

No Space Left Behind

The PSJRA is preparing to begin a program we are calling “No Space Left Behind.” While we have been planning for several months to implement the “Façade Grant” matching-funds program to downtown businesses within the redevelopment area, we have expanded this program to include a variety of uses and improvement programs for potentially each and every space (and property owner), particularly along the 98 corridor, Reid Avenue and Williams Avenue.

We have formed a dedicated and capable committee to provide all the elements to make the façade grant program an understandable, step-by-step process. We hope to have the entire program ready to present to the PSJRA Board of Directors at the regular January 10th meeting. The materials available for those wishing to apply for the grant will include the application, a completed “sample” application, color boards with recommended pallets and design elements, and a “pattern book” with photos, drawings and specifications of various elements that will enhance the appeal of the business districts.

The objective of the façade-grant program is to attract, encourage, and capture greater tourist and retail commerce to the area; and to help correct existing material, code and functional deficiencies in buildings. At the end, if we are successful, this program will improve and integrate the visual and pedestrian appeal of our commercial districts – which should help attract tourist, visitor and investment dollars.

We have taken the broad-based architectural styles defined by our consultants and have created a new ethic: a “Florida BayTown” vernacular. This style will celebrate the best of the instinctive styles native responses to the climate, conditions and customs that the generations preceding ours have developed here. It promotes shade and natural airflow in pedestrian circulation paths and offer spots to comfortably pause, rest and visit with one another as we make our way among the various businesses. Each element should have a reason to be there—each should relate to the whole and have an essential utility.

The Design Review Committee (DCR) will help individual businesses chart their general course for their exterior improvements. This committee will review the applications and make recommendations to the PSJRA Board of Directors for acceptance into the program. Upon completion of each project, the PSJRA will reimburse the business for 50% of the accepted renovation costs.

And what about the vacant properties? And how about those properties that appear to have been abandoned (broken windows and untended grounds)? Mayor Magidson provided me with a wonderful article titled, “Economic Redevelopment of Small-city Downtowns: Options and Considerations for the Practitioner.” This article addresses the benefit (and need) for all buildings in a downtown area to appear “market ready” (in other words, well-kept building and well-tended surroundings) and states, “If some of the downtown district’s buildings need to become market ready, then city officials can offer incentives to owners.” (www.dca.state.fl.us/growth/executiveorder.htm). The article gives additional recommendations for the use of vacant buildings to “...adapt unused and vacant space into productive property, and work on competitiveness of business enterprises.”

In the “No Space Left Behind,” we hope to utilize vacant window spaces to provide displays for viable business or to display banners/signs to promote upcoming events. This will not only make the vacant space more appealing, it will help existing business.

This program will have a major, positive impact on our business community, and we look eagerly forward to the implementation.