

Section I: Downtown Profile and Assessment

The Downtown Profile and Assessment provides an overview of existing conditions in the Watkins Glen DRI area, challenges that the Village faces, and opportunities for Downtown to thrive. Based on an analysis of existing data and previously completed studies, the Downtown Profile and Assessment provides an understanding of the major industries and attractions; the real estate market; challenges and opportunities in the business, residential, retail, arts and entertainment landscape; major employers; and potential projects that could drive further economic investment to Downtown. Additional analysis of existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities was conducted via site visits focused on the physical condition and locations of public space, streets, and other improvements; the age, condition, and types of buildings; storefront conditions and signage; and access and visibility including availability of parking and pedestrian amenities.

Introduction

Watkins Glen is located in the Southern Tier Region of New York State in Schuyler County on the southern shore of Seneca Lake, one of the eleven Finger Lakes. The Village is accessible from Interstate 86 via State Routes 14 and 414, which intersect at the Downtown crossroads of Franklin and 4th Streets. Watkins Glen is a compact, lakefront Village with a wealth of natural resources that have attracted people to the area and established it as a regional center for tourism, recreation, and commercial activity. The Village's access to natural resources and cultural attractions, including its location on Seneca Lake, Watkins Glen State Park, the Seneca Lake wineries, and Watkins Glen International Racetrack, make it one of the most popular destinations in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes region. However, its State Route accessibility also creates an obstacle for pedestrians, as truck traffic through the Village poses noise and safety issues. In addition, fluctuating seasonal tourism in Watkins Glen poses a challenge in maintaining a consistent visitor presence throughout the year, which limits year-round economic vitality. Strong demand for short-term seasonal rental housing aimed at tourists constrains the supply of housing available to new or existing Village residents, which further hinders the vibrancy of the Village throughout the year.

As a regional center, the Watkins Glen area is also home to large employers including Cargill Salt, located in the Village on Seneca Lake, and Schuyler County Hospital, in Montour Falls. These anchor employers provide stable job opportunities for local residents. An objective of the DRI plan is to build on the existing employment base by integrating local attractions. The plan will harness the financial and revitalizing benefits of tourism, while supporting institutions that generate well-paying jobs and community benefits to serve residents and attract young professionals.

Together, these attractions and anchor institutions form a network that serves visitors and promotes local revitalization and sustainable economic gain for residents. Projects proposed for DRI funding aim to make Watkins Glen the core of regional activity in order to leverage the benefits of visitor investment in a way that also improves residents' quality-of-life.

DRI Area Boundary

The Watkins Glen DRI area is an L-shaped boundary that runs along Franklin Street and 4th Street within the Village. The total land acreage of the DRI area is approximately 220 acres, stretching north to south from the Seneca Lake waterfront to the southern boundary of the Village. The eastern boundary follows property lines along the eastern side of Decatur Street, and the western side of Madison Avenue (see Figure 1). The boundary also extends east along 4th Street to the boundary of the Village. The DRI boundary incorporates three distinct parts of the Village: 1) the Downtown core on

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North Franklin Street and the Seneca Harbor waterfront; 2) the business transition area on South Franklin Street; and 3) the East 4th Street corridor including Clute Park.

The DRI area also includes four major gateways to the Downtown: the northern gateway on North Franklin Street, Route 414/East 4th Street, South Franklin Street at Fairgrounds Lane, and the intersection of Route 414 with South Franklin at 15th Street. The DRI area is compact and walkable, with its farthest edges about a 20 minute walk from the corner of 4th and North Franklin Streets.

Figure 1: DRI Area Boundary

Critical Issues

The Watkins Glen DRI plan addresses several critical issues facing the Village that have emerged through the work of past planning efforts and the DRI planning process.

Housing availability.

Watkins Glen's success as a tourism destination has created some challenges in the housing market for local residents, regional service-sector employees, and potential new residents. One of the negative consequences of tourism has been the evolution of the seasonal housing market. Conversion of single-family homes to seasonal or short-term rentals reduces the available housing stock for new and existing residents, raises rents, and contributes to a lack of parking Downtown. According to the residential market study discussed in the real estate market analysis section, there is a lack of available housing in the "middle" market, which would accommodate service-sector employees and young professionals. The DRI Plan seeks to address these issues by encouraging development of additional housing options, including mixed-use residential and renovation of vacant upper-floor units, proposing balanced regulations of vacation rental housing, considering development of a new hotel to ease pressure on the rental market, and exploring parking management strategies.

Economic development for local businesses and employment opportunities.

Watkins Glen currently has a mix of retail and commercial uses, some long-standing businesses that provide services to local residents, as well as a newer trend toward businesses that support both local residents and the tourism industry. The DRI Plan seeks to provide assistance to the local business community by promoting existing local businesses and attracting new entrepreneurs. In addition, while the Village has some key anchor employers, there are not enough well-paying jobs to keep young residents in town while also attracting young professionals to move to Watkins Glen. The DRI plan will explore strategies to create opportunities for entrepreneurship and business growth to expand the local job base.

Year-round cultural and entertainment resources to attract visitors and new residents.

Tourism brings visitors to the Village who spend time and money on experiences and hospitality services, but many of the peak season attractions do not extend beyond the summer months. As a result, Watkins Glen is losing out on potential tourism dollars; but, more importantly, the Village has fewer services and activities for local residents in the winter. Watkins Glen can capitalize on income from the tourism industry while also attracting more residents by transforming the DRI area into a year-round vibrant hub of activity.

Quality-of-life enhancements such as improved streetscapes and public open space.

Quality-of-life improvements help to make living and visiting a community more pleasant. Currently, Watkins Glen benefits from its lakefront access and walkability, but can also improve streetscapes, expand public open space, provide greater waterfront access and connections, and improve the urban

design appearance of Downtown buildings. Aesthetic improvements, streetscaping, stronger public waterfront access, wayfinding, and a greater variety of recreation, entertainment, and dining options will serve both the local year-round population and seasonal tourists.

Summary of Recent Planning Efforts

Watkins Glen has benefited from recent planning efforts that have shaped the Village, county, and region. At the Village level, the local economic development initiative, Project Seneca, has driven the Watkins Glen Local Waterfront Redevelopment Program (LWRP), which has provided funding for improvements to the waterfront, including projects at Clute Park that will tie in closely with the DRI (see Figure 2). The Watkins Glen Comprehensive Plan (2012), the Lakefront Management Plan (2010), the Village of Watkins Glen Parking Census (2009), and the Villages of Watkins Glen and Montour Falls Area Transportation Study (2009) have also contributed data and recommendations at the local level that have been incorporated into the DRI Strategic Plan. The Northern Gateway Improvement Strategy (2012) outlines design and landscaping changes to calm traffic and improve accessibility along Route 14/N. Franklin at the Village's Northern gateway.

At the regional and county levels, recent planning initiatives represented in the DRI include the Southern Tier Central Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021, the County-Wide Comprehensive Plan (2015), Greater Corning Housing Study (2017), and the Schuyler County Housing Study (2009). These plans outline strategies for addressing the challenges of economic development, housing needs, balancing tourism and small town character, and providing healthcare in a rural area.

Recent, Ongoing, and Planned Projects

Project Seneca

Project Seneca is a redevelopment effort driving regional economic growth through investment in targeted initiatives along the head of Seneca Lake. The program was established to create a consistent, area wide economic development message, encompassing a wide range of initiatives that will be implemented over a ten year period. Project Seneca has over \$118 million in investments completed or planned for the short term in Downtown Watkins Glen. Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPED) with a local steering committee has led this program since it was conceived in 2012. Project Seneca's achievements to date include the following recent and ongoing projects:

Construction of a New Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant

Construction at the new plant's location along the Seneca Canal is expected to be completed in fall 2019. The new wastewater treatment plant is designed with an extra 30% capacity to accommodate future growth in the area. The ongoing operational costs will best be met with additional significant year-round apartments.

Reuse of the Current Wastewater Treatment Facility

Once the current wastewater treatment facility site on Seneca Lake is decommissioned, reuse of the site will expand public access to the waterfront. Ideas for this site are still in formation, but the site could allow for outdoor gathering space, a waterfront theater, outdoor lawn and recreation area, and an observation deck. Redevelopment could involve private partners to generate additional tax revenue for the Village and County, such as a potential restaurant use. Schuyler County was awarded funding through the 2017 Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) to prepare a feasibility study to explore options for redevelopment of the site. Once the feasibility study is completed, the County and Village would need to seek future grant money for redevelopment of the site.

