

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: New York City

Municipality Name: New York City

Downtown Name: Long Island City

County: Queens

Downtown Description - Provide an overview of the downtown and summarize the rationale behind nominating this downtown for a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award):

Long Island City (LIC), known as the Fourth Central Business District of New York City, is an important economic center for the region with a diverse set of industries with good paying jobs. The community is poised for accelerated growth through recent major infusions of both public and private investments. However, these investments have not resulted in a truly integrated community. LIC contains populations who are underserved and who need to be better integrated into the community so that the community's growth is an opportunity for all. Our proposal as a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) seeks to build on work funded in part by the Regional Economic Development Council, which identified the need to, and recommended some strategies to, establish better linkages between the massive developments and opportunities now presented for LIC's future and our local populations, and to help ensure that our community is cohesive and inclusive economically, socially, educationally, and culturally. We seek to maximize our burgeoning community's assets to become a livable, mixed-use community with abundant connectivity among our residents and workers, to improve the quality of life for all, and to set up lasting means for community inclusion so that the pace and pressure of development in LIC leaves no one behind.

As a downtown geographic designation, LIC has a core central district that is dense with commercial and industrial activity as well as new residential growth. Just north of the central district the area has established residential and industrial uses as well as a hospital that serves the LIC area. Major cultural institutions are located throughout. The boundary area includes zip codes 11101, 11120, 11109, and 11106. The area is serviced by major public transportation, including 13 MTA subway stations, 17 bus lines, the LIRR, ferry service, 4 bridges, 1 tunnel to Manhattan, access to main roads and major highways, and LaGuardia and JFK Airports. The area also includes the Long Island City Business Improvement District (BID) and BID expansion area, and the Long Island City Industrial Business Zone (IBZ). As such, the district is a compact, well-defined downtown community with definite boundaries, as shown in the attached map.

The population of LIC as of 2013 is 65,930 residents. The central district is experiencing consistent population growth with 29,061 residents, a growth of 13.5% since 2000. Jobs in the area increased by 20.2% from 2004 and 2013, and equal 85,875 workers in diverse industries. However, as the district overall is experiencing new growth and development, there remains substantial pockets of poverty and disparity in income and educational attainment. Within the area, there two New York City Housing Authority developments: Ravenswood Houses and Queensbridge Houses North and South . The latter is the largest public housing development in the country. Just a bit further to the north is Astoria Houses. The census tracts which include the public housing developments report some of the highest levels of poverty, as well as the lowest levels of educational attainment compared to the overall area and the city as a whole.

The DRI will knit together the separate areas of investments into a cohesive and broad-based economic opportunity area which will bridge the gaps remaining among less advantaged portions of the population and the local growth opportunities around them, simultaneously making it a more successful neighborhood for all. The DRI will better integrate the community for the future, through approaches such as those identified in Section 8 below. In order to capture the growth and to better connect the people in the area, more investment is needed to establish a full service, livable, 24/7 urban community. If we do not address this need, LIC and the region will risk losing future economic growth and opportunity, hurting the populations who need these the most.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines.

- 1) Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood. Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment.**

As shown in the attached map, the Long Island City area designated for this DRI encompasses zip codes 11101, 11120, 11109, 11106. The core of the area where there is the greatest density of businesses and jobs is located around the north-south axis along Northern Boulevard and Jackson Avenue, and the east-west axis along Queens Plaza and Queens Boulevard. The area of impact of this core is bounded on the west by the East River; on the south by Newtown Creek running parallel to the Long Island Expressway (Route 495) from the Midtown Tunnel; on the north roughly by Astoria Boulevard running parallel to the Grand Central Parkway (Route 278); and on the east just inside Greenpoint Avenue around Sunnyside and Sunnyside Gardens. This is the area designated, because it is historically and geographically well-defined, mixed-use, and compact relative to the surrounding area. The area contains a population of 65,930 residents, and 85,875 workers.

