DOWNTOWN RENSSELAER WATERFRONT

CITY OF RENSSELAER, NY

Submitted for:

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – CREDC

JUNE 2016

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Capital District

Municipality Name: City of Rensselaer

Downtown Name: Downtown Rensselaer Waterfront

County: Rensselaer

Point of Contact: Charles Moore, AICP

Title: Director of Planning & Development

Phone: 518-465-1693

Email: Charles.moore@rensselaerny.gov

Downtown Description:

The downtown City of Rensselaer is a distressed former industrial city on the banks of the iconic National Heritage Hudson River, across the water from Albany, NY. With a high percentage of its 9,000 residents living near the poverty line, the city has struggled to rebuild with a weak tax base. The city is now embarking on a bold vision to transform itself as a hub of emerging technology businesses, capitalizing on its scenic waterfront location and direct access to a major transportation hub of the Capital District.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

1) **Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.**

The boundaries of the target neighborhood include the Hudson River waterfront area of Rensselaer, as illustrated on the Revitalization Target Area map in Appendix-B.

This target neighborhood is very well defined—physically constrained between the Hudson River on the west and the Amtrak Rail Lines to the east—extending from the downtown City of Rensselaer north to the Amtrak Rail Yard. The boundaries of this revitalization area have been carefully formulated from analysis which was undertaken recently as part of the 2016 Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Nomination Plan for the city. The target area includes 4,000 linear feet of natural shoreline along the Hudson River, covering 200 acres of distressed area which was once a hub of railroad and industrial activity generations ago. This waterfront provides spectacular scenic views of the river and the Albany skyline beyond, however access to it has been largely prevented for many years due to early development patterns and the Amtrak rail lines which created a physical barrier between the historic city neighborhoods and the river. Downtown Rensselaer, largely composed of Census Tract 515, is officially designated as a "distressed area" with roughly 20% of the population living at or below the poverty line. This area is badly in need of economic rejuvenation. The goal for this revitalization area is to establish downtown Rensselaer as a new hub of leading technology businesses, transforming the abandoned waterfront with redevelopment to provide much needed jobs, housing, recreation and public access to this scenic National Heritage river.

Near the center of this revitalization area—nestled between the historic city neighborhoods and the waterfront—is the Rensselaer Train Station, the 9th busiest station in the United States serving as many as 800,000 travelers a year. A majority of these travelers are not benefitting the city, as they are currently only using the station to get to and from other destinations such as Albany, and there is no local draw or attraction to capture this population. However, the growing station provides excellent potential for the creation of new transit-oriented development sites around this busy hub.

Just to the northwest of this train station, amid other vacant or underutilized property, lies a 23-acre vacant parcel on the river which is considered the "Project Anchor Site". This property has been identified by numerous developers as having very high redevelopment potential due to its strategic downtown location on the Hudson River. This site has recently been proposed to host the Rensselaer Clean Energy Deployment Center (CEDC)—a mixed-use development which was identified as one of the top initiatives of the **Capital 20.20 Strategy**—as well as SUNY Polytechnic Institute campus space and several other proposals. This Project Anchor Site is believed to be the best starting point for a multi-phased revitalization effort. (To view some of the proposed redevelopment concepts, please see the web-links provided in Question 9.)

It is important to note that the large majority of the target area is comprised of vacant and underutilized land which was formerly industrial, and therefore this revitalization project would not be displacing any people, homes or businesses. In this sense, it is a "clean slate" of opportunity to greatly improve the City of Rensselaer economically, socially and visually. The city strongly believes that transformation of this blighted waterfront area is the highest priority for an economic turn-around, and has been taking a creative and aggressive approach to promoting a smart, transit-oriented, technology driven vision for its redevelopment. It is believed the DRI funds awarded here would have the greatest catalytic effect on the region because of its centrally connected location.

2) **Size.**

The downtown Rensselaer revitalization area has the advantage of three different levels of growing population "catchment areas" which would support its growth, as follows:

1) Immediate Neighborhood. At its most basic level, the immediate historic and older residential neighborhoods which surround the project area provide a dense local population of residents who are within walking distance of any new jobs, retail, services and recreation created. This area can be seen just east of the target neighborhood on the Revitalization Target Area and Context Map images shown in Appendix B. These neighborhoods include a population of more than 2,000 residents who are within a ½ mile radius, and more than 5,000 residents who live within a mile radius on this side of the river. It is also important to note that, within the half-mile radius, there are approximately 200 vacant residential properties which have the potential to be developed, so this immediate catchment area has the capacity to grow.

2) City of Albany & Surrounding Vicinity. At a secondary level, the slightly larger geographic area around the city includes many newer residential neighborhoods, as well as the major population center of the City of Albany just across the bridge. Within this larger catchment area—determined by the surrounding census block groups—there are more than 20,000 people. It is anticipated that this larger radius population area would help to support new commercial and recreational uses here, as well as seek job opportunities. These nearby population areas, notably the adjacent municipality of East Greenbush, continue to grow.

