

# Vacant Property Revitalization Program

## Introduction

The Lewis County Development Corporation (LCDC) developed the Vacant Property Revitalization (VPR) Program in partnership with Lewis County to create a fund for the rehabilitation of vacant downtown commercial buildings. The program will target vacant and potentially unsafe or blighted properties within downtown areas to turn them into usable spaces for business development and other opportunities. Through a public and private partnership, the LCDC will provide one-time grants to private building owners, and provide the support, resources and connections needed to bring the project to fruition. The Program will have immediate effects on our downtowns, as projects will revitalize vacant properties, enhancing our communities, driving business development and bringing residents and tourists into downtown areas. The program will bring buildings back to life, increase property tax base, create local construction jobs, as well as future employment within businesses and enhance the local quality of life.

## The Program:

The LCDC has approximately \$1,000,000 from Lewis County American Rescue Plan Funds to distribute to projects located in Lewis County.

The LCDC will offer financial assistance in the form of a reimbursement grant at 50% of project costs up to \$100,000 per project for construction rehab assistance for vacant properties within downtown areas in Lewis County, NY. Through a formal contract with the LCDC, qualified property owners will be responsible for bringing the building back up to code and redeveloping the property back to active use. LCDC staff will monitor projects assisted under the VPR program for the duration of the construction and at least three years after the project completion. Additional funding from local, state or federal resources may be available, provided applicants are willing and able to comply with the various guidelines associated with those funds.

Upon having a project and being accepted into the program, LCDC staff will provide one-on-one guidance and the connections needed to bring the project to fruition. These services could include, but are not limited to, business planning, connections to engineering and architecture firms, financing, bookkeeping and accounting, compliance and codes. All projects will be reviewed by the Community Economic Development Fund Committee; and committee created by the LCDC to review grant applications. Final approvals will be made by the LCDC board through a recommendation of the committee.

## The Application Process:

- Applicants submit a VPR Application at [naturallylewis.com](http://naturallylewis.com), including questions on the applicant, ownership, building information, scope of work and rehabilitation budget.
- Staff verifies the information presented.
- Staff meets with applicant to discuss proposed project and develop project needs.

- Staff will work with applicant on project plan, schedule and budget to present to CEDF Committee.
- The CEDF committee reviews project based on selection criteria, project feasibility, and community benefit, and, if qualified, submits project to the LCDC for board approval.
- LCDC board approves the project
- Property Owner enters into contract agreement with LCDC
- Program begins and redevelopment commences
- There will be ongoing review and monitoring during project construction
- Annual review of project after construction completion for 3 years after (“Regulatory Period”)

## Selection Criteria

The VPR Committee will review the following criteria in determining funding for a project:

1. The project must reduce blight, contributing to the economic recovery of downtown areas
2. The project must be a vacant building and/or floor (currently unused, or unable to be used due remediation or construction needs)
3. The project must include renovation of commercial buildings resulting in occupancy through new business or residential (residential occupancy includes 2<sup>nd</sup> floors and above)
4. The project must be financially feasible
5. The project must show community benefit, such as increased tax base, job creation or new business development

For the project to be eligible for funding from the VPR Program, the applicant must demonstrate project feasibility, willingness and motivation to complete the project, and financial feasibility. The committee will also assess the building features, such as structural integrity of the property and overall feasibility to complete the project.

A completed application and assistance by staff does not guarantee funds from the VPR Program. All projects will be presented and reviewed by the CEDF Committee, who will make recommendations to the LCDC board for final approval. The LCDC reserves the right to reject any application when, in its judgement, rehabilitation of the project is not economically feasible or not in the best interest of the surrounding community.

\*\* Please Note: Applications will not be approved for individuals that have unpaid property taxes, school taxes, water/sewer charges\*\*

## Awardee & Project Requirements:

1. Projects must include the rehabilitation of vacant or underutilized commercial buildings and spaces, into usable spaces that contribute to new economic and community benefits through new businesses, job creation and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents in the community.
2. The commercial building, or portion of the building you are requesting funds for, must currently be vacant:
  - a. Building is unoccupied, unattended and not actively used as a place of business or residence

- b. Needs construction and rehabilitation (structural, codes compliance, internal renovations) to make a usable space to create economic opportunities
- 3. Properties must comply with local zoning ordinances to be eligible. All required variance, conditional use permits, SEQR and/or site plan reviews must be secured and approved before work can begin.
- 4. Awardee must submit project design for approval before project begins.
- 5. Awardee must meet with staff and program partners periodically to ensure project plan and feasibility are sufficient.
- 6. The awardee will submit paperwork to the State Historic Preservation Office and ensure the project is in accordance to the State Historic Preservation Office.
- 7. Site plan reviews and SEQR will be required based on local zoning laws.
- 8. The awardee agrees that the LCDC shall at all time have access to the job site and premises for the purpose of inspecting and reviewing renovation work.
- 9. Rehabilitation projects must begin within six (6) months of approval.
- 10. As a condition of receiving assistance under this program, owners must commit to renting, or actively market to rent the space, for a period of three (3) years from project completion (“Regulatory Period”).
- 11. Any contract or agreement to be executed relative to the work as listed in the Project Agreement shall require that the owner give all notices required by, and comply with, all applicable laws, ordinances, regulations and codes of the local jurisdictions.
- 12. All awardees shall be required to obtain a policy of general liability insurance with limits of not less than one million dollars (\$1,000,000). Said policy or policies shall include fire and theft. Each policy or polices of insurance required shall be in form and content satisfactory to the LCDC and shall provide that the LCDC is named as the additional insured and that the LCDC is name as a loss-payee.
- 13. Upon project completion, the general contractor shall provide a certification from the general contractor that work has been completed.
- 14. All property owners must maintain ownership of property for a minimum of five years after project completion and receiving grant. If property owner sells property within five years of project completion and receiving grant, they must pay back grant money on the following schedule:

Project Completion Date – 1 Year	100% of grant funding
1-2 Year	80% of grant funding
2-3 Year	60% of grant funding
3-4 Year	40% of grant funding
4-5 Year	20% of grant funding
After Year 5	No payback

### Financial Assistance:

Awarded projects will receive 50% of total project costs, up to \$100,000 per project, and will be in the form of a reimbursement grant. Funding will be reimbursed to property owner once agreed upon milestones are met and project is complete.

## Lewis County Development Corporation Responsibilities:

1. The LCDC will ensure compliance throughout the construction process through site visits.
2. The LCDC will ensure compliance with applicable standards throughout the construction process through design review. All work done under the VPR program will be subject to review by the Lewis County Codes Department for zoning compliance.
3. The LCDC shall request a certificate of completion by the General Contractor stating that work has been completed.
4. The LCDC will ensure that the property improved under the VPR program is maintained and in good condition and is occupied or actively being marketed to rent, for a period of three (3) years after project completion.
5. The LCDC will require annual visitation for a period of (3) years after project completion.

## Project Agreement:

The Lewis County Development Corporation and the awardee will enter into a contract agreement stating the terms of the Vacant Property Revitalization Program. The applicant must provide project scope, cost estimates, design plans, and will work with LCDC staff on finalizing milestones in which grant reimbursement can occur.