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November 30, 2009

Final report of the Village of Mamaroneck
Downtown Ad Hoc Task Force

Task Force Membership (seven):

Randi Robinowitz, Trustee, representative from the Board of Trustees
Richard Slingerland, Village Manager
Ed Flynn, Police Chief
Clark Neuringer, representative from the Village's land-use Boards (ZBA Chairman).
Rose Silvestro, representative from business
Domenic Ruggiero, representative from the Downtown residents
Dawn Saidur, representative from the Downtown restaurants

Goals:

The following is the list of issues that were reviewed by the Task Force, as established by resolution of the Village of Mamaroneck Board of Trustees.

The list was established as follows, to include but not necessarily be limited to, the following list:

1. Noise
2. Parking
3. Downtown Events and Performances
4. Improving Transportation and Access, for example through a Bus Loop or Trolley Loop
5. Security
6. Lighting
7. Establish a longer term Downtown Strategy for the Village to consider and include in the update of our Comprehensive Master Plan
8. And such other related concerns as may be raised and agreed upon by the Task Force.

Meetings held:

The Task Force was formed and its members appointed by unanimous vote of the Mayor and Board of Trustees on Monday, July 20, 2009

The Task Force met on the following dates:

July 28, 2009
August 3, 2009
August 17, 2009
August 31, 2009
September 15, 2009
September 22, 2009 – Public Input Meeting
November 30, 2009 – final meeting of the Task Force

Record of discussions:

During the several meetings that were held, including the final meeting, the Downtown Ad Hoc Task Force reviewed the issues that were assigned to it. This is a summation of those discussions, subject by subject.

An overriding goal and standard of the Task Force was to avoid establishing limits that would apply only to one or a few Downtown establishments. Another goal to encourage and achieve input from the broader community was offered at the September 22, 2009 Public Input Meeting, but a limited pool of public members attended.

1. Noise:

The Task Force discussed the impacts of noise, on the community at large. We also discussed how decibel limits in an ordinance can become difficult to enforce, as well as having a negative effect upon the Village's thriving Downtown business community. On the whole, it was determined that it is the goal of the Task Force and the Village government to try as best as possible to balance any effort to address concerns related to noise both from a residential and business standpoint.

Mr. Ruggiero, P.E., prepared and submitted an extensive report on noise, its impacts, and regulations from nearby communities, including the Village of Larchmont.

It was discussed that the Village of Mamaroneck currently has an extensive Noise Ordinance under Chapter 254 of the Village Code. The Task Force also determined that the Village Code has appropriate levels of noise regulations in it, but that the Village Code could be bolstered with respect to evening events and commercial operations. Some key issues and events noted were the noise complaints submitted by the residents of The Regatta Condominiums about the new Molly Spillane's bar and restaurant, and noise issues (with few complaints) from the operations of sidewalk performance permits by Café Mozart.

With regard to specific complaints from residents about noise from the new Molly Spillane's restaurant, interim noise recommendations by the Task Force are listed below, with interim actions taken by the Village, as follows:

- The Village Manager and the Police Chief contacted the owners of the bar/restaurant about limiting the times and volumes of outdoor events. Several meetings and discussions were held with Molly Spillane's owners, and ongoing efforts are being made to explore noise control measures. They have agreed to regularly advise their patrons to be quieter in later hours.
- The Village has installed advisory signs on surrounding streets to advise late night pedestrians and patrons to "Please be Quiet".

- Molly Spillane's owners installed a row of planters and hedges as a barrier facing East Prospect Avenue.
- Molly Spillane's owners are continuing to explore the possibility of installing an awning or other enclosure over the rear patio of their establishment, to further reduce noise impacts on surrounding properties.

Noise Recommendation:

The Task Force discussed several times, and has made a recommendation as part of this final report, to amend the Village Code to limit the playing outdoors of music, speakers and/or the use of any sound amplification devices (including radios, amplifiers, televisions, speakers, etc.) on the weekdays of Sunday through Thursday evenings ending at 11 p.m., and on Fridays and Saturdays at 12 a.m. Midnight.