- 2) Size. Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown.**

The designated area is of sufficient size to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, because it already has a sizeable existing population of both residents (65,930) and workers (85,875), is serviced by multiple public transportation means and by major roads, 4 bridges, a tunnel to Manhattan, and two major airports. Although the area as a whole experienced a slight decline in residents from 2000 to 2013 (roughly -4%), the core of the area increased 13.5% in resident population, and overall the area experienced a 20.2% increase in the number of jobs. For decades, the area struggled to find its identity, evolving from a largely ethnic population employed by local manufacturers, to a more diverse 24/7 community which now includes professional firms, cultural, and academic institutions, as well as a still thriving industrial base. In the last decade the median household income of the population overall increased as well as education attainment; the population 25 years and older saw increased percentages of residents with high school diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or better. Although the overall population showed improved income and educational attainment, persistent and substantial pockets of poverty remain, primarily in the census tracts where the area's public housing developments are located. In these census tracts, over 30% of the people are living below the poverty line. The community is thus ideally poised for this

DRI as a means to help shape its future evolution, so that the community is inclusive of all populations, regardless of race, gender, income, or other status, and so that the present wave and influx of development do not exclude or overtake the local populations in need.

3) Past Investments & Future Investment Potential. Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

Long Island City will be able to capitalize upon and leverage significant public and private investments which have been made in the community in recent years. Such investments include but are not limited to those listed below. Among the most recent are those that have been invested to support Long Island City's creation of a first-ever Comprehensive Plan.

Notwithstanding these sizable investments, none of them address the specific goals of this DRI – i.e., to convene a DRI Planning Committee for LIC to develop a Strategic Plan for the community and to identify key projects with the specific aim of better integrating the community and connecting those who are less advantaged with LIC's growing assets, including employers and job opportunities, public amenities, quality of life measures, transportation, and culture. The goals are cohesion, connection, and integration, so that the investments which have been made -- both public and private, and both past and future – benefit *all* of LIC residents and workers, and ensure that the less advantaged pockets of our community are included to the maximum possible extent in the community's burgeoning success. If accomplished, this will be a singular hallmark initiative and will leave a lasting legacy for many generations to come. The community stands ready to meet this challenge. The work done to date on Phase 1 of the Comprehensive Plan has laid the groundwork for the DRI, enabling the DRI effort to get substantively underway immediately upon award.

i. Public and Foundation Investments: the Long Island City Partnership (LICP) received funding for the LIC Comprehensive Plan as follows:

NYC EDC - \$100,000 (2015)

Ford Foundation – \$150,000 (2015-16)

New York State Regional Economic Development Council - \$100,000 (2015)

New York City Council - \$50,000 (2015-2016)

Additional funding of \$47,500 from the following:

Queens Borough President

Cornell Tech

Verizon

Con Edison

TD Charitable Foundation

ii. City Investments

NYC EDC - \$80 million (2012) (for Queens Plaza, Dutch Kills Green, Jackson Avenue, Court Square improvements)

City of New York - \$40 million (2015+) (for Long Island City/Hunter's Point reconstruction)

City of New York - \$6.65 million (2014) (for Queensbridge Park seawall and new waterfront promenade)

City of New York – investment in citywide ferry service and East River ferry access (ongoing)

City of New York - \$200 million (for new schools – ongoing)

City of New York & New York State - Major waterfront developments of Hunters Point South, Queens West, and Gantry State Park. Combined the developments will provide more than 8,000 units of housing, including affordable units for low/moderate income families, parks, retail space, and new schools.

iii. Additional funding to LICP for area economic development and neighborhood programs:

New York City Council – discretionary funding (for BID expansion, Long Island City Springs, and Queens Plaza lighting – ongoing)

New York City Department of Small Business Services – investment in AvenueNYC placemaking and neighborhood marketing; 3-year services contract (FY17-19) for the Industrial Business Zone, plus 30 years' worth of contracts under successive programs to assist with small business in Long Island City.

b) Private Investments

Exact dollar amounts are unknown, but the influx of private investments into Long Island City has been massive. The area is experiencing growth particularly in residential and hotel development, which represents a major turning point as LIC becomes more and more of a mixed-use community with 24/7 activity among residents, visitors, and businesses.

Since 2006, more than 10,800 residential units have been built. More than 22,500 residential units are currently under planning or construction. These include primarily rental apartments, both market rate and some affordable or slated to be affordable units. LIC now has 27 hotels in operation, and 36 new hotels are under planning or construction. Additional public and private investments for commercial developments include 2 Gotham Center (2011), 27-01 Queens Plaza North (the Brewster Building), and the recently announced 1 and 3 Gotham Center.

