

VALLEY STREAM

Preparing for the WINDS of CHANGE

Civic group to try again to get \$10M state grant for revitalizing downtown

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Valley Stream leaders envision a downtown filled with new residents and thriving local businesses and have formed a citizens task force to help craft a plan to revitalize the village's commercial core.

The 32-member group of business owners, civic leaders and community activists is soliciting advice from planning experts, developers and the mayors of Long Island communities with resurgent commercial districts before the village applies for a \$10 million state grant conceived to help kick-start flagging downtowns. The task force plans a draft by spring.

Those involved in the efforts to boost Valley Stream say the community's three train stations, shop-lined avenues and proximity to New York City make a good template for the type of lively downtown the grant is meant to help create.

"Downtown Valley Stream has the bones that every other downtown would love to have," said David Sabatino, a local business owner and co-chairman of the task force.

Fleshing out those bones will come with challenges, Sabatino and others said.

Valley Stream Deputy Mayor Vincent Grasso, who formed the task force, said the village's housing stock skews heavily toward single-family homes, which means there's little room for young professionals and retirees looking to rent apartments within walking distance of stores, restaurants and transit.

Meanwhile, the local businesses on Rockaway Avenue, the main commercial thoroughfare, have suffered as the opening of nearby Green Acres Mall decades ago and the rise of online shopping siphoned away customers.



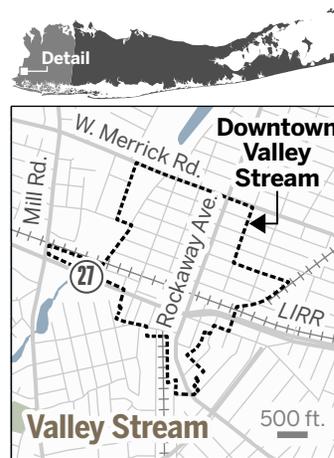
Deputy Mayor Vincent Grasso on Rockaway Avenue, a focus of revitalization efforts in Valley Stream.

"The criticism we've heard a lot . . . is that . . . [Rockaway Avenue] itself doesn't have quite the volume of foot traffic that sort of justifies a major investment," he said. "This is a challenge that's faced by communities across Long Island."

Mixed-use buildings with apartments near train stations could help reverse the trend, Grasso said.

Sabatino said that smaller, "surface beautification" tactics, such as installing public seating, public art and new greenery could also help improve the look and feel of the commercial district.

The task force represents the latest in a series of efforts by the village to enliven its downtown. The village board adopted a floating zone in 2005 under which developers could build multifamily housing in commercial districts, according to the village's unsuccessful application for the state grant last year. The village also adopted a



"complete streets" policy in 2013 to make village roads more pedestrian- and bike-friendly, and set facade and streetscape design guidelines in 2016.

The village in May finished a \$2 million conversion of the former Village Hall in the heart of downtown into the village courthouse. It is also currently expand-

ing its waste transfer facility in part to accommodate potential population growth, and drafting plans for a new performing arts center. Developers have also built new multifamily housing in the village in recent years.

Valley Stream Chamber of Commerce president Dominick Minerva said the chamber supports the revitalization efforts, calling "smart growth" in the center of the village "the key to the future of our downtown."

Grasso acknowledged that some residents are skeptical of adding new rental housing downtown.

"The community very much regards itself as a single-family home community. We understand the value of that," he said. "At the same time, we recognize the need for growth."

"The idea is to not resist change until it finally rolls over you, but to adapt, to work with the change that's coming, and to recognize how those changes can benefit the community."

Around LI

Town razes first house of 2019

Brookhaven has demolished its first vacant house of the year.

A town demolition crew on Wednesday tore down a home on Montauk Highway in Mastic Beach that officials said had been abandoned for "many years" and had become "a dilapidated and dangerous eyesore in the neighborhood."

The structure, which officials said in a news release was on "environmentally sensitive wetlands," will be cleared of debris and preserved as open space.

Brookhaven officials said 67 vacant houses were torn down last year, including at least one in each of the town's six council districts.

— CARL MACGOWAN

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