Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI): Block 14 Future Development
Downtown Ithaca, NY



Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation II
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation II is pleased to announce this Request for Expressions of Interest for a development site titled, “Block 14,” in Downtown Ithaca, NY. The site is positioned strategically along the centralized State Street corridor which connects the core of Downtown to the heavily traveled Route 13. The Downtown Ithaca LDC II has served as the facilitator for the redevelopment of this block, seeking to understand the possibilities and challenges inherent in this major redevelopment opportunity. The site provides potential for a full block of urban development at a key City of Ithaca location, serving as a critical connection between Downtown Ithaca and the West End/Waterfront districts of Ithaca.

We seek a qualified and creative development team(s) able to utilize this unique opportunity to deliver a transformational project for the Ithaca community.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



The Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation II (DILDCII) has been working for several years to facilitate the redevelopment of Block 14 to serve as a key block linking the Downtown and West End neighborhoods of Ithaca. The DILDCII, working in tandem with the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County, seeks a developer able to convert this strategic property into one or more mixed-use projects incorporating housing, commercial space, and community/neighborhood amenities.

Among the specific uses identified by the DILDCII as important to an in-fill development for the block are the following:

- Housing, with a preference for blended mixed-income housing (see section on the Downtown housing market)
- Retail and other pedestrian friendly ground-floor commercial uses (see section on Downtown retail market)
- Other commercial uses, especially recreation, food and beverage, and other engaging, experiential businesses

- Community and neighborhood amenities such as childcare, eldercare, and community accessible space for nonprofit organizations
- Parking (see comment in parking section)
- Possible consideration of utilization of a block face to serve as an intercity bus hub, with a modest waiting facility

The DILDCII vision for Block 14 seeks to wed these different uses into a financially feasible and sustainable development that will serve as a catalyst for further area development and transform the existing area into a desirable destination for community and neighborhood residents.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Block 14 is located at a strategic location on the western edge of Downtown Ithaca and the eastern edge of the West End District. The area is a transition zone between the two districts, making it an important location for appropriate in-fill development. The West End commercial corridor runs from Downtown westward along two major arterial one-way pairs – West Seneca Street and West Green Street. Block 14 sits at the eastern end of this corridor.

West Seneca Street abuts Block 14 to the north. Seneca Street is a one-way major roadway through downtown and the West End. It is also designated as New York State Highway 79 and serves as a primary west to east thoroughfare, including for local and inner-city bus traffic. To the north of Seneca Street are the Northside and Fall Creek residential neighborhoods.

North Geneva Street abuts Block 14 to the east and is a two-way side street traversing Downtown and the residential neighborhoods. To the east of the block is the central business district highlighted by the Ithaca Commons pedestrian mall, Dewitt Mall, and Press Bay Alley.

West State/MLK Street abuts Block 14 to the south. State Street further east two blocks was transformed into the Ithaca Commons pedestrian mall, a hub for commercial enterprise and community gathering. West State Street was renovated in the early 2000's and is a two-way, less trafficked road connecting Downtown to Route 13. Farther south is the Southside residential neighborhood.

North Albany Street abuts Block 14 to the west and serves as a minor north-south two-way street serving the residential neighborhoods to either side of the West End commercial corridor, including local bus service. Further West is the transitioning West End neighborhood and the evolving Ithaca waterfront.

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) is a New York State program that provides communities with funding to transform downtowns and strengthen their economic and community vitality. Ithaca was awarded a DRI grant focused on this area, with investments intended to redevelop the area and improve connectivity between Downtown and the West End while strengthening connections to surrounding neighborhoods and regional destinations (see www.ithacadri.com/). Through improvements to streetscapes, pedestrian infrastructure, public spaces, private redevelopments, and other connections, the DRI will help create a denser, more cohesive and accessible district for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and motorists. Block 14 is a key location within this effort, positioned at the intersection of Downtown and the West End.

DOWNTOWN RETAIL

Ithaca is repetitively ranked in the top 6 for cities of its size as a destination for arts and culture. This label is reflected in Downtown Ithaca's predominantly locally-owned, small businesses particularly those offering food of all types and locally produced arts. Restaurants remain the dominant use in Downtown Ithaca, occupying 38% of commercial spaces, with 25 casual and 19 fast-casual restaurants among the 157 stores. Shops selling goods account for 28%, including 16 gift shops, 11 clothing and shoe stores, 5 groceries or markets, 4 bookstores, and 3 home décor stores, among others. Service businesses such as bike and auto repair, salons, spas, and tattoo shops account for another 8%. Downtown vacancy has recovered significantly post-pandemic and currently stands at 11.2%.

