
I. Introduction

A. Village of Herkimer Profile

The Village of Herkimer is the county seat of Herkimer County in the heart of the economically distressed Mohawk Valley region. The population of 7,498 includes 51.4 percent low income persons, and 20 percent have incomes below the poverty level.

The Village has an historic and architecturally intact Central Business District that has suffered from the effects of disinvestment and physical deterioration through the years. Underutilized and vacant commercial space dominates Main Street, and streetscape conditions are very poor. Conditions reflect the very poor economic conditions that have impacted the Village and the Mohawk Valley over the past 30 years. The Mohawk Valley is one of New York State's most distressed regions. Over 50 percent of the Village's tax assessment is tax exempt.

Similarly, residential neighborhoods surrounding the business district have deteriorated significantly, as manufacturing operations such as Library Bureau, Mohawk Data Sciences and, most recently, Guilford Mills have shut their doors. Over 50 percent of the housing units in the Village are rental units owned by investor owners, which contributes significantly to housing problems throughout the community.

The Village also has significant community facilities deficiencies, including no recreation and/or youth center, no senior center, a general lack of open space and recreation facilities, and a variety of improvement needs at existing Village parks.

B. Previous Community Development Projects and Programs

The Village of Herkimer has had very limited success in utilizing the Small Cities program to help revitalize its neighborhoods and business district or retain its employment base. Small Cities grants of \$600,000 in 1991 and \$459,292 in 1998 have not been commensurate with the extraordinary economic, housing, and public facilities needs in the Village.

The Village has received four HOME grants that have totaled just over \$1.1 million since 1990, a Section 108 Loan of \$540,000 in 2001, and several smaller grants to aid community revitalization. These grants have helped the Village address some housing rehabilitation, waterfront and homeownership needs but, as with Small Cities grants, grant amounts have not kept pace with overall community development needs and have not been able to adequately address economic distress levels in the Village.

C. Purpose of Developing a *Community Development Strategic Plan*

The lack of success the Village has had securing Small Cities grants and other Federal and State assistance points to the need for a well-developed “Strategic Plan” to identify and guide improvement efforts and to provide critically needed documentation related to Village needs. With the second highest percentage of low income persons in Herkimer County, a poverty rate of 20 percent, and a struggling Main Street, it is clear the Village has community development needs that must be addressed comprehensively, rather than on a hit or miss or project-by-project basis. The preparation of this *Community Development Strategic Plan* will provide the data, needs analysis, and prioritization of projects that will help the Village address identified needs. The *Strategic Plan* will help guide the use of local, State, Federal, and private resources.

The Village believes that through the preparation of this *Community Development Strategic Plan* it will be able to obtain the data that will support stronger, more well-developed Small Cities applications in the years ahead. The *Strategic Plan* will also help to better coordinate potential funding resources and improvement projects. The *Strategic Plan* will also help the Village prioritize needs and projects far better than in years past.

D. The Herkimer Approach

The Village of Herkimer has secured public input into the identification of needs through public meetings, distribution of housing and business surveys, and coordination with the “*Communities 2000*” visioning effort of Herkimer County Community College. This input has been blended with a Village-wide housing conditions survey, analysis of Census data, and input from Village officials and others interested in community development.

The Village has examined needs on a Village-wide level, as well as neighborhood and target area levels that are most important and relevant to the Community Development Small Cities Program.

The Village of Herkimer has unfortunately missed several major community development and revitalization opportunities in the past because it has not had a strategic plan of any kind. Starting with this *Community Development Strategic Plan*, the Village will not allow this trend to continue in the years ahead. While not every Federal and State program can or should be pursued, the Village will utilize the *Community Development Strategic Plan* to focus its resources and maximize the impact of its efforts and funds received. The Village will seek to identify and utilize public/private partnerships, leverage funds to the extent feasible, and take advantage of community improvement opportunities. The *Community Development Strategic Plan* will help identify these opportunities.