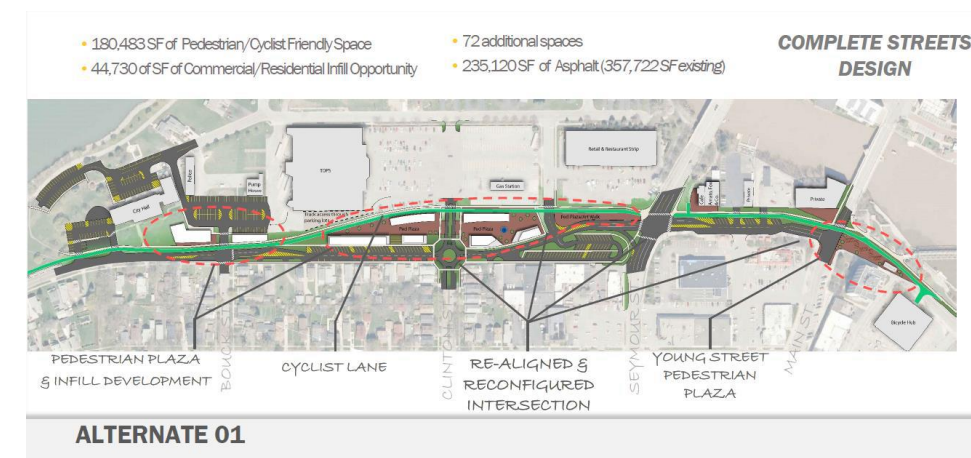
- Improve access to waterfront and connections between neighborhoods
- Create a multi-modal roadway
- Improve pedestrian crossings and cyclist safety and connectivity

Recommended projects include:

- Two-way elevated Bike Lane on Niagara Street
- Southern Approach Realignment
- On-Street Parking between Seymour Street and Main Street
- Intersection realignment at various intersections to provide greater visibility for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians



Two-way Elevated Bike Lane



Southern Approach Realignment

Main Street Conceptual Master Plan (2018)

- Developed conceptual layouts for the Main Street Business Corridor
- Designs were focused on implementing streetscape features
- Recommended Features for Main Street:
 - Gateway/Welcome Sign
 - Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage
 - Traffic Calming Measures (Bump Outs, Enhanced Crosswalks, Median Enhancements)
 - Planters and Hanging Baskets
 - Site Furniture (Benches, Trash Bins, Bike Racks)
 - Post Flags/Banners