3) Active Transportation Hub. At the third level, the presence of the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station within the center of the target neighborhood is also anticipated to provide a large influx of business travelers, tourists and commuters into the heart of the target area. As noted in Question 1 above, this train station currently handles up to 800,000 people embarking and disembarking here each year, however a majority of this traffic is currently only using the station to get to and from other destinations such as nearby Albany. The City of Rensselaer currently lacks a critical mass of commercial retail, services, restaurants and activities to attract this traffic to explore and patronize downtown. It is believed that the proper mix of development along the local waterfront and improved physical connections would create a very convenient and attractive destination for these people to visit. If only 4% of these existing travelers were to be drawn to new downtown development, it would provide 30,000 new visitors a year. This active train station provides a very strong foundation for the development of a transit oriented neighborhood which would be attractive for local commuters coming into the area to work in the emerging tech industry, described further in Question 4.

In total, it is estimated that between these three levels of population catchment areas, the target neighborhood would be well supported by both local and area residents, as well as travelers coming into the target neighborhood, in excess of 20,000 people. Unlike other upstate communities which largely rely on seasonal or tourist activity for their local economy, downtown Rensselaer and the surrounding area has historically remained an industrial port area, with no discernable ebbs and flows of activity. It is anticipated that redevelopment of the waterfront with clean-tech and mixed-use projects would not alter this historic pattern, however it is likely to increase recreational and tourist activity along the river's edge during the summer.

NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

Capital Region
Regional Economic
Development Council

3) Past Investments & Future Investment Potential.

The Rensselaer downtown area has recently been experiencing a number of aggressive private redevelopment proposals—particularly for the Project Anchor Site—and is also benefitting from several public infrastructure upgrades which have either been completed or which will be underway in the very near term. These combined efforts are expected to help leverage this revitalization project as well as other investments and improvements.

Leverages Resources:	Public: $3,000,000	Private: $22,000,000
Prior NYS Funding/REDC Funding:	Amount: $3,000,000	Amount: $187,500
Please identify use(s) of prior funding:	Public Esplanade grants will support and leverage 96 unit apartment construction along the waterfront along with conversion of an old convent into 20 market rate apartments. Auction of city property generated $500,000 in private investment and rehabilitation of more than 30 underutilized properties.	

1) Private Sector. Within the private sector, the area within and around the revitalization target area has been home to several redevelopment proposals in the last few years, summarized below:

- **DeLaet's Landing** — Located at the Project Anchor Site, included a proposal for a diverse mix of residential, commercial/high-tech office and retail uses on the vacant industrial riverfront in addition to the **Rensselaer Clean Energy Deployment Center (CEDC)** by **SUNY Polytechnic.**

- **Kiliaen's Landing** — Just north of the project target area, a mixed-use waterfront plan which is estimated to have the potential of creating 450 permanent new jobs and generate $1.5 million in annual property tax. Such tax revenues are crucial to the City of Rensselaer, which currently struggles with the highest percentage (65%) of tax-exempt properties in the state.

- **Cottage Hill Landing** — A 170-unit residential proposal just outside of the project target area, within the dense older neighborhoods that surround it. This project is proposed on one of the many vacant residential lots that are found within a half-mile of the project site, a fact which illustrates the infill potential of the local catchment area.

- **Belltop Apartments** — A 20-unit residential proposal along East Street on the edge of the project target area. This proposal seeks the adaptive re-use of a former convent.

These types of private-sector projects are seen as an important catalyst for the local revitalization, especially considering their proximity to the train station and transit-oriented development potential. (Images of some of these redevelopment concepts have been included via a web-link in Question 9 for reference.)

2) Public Sector Investments. Within the public sector, there have been several recent infrastructure upgrades and improvements completed, with more expected to get underway within the next year.

- **Amtrak Terminal Expansion.** The busy Albany/Rensselaer train station at the epicenter of this revitalization area is currently constructing an expansion to add a fourth track in anticipation of increased ridership.

- **Railroad Bridge Rehabilitation.** The Livingston Avenue rail bridge, which crosses the Hudson River just north of the project area, is currently under preliminary design for replacement, and is expected to be upgraded to accommodate pedestrian travel across the river. This pedestrian link is planned to connect to the new Hudson River Trail, which is going out to bid this spring.

- **High-Speed Rail Plans.** High-speed rail is currently being considered to link the Rensselaer rail station with New York City. A similar study to develop a high-speed rail link between Rensselaer and the City of Buffalo has also just completed the step of Environmental Impact review. These efforts underscore the strategic geographic crossroads that Rensselaer occupies in upstate New York.

- **City Infrastructure Upgrades Underway.** The City of Rensselaer has recently financed significant infrastructure upgrades with the streetscape rehabilitation of Broadway—the primary boulevard through the center of the target area—with all new water, sewer, gas, sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and a bridge over the rail lines. At the south end of the target area, other infrastructure upgrades include all new gas lines serving the downtown neighborhood.

