

**DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL ZONE FORUM**  
**JUNE 30, 2009 – COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

The Mayor opened the meeting by stating he has two hopes that may be agreed upon during the meeting, one being that a committee of business owners and property owners emerges who want to work with the City and other entities to talk about the issues, problems, and opportunities that exist. The second is that you will all agree that this meeting is useful and that you will want to reconvene sometime in the future to continue this process.

The Mayor asked the audience as what the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and disasters of downtown are:

Strengths

1. Great architecture downtown (George Clark)
2. Lots of parking (Scott Henderson) (polled audience 50-50 agree/disagree)
3. Lots of “free parking” (Marcia Rafte)
4. Financial district a plus, brings people downtown (John Shannon)
5. The Kallet Civic Center (Elaine Clark)
6. Flowers and Christmas decorations (Kelly Rose)
7. Smooth traffic flow, no traffic jams (Terry Karst)
8. Located in close proximity to the Turning Stone Casino (Bruce Herb)
9. Change in zoning to allow light manufacturing downtown (Marcia Rafte)
10. Good number of fraternal clubs in downtown area who give back to the community (George Clark)

Weaknesses

1. Limited parking in front of stores (Terry Karst)
2. High number of vacant storefronts (Sarah Marshall)
3. Deteriorating facades and appearances (John Shannon)
4. City set up R-3 zone to allow businesses to move out of downtown into residential areas. If businesses were located downtown, people would use the downtown businesses, “defeats purpose” of downtown to allow home businesses in R-3 zones. (Don Kingsley)
5. Too few people downtown (Kelly Rose)
6. No stores downtown (Sue Tonra)
7. Complete disregard to others property, enforcement not strong enough (Jim Dean)
8. Fees for permits, signs, etc. (Dave Tudman)
9. City has no theme or combined focus (Randy Jones)
10. Lack of faith in downtown and lack of support, need to think outside the box and invest in downtown as a community, focus on downtown not outer malls (Allan Smith)
11. Community development is a problem; people who make the rules don’t even live here. (Jim Dean)

12. Conforming with handicap accessibility laws make it hard to start a new business downtown because of all the regulations (Don Kingsley)
13. Lack of follow-up person to usher development in downtown (Brahim Zogby)

#### Opportunities & Disasters

1. Fire sites are an opportunity for new development. Downtown properties are not selling well because of economic tsunami. (Don Kingsley)
2. Agree that recent economy is uncertain, but it will improve. Who should market these properties; the City, realtors, property owners? (Mayor)
3. Infrastructure and how much water does the City have? (Army Carinci)
4. Infrastructure downtown is fine, we need to market vacant buildings, downtown is an inexpensive place to do business, we need to let people know that (Scott Henderson)
5. Herb Philipson's brought people downtown, how do we get another anchor store, like the Christmas Tree Shops? (Elaine Clark)
6. Advertise in high school for artisans, craft people, involve the next generation so they come back to work, raise families, etc. (Brett Bogardus)
7. The Mayor needs to create a vision, a tag line for the City. The people are looking for leadership from Mayor and Council. (Mike Ernewein)
8. I don't want government to lead my business. Business people should figure out what they want to do, then go to government to see what help there is. Government is here for guidance, not to tell us what the vision should be. (Randy Jones)
9. Set up a downtown committee of downtown owners with one or two reps from the City. (John Shannon)
10. Downtown improvement contingent upon community support, need to promote positive attitude. (Terry Karst)
11. Agrees with others to form a committee, with assistance from the City when need help and have questions (Brian Karst)
12. Empty buildings and empty lots both opportunity and disaster (Scott Henderson)

#### DISCUSSION OF SUGGESTIONS LISTED ABOVE

Downtown parking issues were discussed and polls was taken to see if people agreed that there was a lot of parking downtown and if the two hour parking restriction in some areas should be less rigorously enforced.

The Mayor said he sent a letter to the District Attorney's office with regard to "violations" and will be contacting the NYCOM to see if some sort legislation could be passed to allow for some type of cumulative sentencing for violations. Many of the quality of life issues are violations. The Mayor said to a very great extent what any court or judge can do with these low level offences is quite limited, there is specific State law that says can be done and judges cannot vary from that. Are curfews legal now? The Mayor said, no. The NYS Court of Appeals recently issued a decision involving a case in Rochester.

A discussion ensued about codes, their enforcement and the frustrations. The Mayor said we either enforce codes or change them; we can't just ignore violations. Once a site plan is approved, it should be followed. The owner can come back to the City to amend their original site plan. There are Federal laws, as well as codes set by New York State, and the City. Bruce Herb brought up the question about Hotel Oneida and what is happening with the building, and who should find out. The Mayor said we do not query private businesses for their status. Alan Smith asked why the City doesn't have someone to do this. Bruce Herb inquired as to why we don't have a committee to do this. Scott Henderson said we as a society spend too much time waiting for government to do things when we should be doing these things. We should look at a way to supplement City government and move in a positive way. He added we are seeing a lack of reasonableness being imposed, citing the curfew issue as an example.

