



TODAY: Cortland County

The newsletter of the Business Development Corporation promoting industry and business growth in Cortland County

The DRI Top 10

Here's where things now stand on key components of Cortland's ambitious Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Pages 4-6

The Northeast Gateway Project

This project has become a catalyst for a host of major improvements that will enhance the quality of life for all of Cortland. Page 7

Wickwire Pool House Revamped

The next phase of the city's recreational improvements at Suggett Park will tackle this important aquatic amenity. Page 8



The BDC is Cortland County's principal economic development organization working for economic and community growth. Together, their programs, projects, and services aim to support existing businesses while promoting other job-creating opportunities across the county.

The Front Desk

The grant season never ends, it seems. Here are a few bullet points on where we are with dollars already won and dollars the community is seeking for future projects:

- **Downtown Revitalization.** With the city's hiring of Fisher Associates, planning and engineering can begin in earnest for the reconstruction of Main Street Cortland under the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award. Fisher prepared the two-way conversion study for the city a few years back and is intimate with the community's vision put forward in the winning DRI plan. This phase of the project will lead to construction beginning in early 2021. Other projects awarded under the DRI (Vine Health & Fitness, 73 Main Street, 83 Main Street, 37-39 Port Watson Street, etc.) are either complete, in progress or in planning).
- **Clinton Avenue.** Work to improve Clinton Avenue infrastructure is also set to begin soon, and when complete will comprise new water and sewer hook-ups as well as significant improvements to the streetscape. Project work is expected to extend from the Clinton Street Bridge west, through the Church and Main Street intersections and potentially projecting out as far as Broadway. This work will also take several construction seasons.
- **Next DRI Round.** The Village of Homer is a first-time applicant in the fourth round of the DRI program. Six other Central New York com-

munities are also competing for the top prize, which so far has gone to the cities of Oswego, Cortland, and Auburn. After review and scoring by the CNY Regional Economic Development Council (REDC), Governor Cuomo will announce the winner sometime later this summer.

- **REDC Awards Competition.** The ninth round of the annual REDC economic development competition is well underway, with project grant submissions due by the end of July. Review and grading of the projects across the five-county CNY region (Cortland, Madison, Oswego, Cayuga, and Onondaga) will continue throughout the summer and early fall, five of the top regional plans winning "Top Award" recognition when Cuomo announces them in December.

We're fortunate to have so many partners as we pursue resources to make our community a better one. These projects—and this is a limited list of initiatives underway—promise to make a real difference in Cortland County now and in the years to come.



Garry L. VanGorder
Executive Director/CEO

15

Megawatt solar project proposed for Lapeer

20

Megawatt solar project proposed for Willet

90

Megawatt solar project proposed for Homer



Dan, Kevin and David McNeil of McNeil Development have been involved in many improvements to the City of Cortland. Photo by Roger William Photography

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On the cover. Top, Enjoying local craft beverages at Cortland Farm Distillery and Brewery. @ExperienceCortland
Bottom, Downtown Revitalization is changing the face of Cortland.

Photo by Roger William Photography

Main Street

Cortland's Downtown Revitalization Initiative



Governor Andrew Cuomo selected the City of Cortland as recipient of New York State's 2017 Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant of \$10 million.

A \$10 million grant from New York State is fostering redevelopment of Cortland's downtown through the expansion of the creative economy, enhancing the existing downtown neighborhood, and re-imagining its infrastructure for the 21st century.

Recognizing that companies are increasingly seeking to relocate and invest in vibrant, walkable downtowns as part of their efforts to attract and retain a skilled workforce, in 2016 New York Governor Andrew Cuomo launched the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), a \$100 million grant program designed to improve the vitality of urban centers across New York State.

Following an extensive, highly competitive application and review process, 10 cities were chosen to receive \$10 million each through the inaugural program. The City of Cortland was among the 2016 semifinalists for funding but fell just short of making the final cut.

