

Main Street Hanover - Community Forum

04/30/2009

Guthrie Memorial Library

Gary Laird introduced the line-up of speakers, provided a brief history of activities to date, and indicated that the organization and task groups had formed a good foundation to build upon for the future. He estimated that there would be quarterly updates presented through similar forums to get additional people interested and involved in the program. Community support, facilitated by the Chamber and the PA Downtown organization, is needed to drive the program forward.

The task group members recognized that there was a great degree of competitiveness in the Main Street program and that the Hanover effort would have a high hurdle to overcome if we applied for Main Street status too soon. It was wisely decided to stay independent for a while and build support for the organization before filing and thereby have better odds of approval to access potential funding.

Gary directed those in attendance to visit the various tables at the rear of the room to see the visual evidence of progress and to take handouts from task group members. There would be ample opportunity to ask questions, gain an understanding of progress made toward the mission, and sign-up to assist.

Bill Fontana, Exec Director of the Pennsylvania Downtown Center addressed the crowd about the progress made so far in Hanover. Since local communities must match dollars when receiving funding he said it was wise for Hanover to avoid the problem that other small communities often experience, i.e., not being fully ready to do the required fundraising. Thus it was decided by the Hanover group to utilize the Main Street model while not actually filing. We are following the model through the task group activities toward Organization, Design, Economic restructuring, and soon, Marketing & Promotion.

Incremental, sustained growth with many little projects and improvements can lead the way before Main Street status is achieved, before existing shops extend their hours to accommodate new interest, before new shops open and before anchor buildings are developed with new owners and more widespread economic revival.

Right now our economy is experiencing bad times. But it is truly a good time to shop locally and there is evidence that in Main Street towns they are doing better due to good customer relationships even during the bad economic times of tight budgets and struggles.

There was about 7 million dollars available last year. While there is only 6 million dollars in the current budget Hanover would be eligible to take advantage of some of that funding. The Federal stimulus package will provide funding next year, through the Department of Agriculture, for road, highway, bridge and other regional transportation-type projects. Then there will be money for other enhancements and Hanover is strategically well placed to request some of that potential funding.

The forum is really a Call-to-action - a call to take control of the local community, return from shopping and spending just in big box stores in shopping strips and malls to the more locally sustainable small stores along Main Streets. Actually, shopping malls are failing faster than small local town businesses.

Gary Laird reviewed the achievements of the three task groups, particularly the Educational process of addressing community concerns about parking, crime, and the downtown business mix. He said we need to dispel myths about the simplicity of getting everything done; in reality, we need many hands to do much planning followed by much involvement and work by many volunteers. That's the way to success.

Shannon Toal spoke briefly about the administrative and legal activities of creating our Mission statement, submitting a request for non-profit status, the articles of Incorporation, formation of a Board of Directors, Officers, By-laws, and the development of a Financial Plan. The task groups would ultimately become functioning

Committees with oversight by Officers.

Ryan Myers discussed the vision of growing and improving the stock of buildings downtown with a new business mix, greater depth and diversification. He directed listeners to view the Photo library - we now have a complete photo journal of how buildings looked downtown in the past present and, eventually, the Main Street program will provide the view for the future. He also reported that the survey of local businesses was underway and being returned.

Drew Derreth, Chair of the Design Task Group, recalled the activities and achievements of the group to date: obtaining new Parking signs, to direct people to the very adequate parking lots, and a downtown map that identifies the parking locations and which will be reproduced and posted. He mentioned the Beautification fund, façade loan program, and the plans to integrate downtown activities with the new Hanover Trolley/Rail Trail. He reiterated the need for people with ideas and passion and who are willing to volunteer to join the program and to work to see the vision through.

Gary closed the forum by asking for questions and directing specific questions to the respective tables and task groups.