

Newark looks to create new downtown vision

Community input sought at session Saturday afternoon

By STEVE BUCHIERE
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NEWARK — The village's ill-fated urban-renewal effort of the 1970s saw architecturally significant buildings razed, only to be replaced by the cookie-cutter variety — or worse, parking lots.



The changes left the village, which still sports scenic neighborhoods and a growing business base, lacking a “sense of place,” said Mayor Jonathan Taylor.

“We want to find a way to bring that back,” he said.

The revitalization has begun.

A number of new businesses are setting up shop in downtown, ushering insignificant building renovations. The village is in the midst of a two-year, multi-million-dollar South Main Street reconstruction project.

There's an energy, Taylor noted, that can be used as a springboard.

That's why the village is embarking on a project designed to envision a new downtown, one that brings back that sense of place to benefit not only those who live in Newark now, but to help attract new residents and businesses.

The village has enlisted the talents of Design Connect, a student-run, community design organization based at Cornell University that is helping Newark create a new look for the central business district.

In turn, said William Herman, a Cornell student and leader of the team working in Newark, “it gives students real-world experience.”

The Newark project is unique for Design Connect. Herman explained the group normally works with municipalities and community organizations on specific projects, such as designing a playground for a park.

“This is a little more abstract,” he said.

Herman already has laid some groundwork, working with Taylor and Mark Peake, the village's Director of Business Development, over the past couple of months, walking the downtown area to get some ideas of what is possible.

"I think (downtown) definitely has a lot of potential," Herman noted. "It's really important (for a downtown) to capture a sense of identity."

While village officials and the Cornell team probably have some ideas of what they'd like to see downtown become, Herman said it's imperative residents play a key role in that vision. That's why they are inviting the community to stop in at Newark Senior High School from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday to express their thoughts with the Cornell team and village officials about what they'd like to see in downtown Newark's future.

Taylor said they're hoping to get input on the best spots for specific types of businesses, such as restaurants, as well as what kinds of business are needed there. They'd also like input on landscaping, recreational areas and how to make the area pedestrian-friendly.

Herman said residents don't need to carve out three hours. Rather, residents will be able to visit four stations being set up for input on a host of issues related to downtown. Those stopping by can expect to spend about 10-15 minutes at each spot, he explained.

The better the turnout, the better the vision, he said.

"The input that we receive here is very important," Herman said.

Taylor emphasized that it's not just resident input that is needed.

"This meeting is wide open to anybody with a vested interest in downtown Newark," said Taylor, including merchants.

While Taylor is disappointed Newark was not a regional winner of the state's \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative — this year's honor went to Penn Yan — he believes the visioning effort adds to Newark's résumé for its 2018 application. It was a DRI finalist this year in the state's Finger Lakes economic development region.

"I think it ties really well with the DRI," he said. "(The selection committee) wants to see that you're going somewhere."

Taylor expects the Cornell team to have a presentation ready by the end of November. The project must be completed by the end of the semester, Herman added.



Courtesy John Zornow

A look at downtown Newark from the 1950s. Urban renewal in the 1970s resulted in most of these buildings being torn down. An effort led by a team of Cornell students looks to forge a new vision for the Wayne County village's central business district.

If you go ...

What: Public input session on vision for downtown Newark.

When: Saturday, Oct. 20, 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Where: Newark Senior High School, Peirson Ave.

More info: (315) 331-4770

Details: Newark village officials and members of Cornell University's Design Connect team will hear community members' thoughts regarding downtown Newark. Community members may come and go anytime within those hours. The focus of the Design Connect team is to create a comprehensive conceptual plan of Newark's downtown area to complement and enhance the current revitalization efforts.