In 2017, Governor Cuomo introduced a second round of DRI funding for a new group of recipients. Ten communities were identified by the governor's Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) to participate in the DRI—this time including Cortland.

The Central New York REDC selected Cortland because the city serves as a gateway to both Central New York and the Finger Lakes and is a magnet for hundreds of thousands of tourists annually, and because it serves county residents and SUNY Cortland students as the primary shopping area in Cortland County.

Cortland's central business district was at the core of the area designated for the DRI, consisting primarily of commercial and residential mixed-use attached buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Property used for surface parking was seen as adaptable for new development, creating a denser downtown with additional economic and property tax benefits. Cortland further envisioned new space for community activities and additional housing for an expanding residential and tourism population.

The state facilitated a planning process that resulted in a Strategic Investment Plan for the community. To fully leverage the impact of the DRI, a local planning committee identified projects that would cost more than available DRI funds to ensure a continued project pipeline for the future. The governor's office then reviewed the projects and determined which would receive implementation funding through the DRI.

Future Vision

The City of Cortland's plan fostered redevelopment of its downtown through the expansion of the creative economy, building a complete downtown neighborhood, and re-imagining its infrastructure for the 21st century.

Cortland's local planning committee (LPC) began work to assess potential projects to be funded through the \$10 million DRI grant. Co-chaired by Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin and BDC Executive Director Garry VanGorder, the LPC was composed of a range of residents with a variety of skill sets and perspectives. The group also worked with Cameron Engineering & Associates, a New York firm

assigned to the community as part of the grant award.

"People should know that Cortland didn't win this competition because our downtown is in desperate shape," says VanGorder. "Cortland won because it's headed in the right direction, and because these resources can put us over the top."

Turn to page 4 for an update on the status of Cortland's Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects.

What is an REDC?

Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) are a key component of Governor Andrew Cuomo's transformative approach to NY State investment and economic development.

In 2011, Governor Cuomo formed 10 REDCs to establish long-term strategic plans for economic growth in their respective regions. REDCs are public-private partnerships made up of local experts and stakeholders from business, academia, local government and non-governmental organizations.

New York's REDCs represent the following areas:

- Capital Region
- Central New York (Cortland)
- Finger Lakes
- Long Island
- Mid-Hudson
- Mohawk Valley
- New York City
- North Country
- Southern Tier
- Western New York



Success Story

The DRI Top 10

Local and state representatives zeroed in on several key components for Cortland's Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Here is an update on where each of these transformational projects stands.

In October 2017, Governor Andrew Cuomo paid a visit to Cortland County to announce that the City of Cortland would be the recipient of funding through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI)—an annual \$100 million grant program designed to improve the vitality of urban centers across New York State.

Cortland was one of 10 cities selected to receive \$10 million in funding for the second year of the program. More than 100 New York communities vied for the grants.

"As a gateway to the heart of the state, Cortland is strategically located to benefit from a talented workforce driven by the nearby hub of higher education institutions," the Governor said. "These targeted investments will help make downtown Cortland a sought-after destination for young talent seeking a community where they can work, enjoy the arts, and gather with family and friends all in one neighborhood."

Much has happened and continues to take shape as Cortland's DRI moves forward. Most significantly, an engineering firm was recently selected to begin planning and design for the major transformational reconstruction of Main Street.

Fisher Associates was one of nine companies to submit responses to the city's request for proposal and was chosen from its peer applicants following a document review and an interview in early June at City Hall. That selection was approved by the Cortland City Council and support is also expected from the New York State Department of State.

A central piece of the DRI—to rebuild Main Street infrastructure and streetscape—will include sewer, water, and stormwater upgrades as well as new Wi-Fi infrastructure, sidewalk and curb replacements, lighting, public art installments, a new two-way traffic pattern and a pocket park. Another set of

private projects along with additional capital projects will be funded under the state's December 2017 grant award to the city.

Planning, design and permitting work should last into 2020, with construction expected to begin in 2021. Work will likely cover two construction seasons.