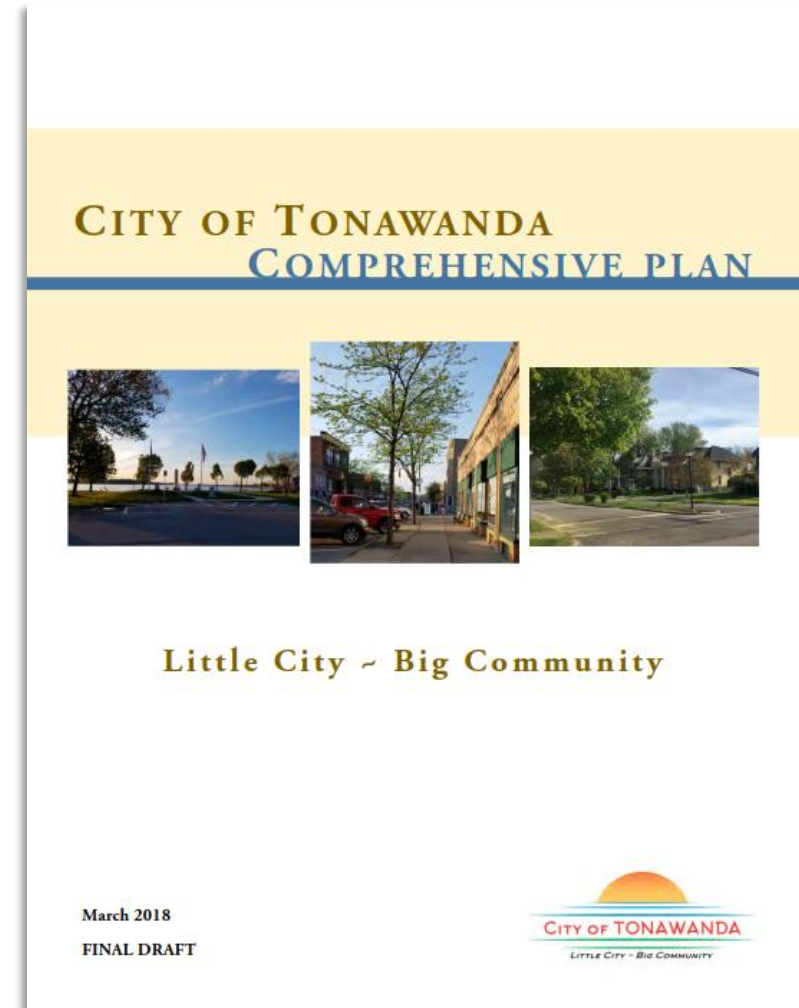


Comprehensive Plan (2018)

- Tagline: “Little City, Big Community”
- Planning Themes:
 - Healthy Neighborhoods
 - An Active, Vibrant, and Prosperous Downtown
 - Connectivity
 - Essential Community Services and Amenities
 - Environmental Quality

Needs:

- More single-family and starter homes
- Incentives for businesses
- Building design standards in the downtown
- Improve signage and wayfinding along the waterfront
- Traffic calming and improvements to pedestrian safety on Niagara Street and other downtown areas



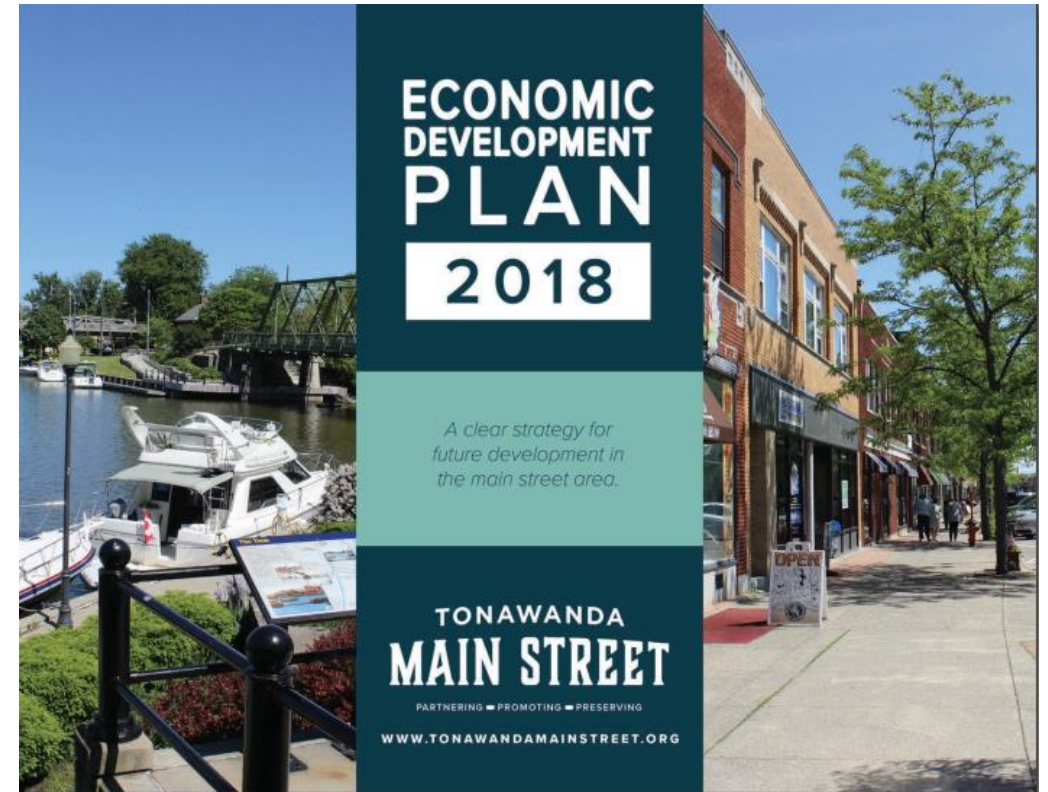
Economic Development Plan (2018)

Needs Identified:

- Improve quality of life
- Encourage private investment consistent with the community vision

Priority Projects Include :

