



The Telegraph **ONLINE**

SERVING NASHUA AND SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Downtown residents need representation

Wednesday, July 03, 2002

By

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There will be a downtown resident on the board of directors of the Great American Downtown, a group that's focused on improving Nashua's downtown to make it even more vibrant.

That's a good move.

As originally composed, the directors would have included business people and city officials concerned about downtown's future but no one specifically representing the people who live there.

Then, Derrick Walcott, a member of the In'R City Task Force, a group working to improve the quality of life in French Hill, Crown Hill and the Tree Streets, spoke up, saying downtown residents wouldn't have a voice on the Great American Downtown board of directors.

While the Great American Downtown organization wants input from the In'R City Task Force, lack of seat on the board of directors was seen as a gaping oversight by Walcott and other residents.

Though "downtown" is perceived as a place of business, it's also a residential district. The side streets are lined with houses and apartment buildings, and there are apartments atop some of the shops along Main Street.

The residents ought to have representation on the board of directors. And now they will get it.

The steering committee for the Great American Downtown group last week agreed to add a seat on the board of directors for downtown residents. It's the fair thing to do. Politically, it's also wise.

Business owners have their perspectives about what to do to spur more revitalization downtown. However, residents, especially homeowners who live in the residential areas near Main Street, may see issues from a different viewpoint.

One of their fears is that gentrification may set in, forcing housing prices upward and leaving low-income people out of places to live.

No one has been named to fill the new director's seat. The steering committee of the Great American Downtown plans to solicit names of interested persons before making a final choice.

We hope a number of people submit their name and that a strong voice for the residents emerges.

Their suggestions are needed and their contributions should make the final plan developed by the Great American Downtown a better vision for improving Nashua's core area.

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Task force wants resident seat for downtown group

Friday, June 28, 2002

By **ANDREW NELSON**, Telegraph Staff, nelsona@telegraph-nh.com

NASHUA – The In'R City Task Force fears the future of the city's downtown is going to be shaped by an organization that excludes the people who live in the heart of the city.

"We feel that the citizens of the downtown are being left out. There's no place for them," said Derrick Walcott, a member of the task force.

The Great American Downtown, the group forming to focus on continuing the vitality of the historic core of the city, presented a draft copy of its board of directors at a Monday meeting.

It has seats for City Hall, big financial contributors, the legal community and The Telegraph, but it doesn't have a seat reserved for residents.

Joy Barrett, a leader in the Great American Downtown, said the draft outline of the directors is a work in progress and ideas are welcome.

"We desperately want feedback. We tried very hard never to have anything set in stone," she said.

Barrett expects the issue of a resident seat to be discussed when the steering committee meets this morning.

The In'R City Task Force – which aims to improve the quality of life in the working-class neighborhoods of French Hill, Crown Hill and the Tree Streets – participated as a core member when the city unsuccessfully applied this spring for a national Main Street Program designation, but not in the formation of the Great American Downtown.

"Once (the Main Street Program) went away, so did our spot," Walcott said earlier this week.

Representatives from the task force sit instead on a "community board" set aside for a wide range of interests, including the Nashua Historical Society, church organizations and the police.

That does not satisfy Walcott.

"It's kind of a feedback deal, instead of a control," he said.

But Barrett said the "community board" will be the place for forming what happens around the downtown.

"This is where the things are going to be happening," she said.

Barrett described the directors as "hood ornaments" who will have the financial responsibility for the nonprofit organization.

Walcott said he planned to tell the Board of Aldermen about the group's complaint, but he lost his

chance after sitting through a four-hour meeting Tuesday when the aldermen adjourned abruptly.

The city has pledged \$40,000 for each of the next three years.

During an interview, the Ledge Street resident read the mission statement put together for the Great American Downtown. It says the new organization should "truly reflect the character of our city."

But the people who live in the area are missing from the board of directors, he complained.

It is good to have elected representatives and City Hall officials involved, he said, but they have to look out for a range of the public, Walcott said.

"They are a part of the puzzle, but they don't speak for the citizens exclusively," he said.