Despite all of these wonderful investments, not all of LIC's residents and workers have been well integrated into the community or have access to the opportunities which these investments have created. This is true whether it be access to jobs, access to public spaces and amenities, better connections with public transportation, or access to culture. The singular goal of this DRI is to solve this problem, and none of the investments made heretofore by the City, the State, or the private sector has addressed this important need; nor is there any solution on the near horizon other than through this DRI.

4) Job Growth. Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

Recent job growth in the area points toward Long Island City becoming one of the most vibrant, sought-after communities in New York for residents, employers, and visitors alike. Increasingly, residents are able to walk or bicycle to work. The businesses in the area are a diverse mix of legacy manufacturers and new technology manufacturers, as well as start-ups and large anchor tenants such as JetBlue and Citibank. Also, the community has seen recent growth in sectors such as: back office administration and support; waste management and remediation; clean tech; hospitality and food services; health care and social assistance; and professional, scientific, and technical services. These developments demonstrate that LIC has great potential for a stable and growing workforce, as well as for a vibrant entrepreneurial sector.

Indeed, 87% of respondents to a recent survey of local businesses commissioned by the Long Island City Partnership said that they plan to stay in the community and will retain or increase employment within the next five years. These businesses currently account for more than 20,000 jobs, and they expect to generate another 1,000 new jobs over the next five years.

With the construction of Cornell Tech on neighboring Roosevelt Island, LIC can and should be the beneficiary of new jobs and opportunities in high tech fields as a result of the new scientific research and development hub being created there. In addition, LIC is poised to become a biotech hub which could anchor the industry in this region.

However, even in the face of these promising developments, lack of connectivity threatens future growth and community stakeholders want to be sure that all of LIC's people are included in the opportunities being created. This DRI is proposed so that we can work on creating maximum linkages to connect all of our people – particularly those who are still underserved and under-educated – with the tremendous opportunities now at our door, and better connect all parts of the community to create a true 24/7 modern downtown.

5) Attractiveness of the Downtown. Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, healthy and affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces.

Long Island City has many public assets and attractions which, if leveraged through this DRI, will be enhanced and be much more accessible to all of our people. In fact, a key goal of the DRI as proposed would be to help build connections among these assets and our local populations in need, effectively knitting them together for the first time.

These assets include: more than eight public parks and open spaces, many with playgrounds; more than eight cultural institutions; bikeways and walkways including Queens Plaza Greenway and Vernon Boulevard Bike Lane; 13 Citibike shared bicycle stations; a major hospital (Mount Sinai Queens); two major educational institutions (LaGuardia Community College and CUNY Law School); four branches of the Queens Public Library with a new branch under construction on the waterfront; and the Long Island City YMCA.

LIC's central district is also home to many "anchor institutions." These are not-for-profit organizations well-established in our community and therefore likely to stay indefinitely, such as:

the Long Island City Partnership, Urban Upbound, Long Island City Cultural Alliance, Hunter's Point Park Conservancy, the Floating Hospital, Hour Children, the Fortune Society, Zone 126, Sunnyside Community Services, and Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House.

Yet, in spite of the many attractions of LIC's downtown, there are too many barriers between them, keeping them from becoming a cohesive whole and they fail to be inclusive of all of the community's people. This DRI seeks to solve the problem and fill the void.

6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life. Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

As reflected in the above list of major public investments by the City and State of New York and their agencies and departments over the past 10 years, a major push exists to help ensure that Long Island City enjoys a good, healthy quality of life. Such a policy is embedded, for example, in the City's commitment to area-wide reconstruction of Hunter's Point, to creation and maintenance of the public parks identified above, to investments in LIC's first ever Comprehensive Plan, construction of new schools, over 30 years' investment in LIC's industrial areas, reconstruction of waterfront infrastructure, creation of a new waterfront esplanade after Superstorm Sandy, and many other examples.

The willingness and zeal of LIC's public and private stakeholders to help enhance the community's quality of life are unquestioned. The challenge to be solved by this DRI is to make sure that local developments are inclusive of all members of the community, and that lasting linkages are made so that all of LIC's residents and workers enjoy the benefits and opportunities of what is being developed here. This DRI proposes to solve this problem and to fill this void, building on the work of Phase 1 of the LIC Comprehensive Plan, as more fully described in Section 8 below.