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[Kayak/Canoe Launch at Tank Beach](#)

This project has been funded with Environmental Protection Fund money and is anticipated to be completed by the summer of 2018. There are additional costs beyond the initial grant amount, due to its location in a wetland.

[Northern Gateway Project](#)

This project includes the construction of a median along Route 14/N. Franklin Street between Cross Street and Division Street, resurfacing of the roadway and sidewalks, lighting, and a crosswalk for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the road safely in what is currently an inhospitable area. This project will improve pedestrian and cyclist safety and will make the Downtown and lakefront more welcoming and accessible.

[Local Waterfront Redevelopment Program Grants](#)

In 2016 Schuyler County received a \$1,091,500 grant from the Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program to prepare a regional strategic plan for Watkins Glen and Montour Falls and implement projects identified in the Watkins Glen Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. Capital projects include the rehabilitation of Clute Park bathhouse, Catharine Valley Trail Connector extension and enhancements at Clute Park and Montour Falls Marina. The grant also includes funding for a retail market study. The Village received \$1,319,362 in 2017 for the design and construction of a four-season pavilion with restrooms and a commercial-grade kitchen. This grant funding will also cover a reuse study for the wastewater treatment plant.

[New and Redeveloped Housing](#)

Project Seneca has provided funding for the completion of new housing developments including the Water Works Condominiums and Apartments and Water Works Art Gallery, and the Brewery Apartments. These developments are located on Seneca Lake, north of the DRI area. Redevelopment projects include housing along South Madison and the Middle School redevelopment. The Middle School Redevelopment repurposed the historic Watkins Glen Middle School building, creating 51 affordable housing units for seniors.

[Watkins Glen State Park Investment](#)

The Park is currently undergoing a \$6.5 million renovation to improve the park's entrance and provide a new visitor information center in partnership with the Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce. Aesthetic improvements will include the parking facility at 10th Street and Franklin Street with a reconfiguration of parking and traffic signals to alleviate traffic concerns Downtown.

[New York State Department of Transportation's \(NYSDOT\) upgrade of Route 14](#)

The Village will undergo a \$5 million extensive roadway project and aesthetic upgrade that is expected to be completed in 2018 and will include new ADA sidewalks, wayfinding, and repaving of Franklin Street.

[Schuyler Redevelopment Site](#)

This privately owned site is expected to be redeveloped for multi-family residential development on an undeveloped parcel on Seneca Lake. The location is walkable to the Downtown and would have residential condos overlooking the lake.

[Schuyler Hospital Capital Project](#)

The hospital plans to invest up to \$17 million, including a \$10.3 million competitive grant and \$6.5 million in routine capital investment. As part of Governor Cuomo's Statewide Health Care Facility

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Transformation Program, Schuyler Hospital was awarded \$10.3 million and will designate funds for construction of a primary care hospital-based clinic and repurposing of inpatient space to enhance outpatient specialty services capacity.

Figure 2: Recent, Ongoing, and Planned Projects

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Strategies

In 2011, Governor Cuomo formed the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) and established the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA), a streamlined, competitive process designed to challenge the creativity and empower regions throughout the state. During the past six years, 460 projects have been identified by the Southern Tier REDC and supported through this process, resulting in \$276 million in public investment leveraged by \$1.1 billion in private investment within the region. Since its inception, the Southern Tier REDC has identified downtown revitalization as a key priority. The REDC's 2017 Progress Report, *Southern Tier Soaring*, outlines a simple, but focused set of strategies:

- Build the greater Binghamton Innovation Ecosystem.
- Invest in the advanced manufacturing industry.
- Transform the food and agriculture industry.
- Promote the Southern Tier's innovative culture.

The revitalization of the Watkins Glen DRI area will promote the REDC strategies by investing in the region's cultural attractions as well as innovation for agriculture and food industries. By building upon the Village's status as a regional Downtown, the DRI seeks to create a vibrant hub where tourists and locals can come to enjoy local wines, beers, food, and recreation. Potential benefits of the DRI plan will bring greater recognition to the burgeoning food and agriculture industries in the Southern Tier by generating investment and attracting new opportunities for wine makers, brewers, and restaurateurs.

Population, Housing, and Employment

Population

According to the 2010 Decennial Census, Watkins Glen has a total year-round population of just over 1,800 residents. The 1.9-square-mile Village has the highest population density in the County, with approximately 980 people per square mile. The 2011-2015 American Community Survey's (ACS) 5-year estimate indicates a slight uptick in population to 1,912 residents, following a long period of decline that started after the number of residents peaked in 1950 at just over 3,000. Watkins Glen is the largest Village in Schuyler County, with a population exceeded only by the Towns of Dix, Montour, and Hector. The ACS estimated median household income in the Village to be approximately \$35,000, lower than both the county (\$47,723) and state (\$59,269). The median age in the Village is 40.2, which is younger than Schuyler County, but older than New York State (Table 1). The two largest age cohorts are the Village's youngest and oldest residents (Figure 3). The 19 and under population makes up nearly 20% of the population, while almost 22% are 65 or older. Millennials (20-34 years old) account for about 18% of the population.

Table 1: Population Characteristics, Watkins Glen, Schuyler County and New York State, 2010

	Village of Watkins Glen	Schuyler County	New York State
Population	1,859	18,343	19,378,102

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Median Household Income	\$35,556	\$47,723	\$59,269
Median Age	40.2	45.5	38.1

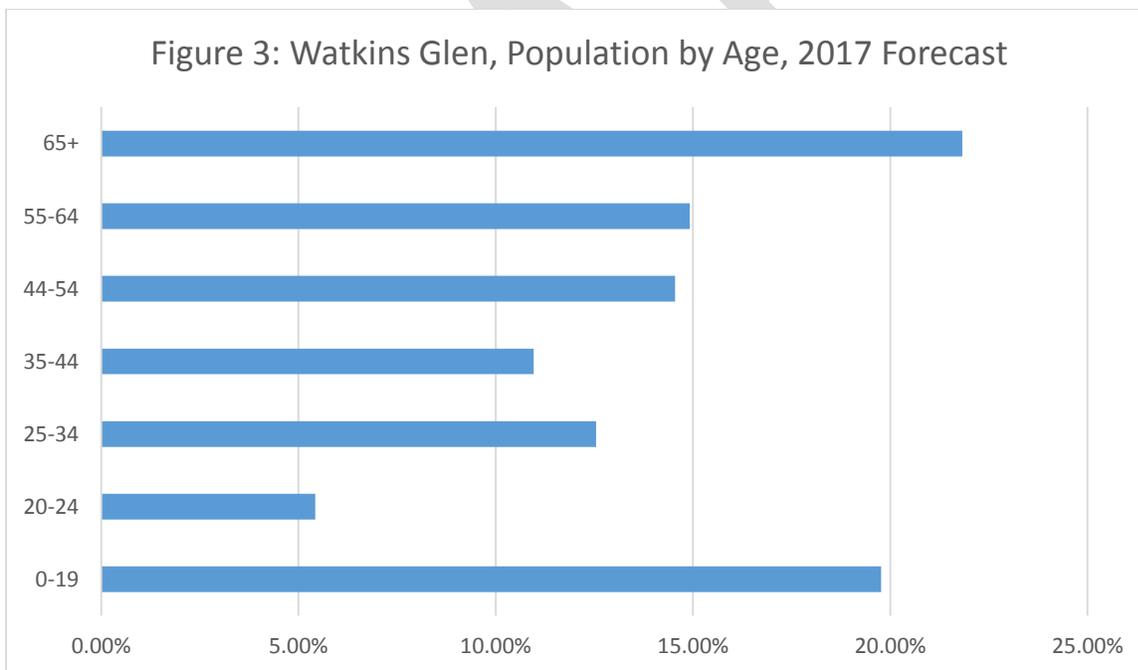
Source: 2010 U.S. Census

	Village of Watkins Glen	Schuyler County	New York State
% Below Poverty Level	19.7%	14.6%	15.5%

Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Race/Ethnicity						
	Village of Watkins Glen	% of Population	Schuyler County	% of Population	New York State	% of Population
White	1,788	96.2%	17,803	97.1%	12,740,974	65.7%
Non-White	71	3.8%	540	2.9%	6,637,128	34.3%

Source: 2010 U.S. Census



Source: ESRI

Housing

The Village has a variety of housing types, though of its 935 housing units, the majority of occupied units (59.6%) are single family homes. In total, apartments account for 37.3% of occupied housing units in Watkins Glen.¹ A small number of mobile homes (0.7% of occupied housing units) are located

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

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in the Village. Mirroring other markets in the Southern Tier, the housing stock in Watkins Glen is generally older, with 62% of occupied housing units built in 1939 or earlier. According to ESRI, the housing vacancy rate in 2017 is estimated at 7.6% in the DRI Area and 11.2% village wide.