- **Future City Infrastructure Upgrades Planned.** Similar to the Broadway improvements noted above, the City of Rensselaer is beginning significant infrastructure upgrades along East Street on the eastern side of the project area. This work is scheduled to go out to bid in the next month, and includes new underground utilities, streetscape upgrades as well as sustainable "green-infrastructure" stormwater controls.

- **Hudson Waterfront Trail Out To Bid.** Along the waterfront of the project area, plans are currently underway to construct a major segment of the Hudson Riverfront Trail, which will connect downtown Rensselaer with the Livingston Avenue Bridge pedestrian link noted above.

- **Rensselaer Waterfront Park Design.** The city is currently working on the design for the Rensselaer Waterfront Park—located at the Project Anchor Site—as the centerpiece for surrounding private development. This work is being coordinated with private developers and the Waterfront Trail.

- **Broadband.** The city has embarked on an effort to establish an ultra-fast city-wide broadband network to attract new technology businesses and provide broadband services to underserved populations, built from the existing fiber-optic trunk lines they have already established. These combined efforts are part of the city's strategy to help attract new clean-technology businesses and sustainable development into the downtown as part of a vision for Tech Valley.

- **Solar Farm.** The city is currently working to establish an 8-10 acre solar farm south of the project area on the nearby BASF property.

- **Environmental Compliance.** The city is proud to note that it is significantly ahead of schedule for eliminating combined sewer overflows into the Hudson River in accordance with the Albany Pool CSO Long-Term Plan developed with the CDRPC and the NYSDEC.

4) Job Growth.

The City of Rensselaer has lately been experiencing the beginning hints of a rejuvenation, and promising signs that its effort to attract "Tech Valley" businesses is bearing fruit. Examples of this can be seen in the recent private sector business growth and job changes in the local market. These include:

- **Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc.** — Just a short drive up the hill in the adjacent municipality of East Greenbush, Regeneron is planning a massive expansion of an additional 480,000 s.f. as part of a second, nearby campus. This expansion is anticipated to increase their local workforce of 1,300 people with an additional 1,000. The company experienced $4.1 billion in revenue in 2015, a 46% increase.

- **DocStrats** — A promising information technology and training company located in downtown Rensselaer which has been growing steadily. With revenue of $3.17 million in 2013, they employ around 25 people, with plans to double their workforce over the next three years.

- **Monolith Solar** — Founded in 2008, this fast-growing company was started by two people in a garage and now employs 40 people in downtown Rensselaer. With the recent trend for solar installations growing quickly, this company is looking to expand further.

- **Albany Molecular Research, Inc. (AMRI)** — Provides manufacturing of bulk active pharmaceuticals and advanced intermediates, with more than 1,300 employees worldwide. AMRI's Rensselaer facility is located along the waterfront at the southern edge of the target area, with 260 local employees.

- **Vision Data Equipment Corporation** — A growing supplier of IT media/publishing software applications, with offices just outside of the target area. Currently employs 40 people.

- **Rensselaer Technology Park** — A campus dedicated to university-related technology ventures with the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, located at the northern end of the city.

The above list represents an important sampling of the local technology businesses which are already established and serve as a growing foundation for creating a high-tech industry center in this area. By hosting these emerging technology companies, and attracting similar technology firms and educational institutions, it is believed that the city would be well positioned with long-term sustainable job growth as the technology market continues to blossom.

It is also anticipated that additional growth in the technology sector, along with a diverse mix of downtown housing, recreation and retail business, will make the downtown a very attractive place to live, work and visit for current and future generations.

5) Attractiveness of the Downtown.

The downtown City of Rensselaer and its environs have a number of very strong physical features which can be enhanced or leveraged to make this otherwise underutilized area very attractive:

- **Waterfront.** The primary neighborhood target area includes more than 4,000 linear feet of scenic Hudson River waterfront, which is ideal for new mixed-use development with restaurants, parks, trails, marinas and other recreational activities.

- **Scenic Views of Albany.** The primary target neighborhood includes spectacular skyline views of Albany across the river, sunsets and night-time views of the Capital.

- **Hudson River Trail.** The city is currently embarking on an effort to construct the Hudson River Trail along the waterfront, and is designing a waterfront park which will act as the visual and recreational centerpiece to the new catalyst development around it. (See web-links provided in Question 9 for visuals.)

- **Public Parks.** The city is working to design the new Rensselaer Waterfront Park, connected by the waterfront trail, as the centerpiece of new private sector development on the river. There is also a public park at the Dunn Memorial Bridge, as well as a boat launch.

- **Transit Hub.** The primary target area includes the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station, served by two bus lines, with direct access to NYC, and high opportunity for new walkable, transit-oriented development around it.

