

## **MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN**

The Trustees and I are embarking on a review of all of our policies/regulations/time frames for operation in our business district with the goal of sustaining and in some cases revitalizing areas of our “downtown.”

Given the continuing appearance of empty storefronts coupled with less than robust sales for some existing businesses, a re-examination of the Village's role in this is the prudent approach.

In essence, in this very competitive environment, we want to ensure that the Village has no barriers that serve as disincentives to opening a business in Bronxville when compared with neighboring communities.

With the steady rise of Internet commerce and big box retailers, the shopping paradigm has clearly changed requiring an examination of methods for conducting commerce.

Some of the questions/issues requiring review are the following:

- The Village's active discouragement of national chains (yet, we have the king of all national franchises – Starbucks). Is this still good policy?
- Should the procedural and location restrictions currently placed on service businesses versus the sale of retail goods be minimized in light of the fact that many of the successful new businesses are those with a product that cannot be purchased at midnight on the Internet? For example, a ballet class or tutoring service.
- Many parking issues come to the fore (operating under the caveat that we cannot increase inventory immediately.)
  - How do we give an incentive to merchants and their employees to park in remote available locations versus feeding the meters on the prime parking streets thereby filling spaces better used for potential customers?
  - Is better signage needed to direct shoppers to the available parking places off of the major thoroughfares? As a corollary, how do we change the culture that assumes if there is no parking on Pondfield Road or Park Place, there is no parking to shop?

- Under the parking aegis, how do we balance the need for parking enforcement both in terms of the revenue it produces as well as ensuring a turnover of spaces for additional shoppers with the loss of goodwill generated with perceived aggressive and uneven enforcement, cognizant of the fact that loss of goodwill has a monetary value as well?
- Should we be bonding for a municipal parking garage as the next major capital project?
- How do we market the Village, perhaps with a more regional approach utilizing the growing benefits of the social media while in concert emphasizing to Village residents the nexus between shopping local and lower taxes?
- Is there recourse when landlords make demands in leases that cause prospective renters to do business elsewhere?

This is a particularly frustrating issue as an inflexible landlord can keep a store empty rendering it unattractive to the overall streetscape as well as dampening the perceived vitality of the rest of the business district – and if empty long enough can petition the Village for a tax reduction!

New York State law has no provisions for penalty taxation of perpetually empty store fronts. We are, however, looking into other options offered including an inspection fee schedule for vacant spaces.

- Are the Village's Planning/Zoning regulations and approval process timeframes in line with like communities competing for the same businesses?
- Is it beneficial to encourage more outdoor dining? If permitted, should it be subject to a yearly permit review based on cleanliness, noise and proper amount of approved seating?
- Is there a fair, non-subjective method to monitor the outdoor display of merchandise? As example, beautiful flowers and plants add beauty to the streetscape whereas snow shovels and cases of water do not.
- Are the Village's Code provisions relating to signs in store windows in concert with current needs? Should our regulations be enforced more vigorously to achieve a more attractive visual appearance? Per our current Code, none of the signs posted advertising school plays, charity auctions etc. are permissible. Yet it is very hard for merchants to turn down students or loyal customers who ask to post an announcement of community events.
- Should we be spending more municipal money on beautification and streetscape?

- Is there a way to get some of our merchants to improve the condition/cleanliness of their sidewalks/trash system/storefronts somewhere between gentle suasion and punitive fines?

Net/net, times have changed for good or for ill in the business environment and the Village has to keep pace on the above subjects to maintain the beauty and aesthetics that make Bronxville the unique and historical Village it is.

Many of our residents are experts in some of the above areas due to professional training and expertise or simply because they are the boots on the ground experiencing the Village everyday as a resident and consumer.

I ask your feedback as we clearly enter a new era in retail services. My email address is Mayor@vobny.com