In 2017, the Greater Corning Housing Study was conducted to assess and understand the impacts of economic factors and market trends in the greater Corning area. This study included an evaluation of housing market conditions in the Village of Watkins Glen. The Greater Corning Housing Study indicated low housing inventory and an overall lack of housing in good condition and a desirable location at all price points in the Village. This study noted that there has been a surge in the construction of new housing in Watkins Glen since 2012. The homeownership rate in Watkins Glen is 68%, lower than neighboring communities such as Painted Post (82%), Riverside (82%) and Big Flats (87%). Ninety percent of homes available for sale in Watkins Glen were priced under \$211,000 in 2016. Though high-end homes represent a very small percentage of the housing stock, Watkins Glen (0.4%) and Erwin/Painted Post (2.8%) were the only communities in the Greater Corning area with homes priced over \$1 million.²

Recent housing developments in Watkins Glen include the Waterworks Condos on Salt Point Road (12 condominium units), the Watkins Brewery Vacation Rentals (seven short-term townhome rentals), and the Seneca Terrace Apartments (24 rental units). The proposed Schuyler Redevelopment site would continue this trend of higher-end multi-family housing in the DRI area. A 40-unit tiny house development, “Le Bourgade,” recently opened outside the Village, offering year-round long-term leases on the Seneca Lake hillside. In addition, the former Watkins Glen Middle School on Decatur Street was renovated with support from the Department of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) and Empire State Development (ESD) to offer 51 units of accessible low-income housing for adults aged 55 and older.

Employment

The salt industry, hospitality, and healthcare have several anchor institutions in Watkins Glen and neighboring communities. Watkins Glen is home to three of the top 10 largest employers in Schuyler County, including Walmart (243 jobs), Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel (128 jobs) and Cargill Salt (111 jobs). The County’s largest employer, Schuyler Hospital (435 jobs) is located just outside the Village in neighboring Montour Falls. Watkins Glen International, located five miles outside the Village, provides 86 jobs.³ Hospitality and tourism are major employers in the area, but may not provide a year-round living wage for all workers. Most people living in the Village work outside of Watkins Glen in neighboring counties. Creating a more robust year-round destination Downtown will improve employment prospects and foster investment in new businesses that will generate jobs and opportunities for residents.

Land Use and Zoning

Existing Land Use Overview

The development of Watkins Glen has been shaped by its location on the Seneca Lake waterfront. While recreation and sightseeing are a major draw, the lakefront is also the site of much of the Village’s industry. Cargill Salt is located on 4th Street between Magee Street and the Seneca Canal. The wastewater treatment plant slated to be decommissioned is also located on the waterfront, just west of Cargill. The Catharine Valley Trail runs along portions of the waterfront, in places forming connections between commercial and public uses such as the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel and Captain

² Greater Corning Area Housing Study: 2017-2020

³ Data collected in 2015 & 2-16 by SCIDA, Southern Tier Economic Growth (STEG) and SCOPED

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Bill’s Seneca Lake Cruise Terminal. Today, the Downtown corridors of Franklin and 4th Streets are largely commercial and mixed residential use. Commercial uses in the DRI area are mainly comprised of small retail, restaurant and office spaces along Franklin Street and 4th Street. Walmart is also located along 4th Street, bordered by the Seneca Canal to the east. Within the DRI area, residential use is located mainly along Decatur Street and north of 4th Street. Government and institutional uses are scattered throughout the DRI area, including the Schuyler County offices and Village Hall (see Figure 34).

Table 2: Existing Land Use within the Watkins Glen DRI Boundary

	# of Parcels	% of Total Parcels	Acres	% of Total Area
Single-Family Residential	192	38.6%	31.1	19.1%
Multi-Family Residential	54	10.8%	6.2	3.8%
Mixed-Use	47	9.4%	6.0	3.7%
Commercial	76	15.3%	30.1	18.5%
Institutional	9	1.8%	4.2	2.6%
Utilities	4	0.8%	1.2	0.8%
Industrial	2	0.4%	14.5	8.9%
Transportation	2	0.4%	0.5	0.3%
Vacant	80	16.1%	29.2	18.0%
Parking	16	3.2%	6.0	3.7%
Parks and Open Space	16	3.2%	33.6	20.7%
Total	498	100%	162.5	100%

Source: Schuyler County

Figure 3: Watkins Glen Land Use

Parks and Open Spaces

Watkins Glen has abundant open space uses that can be leveraged to promote a high quality-of-life Downtown. Its location on Seneca Lake offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including kayaking, boating, and camping. Watkins Glen State Park is the largest attraction in the Village. The entrance to the State Park is located on the west side of Franklin Street between 9th and 11th Streets. Parking is provided at the main entrance to the park on the western side of North Franklin at 10th Street, and directly across Franklin Street. Additional parking is also available at the upper entrance to the park at 3310 Route 409 and the southern entrance at 3530 Route 419. The Park includes 19 waterfalls and rim trails overlooking a 400-foot gorge. Nearly a million visitors per year come to hike for the day or camp overnight. Current construction at the Park entrance includes a \$6.5 million project to create a more welcoming approach to the gorge with green space, a new welcome center, and enhanced educational displays.

Lafayette Park is a small Village park centrally located within the DRI area, generally bounded by 3rd Street to the south, Decatur Street to the west, 4th Street to the north, and North Porter Street to the east. The park has a small playground and gazebo and hosts the Village farmers’ market on Friday afternoons. Also within the DRI area is Seneca Harbor Park, a small County park located along the waterfront north of 1st Street. The park features picnic tables and is heavily used by local residents and tourists, especially during special events and activities.

Clute Memorial Park is an approximately 15-acre Village park located in the eastern portion of the DRI area between the waterfront and 4th Street. Though close to the Downtown, the park is located east of Cargill on the other side of the bridge over the Seneca Canal and is not visible to pedestrians and

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cyclists in the Downtown. The park has playground facilities, picnic tables, a skate park, a small pavilion, and public bathrooms. The Village has received grant funding to upgrade the existing bath house, as well as partial funding to create a year-round pavilion with facilities to host weddings and other events.

Upgrades to existing parks and the continued provision of high-quality public space in the DRI area will complement the plan's goal of bringing additional housing and activity to the Downtown. New residents living in upper-floor apartments or multifamily housing will benefit from nearby open space.

Opportunity Sites

There are several significant vacant and underutilized parcels in the DRI area that present opportunities for redevelopment (see Figure 5). The Village's DRI application identified over 75 parcels as "targeted for redevelopment," including vacant lots, grey fields, abandoned housing units, and deteriorated commercial spaces. Many of these parcels are privately owned and may not be available for immediate improvements. Some potentially transformative opportunity sites, such as the Schuyler Redevelopment site on Seneca Lake, are proceeding with development plans independent of the DRI process. Others are not ready for development, such as the current wastewater treatment plant, which will be decommissioned once the new facility is built. Among the key opportunity sites that could be recommended for funding in the DRI Plan are:

1. Six vacant parcels owned by the Watkins Glen Housing Authority on a residential block across from the Jefferson Village Apartments on 2nd Street. The parcels have frontage on 2nd street, North Porter Street and 3rd Street. There has been interest in developing middle-income housing at this site.
2. 1 North Franklin Street – A vacant one-story building occupies this site. It is for sale by a private owner and has been proposed for mixed-use redevelopment, potentially including a commercial/residential mix or a hotel and restaurant with public space.
3. 15 North Franklin Street – This site currently has two vacant buildings in deteriorating condition. It is privately owned and not for sale, but proposed redevelopment concepts include mixed-use residential/commercial.
4. Captain Bill's Seneca Lake Cruise Terminal – This lot could be improved through landscaping and redevelopment of the existing structure to accommodate its existing uses and improve public waterfront access and visibility at the northern gateway.
5. 602 Franklin Street – This site is underutilized and could be redeveloped for mixed use, hotel and spa, office, or residential uses. It is privately owned and not for sale.
6. 715 Franklin Street – This site is vacant and currently for sale. It has recently undergone DEC contamination clean up and could be redeveloped for mixed-use with ground-floor commercial and residential upper-floor use.
7. Third Street Carriage House

In addition to these major sites, there are also many smaller sites that are appropriate for façade improvements, renovations, and business expansion. Individually, many of these smaller sites may not seem transformative; however, taken together, they can create a groundswell that transforms the urban character in downtown Watkins Glen, creates jobs, and attracts new visitors and residents.