- Young Street Redevelopment
- Four-Seasons Pavilion
- Signage and Wayfinding Improvement
- Streetscaping on Main Street
- Renaissance Bridge Lighting
- Various mixed-use infill and redevelopment



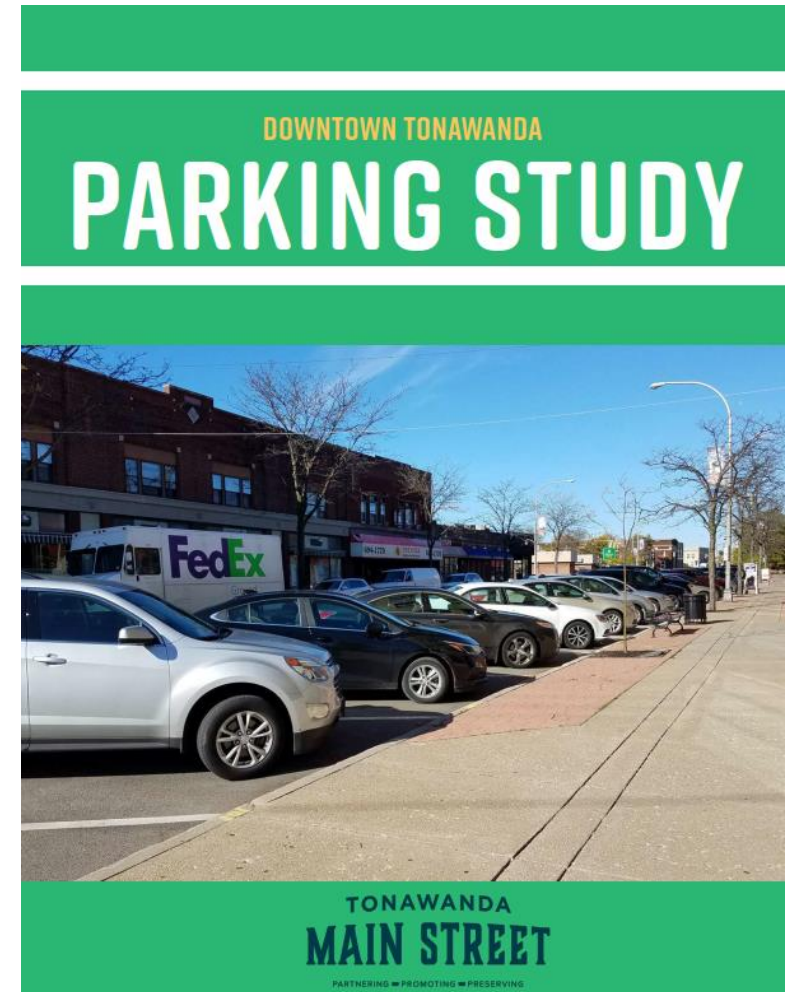
Downtown Tonawanda Parking Study (2018)

Needs Identified:

- Limited public parking and underutilized parking spaces
- Lack of signage

Recommendations Include:

- Policy and administrative changes to reduce parking minimums, allow for shared parking, revise permit system
- Streetscape and parking lot improvements



