

Final Minutes of Meeting

Subject: Roosevelt Arts in the Streets, or what could be done to revitalize Roosevelt?
Date/Time: Saturday, May 30, 2015 / 3:00PM-4:30PM
Location: 23 Pine Drive
Attendees: Bob Clark
Ed Goetzmann ¹
Alan Mallach
Isaac Menda
Robin Middleman
Maureen Parrott
Joe Trammell ²

Summary of discussions

The meeting was attended by members of the community who are very happy and proud to be living in Roosevelt. However, the general consensus of those in attendance is that improvements could be planned and implemented to make the town more attractive. Some of the improvements might include: transforming Rochdale Avenue into a more pedestrian-friendly main street through implementing traffic calming techniques; installing displays about our community and history in an accessible cultural center so that visitors could more easily appreciate what the community and our public school are all about; and introducing art to our streets to make them more pleasant looking. It was also agreed that the end goal of revitalizing the community is not to make Roosevelt a tourist attraction but, rather, help keep it a vibrant municipality which will continue to prosper in the future.

Background

The possibility of implementing changes has been discussed over the years and most recently at the "Our Streets" workshop held by the Borough of Roosevelt's Planning Board in the fall of 2014. Information on the workshop, including the powerpoint slides, is available on the www.web2sons.org web site within the Zoning directory and through the following links:

<http://web2sons.org/zoning/reports/OurStreets/OurStreets.pdf>

<http://web2sons.org/zoning/reports/OurStreets/WorkshopOurStreetsMins.pdf>

¹ Mr. Goetzmann is a newly appointed member of the Roosevelt Planning Board

² Mr. Trammell is also a member of the Roosevelt Planning Board

Although there was interest expressed by residents in the workshop in seeing changes made, concerns about paying for any improvements was expressed and identified as a key issue. The need for planning future improvements was agreed upon in the eventuality grants are to be pursued.

As a follow-up, in the summer of 2014, the Monmouth County Engineer, Mr. Joe Ettore, embarked on a safety audit of Rochdale Avenue, a county road that is under the Monmouth County's jurisdiction. The safety audit will focus on identifying what problems might exist and how they could be addressed.

The poor condition of the borough's neglected homes

Between 5% and 10% of homes in Roosevelt are either a) not lived in and listed for sale or b) otherwise in a state of disrepair. This begs the question: what could be done to revitalize Roosevelt to encourage others to move here? Homes that are poorly maintained are an eyesore and disconcerting to those of us who live in Roosevelt as well as those who might considering moving here. The reasons why it is troublesome is because much of the housing stock is as old as it is, and because the borough is a tight knit community and it reflects poorly on all of us. Although many homes are in great condition, including some that are owned by newcomers, the negative aspects of living among abandoned or otherwise neglected properties cannot be ignored.

Regarding the improvements to unkempt properties, an ordinance was recently enacted in Roosevelt authorizing the borough to make basic improvements to properties that are deemed unsafe. This might not, however, authorize improvements to be made to homes like the one in the photo below which may not have yet foreclosed. Other residents cannot afford to improve their homes but may be encouraged to do so if fewer homes are in disrepair.



Traffic Calming

There are many opportunities for slowing down vehicular traffic, especially along Rochdale Avenue. It was agreed that we would request that Monmouth County engineering department provide an update on its safety audit. Options that could be looked at include narrowing the travelled lanes, introducing markings to slow down traffic and signage that will inform motorists to share the road. Ms. Parrott volunteered to send Mr. Ettore a letter requesting an update on the safety audit of Rt. 571.

Developing street design proposals

In the best of circumstances, the process of developing proposals should involve the community. Volunteers could help organize the effort if the Mayor, the Planning Board, the Environmental Commission, the Roosevelt Public School Board and the Borough Council are in favor of developing the proposals. The Roosevelt Arts Project is also expected to participate in the project.

One organization that could help support reaching out to the community is Creative New Jersey –see <http://www.creativenj.org/>

Some improvements could include making our streets more attractive. For example, the abandoned gas station could be painted with murals as it has been abandoned for many years and is a terrible eyesore. The area in front of the gas station could also be used for displaying information for those looking to find their way around Roosevelt and Monmouth County.



The long defunct gas station (above) is strategically located to welcoming visitors to Roosevelt as well as providing the community a great opportunity for further beautifying our town. This work could temporarily improve the look of the service station in the short term and could be advanced for relatively little monies.

An example of an attractive mural is one on a building along 6th Avenue near Canal Street in New York City –see the following photo. It was noted that making the interim improvements to the gas station would not preclude continuing with the plans for rehabilitating the building and selling the property in the future.



The possibility of creating a cultural center along Rochdale Avenue near the amphitheater is another possibility for making our main street more attractive. It could be as simple as a gazebo that has built-in display boards about our history and culture as well as the surrounding communities and environment.

Other options to beautify our streets include the installation of sculptures at the two traffic islands.

Funding options

The National Endowment for the Arts “Our Town” program is one option for securing grants including funds of up to \$200,000. However, pursuing grants of this nature is very competitive and will require mobilizing quickly as the proposals are due in the fall of 2015. The current deadline is September 21, 2015.

The NEA grant application site, including past awards, may be reviewed at:

<http://arts.gov/grants-organizations/our-town/introduction>

<http://www.grants.gov/view-opportunity.html?oppld=276754>

<http://arts.gov/exploring-our-town/showcase>

It was agreed that the community should coalesce and establish or affirm priority steps that are aligned with a town master plan or go beyond that to include synchronized efforts that align and build upon our town's historic and cultural assets. This will make for a substantial proposal that has a greater chance of receiving a grant.

Summary

A number of challenges were identified during a wide ranging discussion that reflected various perspectives and sense of priorities by those attending about the state of our community and its current challenges. Ultimately clearly understanding and listening to and incorporating the ideas and concerns of this small group of citizens into an aligned effort reflected that this same process needs to happen at the community level. Community engagement and buy-in is essential. A strategic plan and steps need to be established.

The concepts will be developed further with the Mayor, the Planning Board, the Environmental Commission, the Roosevelt Planning Board, the Roosevelt Arts Project and the Borough Council.

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