

New Rochelle: A Case Study for Pattern for Progress

Marketing Strategies for the
Attraction and Retention of
Millennials to the Hudson Valley

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Statement of Purpose/Project Description.

An analysis of potential marketing strategies for the City of New Rochelle focused on the inquiry: how can New Rochelle use its Downtown area to attract, and more importantly retain, Millennials?¹

It was concluded that this assessment should focus primarily on the New Rochelle's Downtown area, as it is the location Millennials were most likely to live and/or spend most of their time. New Rochelle does provide a diverse range of high quality single-family residential neighborhoods, as well as strong schools. Taking advantage of these amenities, however, would not be a high priority for a target demographic that has just graduated college, and is living with roommates or alone. Instead, the vibrant restaurants and bars, proximity to a major transportation hub, and the living opportunities in mainly high rise luxury apartments, all provide attractive amenities to Millennials.

The downtown offers many amenities that Millennials are seeking; a place to live and work that is unique, culturally diverse, and most importantly **WIRED** for technology. Combining the strengths of the downtown area, whether it is art, night life, urban environment, dynamic dining options, or just proximity to the waterfront and Manhattan, New Rochelle's downtown can undoubtedly contains the "cool factor" Millennials are attracted to.

Four primary assets have been identified as part of the Downtown area. These include: geography, recreation, education and community. These four assets are the building blocks for continuing improvements to the downtown.

We also paid special attention to strategies targeted at using the City's Downtown amenities to retain the existing population of Millennials in New Rochelle. New Rochelle is uniquely situated when compared to most other large cities in the Hudson Valley because it is home to three (3) colleges, each graduating a large class of young adults each year. These Millennials already possess ties to the City, whether through residing in dormitories, or commuting to the New Rochelle or classes each school year.

With these parameters in place, we identified existing strengths of the Downtown area that would be appealing to the target demographic, such as current dining and entertainment opportunities, public spaces and proximity to transportation. In addition, the group identified various opportunities for New Rochelle to increase its appeal to Millennials. This included utilizing the New Rochelle's waterfront as public recreational space, and encouraging the adaptive reuse of buildings with "Millennial-centric" business (e.g., performing arts, specialty shops and personal health facilities).

We also identified several aspects missing from the Downtown area, which may be hampering the New Rochelle's ability to attract and keep Millennials. This includes higher costs of living and the draw of employment and entertainment opportunities in New York City. With neighboring communities having a

¹ The term "Millennial" generally refers to the members of the generation born between 1980 and 2000. For the purposes of this analysis, however, we limited the target group to individuals aged 21 to 35. This large "subset" of the generation is assumed to be in the workforce, and be able to contribute substantially to the economic revitalization of urban areas in the Hudson Valley.

similar focus on this important segment of the population, the question remains...what sets New Rochelle apart from its neighboring communities?

Using this information, the group identified various strategies to accentuate the assets, take advantage of the opportunities and address the potential detriments in a manner that we believe would motivate recent college graduates and young adults to “live, work and play” in New Rochelle.

Assets - Opportunities and Strengths.

The City of New Rochelle has several existing strengths and emerging opportunities.

Location! Location! Location! New Rochelle is ideally situated on the Long Island Sound. It has access to two major highways include Interstate 95 and The Hutchinson River Parkway. It is also served by the New Haven Line of the MTA’s Metro North Railroad. The New Rochelle Station is the busiest station on the New Haven line in NY State offering a short 25 minute ride to Grand Central and is a stop on the Amtrak Northeast Corridor Line. I-95 serves as the main route through New Rochelle with two exits directly serving the city. The Hutchinson River Parkway is designated for passenger vehicles only and runs through the city as well.

New Rochelle has become an educational hub; it is home to three colleges **Monroe College, Iona College, and The College of New Rochelle**. Each college offers undergraduate and graduate studies, and programs such as culinary arts and nursing. These educational institutions can provide the Millennials their continued desire to educate and experience new opportunities.

For many Millennials, choosing a school in an environment they feel safe is paramount, therefore crime is another important factor to consider. New Rochelle’s crime statistics report an overall **downward trend in crime**. However, the Downtown is perceived to be somewhat unsafe. New Rochelle’s branding/marketing initiative with North Star Destination Strategies presents the **opportunity to change the perception of the City** so it is in line with the positive trends that New Rochelle is experiencing. Although New Rochelle has some shopping/entertainment opportunities in the Downtown along the **Main Street corridor** and at **New Roc City**, it lacks shopping such as specialty and funky boutique style retail stores that attract Millennials and leads them to NYC or neighboring towns for the shopping experience they crave. New Roc City is the City’s premier entertainment facility with retail, restaurants and a Regal Multiplex Theater, including an IMAX theater.