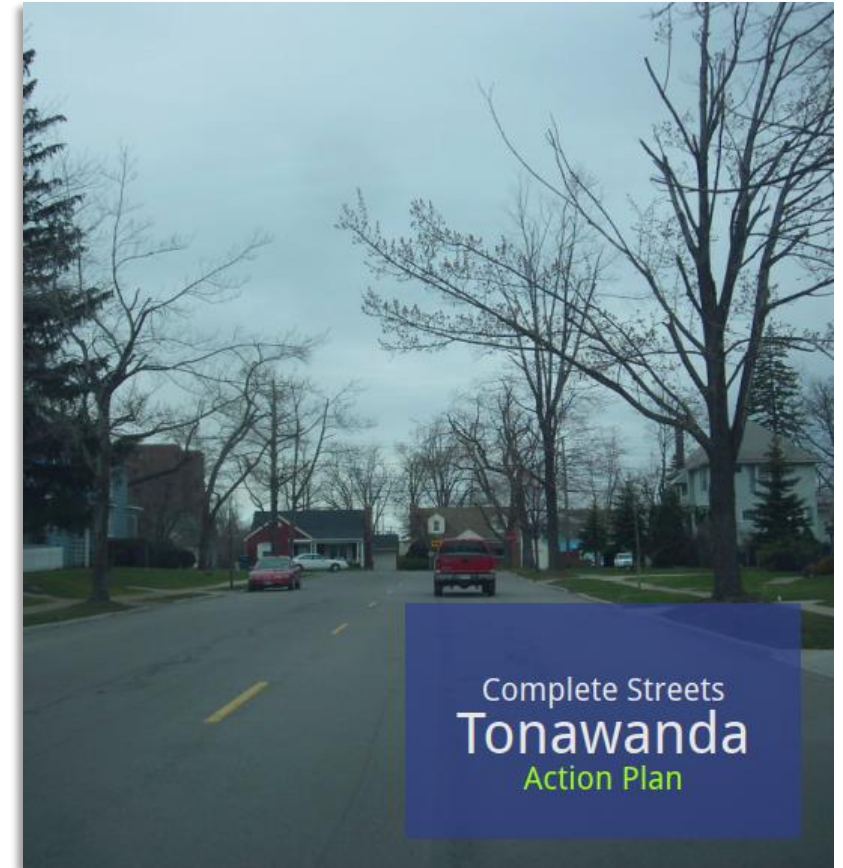
Complete Streets Action Plan (2017)

Needs Identified:

- Connect the waterfront to downtown through traffic calming and wayfinding
- Invest in business district and bike infrastructure to attract cyclists passing through the area

Suggested intersection improvements:

- Main St. and Broad St. (slow traffic and pedestrian crossings)
- Main St. and Seymour St. (pedestrian crossings, long-term roundabout)
- Niagara St and Main St (explore roundabout)
- Niagara St at Seymour (bike and ped amenities)



Completed Projects and Future Investments

- Zoning code update (Forthcoming)
- Canal Street Public Plaza (2022)
- Ellicott Creek and Niawanda Park Docks (2021-2022)
- Tonawanda Rails-to-Trails (2020)
- Canal View Commons
- Creation of the Blueways-Greenways Intermodal Hub (2016-2017)
- ADA Fishing Pier (2015)

Any other projects or investments that should be considered?



Characteristics of Strong DRI Projects and Project Slates



Strong DRI Projects

- Well-defined project scope
- Sponsor has demonstrated capacity to implement the project
- Evidence of strong public support for the project
- Clear community and economic benefits
- Evidence of market demand (market studies, economic assessments)
- Documentation of ability to financially maintain the project after completion (e.g., pro forma)



Strong DRI Project Slates

- Total between \$12-\$15 million in DRI funding requests
- Removal of one project will not result in total DRI funding request of less than \$10 million.
- Proposed project list should not be prioritized: every project should be one that the LPC and community would be excited to see implemented.
- Final slate should include a mix of public, private, and nonprofit projects and a strong mix of project types.



Project Evaluation Criteria



State Evaluation Criteria

- **Alignment with Local and State Goals.** Projects must advance the goals established by the LPC and the State for the DRI community.
- **Catalytic Effect.** Projects must have a significant positive impact on the revitalization of the downtown area.
- **Project Readiness.** Projects should be well-developed and ready to proceed as soon as possible upon the award of funding.
- **Eligible Project.** Projects must be one of the eligible project types.
- **Cost Effectiveness.** Projects must represent an effective and efficient use of public resources.
- **Co-Benefits.** Projects must result in benefits to the community, beyond just the project developer, such as: additional economic activity and improved quality of life.

Local Evaluation Criteria

| Potential Local Evaluation Criteria | LPC Votes |
|--|-----------|
| Transformative potential - elements that fundamentally change the downtown and how it is perceived | 8 |
| Ability to provide a sustainable impact in the downtown | 6 |
| Community and economic benefits | 5 |
| Capacity of responsible parties to implement the project | 5 |
| Alignment with the community's vision and goals | 4 |
| Estimated impacts on tax revenue | 4 |
| Catalytic effect - the ability to make other things happen | 4 |
| Public support | 3 |
| Potential to leverage additional private and/or public funds | 3 |
| Extent to which ongoing maintenance of management is needed and can be realistically addressed | 3 |
| Existing local capacity to sustain the implementation of projects and initiatives | 2 |
| Market demand and economic feasibility | 2 |
| Consistency with state goals | 1 |
| Estimated project costs, including cost to public and private sector partners and long-term operating or maintenance cost implications | 1 |
| Availability of alternative funding sources that are more appropriate than the DRI award | 1 |
| Estimated job growth and retention | 1 |
| Employment and workforce development potential | 1 |
| Need for DRI funds to make the project feasible | 0 |
| Other | 0 |