Figure 5: Opportunity Sites and Vacant Parcels

Zoning

The DRI area contains seven zoning districts (see Figure 6):

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- Central Business (CB)
- Residential Transition (RT)
- Residential High Density (R-III)
- Business Transition (BT)
- Lakefront District (LD)
- Commercial/Light Industrial (CL)
- Canal District (CD)

The Central Business District (CB) is located along Franklin Street between Cross Street to the north and 12th Street to the south. This area has a traditional “main street” style of development, characterized by buildings extending to the street line, with parking and services provided in the rear of the lot. The intent of this district is to protect and preserve the unique business and architectural character within this area of the Village. The CB district is designed to ensure that all new development is consistent with and enhances the existing character, in part by requiring new development to provide an urban edge similar to what is presently existing and to prohibit, to the greatest extent possible, the demolition of existing structures. The CB district does not allow multi-unit residential uses, which is a barrier to providing new housing to serve potential demand for Downtown living.

The character of the DRI area transitions from the CB district to the Business Transition (BT) district, starting along the southern portion of Franklin Street at 12th Street. The BT zone is intended to accommodate commercial and office uses at a lower scale than the downtown core, in a manner that is supportive of existing residential uses. This district currently includes auto-oriented commercial uses with off-street parking, including the Tops supermarket, gas stations, drive-through fast food, motels and bed & breakfasts, and some single-family homes.

The Residential Transition (RT) district is mapped in two locations in the Village and the DRI area. Both are older, developed areas immediately adjacent to the CB district to the east and west. Like the BT district, the RT district acts as a buffer between the CB and residential districts. It is the Village's intent that residential and other permitted uses co-exist in this zone through the use of development guidelines and requirements to ensure their compatibility. This District also seeks to preserve the unique character of these areas, while accommodating a greater degree of flexibility in the types of uses to be permitted within the RT.

In 2016, the Village adopted design guidelines as part of the implementation of its 2012 Comprehensive Plan. Guidelines have been designed to preserve and enhance the Village's character, improve aesthetics along primary streets, and encourage economic development. These guidelines are intended to help prepare for development rather than react to new pressures, specifically retail franchises and chains. Additional design guidelines could be incorporated into the Village's Zoning Code to ensure new development meets agreed-upon urban design standards and fits in with the scale and character of the Downtown.

Figure 6: Zoning Map

Historic, Cultural and Educational Resources

Historic Resources

Watkins Glen was first settled by Europeans under the name Salubria during the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition following the Revolutionary War. The Village was later renamed for Dr. Samuel Watkins, who arrived in 1828 and founded a large hotel that stood at the Village's main intersection until 1977. The Village developed around Seneca Lake in the 19th Century, and was officially declared the County

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seat in 1877 and has remained an important administrative and economic center. The Village's first attraction was the year-round Glen Springs Resort, built in the mid-19th Century on 380 acres of land. The Resort was a popular destination for tourists, and employed many Village residents. The hotel closed its doors during World War II, as fewer visitors came to the region. Following the War, the Village hosted an auto-race to bring back tourism on October 2, 1948. The region's natural resources have also played a significant role in the Village's growth, including its parks, landscapes, and soils.

The Village contains eight sites or districts on the National Register the first five of which are in the DRI area: the Watkins Glen Commercial Historic District, the Schuyler County Courthouse Complex, St. James Episcopal Church, the U.S. Post office, First Baptist Church, Watkins Glen High School, A.F. Chapman House, and a portion of the Watkins Glen Grand Prix Course (see Figure 7):

[Watkins Glen Commercial Historic District](#)

The Watkins Glen Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register in 2012. The Historic District contains more than 30 historic buildings dating from 1844-1939, highlighting many of the Village's architectural styles, including Romanesque, Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, and the Second Empire.

[Schuyler County Courthouse Complex \(Franklin Street\)](#) – The combination of county court house, clerk's office and jail forming the county seat within a village is increasingly rare in New York State. The complex is made up of three buildings constructed in 1855: a two-story courthouse building; a two-story sheriff's residence and jail; and a one-story building serving as the Clerk's office. Since its construction, it has been continuously used by the county government.

[U.S. Post Office \(600 North Franklin Street\)](#) – The Watkins Glen Post Office is on the east side of Franklin Street at its intersection with 6th Street at the southern end of the commercial district. It is a small, one-story red brick building, constructed in 1934-1935. The post office is a representation of the federal architecture erected as part of the public works projects initiated by the U.S. government during the Great Depression. It is built in a simplified Colonial Revival style with the influence of modern ideas and Art Deco-inspired details.

[Watkins Glen High School \(900 N. Decatur Street\)](#) - Built as the Watkins Glen High School and more recently used for senior housing and the Watkins Glen Performing Arts Center, the school building occupies most of a nearly three-acre rectangular block between North Decatur, North Porter, 9th, and 10th Streets. The site consists of a three-story red brick school building constructed in 1929, with a two-story addition built in 1958. The most prominent exterior feature of the building is its broad pedimented portico, with full height Doric columns, on the northern wing of the façade. The site was upgraded to a Performing Arts Center and age-restricted housing in 2014.

[Watkins Glen Grand Prix Course \(1948-1952\)](#)

Auto racing is a key component of the Village's history. The original road course of 1948 is an important landmark in Schuyler County and was added to the National Register in 2002. Though at a different location today, the Watkins Glen International race track hosts NASCAR, Formula 1, Can Am, Trans Am, Six Hours, CART Indy Car Series, and Formula 5000 races. Racing is a visible component of the Village's identity; signs and street furniture elements incorporate racing themes, Village sidewalks include a racing "walk of fame," and the International Motor Racing Research Center is located within the Village. Each fall, the Grand Prix Festival of Watkins Glen celebrates the Village's motor racing heritage and attracts racing enthusiasts.

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Watkins Glen has a unique sense of place stemming from its rich history, which should be promoted through additional marketing and signage.

[St. James Episcopal Church \(112 6th Street\)](#) – This Gothic Revival style church was constructed in 1864 and was the first brick church in Watkins Glen. It is the oldest of the Village’s three historic churches. St. James retains its classic historic features, including a high pitched roof, Gothic arched windows, buttress, and metal capped spires. The church is sited facing east on Decatur Street, directly across from the Presbyterian Church.

[A.F. Chapman House \(115 South Monroe Street\)](#) – The High Victoria/Queen Anne style dwelling is sited on the crest of a steep hill overlooking the historic core of the Village to its east. Augustus H. Moore, a prominent local businessman, purchased this lot on South Monroe Street in 1870 and finished construction on the house approximately three years later. The picturesque brick home is a representative example of late 19th century domestic architecture in Watkins Glen and a testament to the Village’s prosperity following the opening of the Chemung (now Seneca) Canal in the 1830s. Aaron F. Chapman purchased Moore’s property in 1885 and updated the house with Queen Anne style embellishments between 1885 and 1894.

[First Baptist Church of Watkins Glen \(5th Street and Porter Street\)](#) – Built in 1888-1889, this Victorian-era religious building sits on the south side of 5th Street at the corner of Porter Street, across from the Village’s historic public green, Lafayette Park. The church’s interior includes original design, materials, and craftsmanship.

Cultural Resources

The Arc of Schuyler, the Performing Arts Center, and the Glen Theater are local institutions that provide important cultural resources in Downtown Watkins Glen. The Arc of Schuyler’s Franklin Street Gallery offers a variety of classes and workshops taught by local artists. New developments, including the Quintus art gallery on Salt Point Road north of the DRI area, have contributed to the local arts and entertainment scene. In October 2017, the Finger Lakes Film Society presented the five-day Seneca Film Festival for the first time. Building on this growing arts, culture, and entertainment industry in Watkins Glen will support the existing draws for tourists, encouraging out-of-towners to linger in the Village. Given additional opportunities, visitors will be more likely to spend time and money in Downtown Watkins Glen.