"It's true that some time has passed since the announcement, but there's been a lot going on behind the scenes," says DRI Co-Chair Garry VanGorder. "This is a major infrastructure project with many partners and stakeholders. We've got to be sure to get it right."

Following are additional projects funded through the DRI, and where they currently stand:

Advance the Crown City Artworks Project

Install public art, such as sculptures, murals, or curated exhibitions at select locations throughout downtown to enhance the appeal and attractiveness of the area. New art installations on blank walls, in small gardens, and on sidewalks will create a unique experience for residents and visitors alike.

Status: A public arts working group composed of area artists and other members of the community was created as the DRI proposal was formulated. This group has continued to meet periodically to develop a frame-



Installing public art such as murals, sculptures and exhibitions is part of the DRI's Crown City Artworks Project.

work for public art which will best support the infrastructure and determine the space to be designated for local artists and possibly regional and national artists. With an engineering firm in place, the working group

"These targeted investments will help make downtown Cortland a sought-after destination for young talent seeking a community where they can work, enjoy the arts, and gather with family and friends all in one neighborhood."

— Governor Andrew Cuomo

will coordinate with Fisher Associates on integrating public art into the overall plan.

Create a Downtown Pocket Park on Main Street

Develop a downtown pocket park on a centrally located vacant property on Main Street. New landscaping, seating and lighting will transform a city-owned lot between 10-16 Main Street into an oasis for family gatherings and lunch breaks, as well as a small event space.

Status: An offshoot of the Artworks Project, the working group is developing a general plan for the park, with specific design to be determined in coordination with landscape engineers at Fisher Associates.

Develop a New Multi-Use Entertainment Facility

Renovate a vacant historic building at 28 Main Street to create a multi-use entertainment facility with bowling lanes, live performance space, kitchen and bar, audio/visual recording studio, and rooftop park. The adaptive reuse of this historic structure will boost nightlife and weekend activity in the downtown area.

Status: Contracts for the project are now under review. Preliminary architectural design is complete, along with an engineer's structural analysis of the building. Plans are to begin construction this fall and finish the project by spring 2021.

Establish a Downtown Health and Fitness Center

Provide funding for renovation of space for a gym and a 2,000-sq.-ft. physical therapy center in an existing commercial building to meet intergenerational demand for high-tech healthy living resources and support downtown livability.

Status: Work on Vine Health & Fitness, a new state-of-the-art wellness center in the heart of downtown Cortland, was completed in fall 2018. Vine occupies 7,000 sq. ft. in the Bailey Place Insurance building at 20 N. Main Street and offers clients the latest in interactive fitness technology.



Establish the SUNY Cortland Institute of Applied Geospatial and Drone Technology

The Institute for Geospatial and Drone Technology will serve as a resource for entrepreneurs and startup companies as Cortland strives to become the leading hub for GIS and drone fields in Central NY. Funding will be used to renovate existing space on Main Street to provide meeting and office spaces; purchase drones, software, and hardware; and install an outdoor drone testing facility. The project capitalizes on significant funding to the Central New York region for drone research, development and manufacturing.

Status: Curriculum development is underway; downtown office space is pending a lease agreement.

“We have more and more people living downtown, and we believe it's important that we do everything we can to rebuild it as a great place to live.”

— Garry VanGorder,
BDC Executive Director

Create a Building Owner/Business Startup Loan and Grant Fund

This revolving loan and grant fund will assist property owners in renovating and upgrading downtown commercial and residential buildings. Improvements may include sign and façade enhancements, upper-story housing restoration, and commercial space renovation, with an emphasis on projects that reduce the city's environmental footprint. The fund may also assist new businesses with start-up costs such as marketing and fit-out of commercial space.

Status: A draft of program guidelines is complete and is now being reviewed by New York State.

Continued on page 6



Vine Health & Fitness, a new state-of-the-art wellness center in the heart of downtown Cortland, was a DRI project which was completed in fall 2018.