Local Evaluation Criteria – Top-Voted Criteria

- Transformative potential – elements that fundamentally change the downtown and how it's perceived (8)
- Ability to provide a sustainable impact to downtown (6)
- Capacity of the responsible parties to implement the project (5)
- Community and economic benefits (5)
- Alignment with the community vision, goals, and strategies (4)
- Estimated impacts on tax revenue (4)

Tonawanda DRI Vision and Goals



Feedback from LPC Meeting #1

Opportunities: Waterfront/harbor, parks and trails system, available space downtown, community feeling/pride, location between Buffalo and Niagara Falls

Challenges: High vacancy, limited businesses and attractions, low utilization of existing facilities, need for beautification

Vision:

- The most-repeated vision words were:
 - Waterfront/water, business, attract/attraction, thriving, visitor
- Overall, the vision words related to themes of:
 - Waterfront access and development, business/commercial activity, and history/culture.

Public Feedback on Vision

What Resonated:

- *Using the waterfront to attract businesses and engage people*
- *“Historical charm”*
- *“Connection to nature” / “Sustainability”*

Improvements/additions:

- Recreation
- Regional hub for events
- Shopping district
- Tourism destination
- Attracting families



Recommended DRI Vision Statement

Downtown Tonawanda will become a commercial and cultural hub at the confluence of the Erie Canal, Niagara River, and Ellicott Creek, offering a distinct blend of historical charm and modern vitality for residents, workers, and visitors of all ages. By capitalizing on its natural and built assets as a waterfront community, downtown Tonawanda will be sustainable; a vibrant place to live, work, gather, and recreate; and a unique regional destination to connect with history, nature, and each other.



Are there any changes you would make to finalize the recommended DRI Vision Statement?

Public Feedback on Goals

What Resonated:

- *“Walkability”*
- *“Refreshing streetscapes”*
- *“Attracting businesses”*
- *“Embracing waterfront”*

Improvements/Recommendations:

- Access/exposure to nature
- Emphasis on local/small businesses
- Community programming
- Safe transportation



Public Feedback on Strategies and Project Ideas

- *Mixed-use redevelopment of vacant spaces*
- *Improve waterfront access with amenities and conversion of land to public use*
- *Focus on bringing more shops, restaurants, and other businesses to make people want to stay.*
- *Projects that will draw people to become long-term members of the community*
- *Do not change the current “small town” feel*
- *Activities/places for young people to socialize*
- *Mixed feedback on overnight accommodations*

Recommended DRI Goals

1. Attract new shops, restaurants, and other businesses to the downtown area.
2. Make downtown Tonawanda a year-round destination for residents and visitors.
3. Embrace Tonawanda's waterfront, parks, and trails as key activity centers for residents and visitors alike.
4. Improve walkability throughout downtown and better connect downtown to parks, trails, and neighborhoods.

Are there any changes you would make to finalize the recommended DRI Goals?

Recommended DRI Goals

5. Refresh streetscapes to improve access and make downtown Tonawanda look and feel livelier and more attractive to businesses.
6. Upgrade downtown Tonawanda's housing stock with a diverse mix of options for all residents.
7. Celebrate Tonawanda's rich heritage through the preservation of historic buildings and cultural sites and story-telling.
8. Highlight the small-town, historic feel of the city through enhancements to buildings, public spaces, and amenities.

Are there any changes you would make to finalize the recommended DRI Goals?