7) Local Support. Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

Through the recent work to create a first-ever Comprehensive Plan for Long Island City, and as a result of recent investments made by stakeholders in the community, LIC has a ready, willing, and able list of supporters who will be galvanized to participate in this DRI. As a local lead for the program who will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee, the applicant proposes Elizabeth Lusskin, President of the Long Island City Partnership, which is the area's local development corporation, who has already made tremendous headway in bringing together community stakeholders.

Major supporters include:

Hon. Melinda Katz, Queens Borough President

Michelle Adams, Tishman Speyer

Denise Arbesu, Citi Commercial Bank

David Brause, Brause Realty

Tracy Capune, Kaufman Astoria Studios

Mary Ceruti, Sculpture Center
Ebony Conely-Young, Long Island City YMCA
Carol Conslato, Con Edison
Jenny Dixon, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum
Patricia Dunphy, Rockrose Development Corp.
Richard Dzwlewicz, TD Bank
Meghan French, Cornell Tech
John Hatfield, Socrates Sculpture Park
Gary Kesner, Silvercup Studios
Seth Pinsky, RXR Realty
Caryn Schwab, Mount Sinai Queens
Gretchen Werwaiss, Werwaiss & Co.
Jonathan White, White Coffee
Richard Windram, Verizon

In addition, all members of the Long Island City Partnership Board of Directors are supporters, as are all of the public and foundation funders listed above. The Long Island City Partnership has also convened dozens of stakeholders as part of its focus groups over the past two years in connection with the drafting of the LIC Comprehensive Plan. Such stakeholders are also considered to be supporters for this DRI, because they continue to provide valuable input into questions over the future of LIC and ways to enhance the community for all residents and workers.

8) Other. Provide any other information that informed the nomination of this downtown for a DRI award.

The DRI funding will be used to build upon the funding and research completed for the LIC Comprehensive Plan study with the objectives of creating a first ever Strategic Plan through a DRI Planning Committee, and identifying measures specifically to build a more cohesive, connected, and integrated community so that past and future investments include all of our community residents and workers, and that community developments and improvements benefit those who are at risk of being left behind.

Potential projects to be designed and implemented may include, for example:

- Enliven underused public land to create safer and more interesting spaces for pedestrians. Examples are the spaces under the elevated subway tracks and ramps and the bridges crossing Sunnyside Yards.
- Improve wayfinding through a new street sign and kiosk program to help residents, visitors, and employees better orient themselves throughout the neighborhood and increase awareness of the area's many amenities, such as public parks, bike paths, waterfront walkways, cultural institutions job centers, and not-for-profit anchors.
- Develop a not-for-profit multipurpose step-up space for small, growing industrial firms and nascent tech/design firms graduating from co-working or incubator spaces. Co-locate these with prototyping and workforce development services.
- Improve public transportation ingress and egress, linkages, and signage. Perform a traffic study and recommend means so that local businesses have better access to streets, highways, and loading docks, while mitigating risks of accidents, blockages, and bottlenecks.
- Make recommendations to work with MTA and DOT to update and enhance schedules, stops, and stations in the community.

Conclusion

We thank the State for its consideration to award a Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant for the betterment of Long Island City, Queens, and we stand ready to discuss any aspect of this matter or to provide further information as you may need or desire.

Proposed DRI Catchment Area for LIC, Queens



LIC Business Improvement District



LIC Industrial Business Zone



LIC Commercial Corridors



Open Space & Recreation



LIC LANDMARKS/ANCHORS

1. Citibank
2. Cornell Tech
3. CUNY Law School
4. Gantry Plaza State Park
5. Hunters Point South Park
6. JetBlue, MetLife, LICP
7. Kaufman Astoria Studios
8. LaGuardia Community College
9. LIC YMCA
10. MoMA PS1
11. Mount Sinai Hospital Queens
12. Museum of the Moving Image
13. Noguchi Museum
14. Queensbridge Houses
15. Queensbridge Park
16. Ravenswood Houses
17. Sculpture Center
18. Silvercup Studios
19. Socrates Sculpture Park

