

Newport City Downtown Renaissance Project

Community Forum

Proceedings

January 24, 2007

On a cold, bristling Wednesday evening in January a group of committed Newport residents and businesses attended the “Newport Community Forum” to consider the future of Downtown Newport.

The event was hosted by the Newport City Downtown Renaissance Project. It was put together by a committed group of individuals from Newport that got the word out about the event to the community via radio, TV and the print media which resulted in an event that was well attended with 70 people making up the audience.

The event was advertised as a chance to meet with other interested Newport businesses and residents to develop a vision for the future through discussion on topics including:

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

This is the business development component of a revitalization program. It involves strengthening the town’s existing economic base while finding ways to expand it and introduce compatible new uses. Strengthening the downtown’s economy begins with strengthening existing businesses, the gradually recruiting new ones.

PROMOTION

This makes up the marketing component of the revitalization process. It involves letting residents, investors, and visitors know what your downtown has to offer by promoting both individual businesses and the district as a whole. Effective promotion enhances the image of downtown as an exciting community center and meeting place, with activity, thriving stores, successful business, and quality service.

DESIGN

This component involves all the physical aspects of the downtown. The ultimate design goal is to use physical improvements as the basis for enhancing downtown’s marketability as a viable commercial center — one with distinctive architecture and public spaces. Rehabilitating historic buildings and constructing compatible new structures are essential to a successful design strategy. Good design also involves creating an inviting atmosphere by improving all aspects of the downtown that communicate a visual message to consumers, including: buildings, facades, window displays, signs, landscaping, traffic, parking, sidewalks, and streetlights.

AGENDA

		<i>Action Requested</i>
6:00 – 6:15pm	Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sign-in on contact sheet * Sign-in as a participant for preferred committee * Enjoy refreshments
6:15 – 6:20pm	Welcome Introduce Bill Stenger, Joss Besse and Bill McMaster	* Review the 3 areas to be addressed tonight (Economic Restructuring, Design, Promotion)
6:20 – 6:35pm	Keynote by Bill Stenger	
6:35 – 6:55pm	Vermont Downtown Program by Joss Besse	
6:55 – 7:00pm	Newport City Downtown Renaissance Project by Patricia Sears	
7:00 – 7:20pm	<i>Questions & Answers</i>	* Give feedback
7:20 – 7:30pm	B R E A K	
7:30 – 7:35pm	Explain Workplan's Committees Break into three small groups: Economic Restructuring, Promotion, Design	* ID one person per each group to record ideas and priorities from group
7:35 – 8:25pm	Committee work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * brainstorm (15 mins) * consolidate ideas (15 mins) * Prioritize up to 3 ideas (15 mins)
8:25 – 8:45	Report out	
8:45 – 9pm	Next Steps	* sign-up commitment to one committee

Patricia Sears, Newport City Downtown Renaissance Project Coordinator, welcomed the group with Bill Stenger delivering the keynote address. Later, a presentation of the Vermont Downtown Program was made by Joss Besse director of the program. Ms Sears gave a brief overview of the Newport City Renaissance Project. A question and answer period followed.

Bill McMaster, from UVM Extension, directed the participants into small groups to brainstorm and prioritize from the following:

GROUP 1 -ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

One of three primary strategies for the revitalization project is the business development component of the program. It involves strengthening the town's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it and introduce compatible new uses. Strengthening the downtown's economy begins with strengthening existing businesses and gradually recruiting new ones. Economic restructuring involves:

- ★ analyzing current and potential markets
- ★ helping existing businesses identify and capitalize on market opportunities
- ★ supporting the expansion and diversification of existing businesses
- ★ attracting businesses, both retail and non-retail, to the downtown district
- ★ finding new uses for vacant space

BRAINSTORMING IDEAS

Assets Downtown Newport needs:

- more restaurants
- another food store
- Pharmacy
- arts venues
- Cinema
- meeting space
- professional businesses (Lawyers, Accountants, Doctors, etc, *in non-retail locations*)
- signage, information (visitor conveniences)

Some of Newport's opportunities:

- to increase lodging (beds)

- to keep our downtown clean, inviting and safe
- arts center (creative economy)
- to host many festivals
- to increased our web presence
- to expand our internet broadband connectivity, both hardwire and especially wireless (hot spots)
- to capitalize on the lake more
- to attract and capitalize on Canadian visitors

TOP 3 PRIORITIES...

1. Make Downtown a destination

- events / festivals
- restaurants
- Cultural Center
- meeting space
- good and unique shopping

2. Make downtown a Tourism destination

- better signage
- beds
- entertainment
- welcome center

3. IT enhancement

- broadband availability
- wireless connectivity
- increased web presence

GROUP 2—PROMOTION

This is the marketing component of the revitalization process. It involves letting residents, investors, and visitors know what your downtown has to offer by promoting both individual businesses and the district as a whole. Effective promotion enhances the image of downtown as an exciting community center and meeting place, with activity, thriving stores, successful business, and quality service.