- **Walkability.** The primary study area is immediately adjacent to a dense, older residential neighborhood which provides hundreds of homes and potential residential properties within walking or biking distance. The city has also been actively working to rebuild many of the primary downtown streetscapes with new sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and other amenities.

- **Connections.** The New York State capital, downtown Albany, is located just across the river within a 15 minute walk, or a short drive across the bridge.

- **Work & Play.** Rensselaer is located at the center of an employment and event triangle which includes the New York State Capitol, Albany Convention Center, Times Union Center, Rensselaer Tech Park, SUNY East Campus and Regeneron.

- **Regional Crossroads.** Rensselaer is located at an important regional crossroads in Upstate New York, with convenient access to important north/south and east/west corridors including Interstate 90, Adirondack Northway, the New York State Thruway and active rail corridors.

- **Developable Space To Grow.** Downtown Rensselaer, as well as some of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, have a large number of currently vacant parcels which are ripe opportunities for the development of new, mixed use commercial, food markets and diverse housing infill. (A detailed inventory of potential redevelopment properties has been provided via a web-link in Question 9.)

6) Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.

The City of Rensselaer is currently in the process of re-imagining itself as a potential model community for sustainable growth and clean technology. As part of this effort, it is actively working to encourage focused-growth within the downtown area and reconstruct local streetscapes to create a pedestrian-friendly environment with leading green-infrastructure and stormwater practices. The city recognizes that the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station—located at the center of the revitalization target area—has a pivotal role in helping to establish a more sustainable transit oriented neighborhood. Their efforts in the past few years have been to invest in new infrastructure to help attract new business in a walkable community, as they believe this will be a very attractive quality to emerging generations.

With this goal in mind, there are a number of existing policies as well as additional steps which the city expects to take to improve this quality of life:

- **New Zoning Codes.** The city adopted new zoning codes in 2012 which were designed to provide great flexibility while promoting a compact, walkable urban center to help encourage infill development.

- **Transit Oriented Development.** The downtown is blessed with a very active regional transit hub, which provides the foundation for a successful transit oriented development. However, much of the land directly around the train station is currently vacant or devoted to surface parking. This provides an excellent opportunity for active mixed-use infill development to make more efficient use of the real estate and strengthen connections to the waterfront.

- **A Vision for Tech Valley.** The city has been actively working for the past several years to advance a forward thinking economic development strategy by becoming a model community for clean technology, sustainability and smart growth. As part of this effort, it is working to develop a bold Community Broadband project, which is designed to both provide city-wide WiFi to connect underserved populations, as well as attract new leading businesses with Gigabit speed internet.

- **Quality of Life.** The city comprehensive plan, driven by its Vision Statement, notes: "*Residents, workers and visitors will enjoy the high quality of life offered by the Rensselaer's unique combination of small-city charm and regional access to large-city amenities. […]New businesses will be attracted to Rensselaer's quality-of-life assets, excellent transportation infrastructure, and proximity to major educational institutions.*" The city is committed to this effort to rebuild itself with a diverse mix of qualities which will make it attractive to new generations.

7) **Local Support.**

This DRI effort—including the many planning efforts working up to it—has the support of a number of important individuals and local groups which are invested in the Rensselaer economy. Letters of support (provided in a web-link in Question 9) regarding this work have been received from the following groups and individuals:

- State Assemblyman John McDonald
- State Senator Neil Breslin
- Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen Jimino
- Rensselaer City School District
- Capital District Transportation Authority
- City of Rensselaer Common Council
- Amtrak
- Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc.
- Documentation Strategies, Inc.

- Vision Data Equipment Corporation
- U.W. Marx Properties, Inc.
- Fiscal Development L.L.C.
- Realty USA
- CHA Consulting, Inc.
- Perkins Eastman Architects
- The Edgewater Company L.L.C.
- Rover Technologies
- Dalpos Architects & Integrators (Syracuse, NY)
- Millennium Strategies

Prior to this, the city planning staff, Common Council, interested stakeholders and local residents have been diligently working toward a vision of creating an active redeveloped waterfront which is walkable and vibrant. To quote the City Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement:

> *"Residents, workers and visitors will enjoy the high quality of life offered by the Rensselaer's unique combination of small-city charm and regional access to large-city amenities. The City will build upon its unique heritage and exceptional location within the Capital District, renewing residents' sense of pride in their community.*
>
> *The city's waterfront along the Hudson River will be reinvented as a place to live, work and recreate. Public access to the Hudson River from neighborhoods, the train station and the central business district will be of paramount importance. A waterfront pathway/trail will provide continuous public access, connecting to activity centers such as downtown, the train station and adjacent neighborhoods. New businesses will be attracted to Rensselaer's quality-of-life assets, excellent transportation infrastructure, and proximity to major educational institutions.*
>
> *The City will include a variety of housing options that meet the needs of its diverse population. Residents will be encouraged to participate in the city's continuous planning and development process, especially at the neighborhood level. Their involvement will form the foundation of the city's future."*

Recent efforts toward this goal by the city has included the 2011 Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, and the 2016 Brownfield Opportunity Area Plan (Provided in web-links in Question 9).

