

Mayor's Column

April 3, 2017

Since the first of the year an unprecedented number of stores have shuttered their businesses. The empty store situation is of grave concern to the Trustees and I know to many Villagers as well. We lost some truly wonderful merchants, some who are Village residents, who added so much to the fabric of downtown. I thank each and every one for taking a chance on the Village and I am genuinely sorry their ventures didn't prove to be lasting, profitable presences in Bronxville.

Like most of our neighboring communities, our downtown is at a crossroads. The number of empty stores has reached the tipping point of the sustainability of a vibrant downtown.

Every constituent group must take a role in helping to revitalize our business district with Village government appropriately taking the lead.

To that end, the Trustees and I are working with our Chamber of Commerce, landlords, merchants, building owners and resident shoppers and recreating the Retail Mix and Marketing Committee which helped revitalize our shopping district during the downturn in the early 90's.

I will be the Trustee liaison and help set agendas. Issues to explore include:

- Are the rents comparable, fair and competitive with like communities?
- Are we offering the products Villagers want to buy?
- Are store hours conducive to resident shopping patterns?
- Are we getting the message out of the benefits to buying local?
- Do our residents know the services available right here at home?
- What can we do collectively to make the streetscape more attractive?

From the Village's vantage point, we are already looking at what we can do that is directly under our purview to stimulate commerce.

First and foremost, as of June 1, with the anticipated opening of the Kensington Garage, 30 "open" spaces will be added to the inventory in the garage, 55 spaces in the Kraft Avenue Train Station lot and 30 in the Garden Lot will come back on line for customer use. We have also hired a company to evaluate the feasibility of

adding half or full parking decks in areas where the location and topography would be conducive to increasing the overall inventory.

We continue to improve the lighting in our commercial areas with new poles set to be installed this spring on the Kraft Avenue/Fogarty's stretch as well as the Studio Arcade/Train Station Plaza environs.

In addition, we are revisiting the Village's Community Plan which includes as subsets our Planning and Zoning Regulations.

A sampling of Community Plan issues to review include:

- Our policies on outdoor dining and merchandise display
- Traffic pattern and flow near Pondfield Road
- Current restriction on first floor service businesses on Pondfield Road
- The length and requirements of our approval process for change of uses
- Our code as a reflection of the shopping/service needs of a 2017 world
- Our rules, requirements as they relate in competitive alignment with like communities

In addition, we quite simply have to work something out with our non-business institutions that abut the business district. The increase in parking needs of our students, faculty and staff at our public, nursery and private schools can no longer be absorbed without a negative impact on the entire matrix. It is a delicate balance that must be constantly recalibrated.

Many of you have asked if there are any ramifications to leaving a store empty for long stretches of time. Sadly, governments are virtually powerless in this regard. At most, we can conduct periodic health/cleanliness inspections for which we can charge a very nominal fee.

There is no penalty for the damage or loss of synergy empty stores bring to a streetscape. In contrast, after several years of vacancy, building owners can step forward and ask for tax reductions.

It is time for every constituent group to do their part at this crossroads because as Mayors we are always cautioned, "So goes your downtown, so goes your Village."

To that end, we will ask landlords/merchants to share rental costs and histories and compare with neighboring communities.

Have merchants and landlords require employees to park in merchant spaces away from their storefronts and be vigilant in making sure store windows are attractive and sidewalks clean and clear.

At this juncture, our merchants need resident support the most. Local patronage not only adds to a much needed sales base, but sends an equally important though intangible message that their presence in the village is valued and appreciated. I can't say enough how our merchants' generosity benefits every organization in Bronxville. It is also well documented that vibrant business districts help sustain property values.

On our very micro level, without our share of local sales tax revenues, village property taxes would have increased 12% last year.

Please reach out to me with any thoughts to aid our local merchants. And most importantly, please think about making your next purchase right here at home.