Successful promotion involves:

- ★ promoting the goods and services offered by downtown businesses
- ★ organizing special events to bring people downtown
- ★ developing ongoing programs to build a positive image of the commercial district
- ★ establishing a marketing identity for the downtown, including a logo
- ★ publicizing the downtown district's successes

BRAINSTORMING PROMOTION IDEAS:

How do you find Newport?

- Internet
- Chamber of Commerce
- Schools
- Magazines
 - AAA
 - AARP
- Television
- Free Promos (indicating a percentage off over a range of time)
- Newspapers
- Networking with other towns
- Word of Mouth
- VAST
- Rest Areas/Welcome Centers
- Promote on Radio, including out of town stations
- Through sports magazines promote
 - Ice fishing
 - Bass Fishing

What Newport has...

- Location
- Highways
- Hospital
- Skiing/Mountains

- Water/Lake/More Lakes
- Air (clean)
- Recreational
- Schools/choices
- Northeast Kingdom of Vermont is a brand
- People/strong community
- Fire Dept., public safety services
- Newport City Recreation Department
- Goodrich Memorial Library
- E. Hebard Building
- Customer Service
- We love Tim & Doug's
- Professional Services
 - banks
 - real estate
 - lawyers
 - architect
 - investment
- Golf
- Airport

What Newport needs:

- Performing Arts Center
- More restaurants
- Coffee/boutiques
- Strolling in the evening
- Hot Dog vendor
- More Gateway activities
- Promote more activities & boating
- Hotel/Motel on water
- Organic coop
- Tourist Train

TOP PROMOTION PRIORITIES

★ How to Keep People Here:

1. Educate to “Shop Local” & “You can get it here”
2. ‘Be Nice People’: Newport needs to adopt a positive attitude in promoting the City and its Downtown District
3. Best way to highlight downtown business is by word of mouth and products
4. Promotional video
5. Tax break for new businesses

GROUP 3-DESIGN

“Design” involves all the physical aspect of the downtown. The ultimate goals it to use physical improvements as the basis for enhancing downtown’s marketability as a viable commercial center with distinctive architecture and public spaces. Rehabilitating historic building and constructing compatible new structures are essential to a design strategy. Good design also involves creating an inviting atmosphere by improving all aspects of the downtown that communicate a visual message to consumers, including: buildings, facades, window displays, signs, landscaping, traffic, parking, sidewalks, and streetlights.

Components of design include:

- ★ conducting surveys of downtown buildings
- ★ developing design guidelines
- ★ identifying priorities of public improvements
- ★ planning design improvements

BRAINSTORMING IDEAS:

- Landscaping – Like Brattleboro
- Accessibility
- Façade Improvements
- Lighting
- Parking – Angle vs. Parallel
- Underground Utilities
- Practical vs. Pretty

- Gateways to Main St. from West
- Public Arteries – Connections
- Map/Directory at dock/boardwalk
- Signage
- Benches/picnic table at Pomerleau Park
- Plaques – historic markers
- Crosswalk delineation – safety
- Utilization of Upper Floors
- Design guidelines – design control district
- Window treatments
- Museum utilizing Lake theme
- Draw focus to lake
 - activities
 - kiosks
- Flags & visuals

PRIORITIZATION

1. Infrastructure
 - Accessibility
 - Lighting
 - Parking (angle vs. parallel)
 - underground utilities
 - cross walk delineation safety/-public
2. Aesthetics/Beautification
 - Landscaping/Flags/Visuals
 - Façade Improvements
 - Gateways to Main Street
 - Map and Directory at dock & boardwalk
 - Signage
 - Benches/picnic tables at park
 - Plaques/historic markers
 - Design Guidelines
3. Marketing

Volunteer Commitment

At the conclusion of the meeting, many attendees committed to continuing to work on the Newport City Downtown Renaissance Project by signing up for a committee that interested them. The following is the list of committee members:

ECONOMIC RESTUCTURING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. Sherry Norris
2. Maurice Boyer
3. Yves Cotnoir
4. Tim Hamblett
5. Julie Mulroy-Evans
6. Rick Woodward
7. Tina Norton

PROMOTION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. Leon Jaworski
2. Lynn Leimer-Flint (QNEK)
3. Jennifer Hopkins
4. Doug Spates
5. Donna Clay
6. Rick Woodward
7. Celine Champine
8. Susan Lynn-Johns

DESIGN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. Paul Monette
2. Jim Privee
3. Bob Charland
4. Deb Cogan
5. Rick Woodward
6. Ann & Bob Kelley
7. Gary Mason
8. Olivia Bealeu