

MAYOR'S COLUMN

It is quite evident walking along Pondfield Road that our business district has been hit hard by the economic downturn. Many of you have asked what we as a community can do to stem the tide of store closures.

Much of your displeasure has been directed toward Village landlords due to stories circulating about their treatment of some of our long time merchants. As in any community or industry, we have a mixed bag of personalities. Some landlords are caring and pragmatic and currently negotiating rent decreases or abatements while others are consumed by greed and disrespectful of the value of their long time tenants.

Though the Village cannot, and should not as good policy, try to intercede to negotiate for tenants, we have reached out to landlords expressing our displeasure or support. In our municipal role, we have taken measures to make the Village as business friendly as possible. For example, we have opened up more customer parking in the Kraft Avenue lot by moving commuter parking to the Avalon lot and more parking will come on line with the imminent demolition of the BAMS gas station. We have increased police patrols in the business district to enforce the ban on crossing double yellow lines. A new ordinance is in place to ban meter feeding on Pondfield Road, Parkway Road and Paxton Avenue to encourage meter turnover for customers. We are redoubling our efforts to keep the streets well maintained, attractively planted and vacant stores clean and appealing by vigorously enforcing our Village Codes. We are also reaching out to prospective tenants and visiting with anyone interested in opening a business in Bronxville.

Does this help? Yes, but only minimally. Residents have encouraged us to form committees to scout out potential tenants operating successfully in other communities and publish landlords' addresses so residents can express their support or disapproval. These are ideas we are not adverse to trying.

Other suggestions such as penalizing landlords for leaving stores vacant do not pass legal muster. When talking to the merchants directly, they all tell me the same thing. They need you – the customer. They need residents not only to give lip service to their plight but to support them so they remain in business. Their foot traffic is markedly decreased leading them to believe residents are shopping elsewhere and supporting by word only the importance of a vibrant business district to our Village.

Shopping at the "big box" stores or online may yield a bargain or two, but neglect of our local merchants will exact a much greater cost on the long term character and attractiveness of our Village. One can only imagine what a partially shuttered Pondfield Road would do to our home values.

By keeping local dollars local you will also be supporting the people who have supported you. Our merchants' names appear on every donation list for church and civic fundraisers and they are unfailingly generous to every cause. One only has to peruse the last few charity auctions to notice that the donations didn't come from Home Depot or Amazon.com.

Now our merchants are asking you to return the favor in these difficult and unusual times. Not only will you be helping to preserve our local character and unique small town ambiance, but you will get quality goods sold by people who know their products and genuinely care about their customers and their community. Village merchants not only offer customized services such as special ordering, home delivery, gift wrapping and monogramming, but they also know your name.

We are at a watershed in our Village and I urge every resident to renew their commitment to the preservation of our very special Village by patronizing our local merchants. They deserve our support.