2. Parking:

The Task Force discussed the concerns expressed about a lack of parking available in the Downtown. Residents and businesses claimed that the lack of parking affected shoppers and employees. The Task Force reviewed the issue of parking, to determine if in fact there is inadequate parking in the Downtown, or if it is being over-used by some groups in high-demand areas, and under-used in areas of lower demand. The Village Manager also attended a Parking Conundrums Workshop hosted by the Westchester County Planning Department, with Traffic Department staffer Harry Hazelwood.

During a review of the available parking resources allocated around the Downtown, it was determined that the main avenue spaces along Mamaroneck Avenue are over-utilized by merchants and store employees, which ties up the spaces and makes them unavailable for shoppers and restaurant patrons.

The Village Manager surveyed several of the available lots and spaces throughout the Downtown, and determined that several now set aside for permit parking are underutilized. He also determined that several metered parking areas have spaces that are available but underutilized, including the Phillips Park Drive, the Spencer Street lot, the Prospect Street Lot, the meters in the Regatta Lot, and the Tiered Lot aka the Hunter Parking Deck on Prospect Avenue.

Upon review of the situation with the Task Force, and discussion by the Task Force with Mr. Hazelwood, the Task Force came up with several recommendations to reallocate the available Downtown Parking Stock and take several actions that would free it up for more ready and available use by shoppers and patrons, as follows:

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Parking Recommendations:

- Set up a new allocation of parking spaces in the various Downtown Parking Lots, and establish dual purpose lots that can be used both by permit holders and meter users;
- Expand upon the newly implemented Parking Meter Key Program, which started at the Commuter Parking Spaces by Metro North;
- Set up a new Downtown-wide Parking Plan (east of the Metro North Railroad) using the universal "P" Parking Sign System as a directional system to point people to more of the off-street parking that is available;
- Update and publicize a map of available parking in the Downtown, making it available online and through the various stores;
- Set up a lower cost merchant-class of parking permit for parking spaces that are off Mamaroneck Avenue, to free them up for shoppers, and to offer merchants and their employees a discount, through the use of dual purpose spaces that double as both meters, usable by drivers who also may have a "Pre-Paid Parking Permit" that can be used in designated areas;
- Consider other less-used commuter parking lots in the evenings, for example the Bishop Avenue Parking Lot;
- Review all parking permit rates and parking meter rates to make sure they are appropriate for the market and the Village of Mamaroneck;

3. Downtown Events and Performances:

The Task Force reviewed the various events and performances that take place in the Downtown, including music along Mamaroneck Avenue during the summer months, the Harbor Fest/Street Fair, and the various other events that take place such as the Car Show, the Firemen's Festival, and other fairs and festivals. Upon review, it was determined that based on the current number of events, as well as the costs and staff effort associated with them, that no additional Downtown events and performances need to be considered at this time.

4. Improving Transportation and Access, e.g. through a Bus or Trolley Loop:

Upon review of this suggestion, it was determined that the purchase price of a vehicle, plus fuel, maintenance, and driver operating costs of an employee with benefits, would be cost-prohibitive to establishing such a service. However, the Task Force recommended that it could prove valuable to consider such a service for special events like the Street Fair or Harbor Fest.

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5. Security and Policing:

The Task Force reviewed the issue of security and policing under the guidance of Police Chief Flynn, a member of the Task Force, including whether any additional policing measures were necessary in the Downtown. The Task Force, upon review of the Downtown situation, as well as an overview of crime in the Downtown (no police records or reports were reviewed by the Task Force), it was determined that since there is a high police presence at all hours, and criminal activity is under substantial control, then no additional security measures or patrols were necessary or recommended in the Downtown at this time.