In addition to Watkins Glen International and Watkins Glen State Park, two of the region’s greatest attractions are the viticulture industry and Seneca Lake itself. Tourists come to Watkins Glen to visit the more than 40 wineries surrounding Seneca Lake. Together with Cayuga Lake and Keuka Lake, wine trails in the region connect nearly 60 local wineries. Watkins Glen’s unique Downtown waterfront and density of attractions enables the Village to function as a starting point for tours of the wine trail. Wineries, breweries, and vineyards have also attracted international investment. Wine makers from France, California, and Germany have purchased vineyards along the shores of Seneca Lake, demonstrating the region’s potential for growth in these sectors.

The Village is situated at the southern extremity of the 38-mile long Seneca Lake, the largest of the Finger Lakes. The lake is nearly 640 feet deep, which prevents water temperatures from falling below 50 degrees. The Chemung Canal, now known as the Seneca Canal, was constructed in the 1830s to enable trade and has since been converted to recreational space where boats can access Seneca Lake. The lake is a scenic draw and features a public pier, trails, and connections to the marina. The Village’s lakefront provides a scenic location for private events such as weddings, which have become an important component of the area’s hospitality industry.

Figure 7: Historic and Cultural Resources

Educational Resources

Watkins Glen has access to several nearby resources for higher education. The large institutions within a short commute include Cornell University, Ithaca College, Keuka College, Elmira College, and Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Other regional resources that provide educational opportunities for area residents include Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) in Canandaigua. FLCC has satellite campuses in Geneva, Newark, and Victor. Corning Community College also provides a two-year higher education opportunity, serving Steuben, Chemung, and Schuyler counties. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County is located in Montour Falls and focuses on agriculture, energy, environment, and food, taking advantage of the region's agricultural resources. These institutions are important community partners that expand prospects for local residents and bolster opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Transportation

Two main vehicular routes pass through Watkins Glen: State Routes 14 and 414. Route 14 (Franklin Street) serves as the Village's main street, with mixed and commercial uses serving as a regional Downtown. Route 414 (4th Street) serves the eastern portion of the Village, connecting the Downtown to employment centers such as Cargill Salt and larger-scale commercial uses including Walmart. Clute Park and Lafayette Park are both accessible from Route 414. Both State routes are federally designated truck routes that are also heavily used by Village residents, visitors, and those passing through. Traffic flows downhill at the Village's northern gateway from Route 14 southbound. This poses a challenge where traffic is heading directly to a Downtown area with pedestrians. Access from neighborhood streets to State routes also poses a challenge.

Traffic along major truck routes is one of the key issues in the Watkins Glen DRI area. The Village's four gateways feel disconnected, limiting the Village's cohesive sense of place. Clute Park is an important public waterfront resource within walking distance of the heart of Downtown, but the truck traffic, lack of visual connection, safe pedestrian crossings, and lack of trees on Route 414 /4th Street do not create a welcoming environment for pedestrians and cyclists. As federally designated truck routes, there are limited options for improving traffic conditions on Franklin Street and 4th Street. However, the importance of improving connectivity warrants additional consideration for enhanced streetscaping, signage, and additional methods to improve public access to waterfront resources.

Decatur Street serves as a bicycle route that connects to the Catharine Valley Trail, and Franklin Street is designated as Bike Route 14, stretching from Montour Falls through Watkins Glen and up the west side of Seneca Lake.

The condition of sidewalks throughout the DRI area varies. Improvements along Franklin Street, including repaving the roadway and sidewalks, are expected to be completed in the fall of 2018 by the NYSDOT. Local residents have also noted that sidewalks on side streets could be improved.

Parking

Businesses along Franklin Street in the CB District provide parking in lots behind their buildings and are also served by on-street parking, which is available throughout the DRI area and surrounding streets. On-street parking in the Village is free and subject to a two-hour time limit on Franklin Street. There are two municipal parking lots, one off of 3rd Street between Franklin and Decatur Streets, and the second located two blocks south, accessible from both 4th and 5th Streets between Franklin and

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Decatur Streets. There are two County off-street parking lots in Seneca Harbor Park across the railroad tracks at the northern ends of Decatur and Porter Streets. Watkins Glen State Park has two parking lots at the main entrance to the park. These have recently been resurfaced as part of the upgrades currently underway at the park. They allow all-day parking for a fee of \$8. A Parking Census was completed in 2009, concluding that there was adequate parking in the Village. However, demand has likely increased in the ensuing years during peak periods due to a growing tourism industry. The Parking Census provided recommendations to address perceived parking issues, including additional signage, employee parking, striping parking spaces, additional lighting and streetscaping, and consistent enforcement of parking time limits.

Members of the public have expressed a strong desire to see additional parking made available throughout the Village. Since 2009, several changes have occurred, including increases in the number of visitors to the Village, especially those who come for short-term rentals of seasonal homes. These short-term visitors contribute to increasing demand for parking during peak periods.

Infrastructure

Water, Sewer & Energy

Seneca Lake provides opportunities for recreation and wildlife as well as practical applications like aquifer recharge and drinking and commercial water supplies. In addition to this drinking water source, the Village has subsurface aquifers. The Seneca Canal, part of the New York State Canal System, extends from the southern end of Seneca Lake and was once used for transporting goods but now serves recreational boats.

A new \$30 million Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant is scheduled to be built along the Seneca Canal south of Boat Launch Road with an additional 30 percent capacity to accommodate future growth. The Village has competitive energy rates thanks to investments in renewable energy, including a power-purchase agreement for hydro-power. The Village may have an opportunity to market its Downtown as an eco-district or sustainable energy district due to the renewable energy supplied by hydro-power.

Rail Infrastructure

Finger Lakes Railway (FGLK) operates rail lines in Watkins Glen that connect through Himrod to Penn Yan and Geneva. To get from Himrod to Geneva, FGLK has trackage rights on Norfolk Southern rail lines. These rail lines predominantly carry freight, although FGLK ran a passenger excursion service from 2001 until 2013. The rail lines enter Watkins Glen from the north on the western side of Seneca Lake. The line curves to the east, separating the waterfront from the downtown core. At North Perry Street, the line turns back toward the south, crossing East 4th Street and extending past the Walmart before terminating at Glen Creek. The rail line serves Cargill, Inc, carrying salt three days a week.

Environmental Constraints

Steep Slopes, Wetlands and Floodplains

The Catharine Creek Wildlife Management area is located east of Seneca Canal, and contains 1,000 acres of wetlands owned and regulated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Floodplains are designated along the immediate shorelines of Seneca Lake and the Seneca Canal, as well as the majority of Clute Park.

The Village is surrounded on the east and west by the “walls” of the Seneca Lake valley, where elevation reaches 800 feet at the hilltop. The waterfront elevation is 440 feet. Though some houses have been built on the western hill, steep slopes have limited the Village’s outward growth.

Climate

Climate is an important factor that affects tourism in the region. Cold winter weather and strong winds coming off of Seneca Lake pose challenges to development in Watkins Glen. These conditions, in addition to soil qualities and moisture levels, also contribute to the region's booming wine industry. Development in Watkins Glen must account for its cold winter climate when considering ways to revitalize the Downtown and encourage year-round activity. Winter activities such as the Ice Bar at the Harbor Hotel have taken advantage of the seasonal weather in order to attract residents and visitors Downtown. The Village can build upon the success of this type of event and create a greater concentration of year-round vitality in the DRI area.

Real Estate Market Analysis

Residential Market

A study of the real estate market in Watkins Glen, including the residential market and office market, was conducted in the fall of 2017 to understand existing conditions, identify potential issues and opportunities, and provide a foundation for potential DRI projects. A summary of key findings that relate to potential DRI projects is included below.

Demographic and psychographic data for the area indicate the potential for slowly increasing demand for housing, with Watkins Glen growing faster than Schuyler County. The DRI area has competitive advantages, including some identified by local stakeholders, which will help to push this faster rate of growth in the Village. Notable advantages in the Village and the DRI area in particular are pedestrian friendliness, restaurants, historic character, access to Seneca Lake, and relative affordability. The area also has some challenges, which represent challenges to future growth and revitalization, including limited year-round recreational activities for younger adults, few appropriately-priced apartments, traffic congestion and limited parking during peak seasons, and truck traffic on Franklin Street.

While growth in the local tourism industry has provided broader economic benefits, it has negatively impacted the available housing inventory, as conversions to short-term rentals (STRs) such as AirBnB or seasonal residences has reduced housing opportunities for year-round residents. Demand for existing apartments is strong overall, but weakens somewhat for more expensive units with monthly rents from \$1,200 to \$1,500. Demand above \$2,000 per month is particularly weak.

