

Is Middle Settlement Road next for New Hartford development?

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NEW HARTFORD — New Town Supervisor Paul Miscione has a vision for New Hartford.

It involves the creation of an area tied together with trails, businesses and restaurants — a one-stop shop for residents. He is pursuing economic development in the western section of New Hartford in an effort to bring in more business and to create an area with a downtown atmosphere.

Miscione — who served for six years on the town board as the Second Ward councilman before taking the top seat — seeks to develop the area near and around Middle Settlement Road and Woods Park Drive, which is just off Commercial Drive.

“We’ve had a lot of interest with developers,” Miscione said.

He envisions a business area tied together with a neighboring trail system — and a new town hall in the former Gander Mountain building, should the deal go through — creating an old city downtown look, something he said the town is lacking.

Miscione would like mixed-use development in the area. This would allow for a mixture of businesses — including restaurants — entertainment and living quarters, where people could live, shop and be entertained in the same area.

“Those are the concepts people are trying to develop,” Miscione said of mixed-use development around the nation.

Miscione said he had talked to a company in California about that area of New Hartford but declined to name it. He also said that two people in the area had called him and said they would be willing to sell their homes if there were any interested developers.

Comprehensive planning

Officials began looking at developing the area in 2014 when the last Town of New Hartford Comprehensive Plan was released. The plan outlines goals, objectives and actions that were developed to guide the town forward over the next 15 years. The 2014 plan carries over goals that were listed in the 2007 plan.

“We condensed a lot of it to C1 Commercial,” Miscione said of the area he would like to see developed.

As an example, he noted how Seneca Turnpike used to be zoned for business before it was changed to commercial use. Miscione envisions development extending to Seneca Turnpike and beyond.

“It’s really all about smart growth,” said Planning Board member Heather Mowatt, who was on the board during the development of the comprehensive plan, though she said she had little involvement with it.

Mowatt described smart growth as having a plan where development would be put in, looking at the traffic patterns and ensuring that there are utilities. She also noted that the area on and around Middle Settlement Road and Woods Park Drive was addressed in the comprehensive plan.

“That area, to some extent, was targeted for development,” she said.

Planning Board Chair Elise Delia did not return calls for comment.

Miscione said the impact of new development would be three-fold: It would bring more sales tax to the county and to the town; it would grow the town’s assessment base, which in turn would bring in more property tax money; and it would increase the amount of from money the town collects from the various building permits and taxes associated with new development.

What to bring in?

New Hartford already is home to numerous businesses — including a mixture of mom-and-pop stores and national retailers. It's the home of Sangertown Square, Consumer Square and The Orchard, to name a few.

So what else should the town bring in?

Miscione said he would like to bring in more restaurants, using the Cheesecake Factory as an example. He said there are so many different types of restaurants that people tend to go to other communities for them.

He also would like to bring in family-oriented businesses, such as indoor golf or skydiving, and lifestyle businesses.

"People go out with families," he said.

Officials from Sangertown did not return messages for comments. Local businesses in Crossgates Plaza — close to the middle of the area Miscione looks to develop — also did not return messages seeking comment on what type of businesses or development they would like to see in the area.

Residents react

Some area residents were supportive of the idea of establishing a downtown area in New Hartford.

New Hartford resident Tammy Billard brought up Syracuse and Armory Square.

"It would be nice to see something local," she said.

Washington Mills resident Ashleigh Stratton also was supportive of creating a downtown area where she would be able to run errands and grab lunch in the same area.

"I think that'd be great," she said. "It's something I could bring my daughter to."

Both women also liked the idea of new businesses coming into town. Billard would like to see a great assortment of restaurants and Stratton singled out a Christmas Tree Shop. They both also approved of making the former Gander Mountain building into a town hall. They liked how this would bring all the various town departments together under one roof.

The town currently is negotiating to purchase the building. The town offered Spirit Realty Capital \$1.9 million for the building early this month. Spirit had originally wanted \$2.5 million, but came back with a slightly lower \$2.2 million after the town showed interest in purchasing the building.

"Development in general is a good thing," Stratton said.

Miscione said he did not see the addition of any national chains in the area affecting the local mom-and-pop stores in New Hartford. He believes these local stores have found and occupy a niche in town.

"I don't think there'll be an impact," he said.

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