6. Lighting:

The Task Force reviewed the lighting issue in the Downtown, and had the following recommendations to make:

- Improve lighting at intersections in the Downtown, which in turn will improve the Downtown feel, as well as improve safety and the sense of security for pedestrians crossing the street or walking along the sidewalks to and from their destinations.
- Improve lighting in poorly lit public areas, along Prospect Avenue, along Phillips Park Drive, in the lot behind CVS, on top of the Hunter Tiered Parking Deck, and along the walkway also known as the Heithaus Walkway running between Mamaroneck Avenue and the parking lot behind the stores.

* It should be noted that several of the above-mentioned lighting improvements have already been accomplished, including the restoration of the lights on top of the Hunter Parking Deck and Phillips Park Drive. The Downtown intersection light improvements and the Heithaus Walkway Lighting Improvements will be accomplished through grants that have been awarded to the Village but are currently pending.

7. Downtown Strategy:

The Task Force discussed several issues that were raised, and upon review made some determinations on suggestions that had been raised:

- Recommendation – Avoid excessive similarities, and recommend the Board consider changes to the Zoning and Site Plan Codes that would encourage more diversity of stores and restaurants;
- Suggestion – Consider hiring a Downtown staffer, funded through a special assessment on businesses, such as a Business Improvement District (BID);

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- Suggestion – Consider hiring a Marketer to promote the Village businesses, and to attract new businesses that would help attract more shoppers;
- Statement – there is a good chemistry in the Downtown that is attracting more businesses to Mamaroneck, and maintaining a good turnover of vacant store fronts;
- Statement – there is a good economic balance in the Mamaroneck Downtown that the Village should support and encourage;
- Not recommended – Moratorium on development, specifically new restaurants

8. Other related concerns:

There were no additional recommendations of the Task Force at this time.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Noise Recommendation: amend the Village Code to limit the playing outdoors of music, speakers and/or the use of any sound amplification devices (including radios, amplifiers, televisions, speakers, etc.) on the weekdays of Sunday through Thursday evenings ending at 11 p.m., and on Fridays and Saturdays at 12 a.m. Midnight.
2. Parking Recommendations:
 - a. Set up a new allocation of parking spaces in the various Downtown Parking Lots, and establish dual purpose lots that can be used both by permit holders and meter users;
 - b. Expand upon the newly implemented Parking Meter Key Program, which started at the Commuter Parking Spaces by Metro North;
 - c. Set up a new Downtown-wide Parking Plan (east of the Metro North Railroad) using the universal "P" Parking Sign System as a directional system to point people to more of the off-street parking that is available;
 - d. Update and publicize a map of available parking in the Downtown, making it available online and through the various stores;
 - e. Set up a lower cost merchant-class of parking permit for parking spaces that are off Mamaroneck Avenue, to free them up for shoppers, and to offer merchants and their employees a discount, through the use of dual purpose spaces that double as both meters, usable by drivers who also may have a "Pre-Paid Parking Permit" that can be used in designated areas;
 - f. Consider other less-used commuter parking lots for use by users in the evenings in the General Business District, for example use the Bishop Avenue Parking Lot for parking for nearby restaurants;
 - g. Review all parking permit rates and parking meter rates to make sure they are appropriate for the market and the Village of Mamaroneck;
3. Downtown Events and Performances: no recommendations at this time.
4. Improving Transportation and Access, e.g. through a Bus or Trolley Loop: No recommendation for change at this time, due to expense of this proposal.
5. Security and Policing: It was determined that since there is little crime, there is no pressing need to increase police patrols or take other measures at this time.
6. Lighting: Recommendation to improve lighting at intersections in the Downtown, and improve lighting in darker public areas, especially on and around Phillips Park Drive.
7. Long Term Strategy: The main recommendation was to avoid excessive similarities, and recommend the Board consider changes to the Zoning and Site Plan Codes that would encourage more diversity of stores and restaurants.