Since Millennials are tech savvy collaborators, an opportunity to create a **“center” for Millennials**, similar to a senior center. Since the Downtown offers some weekend events, this center could provide a meeting space where Millennials could gather before upcoming music and art events. The City could provide transportation to a performing arts center and other event venues, as parking may be limited at certain locations.

Downtown New Rochelle has **well defined open space areas and a true urban feel** with tall buildings, active streets and sidewalks, and ethnic diversity. The downtown area is surrounded by single and multi-family neighborhoods, offering future relocation options to Millennials as they move from single life to traditional family living. A future opportunity would be to provide for better pedestrian walkways,

bike lanes and hiking trails creating linkages benefitting the healthy, fitness conscious lifestyle of this targeted age group. Residents of New Rochelle can purchase an Omni Card for \$40. The Omni Card allows access to the City's public parks and other recreational areas. An enhanced Omni card that gives discounts on weekly Downtown events and other City hosted entertainment options should be implemented.

The establishment of a strong "sense of place" can subsequently aid in the attraction and retention Millennials. Downtown New Rochelle has a **vibrant and active Business Improvement District (BID)**. The BID has created weekend events such as outdoor movies, concerts, street performance and market areas. Providing these types of services creates a sense of community and increases the quality of life. The City of New Rochelle has also recently entered into an agreement with a Master Developer RDRXR, a partnership between Renaissance Downtowns and RXR Realty for the Downtown and TOD areas. The proposed development will transform the downtown and provide many of the much needed work related and lifestyle amenities important to Millennials.

Another emerging opportunity for New Rochelle is to provide spaces for businesses to start or expand. This type of collaborative space for entrepreneurs may create jobs for Millennials, enticing someone graduating from a local college to stay in the community. New Rochelle is fortunate to have **two StartUp NY locations**, one at Iona College and the other at The College of New Rochelle. The StartUp NY program is Governor Cuomo's initiative to create tax free communities for new and expanding businesses on SUNY and other university campuses across the state. By incentivizing larger businesses to relocate to the greater New Rochelle area, a greater diversification of employers would be created, which in turn would create both additional job and internship opportunities for the Millennial workforce.

Challenges – Weaknesses and Threats.

With all that New Rochelle has to offer, it may be easy to overlook its weaknesses. Threats can likely be overcome with concentrated strategic planning.

While New Rochelle has a train station delivering passengers to Manhattan in a little over twenty minutes, a very appealing feature to Millennials, it is not a unique feature in Westchester County. The train station being centrally located near large-scale residential buildings allows for easy access to work, live and play in New York City and other well positioned communities in the metropolitan region. There are several initiatives going on in the neighboring cities with a focus on drawing and retaining Millennials to their communities, such as Generation Yonkers and an initiative in White Plains. New Rochelle needs a strategy that is competitively unique in its attraction and retention of this important age group.

New Rochelle is not experiencing great job growth at this time, with a minimal inventory of Class A Office Space available for businesses looking to locate here it is difficult to attract the types of technology based industries that many Millennial desire. Therefore, New Rochelle has turned into a bedroom community rather than allowing residents to live and work in the same city. A lack of employment opportunities within the City's limits is a major threat to attracting and retaining Millennials. In conjunction with a lack of job opportunities, there does not appear to be an influx of large companies investing in the area. Those companies which had come to New Rochelle in the past

decades tend to not stay and continue their investment due to the uneducated workforce they are faced with.

Downtown New Rochelle falls short of offering amenities that cultivate the feel that Millennials and other residents desire; there is no evidence of specialty shops or coffee houses to meet up with others, Library Green, the first urban park built in Westchester County in decades, is occupied by a market every Saturday from May through October making it difficult for downtown dwellers to congregate, and many of the downtown retailers are not fulfilling the needs of this edgy age group. While restaurants are plentiful in the downtown, purchasing food is an entirely different issue. A C-Town and Super Stop & Shop are located in the downtown area, but the distance from housing may provide an obstacle to those that prefer to walk. There are smaller grocery stores available but these don't harbor the specialty foods and products that newer consumers care for when compared to a chain like Whole Foods or Trader Joe's. Both of these establishments are found in nearby communities, but this does little to attract people to New Rochelle if they're required to have a car to utilize these stores.

Though there is affordable housing available, the current housing stock may not be affordable to the targeted market, having just graduated from college and entering into the job market. There are several high rise residential buildings located in Downtown New Rochelle. Some offer luxury living and others offer competitively priced units. With different housing options throughout the city, there appears to be a lack of live/work space at the current time, which is attractive to Millennials.

