

COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

**MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FEBRUARY 26, 2009
BOARD OFFICE, 5676 RIVERDALE AVENUE**

PRESENT

Robert Fanuzzi
Herb Young
Gary Axelbank
Suzanne Axelbank
Martin Bennett
Marjorie Borell

Henry Carmona
Janet de Rahm
Alana Ezderman
Ramon E. Fernandez
Beth Forer
Ed Friedman
Candice M. Giove
Kathy Goldstein
Joe Greene

Ariel Hernandez
Maximo Hernandez

Myra Joyce
Josh Land
Danna Liebert
Ben Lipschitz
Chris Matesic
Natalie Matesic
Heather-Marie Montilla
Michael O'Brien
Pamela Otto
Mike Pinney

Ellen Pollan
M. Rosen
Ahron Rosenfeld
Peter Sand
Ruby Shamir
Ben Spalter
Cliff Stanton

AFFILIATION

Committee Chair
CB #8

Someplace Special Haircuts

Greater Riverdale Chamber of
Commerce
Dubai Lounge
Ceruzzi Holdings

Dubai Lounge

Bronx Council on the Arts
Riverdale Review

Weichert Realty House &
Home
Dubai Lounge
Riverdale/Kingsbridge
Neighborhood Association

Grounded Growth Yoga

Life for Champions

Doing Art Together

KRVCDC
Riverdale Economic Vitality
Committee
Bronx Council on the Arts

KRVCDC

Wachovia Securities
KRVCDC

I. The minutes of the January 22 meeting could not be accepted without committee members present.

- II. Chair's report
- a. Budget priorities being due next month, members of the committee and the community were asked to bring suggestions to the next meeting.
 - b. Greenmarkets of New York City signaled their enthusiasm for the Marble Hill site selected by the committee and will be working with the chair on future site visits, research, and community outreach.
 - c. Ms. Janet de Rham of Ceruzzi developers discussed with the chair the tenant search for the 230th Street development. She reported that circumstances are not favorable at the moment for the developer to enter into contract with any retailer, though three national chains have approached them. Ms. de Rham was also amenable to a renewed effort to bring a large bookstore to the development, citing the developers' past work with Barnes and Noble and the favorable demographics for the area. At past meetings with Ms. Kathryn Brohier of BID, Ms. Pamela Otto of KRVDC, and Mr. Jamin Sewell of Councilman Koppell's office, and Mr. Ray Sallaberios of BOEDC, the chair had suggested a united front to go to Barnes and Noble or other large book retailer with a promotional plan for the site.
 - d. A new Facebook group called "Bring Trader Joe's to Riverdale" has been formed to promote the district as a site for the retailer. The chair noted the requirement of a large food retailer for a building with a basement.

- III. Guest Speakers: Members of Riverdale Economic Vitality (REV), formerly known as "Reviving Riverdale," on the vacancies on Riverdale Avenue. The chair introduced the speakers by praising the group for bringing attention to the site and by praising the site as a viable place for commercial retailing. Calling a thriving commercial district essential of civic life and public spiritedness, the chair stated the object of the guest speaker group and of the meeting as simply "to get our Main Street back."

Multiple speakers took their turn stating the objectives of the group, the first being the organizer, Kathy Goldstein. Ms. Goldstein told her personal history of organizing parents groups and of the origins of REV as a Yahoo group, Riverdale Families, which she founded; it now has over 600 members. REV has since organized 30 members for face to face meetings at local homes. Ms. Goldstein described the relationship between merchants and citizens as "symbiotic" and essential for the health of the Riverdale community. The chief goal of the group, according to Ms. Goldstein, is to promote a local commercial economy that will allow residents to stay in their neighborhood not just for their shopping but for their community interests and social life.

Ms. Alana Ezderman, Ms. Danna Liebert, and Mr. Chris Matesic told of being newcomers to Riverdale who loved the area for its community values, schools, and real estate but who were desperate to find the staples of neighborhood life—healthy food stores; yoga studios; children's play spaces; cafes--they had left in their new neighborhood life. Ms. Ezderman and Ms. Liebert spoke of the essential role that such commercial establishments play as public spaces, particularly for young families; Mr. Matesic described the frustration of needing

to go outside the neighborhood—to Westchester and to Manhattan—to find the food stores and grocers conducive to a healthy lifestyle. Together, these speakers told of a great desire on behalf of new residents to Riverdale not just to spend their money in local shops but to invest their time as community members and skills as business owners.