Donnalee Lozeau, director of development at the nonprofit Southern New Hampshire Services and who is involved with affordable housing issues in the city, agreed with Walcott's point.

"I think there is a place for the residents," she said.

The steering committee is scheduled to meet this morning, and Lozeau expects the residents' group will get a seat.

"I have no sense that's not going to happen," she said. "I see no problem at all."

One of the task force's fears is that gentrification and a spruced-up downtown would push up property values and rents, forcing residents out.

The steering committee tried to address the gentrification issue. The draft copy of the board of directors includes a representative from a nonprofit housing agency.

The lack of affordable housing in the city is a constant complaint heard by city administrators.

Walcott said the residents' group is not confident its concerns will be addressed.

"The issues are on the table," he said.

Andrew Nelson can be reached at 594-6415.



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Staff photo by Bob Hammerstrom

Kathy La Plante, director of New Hampshire Main Street Center, speaks to a small crowd inside Martha's Exchange on Wednesday night during a pep rally to support Nashua's application for a spot in the Main Street program.

City rallies support for Main Street

Thursday, March 14, 2002

By **ANDREW NELSON**, Telegraph Staff, nelsona@telegraph-nh.com

NASHUA – At a part pep rally, part schmooze-fest, store owners, residents, city officials and other fans of the Gate City celebrated downtown Wednesday at Martha's Exchange.

For Derrick Walcott, the heart of the city means "large, old and beautiful buildings," inspiring views that can easily be missed and little boutique stores, which "scream of culture."

Walcott has lived on Ledge Street for the past four years and in Nashua for 25. Now a student at Southern New Hampshire University in Manchester, the 34-year-old is working towards a master's degree in community economic development.

He wants to ensure the ongoing revitalization of downtown pays attention to the residents who call downtown home.

"It only makes sense," said Walcott, a member of the Inner City Task Force.

And Barbara and Stuart Jacobs moved to New Hampshire from New York four years ago. The state wasn't foreign to them, having visited family here for many years. A year after moving, they opened a small shop on Main Street, Absolutely New Hampshire, which specializes in Granite State products.

"We've always loved Nashua. A great place to visit. A great to shop," said Stuart, wearing a T-shirt with an oversized postcard picture of Main Street in the 1950s.

His wife, Barbara, also dressed in a Nashua T-shirt, said the city's downtown has just got a "look" and a "feel" that makes it attractive.

Nearly 80 people crowded into the brew pub area of Martha's on Main Street for the Wednesday rally. A table was covered with pens and information about the New Hampshire Main Street program, part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The city is one of a handful competing to win recognition as a Main Street Community in the statewide contest. The program's goal is to improve the economic well-being of commercial

districts in towns and cities through historic preservation and strengthening community spirit.

There were a few brief speeches by supporters and a well-received performance by members of the Nashua High School cheerleading squad. And many people buttonholed Kathy La Plante, director of the state's Main Street program, telling her about the uniqueness of the city.

"It's really impressive to see what you are doing here," said La Plante, one of 10 judges who will review the contest, to the crowd.

Letters about the special features of downtown, a sign of support for the program, are coming in strong, said Alan Manoian, the city's downtown development specialist.

So far 225 letters have arrived at Manoian's office, but to renew the effort, he announced that a competing community, Laconia, has received more than 600 letters.

He told people to spread the word and encourage friends, children's school classes and members of churches and temples to continue to write supportive letters. (Letters can be mailed to him at City Hall, 229 Main St., Nashua, NH 03061-2019.)

Kathy Cardin-Smith takes a long view of Nashua. Her family is three generations of jewelers on Main Street. She and her brother Tim now run the family business, Cardin Jewelers.

She views the initiative to join the New Hampshire Main Street program as one "to better your community for the next generation."

Her family enjoys strolling and admiring the historic buildings, learning the history of what made Nashua and biking around the large red brick mills turned apartments and offices.

"It has a neat history," said the 47-year-old native.

Andrew Nelson can be reached at 594-6415.