

Village of Athens, NY
2024 NY Forward Proposal: REQUEST FOR LETTER OF SUPPORT
SUMMARY INFORMATION FOR VILLAGE OF ATHENS 2024 NY FORWARD PROPOSAL
September 9, 2024

Please address (but do not mail) your letter of support to:

Capital Region Economic Development Council (CREDC)
Michael Yevoli, Regional Director
433 River Street, Troy, NY 12180

And email it to the New York Forward website at: RevitalizeAthensNY@gmail.com

(You may also drop the letter with the Village Clerk at the Community Building on 2 First Street, Athens, NY)

The Village of Athens is submitting a proposal under New York State's New York Forward program. For the 2024 solicitation we are focusing on a target area surrounding the Second Street corridor. The project is being completed in parallel with an update to our Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, which was adopted in 2002. We are in the process of carefully selecting actionable projects. This compact downtown area will be safe and more walkable. Athens has addressed all aspects of the proposal, which we share with you below as background for your letter of support. We only have 20 pages to tell Athen's story. Letters of support don't count towards this, **so letters that reflect your personal support are very important.**

ALIGNMENT WITH CREDC STRATEGIES AND OUR VISION

Our projects advance the CREDC Strategies of People, Place, Innovate and Grow. Our current draft vision statement for the NYF Area is as follows: *"The revitalized Village of Athens NYF area features our historic waterfront business district with upgraded infrastructure and improvements that make it accessible to residents, workers and visitors. Our ongoing economic development and sustainability initiatives drive greater prosperity, expand tourism and enhance quality of life for current and future residents, while honoring our core values of family and community."*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We are conducting two community engagement events and a meeting with businesses. We have mounted a full featured website with a community survey and a call for projects. You can see all of these at <https://www.revitalizeathensny.com/nyforward>. We have reached out to potential sponsors of projects.

SUPPORTIVE LOCAL POLICIES

Athens has adopted a number of policies and local laws including:

- Updating our 2002 LWRP with State Grant assistance
- Designated as a disadvantaged community for climate and environmental protection.
- Passed a resolution and are submitting materials needed for Pro-Housing Community certification
- Revolving loan fund assists with historic district exterior rehabilitation
- Mixed-use waterfront district zoning to encourage more leisure and recreation-based businesses
- Updated the Comprehensive Plan in 2020
- Third year designated as a "Tree City" community and were recently awarded a forestry grant
- Clean Energy Community designated by NYSERDA
- Adopted the NYS Smart Energy Code

QUALITY OF LIFE

We have highlighted multiple reasons why Athens is a great place to live, work, play and visit including:

- Small, rural Hudson River waterfront community with historic character
- A safe, quiet village with well-maintained, affordable homes and adaptively re-used historic structures
- Sidewalks are accessible and walkable with ample parking for easy access to businesses and public services
- Historic downtown business district enhanced with upgrades to primary corridor (2nd Street)

- Waterfront used for recreation, small business, and cultural activities
- Upgraded waterfront park that is more accessible and drives foot traffic
- Protected Hudson River estuary
- Water and sewer infrastructure is being upgraded to improve water delivery, enhance collection and treatment, and allow for future expansion

PAST INVESTMENT, PENDING & FUTURE POTENTIAL

There has been considerable investment by public, nonprofit and private investors including development of: Opera House; Happy Clown Ice Cream Shop; Catskill Bread Company; Seconds Restaurant; Stella’s Restaurant; Tenth House Health; Anh Le New York; Athens Rooster; Screaming Eagle Kayak; Lighthouse Liquors; The Stewart House; and Deep-Fried Beers among others. The former Elco Boat Factory is getting new life thanks to artist Carol Bove, who is transforming the space into a sculpture workshop and fabrication center (\$5.0 million). The Stewart House historic Hudson River hotel and tavern was renovated in 2017. New owners have invested over \$1.0 million with plans to expand. The former Dionysos Restaurant has been demolished to make way for a waterfront hot dog stand and public garden remembering the artist, Brice Marden. The Village has been making investments also. It restored the historic Athens School House; made repairs to the gymnasium (\$50,000 grant received); partnered with a local graphic artist to create and implement branding for the Village including signage; begun creating the Village of Athens App, including walking tours and business information for visitors; and made over \$2.0 million in infrastructure and DPW upgrades.

RECENT AND IMPENDING JOB GROWTH

NY Forward projects planned to be included will create and retain over 100 downtown jobs. In addition, many new residents during/post pandemic work from home in the NYF area. According to the US Census “On the Map,” 704 people lived in the NYF area in 2021. 158 people were employed in the NYF area. 143 people are reported to migrate into the area to work daily and 689 migrate out of the area to work daily. On the Map’s most recent data is from 2021. The Village and CREDC can document significant new in migration of homeowners, renters and workers – both full-time and part-time owners – post pandemic. Many seasonal residents work from home in Athens.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROJECTS (DRAFT)

Athens is selecting projects that advance our vision, are consistent with CREDC strategies and are supported by the community. Project sponsors are ready to manage state grant assistance, expand commercial uses, conserve historic buildings, build new homes and apartments, accommodate tourists, create cultural and arts endeavors and address climate change. Athens is building a list of potential 2024 NYF projects, which include:

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS (+/- \$7.0 Million)

- Complete Streets: 2nd St. from Water to Warren St.
- Riverfront Park: Add docks, boardwalk, gazebo, kiosk and restrooms
- Restore the ferry slip
- Pathway linking parks and creating access to the river
- Rehab. Community Building’s museum and gym
- Upgrade the kayak launch south of Riverfront Park

- R.D. Evarts Library – Children's Museum
- Athens Antiques: Rehabilitation and Accessibility
- Tenth Health House: Rehabilitation
- Trinity Episcopal Church: Historic Rehab. and Reuse
- Athens Cultural Center: Rehabilitation
- Stewart House: Rehabilitation

C. SMALL PROJECTS FUND (\$300,000)

- Small Project Fund

NEW CONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION & REUSE (+/- \$7.0 Million)

- Brooks Opera House – Rehabilitation

D. MARKETING AND BRANDING (\$200,000)

- Marketing Materials and Walking Tours

READINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

Athens is ready to support the planning process to prepare the application, and if selected to create a local Planning Committee and support development of a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) with assistance that the state provides. Once the SIP is complete and projects are selected, the Village has the administrative capacity to implement projects and be reimbursed by NYS. We are ready to support nonprofit and private sponsors. If funded, we will hire a professional consultant to administer the proposed \$300,000 Small Project Fund.