

Town officials partner with Bryant to help Pascoag



Sunday, 26 April 2009

By JOSEPH FITZGERALD

BURRILLVILLE — In an ongoing effort to reinvent downtown Pascoag, town officials have partnered with the state's top business school to examine marketing strategies to attract steady business investment to Pascoag's downtown business district.

The Burrillville Redevelopment Agency has reached out to Bryant University to investigate ways the town can help set downtown Pascoag apart from other regionalized retail outlets "It's no mystery as to why 'Main Streets' all across the country have slowly decayed; the economic geography has changed steadily since World War II with federal policy calling for massive highway construction, and local zoning maps calling for decentralized housing, business and office parks," explains Burrillville Town Planner Thomas Kravitz.

All of that, says Kravitz, has made it more convenient for people to use shopping centers and malls rather than visiting a local 'neighborhood' store or shop. "Consequently, Main Streets like Pascoag have slowly lost their appeal over the years," he says.

Two marketing classes at Bryant University, one led by Elaine Notarantonio, the other by Jean Murray, are working on qualitative and quantitative analyses of downtown Pascoag. A focus group will be conducted, which will include a number of targeted surveys seeking to identify specific demographic information that will assist in the town's marketing initiatives.

"The anticipated outcome will be a document that the Redevelopment Agency and land owners can utilize to market Pascoag," says Kravitz. "We want to fill vacant storefronts and redevelop vacant lots."

The town has had some success over the past several years. The historic New York Department Store, once a cornerstone of Fountain Square, is one such success story. The building on High Street was deemed unsuited for rehabilitation and a proposal to demolish the building and construct a new Dunkin Donuts and Baskin Robbins ice cream parlor was made, and nearly brought to fruition. But in 2004, the project was abandoned. Instead, the owner of the property on the opposite corner, Mark Murphy, acquired the property and constructed the building as proposed. The new tenants include NorthWest Health Center, Pascoag Chiropractic office, Logee Insurance company and Hershey ice cream parlor. There are four apartments above, which were also part of the original plans.

In 2001 the town acquired ownership of the historic laundromat building on Main Street to save it from being demolished. At high flow, the Pascoag River came in the basement over the stone slab foundation and damaged the supports. Through the use of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), a Neighborhood Opportunity Program grant from the RI Housing Resources Commission, and town funds, the building was stabilized by raising it up, and a new concrete foundation and first floor were built. A new roof and temporary first floor facade were put on while the building is prepared for resale.

A new deck was added to the side to overlook the Pascoag River. The Town's Village Commercial zoning permits the use of the first floor for a variety of retail and personal service uses. The upper floor may be used for two residential apartments.

According to Kravitz, downtown Pascoag has a lot of potential. "There are niche retail opportunities that you wouldn't typically find in the regionalized retail centers that might want to locate to Pascoag, such as a book store, sports equipment shop, candy or antiques shops," he says. "One goal is to garner the interest of an investor, with interests and contacts in smaller, unique places like Pascoag."

In the meantime, Pascoag continues to reinvent itself through enhancing its natural features. Construction of the Pascoag Riverwalk, for example, has set the stage for restaurants and shops to offer outdoor seating in a unique natural and historical environment.

In 2006, town officials officially opened the ½-mile riverwalk along the Clear River in downtown Pascoag. The riverwalk is one phase of a multi-phase pedestrian trail system that will improve active recreation opportunities within the town's village centers and ultimately link the villages together. "That's a type of friendly environment you can't experience at a chain retail store," Kravitz says. "Pascoag must continue to play off its strengths, which are its historic architecture, stone arch bridges and access to and along the Pascoag River."

Last Updated (Tuesday, 28 April 2009)