If selected for this Downtown Revitalization Project, the City of Rensselaer Office of Planning and Building is well prepared and equipped to act as local lead to convene a local DRI Planning Committee of experienced and interested stakeholders and coordinate the effort with experts.

8) **Challenges.**

The City of Rensselaer recognizes, in its ongoing effort to revitalize this former industrial area, that there are a number of challenges to creating a successful community transformation. These are areas which the city expects to continue working to improve, and could be addressed as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative:

- Despite the fact that there is a high level of both private sector interest and potential in this revitalization, downtown Rensselaer remains an "untested market" to developers. The many development proposals which have come forward lately—even after spending significant funds to lay the engineering groundwork for these projects—have been stalled because it is a challenge for them to get financing. **This is the single biggest challenge to the local revitalization.** The City of Rensselaer has worked very hard to bring the necessary elements together, but has now done all it can, and needs outside assistance to raise investment confidence with a catalyst project to jump-start the neighborhood.

- Although the target area has the benefit of vacant land along the Hudson River waterfront—an asset many other communities would love to have—this waterfront area has been somewhat stymied from development due to limited accessibility. The accessibility issue has also been a deterrent to redevelopment. The city has been working to improve accessibility to this target area, however more steps are needed to create strong pedestrian connections to both the downtown and the train station to increase marketability.

- Although the neighborhood target area has the benefit of a major and active transportation hub, much of the real-estate directly around this train station is either vacant commercial land or surface parking. In order to successfully adapt this asset into a successful local economic driver, this transportation hub must be connected to the rest of downtown and the waterfront with active mixed-use development and jobs as part of a transit oriented community. This step is necessary to break the pattern of downtown Rensselaer acting only as a "pass-thru" to other destinations, but instead becoming a destination itself.

- Downtown Rensselaer, largely composed of Census Tract 515, is officially considered a "distressed area" according to EDA, and is classified just short of the threshold for a "highly distressed" area, with roughly 20% of population living below poverty level. Planning efforts as part of this work should take steps to include a diversity of housing and jobs to improve local opportunities and avoid wholesale displacement of this population through gentrification.

- The City of Rensselaer has the highest percentage of tax-exempt properties of any city in the state, making local-funding projects very difficult when tax revenues are very low. Economic movement is currently difficult at a time when leverage is needed to make bold steps. It is anticipated that a "carrot and stick" approach is needed to push through this obstacle.

9) Other Information / Links.

The following links are provided for easy access to relevant information supporting our application. We encourage you to visit some of these to see the progress and work which has gone into our local revitalization vision:

Images of Proposed Redevelopment Concepts
http://behanplanning.com/files/3814/6427/7507/RENS_Redevelopment_Concepts.pdf

Letters of Support
http://behanplanning.com/files/8414/6478/4753/RENS_Letters_of_Support.pdf

Inventory of Potential Redevelopment Properties
http://behanplanning.com/files/2614/6427/7714/RENS_Redevelopment_Properties.pdf

Marketing Material "City of Rensselaer – Hub of New York's Tech Valley"
www.rensselaerny.gov/Libraries/Clerk/WEB-CityofRensselaer.sflb.ashx

2016 Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Plan
http://behanplanning.com/files/9114/6402/4349/2016_Rensselaer_BOA_Draft_Reduced.pdf

2011 Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan
http://www.rensselaerny.gov/Files/Rensselaer%20LWRP%20Update_Final%20Draft_July%202011.pdf

NEWS: SUNY Polytechnic Seeks Proposals for Rensselaer Riverfront
http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-local/article/SUNY-Poly-seeks-no-proposals-for-Rensselaer-7288088.php

NEWS: Rensselaer Waterfront Transformation Wins State Funding
http://www.bizjournals.com/albany/news/2015/12/10/rensselaer-waterfront-transformation-wins-state.html

City of Rensselaer Comprehensive Plan

City of Rensselaer Zoning Map

APPENDIXES (On following pages)

Appendix A – Executive Summary

Appendix B – Revitalization Target Area Map

Context Area Map

Appendix C – Downtown Area Photos

Appendix A: Executive Summary

The City of Rensselaer is seeking assistance to leverage and push forward a bold vision to be reborn as a downtown hub of emerging technology and clean-energy business within the Tech Valley. Conditions are ripe for this transformation, as recent developer and investment interest in our waterfront is at a tipping point. Serious redevelopment interest is currently stalled because downtown Rensselaer remains an "untested market" where it is very difficult to obtain financing. We believe the Downtown Revitalization Initiative effort would firmly establish the necessary strategy and private sector confidence to tip the scale and begin a cascade of revitalization. If successful, this effort would have a profound impact on the local economy, reinforce the region and establish Rensselaer as a new, walkable riverfront destination.

