



July 11, 2012

Village Board Hears Realities about Downtown Commercial Leasing; Discusses Ideas to Reinvigorate Business

By Carol P. Bartold

According to Jonathan Gordon, principal of Admiral Real Estate Services Corporation in Bronxville, the village needs to do something to mitigate vacancies in the downtown business district. Gordon addressed the Bronxville Board of Trustees at its regular meeting on July 9.

"We're marketing Bronxville to new businesses," Gordon said, "and I personally am seeing an unprecedented amount of resistance to leasing in Bronxville." He attributed much of the slowdown to the economic downturn since 2007, but said that now commercial leasing in Bronxville has begun to lag in comparison to nearby communities.

"I think Bronxville has the right shape," Gordon said. "We're a walking town. We have the right demographics, downtown has all the right bones, but we're missing something. Something is not clicking and we need to figure out what to do; otherwise, we'll see more vacancies very quickly."

Mayor Mary Marvin stressed the importance of a vibrant downtown supported by village residents. "We're equally concerned," she said. Always a strong supporter of downtown businesses, Marvin pointed out the direct relationship between a thriving and successful business district and property values.



Pictured here: Left to right are Village Administrator Harry Porr, Mayor Mary Marvin, and trustees Guy Longobardo and Anne Poorman.

Gordon told the Trustees that he hoped to open a dialogue with village officials that will help formulate a plan to reinvigorate the downtown business district. He noted that Scarsdale, which suffered a commercial vacancy rate comparable to that of Bronxville, has found a way to fill empty spaces with restaurants. Although local zoning codes require such service-oriented businesses to provide more parking spaces than soft goods retailers, Gordon pointed out that Scarsdale found a way around that.

Mayor Mary Marvin stated that she, Village Administrator Harry Porr, and Building Superintendent and Village Engineer Vincent Pici have all contacted their peers in Scarsdale to learn about methods used to fill otherwise empty commercial properties. Marvin also said that the village is willing to study best practices of other nearby communities with successful downtown business districts.

"We're analyzing the Scarsdale code and our own code to see if there is something they're doing that we can do here as well," said Porr.

Gordon raised the idea of attracting a recognizable, name-brand anchor restaurant to Bronxville that would pull customers into the downtown area but said that having to appear before the planning board for site plan approval and the zoning board of appeals to apply for variances could be a three-to-six-month process. He pointed out that, although business is speculative by nature, a long approval process during which the applicant would incur attorney fees, traffic studies costs, and architect fees, with no guarantee of success, gives the zoning code an onerous appearance.

"The perception is that the code is onerous," Gordon said. "Maybe in these tough times we can make it a little easier."

"We're willing to help and do whatever we can," Marvin stated. "We value our business district. It's a fine balance in keeping the zoning code welcoming and, at the same time, keeping businesses diverse and as attractive as possible."