

The Scarsdale Inquirer

Founded in 1901

VOLUME 96, NUMBER 25

FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 2017

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

TAP examines what works in downtown area

By CATHERINE FERRIS

SCARSDALE VILLAGE — While residents may have grown used to seeing empty storefronts in the downtown area, they can expect a number of changes in the coming months, Trustee Jane Veron hopes, for the better.

Veron is the CEO of The Acceleration Project, which has been working on studies of the village downtown business scene.

In 2014, TAP conducted focus groups to take a look at the business climate downtown, and these findings have been verified by a second study this past year.

TAP's goals, Veron said, are to "increase traffic in the village center, to assess consumers' expectations and to advise merchants what they need to do to attract consumers."

The pro bono study, which had help from TAP consultants Amy Nadasdi, Dalya Khan, Penny Bauersfeld and Swapna Kanekar, surveyed more than 500 consumers. Veron said about 95 percent of those interviewed were Scarsdale residents.

"It takes a partnership with the property owners, the merchants and the consumers," Veron said. "All the stakeholders have to come together."

The study identified a gap between what consumers want and what business owners think consumers want. In addition, the study showed the pressure of what businesses have to face while competing with the internet in today's market.

Fast forward to 2017 and one of the major things TAP discovered when examining the issue of competing with the internet, big box stores and the mall is the experience of the consumer.

"In any small business environment, the thing that sets business apart from big-box stores and the mall is the service," Nadasdi said. "Our consumers are savvy. They're smart consumers, so they want good service."

Veron agreed; consumers want an experience. So, rather than going out to buy a book when a consumer can do that by ordering one through Amazon, a business owner should be knowledgeable and offer more personalized recommendations.

Khan said another trend consumers seem to be following is enjoying a multipurpose space. For example, a bookstore that is also used as a café, or a space for speakers or a book club is likely to succeed.

Nadasdi said there were two types of information TAP collected on trends — dining and retail.

"If we're looking at potential merchants, we're going to be looking to see if they follow the trends," she said.

Khan said one of the major trends for dining is healthy, local, farm-to-table food and family-friendly restaurants with a modern vibe.

And, as it happens, a restaurant with modern cuisine that will fit what TAP found consumers are looking for is expected to be



opening in the downtown village area. Veron said she couldn't reveal many details, but, because it may be opening in a historic building, it'll require an investment.

And if the restaurant can be built, it's an investment that building owner Rush Wilson is willing to make.

Healthy eating is just one of the things TAP found consumers are looking for in the village.

Nadasdi identified five specific dining styles among Scarsdale consumers. Among them, the midweek lunch crowd including women who work out in the morning or attend business meetings. They typically look for a place that can accommodate large groups and can sit down.

There are the teenage wanderers who have some money to spend, want to grab something to eat that can be photogenic for Instagram and other forms of social media.

Then there's the Friday night family dinner, which needs a kid-friendly and healthy



SCARSDALE INQUIRER/JIM MACLEAN

This new restaurant on Christie Place may be the first sign of downtown revitalization in the village.

menu with large tables, and isn't too fancy.

The Saturday night people look for a good date-night option.

Finally, there's the weeknight mom with kids who will need a sit down restaurant, or something that can be ordered and taken on the go with healthy options.

"We want to bring more traffic into the village in the evenings," Nadasdi said. "What a great place to walk around in the evening on a date night. We want more places open later."

While there's a push for more of a village nightlife, a wine bar or dessert café is preferential to a bar scene.

In addition to restaurants, TAP studied the retail side of the downtown area too.

While competition may be seen as a bad thing, the TAP study showed having a few different options of the same type of retail, like clothing or jewelry, actually brings more foot traffic into the village, which increases drop-ins to stores.

"People want a choice," Khan said.

TAP also looked at living space in the downtown area, at the possibility of apartments over storefronts.

"There's a need for additional living space," Veron said. "There's prospective living space on Popham Road adjacent to the parking lot, but it's all conceptual now. We want people to stay in Scarsdale. We want to attract millennials and keep the empty nesters."

Finally, what seems to be one of the most frustrating parts of being in the downtown area for consumers — parking — was also examined.

"We are directly addressing it," Veron said. "There's a limited amount of space and we have to share it."

There are a few main points she said must be addressed with respect to parking, like where merchants can park without taking consumer spaces and enforcement.

For a start, the village is expected to undertake a pilot program with new parking meters that can accept credit cards.

Veron said the Freightway garage is being studied as well to determine the best use for the space and to look at the parking situation in that facility.

And, she said, the village is looking for a kinder and gentler ticketing process, but there still needs to be turnover to allow other potential consumers into the village to shop.

Some of the ideas TAP has come up with will take some time to come to fruition, like finding the right restaurants and potentially bringing farmers markets back to the village.

While some of these projects and plans are on the horizon, there are some businesses that are opening in the near future. There is a Mexican-Mediterranean restaurant opening on Christie Place, as well as a new beauty salon.

Veron said discussions with potential tenants continue to see how they can best fit in the village.