In early 2026, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance and City of Ithaca released the Ithaca Retail Market Study and Strategy (see www.downtownithaca.com/ithaca-retail-study-strategy), identifying opportunities to expand retail niches including arts and crafts, vintage and consignment, destination food and beverage, and diversified entertainment. These uses present strong opportunities for Block 14 to complement Downtown's existing retail mix. The Study and Strategy built upon recommendations from the 2024 Downtown Plan. Retail recruitment and retention remains a major focal point for the work of the Downtown Ithaca Alliance and the City of Ithaca.

DOWNTOWN HOUSING

The last public housing study conducted for Downtown Ithaca occurred nearly 10 years ago by The Danter Company, out of Columbus, OH. A formal update has not been undertaken since.

Ithaca's Downtown district has experienced tremendous growth in the housing sector over the past ten- and twenty-year periods. According to 2026 Census update data, the Downtown Ithaca district has a population of 1,933, with 1,687 housing units and 1,499 households. Most new Downtown housing tends to be in structures five stories or higher with more than 50 units/building.

There will be an additional 371 units entering the market from the Theory project at the Gateway complex. Along with other Collegetown, West End, and Waterfront developments under construction, there appears to be a tightening of the local high end rental market. While this trend may be significant for the next several years, the long lead time for a project on Block 14 may push it beyond the absorption cycle for these new projects.

There appears to be an unmet need for middle market residents as well as other types of housing. Downtown Ithaca's housing market also caters to both local residents and students. Increasing the number and diversity of housing units remains a key focus of the City of Ithaca administration and Planning Department, as well as Tompkins County's administration and Planning Department.

PARKING CONSIDERATIONS

The CBD zoning on most of the Block 14 property does not contain a minimum parking requirement. The Business zoning portion does require on-site parking. It is likely that any new zoning for the block would seek to consolidate the zoning types into one single classification (most likely CBD). It will be important to confer with the City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development on the latest proposals and progress for any potential rezoning.

We are asking interested parties to consider how the existing 74 County spaces used on the block can be preserved, relocated, or in some manner maintained in a new project or in the immediate area. Any project will need to recognize this County concern and propose a possible solution.

ZONING

Block 14 currently has two distinct types of zoning:

Block 14 is zoned both CBD-60 and B-2d, with about 75% of the block in the CBD-60 district. The B-2d zone extends 70' in from the property line adjacent to W. Seneca Street. The allowed uses are the same in both districts, and B-2 and CBD zones are generally among the most flexible in terms of allowed uses in the City. Mixed use developments, housing, offices, restaurants, services, and retail are all permitted. Some uses that are not allowed in this location are: light and heavy industrial; mobile homes; auto repair, services, or sales; drive-through restaurants; and adult uses.

The CBD-60 portion of the block allows buildings up to 62 feet in height with no specific story limitation. Effectively, this would allow a 5-6 story building, depending on use. There is no off-street parking requirement, and the only yard requirement is a 10' rear yard, which remains primarily to allow fire access on constrained sites. B-2d is more restrictive in terms of yard and area requirements. A maximum 40' tall building is allowed, and yard setbacks of 5-10' are required on all sides.The district allows a maximum 75% lot coverage by buildings. There are no residential parking requirements in the B-2d. Parking is required for other uses *unless* 60% or more of the building is a residential use. Most new development has relied on this carve out and does not provide parking.

It is anticipated that zoning on this block will be modified under a current zoning code update being undertaken by the City of Ithaca. Indications are that the block will receive some upzoning. The rezoning exercise is expected to be completed in late 2027.

Block 14 also is part of the City of Ithaca Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning, which enables developers to submit requests to the Ithaca City Council for modifications for an entire project.

CURRENT BLOCK 14 OWNERSHIP

Block 14 property is currently held by two distinct ownerships.

- Roughly one-third of the block is held privately. The DILDCII has carried an option agreement with the private ownership group that expires in December 2026.
- The remaining property on the block is owned by Tompkins County. Much of it is currently being used as a surface parking lot for County employees working in nearby buildings. The County also owns a small building on the southwest corner of the block that houses Veterans Affairs and the Board of Elections. (see section on Tompkins County)

Block 14 is currently comprised of 5 parcels for an approximate combined area of 1.14 acres that is 199.90’ by 248.18’. The following is a summary of those 5 parcels.

- 110 N Geneva St (500700-71.-3-3) | Calculated 0.22 Acre commercial property class parcel with a 2 story converted house & large 1.5 story storage building.