The City of Rensselaer has at its disposal a number of assets which—when combined—are key ingredients to establishing it as a high-tech, walkable community. First and perhaps foremost, downtown Rensselaer has a large amount of vacant land along the scenic Hudson River which is ripe for redevelopment. This formerly industrial waterfront provides ample space for a mix of new technology business, commercial, residential and recreational uses with spectacular views of the Albany skyline.

Just a few minutes' walk from the waterfront is the Albany/Rensselaer Train Station, one of the busiest Amtrak stations in the nation. This growing station is located at an important regional crossroads in Upstate NY, accessible to millions of people traveling between Montreal, Buffalo and New York City. Serving this station in the heart of downtown are two CDTA bus lines with direct links to Albany and surrounding areas. A regional transportation hub of this magnitude is a wonderful foundation for the creation of transit oriented development (TOD) and a truly sustainable, walkable city. The many acres of land surrounding this busy train station are underutilized as surface parking, making this an ideal place to infill with new development connecting to the waterfront.

Even the city itself is ideally located—just a 15 minute walk from Downtown Albany or a short drive across the bridge—it is central to a large and growing population which serves the Capital of New York State and has easy access to major transportation corridors such as I-90 and the New York State Thruway. The city is already a well established urban center, and the area of revitalization is largely vacant, meaning no businesses or families would be displaced as part of the redevelopment, which is a very important consideration.

For the past several years the City of Rensselaer has been working hard to leverage these assets and lay the groundwork for this bold vision. By improving local infrastructure and planning for technology growth, we envision ourselves as a future "gigabit city," attracting emerging technology businesses and preparing for the bandwidth needs of tomorrow. Environmental review of the Project Anchor Site has been completed to prepare it as "shovel-ready" for growth. Among the many important assets, the city has been working to develop waterfront recreation with the Hudson River Trail and the proposed Rensselaer Waterfront Park. This waterfront has for many years remained inaccessible. The riverfront amenities of parks and trails are seen as attractive components of healthy, outdoor living not just to families, but to potential developers as well. The city has the opportunity now to create a downtown designed around clean, sustainable energy and

NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

Capital Region
Regional Economic
Development Council

technologies that will attract future generations. All of these elements which the city has been working toward represent a strong alignment with the strategic goals on the CREDC.

This work seems to be bearing fruit, as recent investment and development interest in the waterfront and downtown has been increasing: DeLaet's Landing—at the heart of our "Project Anchor Site"—has been proposed for over $300 million in development, including the site for the SUNY Polytechnic Rensselaer Clean Energy Deployment Center (CEDC). This redevelopment was outlined in the Capital Region Economic Development Council Strategic Plan. Nearby Kiliaen's Landing has been proposed for a $30 million mixed-use waterfront plan which could bring $1.5 million in annual property tax revenue. The Cottage Hill apartments have also been proposed for a $20 million residential development, as well as others. Growing technology companies such as DocStrats, Vision Data, AMRI and Monolith Solar already call the City of Rensselaer home. The interest and commitment is apparent.

