



## **The rebirth of downtowns: Spurring new growth Upstate**

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Across New York state, new and strategic housing investments that focus on historic revitalization have spurred advanced downtown infrastructures. Downtown districts in cities like Syracuse, Buffalo, and Rochester are on the rise and experiencing a rebirth, reminiscent of their prime at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the early 1900s, Syracuse, Buffalo, and Rochester were renowned for their vibrant communities, architecturally innovative buildings, and economic prosperity due to prosperous manufacturing companies, such as Carrier Corp. Kodak, and Bethlehem Steel.

The rise of suburbia after World War II caused the decline of these upstate downtowns, as cars became the preferred mode of transportation and suburban life became a nationwide trend. With the advent of shopping malls, downtown business districts became obsolete-strewn with vacant storefronts, empty lots and unused buildings, attractive to neither businesses nor residents.

Thankfully, the rich history and abundant potential of these upstate cities has not been forgotten. In early 2000, local governments recognized the growing need to revitalize their Main Streets to keep local economies viable. Entities within the City of Syracuse recognized the value of utilizing innovative funding sources, such as the New York State Common Retirement Fund, and private-public partnerships with critical nonprofit organizations, such as The Community Preservation Corporation (CPC), a non-profit mortgage lender in NYS, to help restore upstate downtowns as the bustling and vivacious cities they were once renowned to be.

The shared vision of public-private collaborations was two-fold: historic revitalization combined with smart growth. It became apparent that preserving the fabric of a community was key to bringing downtowns back, while also recognizing that sprawl hurts both the environment and local economies. Partners realized that by reinvesting in these downtown areas and restoring their status as desirable locations to live, shop, work, and play-all within a walkable area-they could simultaneously reduce a city's carbon footprint and enable its residents to enjoy cultural and economic growth in a vibrant downtown.

One of the most important factors in the revitalization effort has been the investment in and creation of attractive housing stock in these downtowns to create density and support convenience in upstate cities. To date, CPC has invested over \$690 million with more than 16,000 units in Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. New developments are providing quality rental housing, reestablishing these areas as desirable places to live. Examples include Syracuse's Pike Block, with 78 new market-rate units and 25,000 s/f of retail space; Rochester's 140-year old Academy Building, which is being rehabbed into 21 upscale apartments; and Buffalo's Lafayette Hotel, which is being converted from a 367-room hotel into 115 one and two-bedroom apartments.

As a result, residents, which include graduating college students who may have once left these cities for other opportunities, are choosing to stay in these newly redeveloped areas and create a

new economy and desirable workforce. The downtown growth can be seen throughout the three cities: downtown Syracuse's population has increased 25% in the last ten years, downtown Rochester's population grew 11.5% between 2000 and 2010, and housing stock in downtown Buffalo has increased 19% since 2000.(According to 2010 US Census data and information provided by the Downtown Syracuse Committee.)

As the residential community continues to grow, upstate cities are experiencing a concurrent economic resurgence and reinvention, with businesses beginning to reestablish their presence. Downtown Syracuse, for example, has added 50 retailers since 2009 and has seen several businesses move from the suburbs into downtown. Small businesses have come to play a critical role in the Main St. infrastructure, as well as new investment from national retailers, like Urban Outfitters, who recognize a new market opportunity and are helping to bring commerce back downtown.

Though historic revitalization of upstate New York's downtown districts has seen growth, there is still more to be done. Through the continued good work of public-private partnerships and a commitment to providing appealing housing in these urban areas, we can ensure the preservation of not only Main St.'s history, but also its future.

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