

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

Last week, the Village's recently established Green Committee invited the Director of Morristown, New Jersey's Green Committee to speak to its members.

My expectation was that the gentleman would focus on issues including recycling, energy efficiency and green technology. Though these topics were addressed, they were components in a much more far reaching and visionary approach to the environment.

The Morristown Green Committee is really a Sustainability Committee embracing a plan for the long term health of their hometown, emphasizing the balance of economic development, environmental protection and community inclusion.

The Morristown vision is threefold:

- To sustain a thriving local economy where community members can get most of their needs met by local businesses,
- To maintain an environmentally friendly and healthy place in which to live and work, and
- To live in a community that includes all of its members and enhances the quality of life for everyone who lives there, works there and visits.

Their approach was a ten step pledge which they asked all residents to sign committing them to initiatives including:

- Walking or riding a bike to a place in town where they would normally drive
- Switching a light bulb or appliance to a more energy efficient alternative
- Volunteering time or making a donation to a local cause
- Attending the local Farmer's Market

Interestingly, the number one priority of the Green/Sustainability pledge was to ask residents to buy something locally that they would normally buy at the mall, on the internet or at a big box store and give a gift to someone from a local business.

In their view, keeping purchasing local keeps money local, saves on fuel and ancillary transportation costs, encourages a walking environment, fosters a human connection between merchant and customer, increases home values and supports those who directly support the community.

Net/net they believe vibrant business districts are critical to the long term life, sustainability and property values of a community.

This struck a real chord for me because many of our Village businesses are at a crossroads. Just this past week, the parent company of Plaza Two filed Chapter 11 Bankruptcy and shuttered the store in a matter of hours leaving employees stunned and now out of work.

Sadly, in spite of the Village and Chambers campaign to “Shop Local”, many merchants have remarked that our Villagers are not patronizing their stores.

As Morristown advocates, we must “support our supporters”.

Our merchants love our Village and in many cases have made a commitment of their life savings to operate their businesses in our community in spite of some formidable challenges. We have less than optimal parking, many landlords are absentee real estate conglomerates devoid of a vested interest in our Village and we are near the top in commercial real estate taxes per square foot in Westchester County.

In spite of these obstacles, things are looking better in the New Year. Three different businesses currently thriving in other Westchester communities are in serious negotiations to rent some of our vacant retail space.

The Village has recently added to the parking inventory with the conversion of the BAMS lot, instituted a less aggressive parking enforcement policy, communicated directly with landlords to help merchants, actively marketed the Village and expedited the approval process for the opening of new businesses. We know we can do more and we will, but we need your help.

We need you to commit to shopping local not only to help our merchants, but to help yourselves. A vacant and shabby business district has a direct negative effect on the value of our homes.

So I urge you to think local, shop local and thereby assure the sustainability of our Village as a vibrant and healthy community. Everyone will benefit. It is working in Morristown and it can work in Bronxville.