- 108 N Geneva St (500700-71.-3-4) | Calculated 0.10 Acre commercial property class parcel with a 2 story apartment building.
- 104 N Geneva St (500700-71.-3-5) | Calculated 0.15 Acre commercial property class parcel with a 24- space parking lot.
- 210 W State St (500700-71.-3-6) | Calculated 0.10 Acre commercial property class parcel with a 3.5 story apartment building with recessed commercial space and small 1 story storage building.
- 214-216 W State St (500700-71.-3-6) | Calculated 0.57 Acre commercial property class parcel with 1 story county office building and 50-space parking lot.



TOMPKINS COUNTY

The DILDCII has been working with Tompkins County for several years, discussing how Block 14 real estate can be leveraged on behalf of the community. The Tompkins County Legislature has expressed interest in allowing its properties on Block 14 to be included in this solicitation, especially if proposals include some ability to retain County office space and parking on the block. The County retains its right to approve or reject any proposal submitted to it by the DILDCII.

The County Board of Elections recently joined the Veterans Services department in the County office space located on Block 14, occupying ~5,000 DGSF in total.

Tompkins County also owns the Human Services office building in the block to the west of Block 14. Employees from this building have been parking on the County owned surface lots on Block 14. Together with the employees working at the Board of Elections and Veterans Services, the total number of Block 14 parking spaces regularly used by County employees is 74. The County Legislature is especially concerned that any redevelopment proposal for Block 14 contains some acceptable mechanism for replacing the 74 spaces that could be lost due to redevelopment.

SITE CONSIDERATIONS

The DILDCII engaged Ithaca based HOLT architects and associated subcontractors to prepare a reuse study of Block 14. The following link connects readers to the abridged version of this study: https://www.downtownithaca.com/block-14-development-opportunity/.

Several key findings of the study are:

- Volumetric study: Without any change or modification to current zoning, HOLT estimates that up to 128 units of housing can be placed on the block. The study illustrates five different configuration scenarios that also include parking and commercial space. (Please see the HOLT report for details.)
- Historic Considerations: This block does not contain any designated or identified historic properties. The Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission will, however, have an opportunity to review and comment on any proposed project.
- Environmental Considerations: HOLT subcontracted with the regional firm GeoLogic to conduct a cursory review of the block, including test borings in the private properties on the block. The results of this review are summarized in the abridged HOLT report. This baseline review found no significant onsite environmental concerns.
- Flood Map Considerations: Recent changes to the FEMA flood 100/500 year flood maps were also reviewed in the study. It was determined that most of the block is located in the 500-year flood plain with portions located in the 100-year flood plain.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Interested developers should provide us with the following submission information:

- Background on your firm, including a company philosophy, and a summary of similar mixed-use urban projects, with contact information;
- Any special background working with municipalities, public/community and non-for-profit partnerships;
- A high-level description of a possible project or projects for this site (note: given our time frame, this can, but does not need to be architectural). We are interested in your ideas and concepts and your thoughts on funding and stacking;
- A description of your firm's ability to fund/finance such a project; and,
- Any other information that would help us better understand your company and your submission.

Submissions must be submitted electronically. Flash drives are acceptable.

Submissions should be sent to info@downtownithaca.com, and titled, "Block 14 submission." Flash drives and other materials can be delivered to the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, 171 East State Street (Center Ithaca), Ithaca, NY 14850. Note that the Downtown Ithaca Alliance public hours are 10am–4pm EST, Monday–Friday.

DUE DATE

Submissions must be received no later than 5:00 pm EST on Thursday, December 3, 2026.

Responses should be submitted via email to:

Downtown Ithaca LDC II

% Nan Rohrer, Downtown Ithaca Alliance

info@downtownithaca.com

Submissions should be contained within one document in PDF format.

SCHEDULE

Request For Submissions issued: October 22, 2026

Submissions due: December 3, 2026 (5:00 pm EST)

Initial Response from the LDC: by December 31, 2026

Disposition Agreement: goal is to be executed by June 20, 2027

NEXT STEPS

The Downtown Ithaca LDC II will review all submissions, looking for one or more candidate firms for continued discussion and project scoping. We will assess the submissions based on the following:

- Company reputation and prior experience working with similar projects.
- Company creativity in project concepts, partnerships, and successful outcomes.
- Likelihood that concept can be successfully developed in a timely fashion.
- Ability to work with public and nonprofit stakeholders.
- Financial capacity.
- Any other items that might impact the pre-development, development, construction, and subsequent management of a Block 14 project(s).

We reserve the right to reject any or all submissions.

QUESTIONS

Questions regarding this solicitation and development opportunity should be addressed to Nan Rohrer, CEO, Downtown Ithaca Alliance. Email questions and inquiries, titled “Block 14” to info@downtownithaca.com and a representative will follow up on your inquiry.