

Hyde Park is making gains, needs sound private investments

Emily Svenson 8:11 p.m. EDT June 13, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

Hyde Parkers have been remarking that Route 9G is suddenly looking much better. One of Hyde Park's two commercial corridors, Route 9G has recently seen significant investment by property owners.

Watching the cycle these plazas have gone through is informative. The Rock Ledge Plaza was mostly vacant when a new owner decided to invest, renovate and actively market it. Seemingly overnight, it filled up with small businesses and is now fully occupied. The equation is clear: invest in a property, make it attractive to businesses and customers, and the result is productivity.

Other owners along 9G are similarly investing in their buildings. The Haviland Plaza was losing tenants, but after upgrades and marketing, a new cafe and slot car racetrack have opened, and other local businesses are relocating to the renovated space. Further south, Shelly's Deli opened in an upgraded former gas station and has become a hot lunch spot. The new Roosevelt fire house and SPCA adoption center add to the activity, with other projects in the works.

These changes add up to dramatic improvements, both visually and in business activity. Residents are brimming with appreciation and pride.

There has long been a belief in Hyde Park that town government either is holding back commercial development or should be doing more to create commercial development. In fact, the town has very little control over business. In the private sector, property owners decide how to manage and market their properties. The town's main roles with regard to commercial development are: (1) keep taxes stable to make Hyde Park an attractive place to invest, (2) maintain infrastructure to support businesses, (3) ensure a level playing field through appropriate zoning rules and regulations and (4) provide prompt responses to permit applications.

Town government is at work on all those fronts. The Town Board has worked diligently to reduce town expenses to keep the tax levy increase under 2 percent for the past three years. We have obtained grants to extend sidewalks in commercial areas and continue to look for funding or partnerships to introduce a commercial sewer district. We are carefully updating the zoning to keep pace with current needs, and are installing a modern software system that will make it easier for applicants to manage building permits. Volunteers on the Town Planning Board regularly help applicants gather the approvals they need from county and state agencies. The result is that when property owners or investors decide to build or upgrade, they are able to proceed swiftly and predictably.

Across town on Route 9, the owner of Hyde Park Mall worked with Stop & Shop a few years back on major upgrades, and the majority of the plaza filled up. Dunkin Donuts built next door, and Rondout Bank upgraded the former Dunkin Donuts. At the same time, several major commercial properties on Route 9 are not turning over. What's going on there?

The key is the decisions made by the property owners. Many of the commercial properties on Route 9 are not actively, or realistically, being marketed. For example, the former Stop & Shop store is still controlled by the Stop & Shop company, which does not want grocery competition. Several former restaurants are being held by parties in the same business who do not want competition. The former Amish Market property and former Dodge dealership have been embroiled in business disputes that limit their marketing. In these instances, the town can only urge the owners to do the right thing for the community and find tenants for these sites.

For anyone thinking of investing in Hyde Park, there are lots of good reasons to do so. We have a permanent population of 22,000, as well as over 500,000 visitors annually and thousands of students at the Culinary Institute and other area colleges. Average traffic counts on our highways are over 20,000 per day. Prices are reasonable, taxes are stable, and if infrastructure is an impediment, the Town has a solid track record of obtaining grants. The community is eager to support new businesses as they join the ranks of those flourishing in Hyde Park.

Emily Svenson is a member of the Hyde Park Town Board.

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