Demand appears to be highest for two-bedroom and large one-bedroom units. However, the lack of apartments for rent from \$800 to \$1,000 per month limits the area's appeal to young professionals, service workers, and more price-sensitive empty nesters. Higher-end apartments in the \$1,200 to \$1,500 range tend to require amenities such as off-street parking, in-unit laundry, and central air conditioning to be marketable. Retrofitting older units to provide these amenities can reflect landlord investment of over \$100,000 per unit. If elevators are required, the resulting cost increase can make projects financially infeasible. Even for moderately-priced units, extensive renovations are often required because most of the Village's housing inventory is over 65 years old.

At the time of this study in the fall of 2017, there was no available inventory of finished single-family homes in the Village, in part due to the market for STRs. Given that most residents of Schuyler County tend to prefer to own rather than rent their homes, there may be demand for condominium units with at least two bedrooms and two baths at a price point of \$250,000 to \$400,000. These units could be marketed toward older empty nesters and professionals. For this type of unit to be marketable in the Village, amenities such as dedicated parking, elevators, ample storage, and outdoor space may be required to entice buyers who are considering an alternative to single-family homes.

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While providing housing at moderate rents and purchase prices will meet market demand, attracting large numbers of year-round residents will likely also require adding jobs within the County or the Village, especially if new development projects are at higher price points.

Office and Co-Working Market

In addition to providing a wider range of housing types and price ranges, Watkins Glen also needs to attract new, well-paying jobs in order to retain and attract workers to the Village. Although Watkins Glen is outside of the region's existing concentrations of office space (such as Ithaca and Corning), the market demand for office space in the larger region is generally strong. Watkins Glen has a relatively small office inventory, with about 100,000 square feet generally dominated by owner-occupied government buildings.

Based on stakeholder interviews, the office vacancy rate is estimated between 5% and 10% in the DRI area. Office rents tend to range from \$9 to \$15 gross per square foot, which is lower than rents in Ithaca, the region's largest office market. Stakeholder interviews indicate that amenities such as elevators and off-street parking are required to attract quality tenants to available space in the DRI area.

Stakeholders also indicate that there is some demand for a co-working facility in the DRI area. Co-working involves a shared workspace that fosters collaboration between employees working for different companies or organization or sole entrepreneurs. Often, these employees are independent contractors/freelancers or frequent travelers who otherwise would be working from home offices or coffee shops. The co-working environment can encourage networking building, collaboration, and learning new skills, and provides social interaction for individuals who have no direct business relationship.

This type of facility could serve long-term tenants, such as individuals currently working from home offices or those with headquarters in nearby cities, as well as seasonal residents that may work remotely while traveling during the spring, summer, and fall months.

Given Watkins Glen's small population and office market and its demographic profile, it is likely that any new co-working space would require public sector support, investment, and management, especially in the early years—a role that the DRI program could play to kick-start this resource in the community.

Retail Market Analysis

A study of the retail market in Watkins Glen was conducted in the fall of 2017 to understand existing conditions, identify potential issues and opportunities, and provide a foundation for potential DRI projects. A more extensive retail study will be completed as part of the LWRP grant award. A summary of key findings that relate to potential DRI projects is included below.

Watkins Glen's retail market is largely concentrated along Franklin Street, generally spread out into four nodes:

- The **Waterfront** node is located along the Seneca Lake waterfront and consists of a full-service restaurant and water-dependent and water-related uses. This area is isolated from the rest of the historic downtown retail corridor, separated by vacant lots, the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel, and rail lines, breaking the pedestrian environment along Franklin Street between 1st Street and the waterfront. Additionally, these waterfront uses are blocked from view from Franklin

Street and there are no wayfinding signs to direct visitors to the waterfront and vice versa, limiting cross-shopping opportunities.

- The **Historic Downtown** node is located along Franklin Street from 1st to 6th streets, which a strong cluster of retail storefronts that total approximately 125,000 square feet of ground-floor retail. Several stores in this area have brought merchandise, seating, and signs out onto the sidewalk to enhance the outdoor shopping experience. Further south, however, there are some storefronts with poorly maintained waterfall awnings and storefront displays that lack transparency. There is also poor pedestrian lighting in this area, as well as a lack of curation of storefront displays and lighting at night, which discourages window shopping when stores close early.
- The **Transitional** node extends from 6th Street to Glen Creek at the entry to Watkins Glen State Park. Although the State Park attracts nearly 1 million visitors a year, the connection to the historic downtown lacks safe and comfortable pedestrian infrastructure. Frequent driveway crossings are an impediment to walking, as are cars parked on sidewalks that should be reserved for pedestrians. The lack of compelling storefronts and street trees in this section further diminishes its appeal for those walking to and from the State Park. New York State DOT is resurfacing the roadway and replacing sidewalks in 2018, which will improve pedestrian access. Coordinating street lighting through the DRI program will also improve the transitional node.
- The **Auto-oriented** corridor extends from the State Park to Fairgrounds Lane at the southern border of the Village. This stretch consists primarily of big box retail stores, stand-alone retail set back from the street, and drive-through restaurants.

The current retail business mix in the DRI area is reflective of the region as a whole, with a large proportion of automotive businesses, food and drinking places, and miscellaneous retail that serves the visitor/tourist population. This retail composition could be further enhanced by adding specialty food stores, boutique clothing and accessories, and experiential retail stores that are currently lacking from the local market.

As more housing units are developed downtown and in close proximity to the retail corridor, the retail business mix should also be responsive to a growing year-round local resident population with more convenient goods and services that are less dependent on seasonal visitors. Many residents and visitors are currently shopping outside the Village in competitive retail markets like Ithaca, Horseheads, Corning, and Elmira. Each of these markets has more retail offerings with over 1 million retail square feet each in Ithaca and Horseheads, and destination draws like Ithaca Farmers Market and Corning Museum of Glass.

Strong competition in the region is exacerbated by a less active and uninviting shopping environment in downtown Watkins Glen. Inconsistent operating hours of businesses limit the vitality of Franklin Street. Businesses that have stayed open later, including restaurants, bars, and Famous Brands, have reported seeing foot traffic past 5 p.m. during peak season. The nearby State Park has also seen a healthy rate of visitors between 5 p.m. and 7p.m. However, the lack of coordination among business owners to stay open later and the absence of storefront display lighting result in the perception that downtown is closed.

The Chamber of Commerce has encouraged businesses to stay open later through active late-night programming on Franklin Street, such as “Fridays on Franklin” during the peak season. Downtown businesses signed a contract with the Chamber to keep stores open during such events; however it has been difficult to enforce due to the presence of “hobby business owners.” Often, the businesses’

small staff capacity to manage stores for extended hours may be a key factor for lack of participation. Greater incentives and resources should be provided to store owners to participate in such events.

A retail demand analysis was conducted to identify future retail opportunities in potential DRI projects. An analysis of retail spending compares the total discretionary income of residents within the trade area against the total sales estimated for local businesses, also within the same trade area. A **retail surplus** is a result of local businesses selling more than local residents are purchasing. This suggests that outsiders may be coming into the area to shop. A **retail leakage** is a result of residents spending more than local stores are selling, suggesting that residents are spending outside the trade area. Depending on the size of the retail leakage, this may suggest opportunities for both existing and new businesses to better capture the demand of the residential customer base.

In the case of Watkins Glen, the retail demand analysis suggests opportunities for new businesses to meet unmet demand from residents in health and personal care, grocery stores, food and beverage stores, and building materials and garden equipment. Notably, retail demand analysis is based on income of residents and does not account for potential spending by visitors. Given the substantial local tourism economy, some sectors that demonstrated a surplus, such as food and beverage stores, are likely supported by visitors.

Overall, the retail demand analysis found that there is demand for additional retail in the village, including opportunities for existing retailers to expand their merchandising options to capture micro opportunities to grow. For example, a downtown bakery or coffee shop might want to include a small section devoted to specialty food, incorporate gifts into their merchandise offerings, or start producing its own product.

Although the food services and drinking places category is already experiencing a surplus based on residential spending and also likely due to the myriad of competitive wineries that also serve light fare, it is important to consider that *visitor spending may continue to drive additional restaurants, bars, specialty food stores, and gift and souvenir stores, and other experiential retail concepts*, such as entertainment-related uses, art galleries, personal service, fitness-oriented uses, etc.