Open Call for Projects

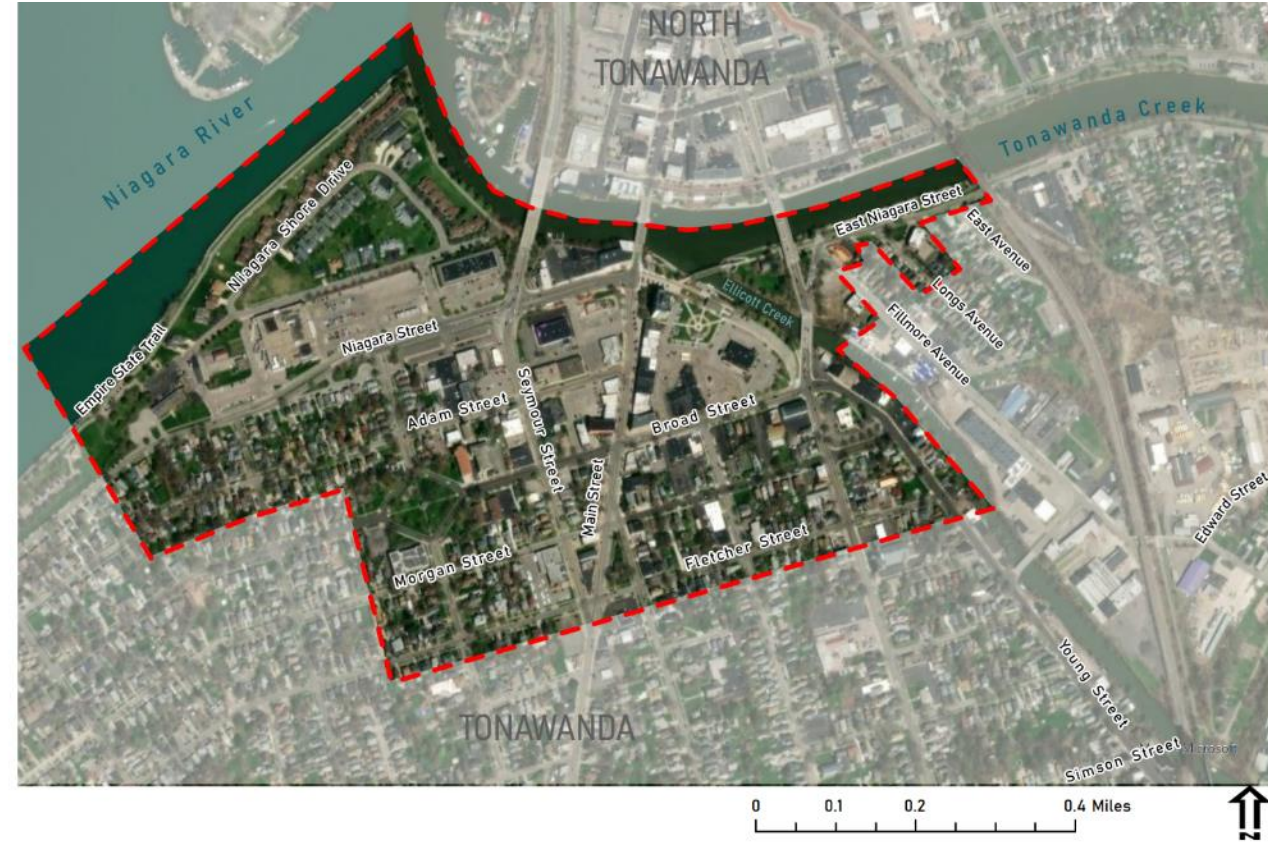


Open Call Overview

- Open Call for Projects: May 30 to July 12
- Proposed projects must be located within or near the preliminary DRI boundary.
- Process:
 1. Applicants submit a complete DRI Project Form (with assistance from consultant as needed) by July 12 or a Small Project Fund Interest Form for smaller or less transformative projects.
 2. Technical assistance and open office hours available throughout the Open Call for Projects

More details at tonawandadri.com/#projects.

Paper applications available at City Hall.



Eligible Project Types



Public Improvement Projects

Streetscape and transportation improvements, recreational trails, new and upgraded parks, plazas, public art, green infrastructure, and other public realm projects.



New Development and/or Rehabilitation of Existing Downtown Buildings

Development and redevelopment of real property for mixed-use, commercial, residential, not for profit, or public uses. Development / redevelopment should result in employment opportunities, housing choices or other community services.



Small Project Grant Fund

A locally managed matching small project fund (up to \$600,000) for small downtown projects, such as façade improvements, building renovations, business assistance, or public art.



Branding and Marketing

Downtown branding and marketing projects that target residents, tourists, investors, developers and visitors.