Ms. Ruby Shamir explained the mission of the group as giving the Riverdale community a voice in articulating economic development goals. She described how REV had broken down its work into three questions—what do we want? How do we get it? and how do we support it?—and that in answering the third question, the group was going to be doing street corner polling in addition to its regular Yahoo Group polling.

Mr. Joe Green spoke of his experience as a local realtor and as an observer of the demographic change taking place in Riverdale. Noting the great opportunity presented by otherwise troubling economic circumstances, Mr. Green suggested alternative, interim uses for empty retail space—public art spaces and community galleries, for instance.

Mr. Michael Pinney, also a commercial realtor, noted the tendency of local landlords to “warehouse” the space and awaiting developing deals, but also suggested changes that could attract new businesses: a stronger chamber of commerce that might attract local businesses; a new “herringbone” parking pattern on Riverdale Avenue to maximize parking spaces; a more informative web page for the Economic Development committee that might serve as a “clearinghouse” for entrepreneurial opportunities, community grants, loan alternatives, and government programs to sponsor small business development.

Mr. Joshua Land thanked the community for their support of REV, and described his past experience in formulating local development plans.

In response to the speakers of REV, several members of the audience had these contributions to make:

R. Fanuzzi agreed with the need to make the Bronx Community Board No.8 website a resource for economic development interest, and started to piece together the “links” that might be helpful. He also described a goal of the committee, and a topic of future meetings, as entrepreneurial skills, with a focus on both private and public funding. With the credit market tight and bank finances questionable, the need is that much greater for local development corporations, community groups, non-profits, and cultural institutions to gain access to public resources. He strongly supported the suggestion of Mr. Green that vacant storefronts open themselves up to transitional, cultural uses and promised to provide more information on alternative funding for existing and prospective business owners.

Ms. Ellen Pollan and Mr. Edward Friedman of Bronx Council of the Arts (BCA) were in attendance at the invitation of the chair, and were very interested in presenting their successful model of culturally-based economic development to Community Board 8 at future meetings. Mr. Gary Axelbank noted that grant funded programs might be more difficult to get in a relatively affluent neighborhood; Suzanne Axelbank, owner of Someplace Special Haircuts, spoke of her frustration in trying to keep a portion of her retail space open for gallery use.

Mr. Peter Stand, President of the board of the Kingsbridge Riverdale Van Cortlandt Development Corporation (KRVDC), was very eager to create partnerships and develop programs with community groups as a way of "reinventing" the mission of the corporation. The chair suggested the corporation as a source of funding for community based economic and cultural development initiatives, Mr. Stand's area of professional expertise, in the district.

Ms. Marjorie Borell of the Greater Riverdale Chamber of Commerce (GRCC) introduced the benefits of group membership to local merchants and invited the many in attendance to join. She also announced the restaurant and market Ottomanelli's was very close to a commitment to a space on Johnson Avenue, and that she was opening talks with Pedi-Cabs with bringing the service to Riverdale. She invited the chair to join her talks with the company.

The chair thanked the presenters and the members of the community for their enthusiasm and interest, and introduced new business owners of Dubai, Henry Carmona, Ramon E. Fernandez and Ariel Hernandez.

IV. Old Business: Shopping Shuttles

In response to a request made by the chair (on behalf of his wife) to the Skyview Owners Corporation Board of Directors, Skyview will now be running their van service to Johnson Avenue during the time it is not being used to bring residents to and from the Metro North train station. The Chair thanked the Board of Skyview for their prompt action.

V. New Business: Old Wine, New Stores

a. The proposed budget by Governor David Patterson includes a provision to allow wine to be sold in supermarkets. Discussion of this subject had to be tabled until the next meeting for lack of committee members.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Fanuzzi,
Chairman
Economic Development Committee

RF:db