According to stakeholders, visitors from outside of the region come to the area seeking the *Finger Lakes experience*. This may include spa and personal care services, live entertainment, farm-to-table dining options and specialty local products such as wine, craft beer, and dairy goods from nearby farms. In particular, higher-end and well-branded restaurants such as Graft have been successful in appealing to visitors seeking unique culinary experiences.

The limited space for additional retail in downtown Watkins Glen also suggests that DRI projects should prioritize improvements to existing retail storefronts. A retail “bootcamp” or technical assistance program can educate business owners on the importance of storefront design, exchange best practices among businesses, and offer tips and tools to upgrading inventory.

A storefront improvement program that funds and guides the development of new storefront signs, awnings and display lighting should also be prioritized to improve the retail environment in the historic downtown corridor. In particular, the program should aim to attract applicants in the retail core who have not previously participated in Main Street façade improvement programs. A

Increasing the accessibility of the retail nodes to customers arriving by car and exploring on foot is also critical to improving the existing retail environment in Watkins Glen. DRI projects that support the improvement and beautification of gateway signage, parking lots, and wayfinding will greatly improve the experience of shoppers downtown.

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Other uses such as downtown housing, hotels/ overnight accommodations, and community facilities that support and reinforce existing retail uses could also be supported through DRI projects. In particular, there appears to be a market for a downtown mid-tier hotel. Current lodging establishments in downtown Watkins Glen are either too expensive or too small to accommodate large tour groups travelling north toward Niagara Falls. An appropriately scaled hotel project, developed in keeping with the Village's downtown character, that can offer such accommodations should be a priority for downtown to ensure overnight stays of existing tour groups passing through Watkins Glen.

Local Organizational and Management Capacity

Watkins Glen has benefitted from a significant amount of planning at the local and county level. The Schuyler County Planning Department offices are located within the Village and provide a valuable resource to local government. County-level economic development and business development agencies such as the Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPEd) and the Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce work closely with the Village government on strategies for improving Watkins Glen's resources for businesses and residents. Entities that could be involved in implementation of DRI-funded projects include Village and County governments, SCOPEd, the Finger Lakes Gateway CDC, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPEd)

SCOPEd is a 50 year old public private partnership that works to build a thriving and sustainable economy in Schuyler County by bringing together member businesses, organizations, and community partners to promote the formation, retention, expansion, and attraction of target businesses in the area. SCOPEd administers the Schuyler County Industrial Development Agency (SCIDA); Project Seneca; the Finger Lakes Gateway Community Development Corporation (FLX Gateway CDC); and SCOPEd provides small business support and a revolving loan fund to help business and job growth. SCOPEd recently adopted a new mission statement emphasizing a focus on bringing production businesses and innovation hubs to Schuyler County.

Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce is located on Franklin Street and serves over 450 members including small businesses, home businesses, corporations, and non-profits operating in Schuyler and neighboring counties. Members participate in events, educational opportunities, and advertising co-ops, and receive member-to-member discounts.

Finger Lakes Gateway Community Development Corporation

The Finger Lakes Gateway Community Development Corporation (CDC) is a non-profit organization that was formed in June 2016. The CDC's mission is to improve the economic well-being in Schuyler County and the region through a community-driven, collaborative approach that fosters economic vitality. Among the CDC's ongoing initiatives is exploring creation of a Business Improvement District (BID). The BID would provide supplemental services for Downtown businesses and to promote long-term economic development. The proposal would include physical improvements such as planters, lighting, and public art, cleaning and maintenance, and marketing and promotion. The BID District Plan is still in formation, with plans to seek approval in 2018.

Section II: Downtown Vision, Goals, and Strategies

Vision Statement

The vision of the Watkins Glen Downtown Revitalization Initiative is to leverage the accessible Seneca Lake waterfront, famous wine trails, vibrant arts scene, internationally recognized racetrack with a storied auto-racing heritage, and world class State Park for progressive community development that retains and enhances our unique character to sustain a year-round innovative and prosperous economy that is supported by our community.

Goal 1: Downtown Living

Build on the strong sense of place in Watkins Glen by increasing walkability, providing a range of housing types, and promoting downtown as a mixed-use district.

Goal 2: Culture and Entertainment

Create an active downtown environment for residents and visitors by supporting arts and cultural organizations, nightlife, youth-oriented activities, and regular events.

Goal 3: Economic Development

Attract high-paying jobs, skilled workers, and young professionals by promoting year-round local-based businesses and investment in infrastructure.

Goal 4: Quality of Life

Promote Watkins Glen's identity as a year-round vibrant community for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Downtown Revitalization Strategies

Watkins Glen DRI Strategies:

- Support the creation of high quality year-round housing that serves residents of varied ages, incomes, and type, through renovation for upper floor apartments and new residential development.
- Develop additional downtown programming and community activities by promoting arts, cultural, and recreational resources.
- Create employment opportunities for the next-generation workforce in the downtown area by supporting local businesses, providing opportunities for small office space, and activating vacant retail space.
- Improve park assets, invest in winter recreational amenities, and enhance access to the region's natural resources and recreational amenities, to promote year-round living and tourism.
- Invest in streetscape improvements that will promote walkability and increase safety for people of all ages and abilities.
- Create a sustainable downtown by promoting energy efficiency, green infrastructure and other green building practices.
- Advance urban design principles that will make for a more attractive downtown.

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- Preserve downtown character by protecting historic resources and encouraging rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council Strategies:

- Build the greater Binghamton Innovation Ecosystem.
- Invest in the advanced manufacturing industry.
- Transform the food and agriculture industry.
- Promote the Southern Tier's innovative culture.

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Section III: Downtown Management and Implementation Strategy

The Watkins Glen DRI Plan was developed by a Local Planning Committee (LPC) comprised of Village Trustees, a representative from the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council, representatives from Schuyler County, business owners, leaders from local organizations and institutions, and local residents. Local implementation of the DRI plan will be overseen in coordination by the Finger Lakes Gateway Community Development Corporation (FLX CDC), the Village Board, Schuyler County, and other Village departments and staff as needed.

Most of the projects recommended for DRI Funding are capital improvement projects that will be undertaken by the Village or Schuyler County. Any changes to local laws or preparation of plans or studies will also be undertaken by the Village, potentially through the use of a private consultant.

Some projects will require participation by private entities or non-profit organizations (e.g., Housing, Neighborhood and Childcare Center; Performing Arts Center; Carriage House, etc.). In the case of the multi-site Building and Site Transformation project, smaller projects that fit criteria set forth in the DRI Plan have been grouped where their combined improvements will have a transformative effect on the Downtown. All projects that provide a benefit to a private business, property owner, or non-profit have received support by the LPC, members of the public, and Village officials, and will be coordinated with the Village and FLX CDC during project implementation. Where the potential recipients of DRI funding are known, the capacity of the business owner or non-profit entity to implement the project has been evaluated through the DRI process. However, it is expected that additional review of project viability and capacity of private entities will be conducted by appropriate state agencies during the implementation phase.

Projects for which the recipient(s) of the benefit is a business, property owner, or non-profit organization that has not been clearly identified in the plan, the recipient(s) will be selected through a competitive process. This type of project would include the Watkins Glen Downtown Revitalization Fund. Criteria for that process will be developed by the Village and the FLX CDC in coordination with the state agency administering the DRI funds, and will include demonstration that the recipient has the capacity to implement the project as outlined in the DRI Plan. A portion of funding set aside for administrative services will be included in the DRI request for projects that will require additional organization and management by the Village. These may include the Watkins Glen Downtown Revitalization Initiative Fund, the Building and Site Transformation multi-site project, the Public Artwork Project, and Village administered capital projects.

The Village Board, County and FLX CDC are unified in their support for the revitalization of Downtown Watkins Glen. The Village, County, and a network of local and regional economic development organizations have invested significant time and energy, capital funds, and grant resources into projects that support revitalization in Downtown Watkins Glen. The Village, County, and FLX CDC have the ability and resources to execute the Strategic Investment Plan included in the Watkins Glen DRI Plan.

Section IV: Public Involvement

The DRI planning process sought to engage the Watkins Glen community, civic leaders, property and business owners, and other stakeholders, to confirm vision, goals, and strategies and to identify projects to recommend for DRI funding. Community input helped to identify catalytic projects with potential to leverage additional investment and promote economic development in the Village.