DRI Project Requirements

Timing - must be able to break ground within two years and be completed in five years

Sponsor - must have an entity (not an individual) that agrees to undertake the project

Site Control - must have authority to undertake the project at that location

Scope - must have potential to transform the downtown area

Budget - should have a detailed budget and leverage other funding

Decarbonization - may be required to meet energy efficiency requirements

Financing - DRI is a reimbursement-based grant program, and sponsors must be able to finance all project costs prior to DRI reimbursement at project completion

Match - private projects must include a minimum 25% match (non-DRI funds)

Small Projects Fund

About

- Fund (up to \$600,000) that LPC may recommend in final slate of projects
- Specific small projects included in SIP as examples (but not recommended for funding)
- Administered by the City
- All small projects need to apply to fund once established

Eligible Activities (LPC can limit)

- Interior and exterior building renovations for commercial and mixed-use spaces
- Upper-story residential improvements
- Business assistance: Permanent commercial machinery and equipment
- Soft costs – architectural, engineering, & environmental services, etc.
- Public Art Program

Private Match Component (LPC can increase)

- Minimum match of 25% of the total project cost on a per project basis.
- Match requirements must be realized on a building-by-building basis and are calculated using the total project cost
- In-kind or volunteer services not eligible as match.



Assistance Available

- Informational meetings for prospective applicants Thursday May 30, 5:30pm and 6:30pm at City Hall Community Room
- Virtual information session scheduled Wednesday June 5, 1pm-2pm
- In-person open office hours scheduled:
 - Wednesday June 12, 10am-2pm at the Tonawanda Public Library Meeting Room
- Ad-hoc technical assistance available upon request
- Questions about the Open Call for Projects? Email Bob.Gibson@wsp.com.

DRI Project Form required for ALL projects to be considered for funding

The screenshot shows a webpage header with logos for New York State, Department of State, Downtown Revitalization Initiative, and NY Forward. Below the header is a teal bar with the text "City of Tonawanda". The main heading is "DRI Project Form" in bold black text with a yellow underline. The body text explains that the City of Tonawanda has been awarded funds through the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) to fund catalytic projects. It mentions that the Local Planning Committee (LPC) is seeking project proposals from the public for potential projects to be included in the City of Tonawanda's Strategic Investment Plan. Projects included in the Strategic Investment Plan will be reviewed by New York State and may receive funding from a total allocation of \$9,700,000. Project proposals must be received by July 12, 2024. At the bottom, it states that two informational meetings will be held in person at the Tonawanda City Hall Community Room on Thursday, May 30 at 5:00 and 6:00pm.

Funding Application Forms for Projects

- **DRI Project Form**

- For transformational projects >\$75K in total project cost to be considered for grant funding directly from the state
- Provide as much detail as possible for project profile development

- **Small Project Fund Interest Form**

- For smaller, less transformational projects <\$75K in total project cost to be considered for grant funding from the City of Tonawanda
- Provide brief project description and itemized cost estimates for improvements/activities



Next Steps



Upcoming Engagement Opportunities – Pop-Up Events

- Wednesday concert series at Gateway Harbor (June-August)
- Cycle the Erie Canal (July 7)
- Canal Fest (July 14-21)
- Art on the Riverwalk Festival (July 14)
- Friday Night Lights (July 19)
- City of Tonawanda Garden Walk (July 20)
- Local Development Corporation Business Owners Meet & Greet (July)
- Neighbors United Day of Play (Sep 21)



Upcoming Engagement Opportunities – Other

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Presentations to other groups (Veterans, Students, etc.)
- Public Workshop #1 Online Engagement Activities
- Tonawanda DRI Website
- Social Media



Next Steps

- Promote the Public Survey through July 19
- Promote the Open Call for Projects through July 12, including targeted outreach to small business owners
- Upcoming meetings
 - Open Call Informational Meetings, May 30, 5:30pm and 6:30pm at City Hall Community Room
 - LPC Meeting #3 (Jul 25): Initial review of proposed projects, presentation of survey results and Downtown Profile & Assessment
 - LPC Meeting #4 (Aug 29): Refine proposed projects
 - Public Workshop #2 (September): Feedback on proposed projects

See more
info and
links at
website
Tonawanda
DRI.com



Public Comment