Photo by Roger William Photography

Success Story continued

Renovate Four Downtown Buildings for a Vibrant Mix of New Commercial and Residential Uses

Renovate four buildings to expand commercial opportunities and promote synergy with residential uses. Buildings include: 13-15 Central Avenue, an underused commercial building that will be transformed into 9,000 sq. ft. of office/retail space; 73 Main Street, a historic building that will include office space and two third-floor apartment units; 37-39 Port Watson Street, which will be made over into four new apartments (two of which will be ADA accessible) and will feature the conversion of the building's side alley into an inviting pedestrian walkway; 83-85 Main Street, a chronically vacant building

that anchors the south end of the corridor that will include three floors of market-rate housing to provide more options for downtown living.

Status: 13-15 Central Avenue: Project is in planning and design.

73 Main Street: Project complete. Commercial information technology tenant has been secured for second floor. Two new third-floor apartments are now available.

37-39 Port Watson Street: Project is in planning and design.

83-85 Main Street: Developers are finishing plans, finalizing the budget and going out for bid on various parts of construction. A general contractor has been hired. Scheduled to break ground in fall 2019.



83 and 85 Main Street are two of the buildings under development through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

Photo by Roger William Photography



The DRI will have a major impact on the City of Cortland.

Photo by Roger William Photography



Customers lounge on the patio of the Cortland Farm Distillery and Brewery on Court Street. *Photo by Roger William Photography*

Provide Downtown Wi-Fi and Improve Connectivity

Build-out the backbone and “last mile” data delivery infrastructure to bring high speed internet to both residential and commercial customers. Offering a public Wi-Fi network will ensure that the downtown is attractive to business owners who require the amenity for provision of services and will encourage residents and visitors to stay downtown longer.

Status: Wi-Fi infrastructure will be installed as construction crews rebuild Main Street.

Complete the Cortland Business Innovation Center

Complete the conversion of a vacant building into the Cortland Business Innovation Center, which will serve as downtown's hub for commerce and culture and a resource for aspiring entrepreneurs. The Innovation Center will provide retail incubation for four businesses on the first floor, eight co-working and startup offices on the second floor, and space for one entrepreneur in residence on the third floor. Funds will be used for completion of interior build-out of the first and second floors, as well as façade improvements.

Status: Construction is 80 percent complete.

“We have more and more people living downtown, and we believe it's important that we do everything we can to rebuild it as a great place to live,” says Garry VanGorder.

Update

The Northeast Gateway Project

Cortland's Northeast Gateway Project was developed to create an attractive streetscape to help brand the city and entice traffic from I-81 toward downtown. It has since become a catalyst for a host of major improvements that will enhance the quality of life for the entire city.

Several years ago, the City of Cortland introduced a Comprehensive Plan as a guide for planning future land use and development, while establishing strategies to address a range of issues facing the city. Among those issues was the need to make improvements to Cortland's Northeast Gateway, beginning at Interstate 81/Exit 11 and the adjacent Clinton Avenue Corridor (NYS Route 13) from Tioughnioga River Bridge to the Downtown Historic District.

This gateway remains the most commonly used route for Cortland visitors and is currently made up of a mix of excessive signage, pedestrian-unfriendly amenities, rough landscape and, until recently, commercial properties.

The city engaged an engineering firm to undertake a public design process that explored options for the area. Consultants managed the plan's development and served as city liaison, while a 12-member steering committee of local residents oversaw the consultant's work.

A public design workshop was conducted to gather community input, followed by a public presentation during which residents had the opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback on the conceptual plans. The result was proposed streetscape improvements that would allow the area to serve as a gateway into the City of Cortland, help brand the city, and entice traffic toward the downtown area.

Bigger Plans

The Northeast Gateway Project became phase one of a larger plan that was mapped out by city planners and New York State to improve a significantly greater section of the city not only cosmetically, but infrastructurally as well.