Purpose and Principles of the Community Engagement Plan

The Watkins Glen DRI planning process began with development of a Public Engagement Plan (PEP) that detailed how the Village of Watkins Glen, New York State agencies, and the consultant team would inform and seek input from all stakeholders in the community including Village government, residents, business and property owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the general public. The objective was to ensure that all stakeholders had ample opportunity to know and understand the DRI process and its intended outcomes; to comment on the study as it progressed; to have their concerns and ideas heard; and to contribute to building a consensus about the vision for the Downtown and other outcomes, culminating in a locally supported DRI Strategic Investment Plan.

Local Planning Committee

A group of local stakeholders was selected to serve on the Local Planning Committee (LPC) as an advisory board to assist private-sector and State experts in developing the Watkins Glen DRI Plan. The Watkins Glen LPC was co-chaired by Laurie DeNardo, a member of the Village of Watkins Glen Board of Trustees, and Judy McKinney Cherry, CECD, member of the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council and executive director for the Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPED). The LPC was comprised of business owners, residents, and leaders from local organizations and institutions. The LPC held monthly meetings that were open to the public to discuss the progress and development of the Strategic Investment Plan and projects. This effort was also coordinated with key stakeholders to solicit feedback and gather information on existing conditions, planned projects, and proposed recommendations.

Overall direction, policies, and decisions on the plan were solicited through the LPC. Feedback on plan products and information was sought from the LPC before distribution to the broad range of stakeholders and the public. The LPC collaborated with NYS DOS, Village of Watkins Glen and the consultant team through a series of seven LPC meetings, to share and review study documents as they were developed. LPC members offered their expertise to provide insights for discussion at meetings and assisted the outreach effort by identifying issues, information resources, stakeholders and potential lines of communication.

LPC meetings were held on the following dates:

LPC Meeting #1 - September 27, 2017

The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the committee and members of the consultant team, discuss a public engagement plan and begin the process of identifying opportunities for revitalization in Watkins Glen. Approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to Village staff and members of the committee, consultant team and New York State.

LPC Meeting #2 – October 25, 2017

The purpose of this meeting was to debrief from the first public engagement event and discuss potential changes and additional details to include in potential project ideas. Approximately 20

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members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to members of the local planning committee, Village staff, the consultant team, and New York State agencies.

[LPC Meeting #3 – November 29, 2017](#)

The purpose of this meeting was to review submissions to the open call for projects and discuss criteria that will be used to score project ideas. Approximately 20 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to members of the local planning committee, Village staff, the consultant team, and New York State agencies.

[LPC Meeting #4 – January 10, 2018](#)

The purpose of this meeting was to review and discuss a preliminary list of projects and begin to identify priorities and eliminate projects that are not appropriate for DRI funding at this time. Approximately 20 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to members of the local planning committee, Village staff, the consultant team, and New York State agencies.

[LPC Meeting #5 – January 31, 2018](#)

The purpose of this meeting was to review and discuss changes to the preliminary list of projects and begin to develop details for four of the public projects: Clute Park, E 4th Street pedestrian improvements, gateway and wayfinding signage, and zoning updates. Approximately 30 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to members of the local planning committee, Village staff, the consultant team, and New York State agencies.

[LPC Meeting #6 – February 15, 2018](#)

Description to come.

[LPC Meeting #7 – March 14, 2018](#)

Description to come.

[Community Engagement Tools and Activities](#)

Members of the Watkins Glen community, including residents of the region, workers, non-profit organizations, business owners, and property owners were all critical stakeholders in developing the Watkins Glen DRI Plan. In addition to being invited to attend all meetings of the LPC, the general public was encouraged to participate directly in the DRI process. The DRI planning process included three public workshops, which were designed to inform and involve the public in a meaningful way. Public opinion and comments were documented and considered in the development of plan recommendations.

[Community Engagement Events](#)

The DRI planning process included three Community Engagement Events as follows:

[Community Engagement Event #1](#)

October 18, 2017

On Wednesday, October 18, 2017, BFJ Planning facilitated the first Public Engagement Event for the Watkins Glen DRI Plan. The event was held at the Watkins Glen Community Center and started with a public presentation on the DRI program, goals and project criteria, the Watkins Glen DRI vision, goals and strategies, the DRI project timeline, and next steps. Following the presentation public feedback on preliminary project ideas and the proposed vision, goals, and strategies was solicited. The workshop was attended by all members of the Local Planning Committee (LPC), representatives of the State, and

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approximately 130 members of the public. Public attendees provided feedback and comments on the potential preliminary projects outlined on large-scale presentation boards and maps. Each station had a member of the consultant team and members of the LPC to facilitate the discussion and to answer questions related to potential projects in the DRI Boundary. The purpose of the exercise was to provide the public with an opportunity to provide input on project ideas, provide input on specific project features and elements, and to generate new ideas for additional projects.

Community Engagement Event #2
December 13, 2017

On Wednesday, December 13, 2017, BFJ Planning facilitated the second Public Engagement Event for the Watkins Glen DRI Plan. The event was held at the Watkins Glen Community Center and started with a public presentation on the DRI program, goals and project criteria, proposals submitted through the call for projects, and next steps. Following the presentation public feedback on preliminary project ideas was solicited at interactive open house stations and a design station. The workshop was attended by all members of the Local Planning Committee (LPC), representatives of the State, and approximately 100 members of the public. Public attendees provided feedback and comments on the potential preliminary projects outlined on large-scale presentation boards and maps, and at a design station for Clute Park. Each station had a member of the consultant team to facilitate the discussion, lead the design charrette and to answer questions related to potential projects in the DRI area. The purpose of the exercise was to provide the public with an opportunity to provide input on project ideas and provide input on specific project features and design elements.

Community Engagement Event #3
March 7, 2018

The third public workshop was held on Wednesday March 7, 2018 at the Watkins Glen Community Center.

Additional information on Community Engagement Event #3 forthcoming.

Open Call for Projects

The LPC sought proposals for private-sector projects to be considered for DRI funding through an open call for projects between November 20 and December 14, 2017. The purpose of the Open Call for Potential DRI Projects was to hear from members of the community who had potentially transformative projects on private sites that provide economic and community benefits. This process enabled the LPC to fully vet private projects that could transform the downtown, in the open. More than 40 submissions were received, including capital/construction projects; demonstration of commitment of private funding sources; demonstration of the project's transformative nature and potential community benefits.

Online Public Surveys

Two online public surveys were prepared and hosted via Survey Monkey.

Visitor Survey

The first survey focused on reaching visitors and tourists to the Village and included questions about their impressions of the Downtown, and ways in which the DRI Area could be improved.

Additional information on survey results forthcoming.

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The second public survey asked members of the Watkins Glen community to prioritize and give feedback on the semi-final list of projects to be included for DRI funding.

Additional information on survey results forthcoming.

Social Media

The consultant team provided project updates via social media, which allowed local interest groups to easily distribute DRI information via their own social media networks. Social media tools used during the process included Twitter and Instagram (@watkinsglendri). LPC members linked to materials and updates through their personal Facebook pages. Outreach materials and meeting info were also posted on the NYS DOS DRI website.

Economic Development Stakeholder Feedback

As one component of developing a real estate market analysis, the consultant team conducted a series of stakeholder interviews to supplement the residential and retail market analysis. Individuals who were interviewed included local building owners, landlords, developers, residential and commercial brokers, major employers, representatives of local government and civic organizations, retailers and residents. Interviews were also completed with a co-working and maker-space consultant, and the Southern Tier Start Up Alliance at Cornell University. These interviews supplemented the available published data and provided a more in depth understanding of potential demand for residential units in the DRI, whether in upper floor locations or new-build/redevelopment projects. These interviews also provided more up to date information on current rents, occupancy levels and absorption to understand current demand, supply and future potential supply of each use under consideration. Additional details on the indications of these interviews are included in Part I, Section I: Downtown Profile and Assessment and Section III: Action Plan.

Conclusion

Through a combination of public workshops, stakeholder interviews, and online outreach, the public engagement process generated input from a broad cross section of the Watkins Glen community. In addition to traditional outreach methods, the open call for projects was an effective tool with the added benefit of promoting investment interest in the Watkins Glen community. The process brought forward new voices, including local entrepreneurs, developers and property owners looking to invest in the downtown. Some of the projects developed through this process have been recommended for DRI funding, while others will move forward independently, contributing to ongoing advancement of DRI goals.