

Road construction 'a temporary setback' in Hyde Park

by Kate Goldsmith

HYDE PARK—Since July 18, anyone traveling on Route 9 through Hyde Park has seen (and possibly been caught up in) the construction taking place on the east side of the road from the Hyde Park Drive-in to the Park Plaza entrance. Work is under way to create what's known as a Complete Street, which will provide improved access and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as enhanced landscaping.

In a press release announcing the construction, the Town Board expressed hope that the project "will result in concrete steps toward Hyde Park's goal to create a strong, modern downtown" and "enhance existing businesses and encourage redevelopment of those buildings currently under-used."

"The project is moving ahead expeditiously and the work is required to be sub-

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A portion of the east side of Route 9 in Hyde Park is under construction to improve pedestrian and bicycle access and to install landscaping to beautify the area. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

stantially completed by Sept. 2," said Town Supervisor Aileen Rohr last week. "The sidewalk pouring should be completed [this] week, followed by the stone wall [to accommodate the sidewalk in front of Hyde Park Antiques Center] and landscaping thereafter."

With intermittent lane closures and a profusion of orange cones and barrels dotting the roadway, an observer would wonder how this all is affecting the businesses within the construction zone.

Hyde Park Chamber of Commerce President John Coppola said none of the organization's members have complained to him about lost business.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's not hurting us," he said, referring to Coppola's Italian Bistro, on the west side of Route 9, across from the construction area. "It's exciting what's happening; it's gonna be good for the town."

Coppola said he sees people walking on the road, a problem that will be ameliorated with the installation of sidewalks along that stretch.

"It's just a temporary setback, but the end result is gonna be good," he said.

Kathy Herzing, owner (with husband Andy) of Hyde Park Florist, said construction has had an impact on their "walk-in" business.

"I don't know that we're hurting," she added. "Typically, summers are slow for florists."

Herzing noted that "people are confused [about] where the driveways are," and speculated that it "probably has, to some degree," affected all the businesses in the zone.

Rohr said, "As expected, we have had concerns from businesses during the pouring of the curbs, but, thankfully, we have been able to address them immediately."

Some of the businesses contacted for this article were unwilling or unable to speak on the record about how the construction is impacting them; others simply didn't return calls requesting comment.

"The majority of business owners have been very excited about the project and have been eager to see it move ahead, because they clearly see how this investment benefits their property," said Rohr. "Of course, it is frustrating for the hard-working owners to see a temporary impact, but we have done all we can to minimize that impact and believe strongly that focusing on our future will ultimately benefit everyone."

Rohr said traffic has not been severely impacted by the occasional lane closures; and noted that local residents can avoid the project area by taking a left onto Valley View Road and following Garden Street and exiting on Kirchner Avenue when approaching from the south, and vice versa when approaching from the north.

During Dutchess County Fair week (Aug. 22-27) Rohr said measures will be taken to alleviate congestion along Hyde Park's well-traveled Route 9 corridor.

"The contractors, the town and the engineers meet biweekly to discuss the progress of the project, and we have several alternative plans in place to implement based on the progress made before the week of the Fair," she said. "We have two very large electrified signs that will be posted in locations to let travelers know they can take an alternate route when necessary."

According to the project website, www.hpdowntown.com, the Town Board obtained multiple grants to make the project possible: Transportation Improvement Program, federal funds awarded through a

competitive program; a New York State Multi-Modal grant; and New York State funding secured by Assemblymember Didi Barrett.

"To be able to bring in federal and state grant monies of more than \$1.4 million to improve our business district and link it to our major tourism assets and neighborhood is truly a giant step forward for Hyde Park," said Rohr. "FDR once said, 'There are many ways of going forward, but only one way to stand still.' For too long, Hyde Park has been standing still, and now with strategic use of monies and help from our partners, we are moving forward to making substantial improvements to our primary business district."