Despite all this, serious and promising redevelopment proposals have stalled due to a lack of private sector confidence and ability to obtain financing. The city has done all it can to set the stage for a project that will influence and inspire surrounding investment. What is most needed now is a thorough strategy and show of confidence that downtown Rensselaer is making a comeback. It is firmly believed that the significant assistance of the DRI effort will provide the necessary strategy and market support to enable a catalyst project and inspire surrounding growth.
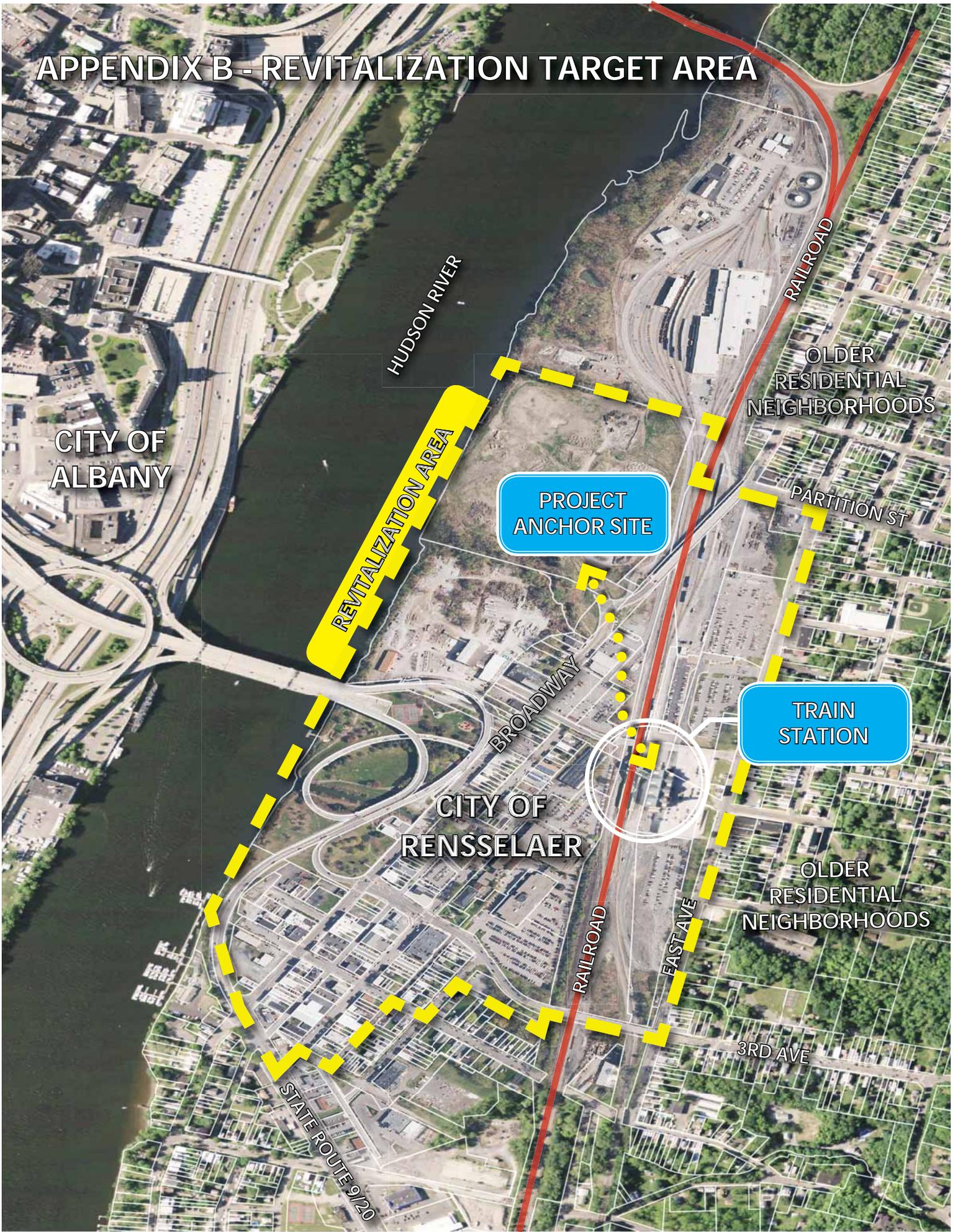
Downtown Rensselaer is THE one place in the region where it makes the most sense to concentrate revitalization efforts. Centrally located at regional crossroads, it has the advantage of access to significant transportation infrastructure along the banks of the Hudson River, boasting spectacular views. The city is has already invested in important new infrastructure, while embarking on a major initiative to bring free or low cost broadband WiFi for the digital generation. It will be the first smart, truly sustainable city in the state, serving as a model for former industrial towns seeking to evolve into the next century. We believe that no other competing DRI can bring these multiple assets together in a combined package as well as we can.

Almost all of the ingredients for a successful transformation are already in place. We hope that you will help us turn the tide and make this vision a reality.

Thank you,

Charles E. Moore, AICP
Director of Planning and Development
On Behalf of the People of the City of Rensselaer

