

OPINION

EDITORIALS

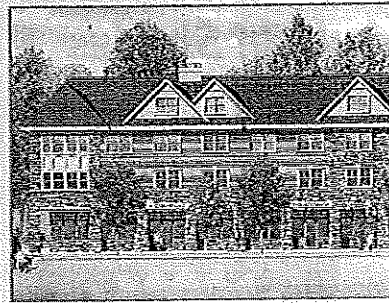
A step forward for Farmingdale

Board can revitalize downtown with mixed-used building at LIRR station

Like so many downtowns that lost a lot of their vitality with the mushrooming of shopping malls and big-box retailers, the Village of Farmingdale is working on coming back. The process has been going on for years, but at tonight's meeting of the village trustees, there is a good chance that a cornerstone piece of that revitalization could win approval.

Led by a recently elected mayor fully committed to the new village master plan, the trustees should go ahead and approve a mixed-use project at the Long Island Rail Road station. It would help bring in young residents, who would also be customers, to a frozen-in-time downtown that has too many vacant stores, not enough foot traffic and not yet quite enough happening at night. It is a transit-oriented development: linking new residential and retail uses to mass transit — a much-needed development pattern that others can replicate.

Back in November, the trustees made large strides toward getting Farmingdale to hum again. They approved a revised master plan and a new zoning code to guide revitalization. It took a while to get there, starting even before the 2006 community brainstorming process led by Vision Long Island, a not-for-profit "smart growth" organization. But now the village seems really poised for action.



BARTONE PROPERTIES LLC PHOTO

The Bartone Plaza building would face Farmingdale's train station.

For one thing, in the March village elections, the issue was clearly drawn: Some candidates ran on a platform of caution — even suspicion — about plans for the downtown. One mayoral candidate, Georgiana Sena, felt that the revitalization project didn't fit well with "old Farmingdale charm." The other, Ralph Ekstrand, ran under the banner of the Farmingdale 2035 Party, a clear reference to the master plan designed to steer the village to 2035. Ekstrand won.

A key goal is to spruce up the area near the station. One of the cornerstones is a Hilton hotel that is expected to go up in a parking lot just south of the tracks. Another is a mixed-use residential and retail development to be built across the street from the hotel, on the site of what is now a warehouse building with a few stores.

This project, called Bartone Plaza, could win approval from the trustees tonight. The developer, Bartone Properties, is a Farmingdale-based company that knows the local market. The plan calls for 16,500 feet of stores on the ground level, plus 115 apartments above. The market-rate apartments are forecast to rent from \$1,450 for a studio to \$2,465 for a two-bedroom, two-bath loft. The 10 percent billed as affordable would rent for \$1,425 for a one-bedroom unit to \$1,680 for a two-bedroom unit. Residents would have underground parking.

Another key feature of the proposal is a brick walkway leading toward the Main Street area, farther west. It would be 15 feet wide, five feet of it covered to protect pedestrians from the weather. This would add walkability, which is crucial to making any downtown work, along with a change to allow outdoor dining at village restaurants.

The big question for tonight is whether to take the next step to put some zip back in downtown. The village has studied these issues deeply and at length. Now it's time for the trustees to trust their master plan and new zoning and approve Bartone Plaza. **N**