Another challenge to attracting and retaining Millennial to New Rochelle is an apparent disconnect between areas for recreation and the Downtown. New Rochelle has abundant waterfront that is essentially cut off due to limited access to public waterfront recreation areas. Once one arrives at the waterfront, most of the space is privately owned or requires an OmniCard for entrance.

While New Rochelle is making great strides in planning and implementation of different programs and large scale redevelopment projects to build upon the foundation of what they already have to offer, continued enhancements will always be needed. With the close proximity to New York City, arguably the biggest draw to live in New Rochelle, it cannot be the only attractive feature to this beautiful city. Improving on these foundations would make New Rochelle a better city for all residents, current and prospective, while creating new standards for what makes a city liveable in this new generation.

Marketing Strategies.

It will be a social and economic benefit to New Rochelle to capitalize on its current branding exercise with North Star Destination Strategies as a resource for determining future marketing goals. The City is also engaged in a **Crowdsourced Placemaking** (CSPM) process with RDRXR, the Master Developer for Downtown New Rochelle. Both of these preliminary strategies will utilize strengths (and weaknesses) to determine how to retain the many Millennial's that are educated in the three local colleges and to attract those Millennial's that are interested in living, working, and playing in a vibrant, **transit and talent** oriented downtown.

The City of New Rochelle has embarked on a citywide branding and marketing initiative with North Star that will identify a “brand” through an analysis of surveys conducted targeting the local and regional community, its consumers and how competition affects their decision making. North Star’s Branding Barometer then identifies and categorizes the ideals that are important to the New Rochelle community. These ideals are then used to create a “brand” that can be put into action.

Crowdsourced Placemaking is a creative, open-minded process in which the community-at-large has an opportunity to participate in determining the ideal uses (i.e. commercial, retail, housing, open space) that will help the Downtown thrive. The CSPM process uses web-based social media such as Facebook and Twitter to garner community support and guide future development opportunities.

These are two of the many marketing strategies/opportunities that are already taking shape in New Rochelle. These strategies, coupled with long term development opportunities, will maximize the City’s objective to create spaces where this targeted generation of mobile, tech-savvy, like-minded entrepreneurs can call home in the lower Hudson Valley further strengthening New York’s ability to grow economically, socially and sustainably.

Recommendations.

Inform:

- Create a website that appeals to & would be used by Millennials, separate from municipal site
- Use site to highlight social aspects, why live here, what’s going on, etc. Millennial “headquarters”

Create & Encourage Flow Throughout the City. And then Control it.

- Create local bus loop – Connect New Roc City, Restaurants, Grocery store, waterfront/parks, etc.
- Pedestrian/bike/traffic linkage from Downtown to Waterfront

Generate Interest with the Omnicard/waterfront access:

- Increase # of Omnicards purchased
- Card also gets discount options at participating businesses
- Consider ferry services to LI, cruises, tours

Entertain:

- Millennial based block parties, festivals, music, etc. (e.g. Kingston, Stamford CT)
- Use Omnicard to spotlight and promote businesses
- New Rochelle Performing Arts Center

Employ & House:

- Entrepreneur License – Include options for live/work space
- Housing appropriate for Millennials (consider: size, price, gym, long term parking)

Challenge & Inspire:

- Designee to facilitate “Think Tank” and build intellectual capital

Impress:

- Innovative environmental initiatives

Approaches.

Use the Website

- New site should be used for all things “millennial”.

Consider Expanding/Enhancing the Omnicard–

- Offer occasional free access to parks/beach to encourage & increase membership
- Encourage downtown spending by promoting card as a way to receive discount options at participating businesses, retail, bars, restaurants
- Agree to showcase participating local businesses, bars, & restaurants on website, etc.

Attract Employers Big & Small... Not that easy? Too soon? ...Raise your own.

- Attract Employers: Expedited approval for downtown office and flex space
- (OR) Designee to facilitate “Think Tank” and build intellectual capital
- Create/foster sense of community for Millennials, Entrepreneurs, Creative Minds
- Put people w/different talents in touch w/each other
- Ideas+ Creative + Financial + Tech = “Think Tank” & rising possibilities
- How to market & advertise this?
- Post in train station, local bars, on the new website
- Promote at local colleges
- Social Media

3 Local Colleges! Make them fall in LOVE with New Rochelle!

- There are over 8,000 students in and around New Rochelle.
- Internship or work/study opportunities.

- Award top students perks in NR. Create incentives to both excel & stay. Omnicard, parking spot...
- Promote the city through the Student Activities centers.
- Create pre-planned "Itineraries," "Date Ideas," etc.
E.g. – Take the bus, Visit the park, Grab lunch at Fresh Taco, catch a movie at New Roc
- Integrate millennial focused entertainment activities for summer season (Kingston, Stamford CT)