Hempstead Downtown Revitalization Plan Begins

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WHAT TO WATCH
Today

NORTHPORT
BUDGET BRIEFING. The Northport-East Northport school board is holding a public hearing at 7:30 tonight at Northport High School on its budget proposal for 2011-12. The board has proposed a budget of $151 million, a 2.5 percent increase over the current year’s budget. Check Jennifer Barrios’ Twitter updates @Newsday_TeH.

WYANDANCH
EPA VISIT. The Environmental Protection Agency will host a community “listening session” today at 1 p.m. in the Wyandanch Community Resource Center. What works and what red tape remains in development partnerships between different levels of government will be discussed. Check Denise Bonilla’s Twitter updates @denisebonilla.

MALVERNE
TRUSTEES TALK. Malverne’s board of trustees will meet at 7:30 tonight in Village Hall (99 Church St.) — two days after Mayor Patricia Norris-McDonald was sworn in by former Mayor Ed Koch. Check Aisha Al-Muslim’s Twitter updates @AishaAlMuslim.

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A new start
DOWNTOWN

Osra Robinson recalls doing most of her shopping in the 1960s and 70s in downtown Hempstead Village, when its streets were vibrant and filled with stores.

Now, “there is a business here and there,” said Robinson, an area resident for 50 years. “For the past 15 years, Hempstead Village has died.”

After more than four years of debate, the plan to revitalize the village’s downtown is slowly starting again.

Across Long Island, communities are looking for ways to bring people back into historic downtowns to shop, dine, even reside.

Hempstead Village in January selected Plainview-based Renaissance Downtowns and Manhattan-based Urban America to redevelop its downtown. Urban American was part of the original redevelopment plan in 2007 that called for rebuilding the middle of the village. Among their first actions was to encourage residents, community leaders and business owners to join the eight committees that will help guide the project.

“This is your community and we are guests here,” Renaissance vice president Brandon Palanker said at a March 16 community meeting. “A partnership approach would be the best manner to move forward.”

The projected cost of the public-private partnership is about $2 billion, which would be paid by contributions from the developers and private property owners, tax credits, bonds and grants. The plan could take about a decade to complete, officials said.

“We are looking to do a vibrant downtown,” Mayor Wayne Hall said. “We want it to be nice and diverse and attract people to our village.”

The development team and village officials envision a combination of residential, retail and office development, with open space, parking and entertainment.

But Leone Baum, who has lived and worked in Hempstead for nearly 45 years, is skeptical. Baum, who represents the Wendell Terrace Council in the Hempstead Chamber of Commerce, is concerned that historic buildings might get knocked down and more residents would mean extra pressure on the village’s old water and sewage system.

“We had mixed use since I can remember,” Baum said. “Now they are acting like it is something brand new.”

Developers and village officials said they hope to create more than 3,000 permanent jobs and 10,000 construction jobs, encourage local spending and strengthen the tax base in a community where properties comprising nearly a third of the village’s assessed value do not have to pay taxes.

“I hope this [project] would give Hempstead a resurgence,” said Francesca Carlow, second vice president of the Nassau Council of Chambers of Commerce. “We need growth.”