APPENDIX B - REVITALIZATION TARGET AREA

HUDSON RIVER

CITY OF ALBANY

REVITALIZATION AREA

RAILROAD

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

PROJECT ANCHOR SITE

PARTITION ST

BROADWAY

TRAIN STATION

CITY OF RENSSELAER

EAST AVE

RAILROAD

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

3RD AVE

STATE ROUTE 9/20

APPENDIX B - CONTEXT AREA

RAILROAD

INTERSTATE 90

RAILROAD

1-MILE RADIUS

INTERSTATE 787

1/2 MILE RADIUS

CITY OF ALBANY

TRAIN STATION

TARGET AREA

CENSUS TRACT 515

COLUMBIA TURNPIKE

TOWN OF EAST GREENBUSH

RAILROAD

CENSUS TRACT 515

REGENERON
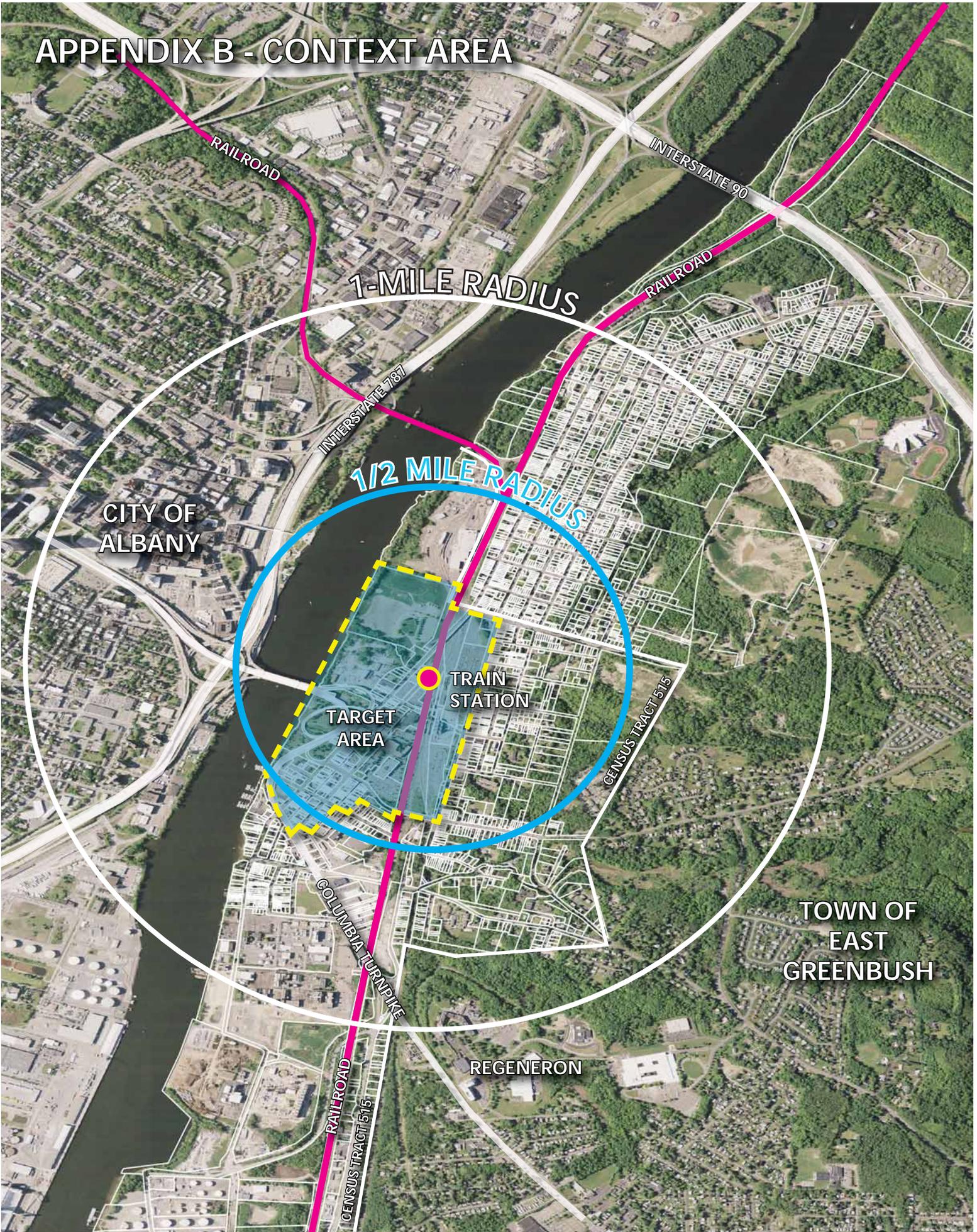
Broadway Reconstruction. In an effort to help attract new businesses and redevelopment in the downtown, the City of Rensselaer has been working for the past few years to reconstruct the major streets—including Broadway shown above—within the target revitalization area. Improvements include all new water, sewer and gas utilities, new sidewalks, pedestrian lighting and access roads to the project anchor site.

Scenic View of Albany from the Project Anchor Site. The project target area is blessed by having over 4,000 linear feet of Hudson River shoreline and vacant land at its disposal, ripe for redevelopment potential. This view of the Albany skyline, taken from the project site, is considered to be a very attractive asset to developers and a nice amenity for recreational use along the waterfront, and is also a wonderful view at night.

View Overlooking Project Anchor Site. View looking down Partition Street of the Albany skyline, overlooking the primary project site on the waterfront below. East-west access to this prime redevelopment area has been somewhat limited due to geography and the historic train lines which separate it from the Rensselaer neighborhoods.

Waterfront Redevelopment Potential. View looking across the Hudson River from the southern end of the Revitalization Target Area. Areas where access to the waterfront is possible have been sucessfully developed with commercial and recreational uses. The city would like to leverage this asset for the remainder of the waterfront shoreline—prime development land—to unlock its full potential.

Albany/Rensselaer Train Station. The project target area has the advantage of being home to a major transportation hub, serving thousands of people every day. This is a core component of the city's desire to develop a vibrant, mixed use transit oriented neighborhood around it which will help draw busineses and visitors downtown and to the waterfront.

Limited Accessibility to the Waterfront. While a useful asset, the historic railroad lines running through downtown Rensselaer have unfortunately created a physical barrier which separates the older residential neighborhoods from the downtown and waterfront. A key component of this project will be to create new development which will connect these areas together for both pedestrians and vehicles, and make more efficient use of the land around it.