Brahim Zogby said apparently it is the position of the City to not have a full-time economic person because of budgetary concerns, and we need someone with expertise to do this, example: to get grants and help with economic development. Marcia Rafte added that the downtown development association was here several years ago and downtown business owners were members of this, and it is now gone. She added the marketing and promotions portion in the planning department's budget was taken out of the budget. John Paul said we need a full-time businessman to run the City; the City is a business, it creates money. The Mayor asked the audience if government is a business. Government doesn't create any money; every penny of money that the City of Oneida spends comes from somebody else, (taxes, fees) it doesn't create any money.

Don Kingsley said he has been in real estate for 52 years. We are in an economic tsunami countrywide, so it is difficult to get things to move, and then you have to price things so that they will sell. Right now it is hard to get a loan unless the person has pristine credit. He said their needs to be a committee to rekindle this situation. The Mayor asks who should market these buildings, who does the advertising, who goes to NY City and decides where to put ads, who pays for the ads, who writes the copy. Is that something that the City should be doing, or is something that the realtors or owners of the properties should be doing, and asked the audience for some input.

Army Carinci said infrastructure is very important for economic development. The Mayor said infrastructure is critical and we are currently looking at a regional water decision. Scott Henderson said the water and sewer infrastructure downtown is fine, he said empty buildings and empty lots are both an opportunity and a disaster. This is an inexpensive place to do business and we need to get that out there.

Elaine Clark said Herb Philipson's was a place that brought people downtown. We need a place like the Christmas Tree Shop, and how do we get them to come to Oneida, and what will attract people down town. She said, once you get one, more will come, more will want to come.

The Mayor said he counted the vacant buildings downtown and there were 37 or 38, in 2007 there were 38. Most of these buildings do not have any type of for sale or for rent signs on them. How do you find out how to rent them, or if they are for rent? Much of

our retail space is not going to be looked at by big businesses, but you have to hope that there are artisans or specialty shops that would come here to locate their business if they knew about Oneida and knew how many people go through Oneida. How do you find those people?

Max Smith said we have to be able to attract artisans, etc. to work and live here, so we need to enforce residential requirements; someone who wants to come down to Oneida and doesn't want to drive by and isn't going to consider living in a community that doesn't even care if you haven't painted your house in twenty years.

Brett Bogardus from the Chamber of Commerce said we need to start in the high school, as they are our future. She said she is one of those people that left and found her way back home realizing this is a great place to have a business and raise family.

Mike Ernewein said the Mayor is the leader of our community and has to create a vision. There is no clear vision, we need a vision that the people of Oneida can get behind and support. Randy Jones said he wants a group of business people to get together and figure out what they want to do, and then come to the City government for guidance. He said when trouble with his paperwork such as for a site plan has, he brings it in and Cassie does a good job to get him through it.

The Mayor asked the audience if they were comfortable with the Federal Government taking over General Motors or healthcare. Then inquired if business owners are comfortable with the City of Oneida taking our economic development and deciding who are winners or losers in the City of Oneida. The Mayor said he is not; the City should be a partner with businesses, and play a meaningful role. John Shannon said he believes we should set up a downtown improvement committee of volunteers with one or two people from the City assisting in that. People have a lot of good ideas of their own but the only way to follow this through is to set up committee on their own. He does not feel it is the City's responsibility. Terry Karst said government could contribute, but not be in control. Brian Karst said a coalition of downtown business owners would come up with the ideas and then when they hit a roadblock, come to the City to find out what steps we have to take and/or are allowed to take, as well as for support and advice.

Marcia Rafte asked if the audience was in favor of dollars in the budget for marketing. The Mayor said we are under-resourced for serious economic development. Someone suggested putting up a bulletin board by the Casino (like everyone else) to market Oneida.

Don Kingsley recommended reading two books, *The Rise of the Intellectual Class*, which is about young people who like the old-fashioned kind of service we used to get, because the business knows the individual by name, and *The Turning Point* which talks about your community and how to reach the turning point, when you get your community, your neighborhoods looking good, all of the sudden your crime rate stops. Mr. Kingsley said if you really want to do this, you should read how it is done.

Scott Henderson said he believes what has been lost in our country is that we all are the government, we elect people to be our representatives, but we are all part of that government.

The Mayor said the State budgeting problems have not been solved, if we think we have problems and there are solutions, we have to rely on ourselves to get things done. The Mayor said there is not as much grant money floating around as there was in past years. George Clark said we should be ready with a plan if the grant money is available. The Mayor said everyone should read the City's Economic Development Plan, which has hundreds of points and proposals to be done. It is available on line at [www.oneidacity.com](http://www.oneidacity.com) and a link can be found on the home page.

Those who wanted to be on the Downtown Committee signed up for a meeting to be held on July 14, 2009 at George and Elaine Clark's business, La Vie Boheme on Madison Street. It was agreed another meeting would be held at City Hall in approximately six weeks.

#### **DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE**

1. George & Elaine Clark            264-4820
2. Doug Selby                            533-7104
3. Pat James                             762-8744
4. Brett Bogardus                    363-4300
5. Linda Bailey                         363-2327
6. Marty Winchell                     761-9288
7. Kim Wood & Milt James        363-5898
8. Becky Karst                         363-0024
9. Dave & Kirsten Tudman        366-7822
10. Randy Jones
11. Scott Henderson                762-3809 or 363-6099
12. Susan Tonra                        264-0256
13. Brenda Manaseri                264-1753
14. Mike Kallet                        366-3701
15. Ron Walker                        363-3664
16. Nicolina Trifunowski         559-0844
17. Barb Henderson                 363-7148