"We were able to get considerably more money through grants and other financing," says Mack Cook, administration and finance



An artist's rendering of a portion of the Northeast Gateway Project.
C&S Companies

director for the City of Cortland. "This allowed us to launch phase two—replacing the old water mains beneath Clinton Avenue from Main Street to River Street at no cost to the city. Work on that begins this summer and will be finished by fall 2019."

Next comes phase three, replacement of the sewer and stormwater lines beneath Clinton Avenue. "Engineering plans are 90 percent complete; state permits are pending," Cook says. "That work is slated for 2020."

Phase four, which is expected to be implemented in 2021, will consist of surface stormwater management and installation of bikeways, pedestrian walkways, lighting and general cosmetic improvements along Clinton Avenue leading to its Main Street intersection. "This is now in design and is 60 percent done," Cook says. "Preliminary plans are being reviewed by New York State." This phase of the project, Cook notes, is funded through grant programs, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency, with the goal of being of no cost to the city.

"Phase five is substantial," Cook says, "and is pretty much a repeat of phases two through four, this time running north of Main Street to Broadway. It will also be funded by grants and begins sometime after 2022."

When all phases are complete, the result will be a scenic connective corridor with pedestrian walkways and bikeways and all new underground systems running from Broadway to Yaman Park, and including Tioughnioga River Bridge.

Final cost is estimated at \$22 million.



The city is planning major improvements to Cortland's Northeast Gateway beginning at Interstate 81/Exit 11 and running to the Downtown Historic District.

C&S Companies

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Work to Begin on New Wickwire Pool House in Suggett Park

Following the 2016 reconstruction of Wickwire Pool, city leaders have now turned their attention to upgrading the accompanying pool house.

The next phase of the City of Cortland's recreational improvements at Suggett Park kicked off this spring with the selection of HUNT Engineers, Architects & Land Surveyors, P.C. of Horseheads, NY, as the firm that will revamp Wickwire pool house.

"The current building was constructed in 1946 and renovated in the 1990s, but needs additional improvements to bring it up to current code," explains John McNerney, director of the Youth Bureau for the City of Cortland and who oversees activities and operations at Suggett Park and the county's seven other parks. "The project is in its very early stages. HUNT is working on the design, which must be approved by the City Council. We are now coordinating with key stakeholders—Red Cross representatives, community members, lifeguard and aquatics staff—as plans move forward."

The project is funded by a \$600,000 grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (PRHP), the agency charged with the operation of New York's state parks and historic sites. "The plan is to use the existing pool house frame and structure and upgrade the locker rooms, restrooms, shower areas, lifeguard first-aid station, and storage areas," McNerney says. "Construction begins this fall, with completion set for June 2020."

The Wickwire Pool House renovation follows the 2016 rebuild of Wickwire Pool. Like the pool house, the pool also dated back to the 1940s and, despite improvements over the years, had many elements of its original construction in need of upgrades.

Today, Wickwire Pool is handicap accessible with a zero- to four-foot shallow section and a two-foot children's play area with spray feature. A separate five- to eight-foot-deep area has eight competitive swim lanes and an eight-foot access stair. The facility features a completely

updated mechanical system and a large deck that accommodates tables and chairs.

That project was funded by a \$500,000 Environmental Protection Fund grant administered by PRHP; \$50,000 from the McDonald Foundation; and \$25,000 from the Cortland Community Foundation in addition to contributions from local donors.

In 2018, Suggett Park saw the addition of a children's Splash Pad with assorted water features, while its playground areas received new equipment such as an inclusive glider which permits access for wheelchairs and an accessible whirl that spins in merry-go-round fashion. Wider ramps, new rails, accessibility swings and a generational swing were other innovations included in the park's improvements.

"Our parks systems play a critical role in residents' lives," McNerney says. "This final phase will make our aquatic facilities top notch."



Suggett Park's Wickwire Pool was completely overhauled in 2016. This year, the accompanying pool house will get an upgrade. Photo by Bob Ellis