

Progress Report to the Town of Brattleboro
Building a Better Brattleboro -
March 2009

In the interest of continued communication and partnership, BaBB offers the following update to town representatives, town officials and the select board. And to put this report in a context I quote Article 21, Town of Brattleboro DID, "The economic, social and cultural vitality of a downtown is a key factor in making a community an attractive place to live and work. Healthy downtowns require consistent and creative effort and advocacy to survive in today's economy. Designated downtown organizations working through the Vermont Downtown Program fill this role." Building a Better Brattleboro (BaBB) is Brattleboro's designated downtown organization.

Last fall in keeping with Chapter 15 of the Code of Ordinances, BaBB presented a plan to the organization's members, the community and to the select board for work to be completed by the organization during FY 09. The following is an update relative to that plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN FY 08/09

Develop the River Garden into the "centerpiece of downtown Brattleboro".

Proposed outcome: The River Garden will function as a hub of downtown activity to local people and visitors alike.

- USDA funding was secured that will fund the patching and painting of the interior, the redesign and reconstruction of the public restroom entry, the addition of an office space, the replacement of portions of the roof as well as other agreed upon enhancements lending themselves to the vision of the facility "as a hub of downtown activity for local people and visitor alike."
- Painting, patching, restroom entry and office have been completed along with the replanting of interior planters and the repair of café style furniture.
- Roof work is planned for spring/summer. Work is underway to secure bids.
- Progress on upgrade of the River Garden has been significant and visitors have taken note. We offered a display of a "Way Point" nature during the late summer and fall, offering the traveler regional and statewide information. Information was successfully distributed through Columbus Day Weekend.
- The Winter Farmers Market expanded its offerings downtown this year reserving 14 Saturdays in November through March. Their records show "agricultural products" sales continuing to increase in spite of the economic slow down.
- Attractive boards have been mounted on the River Garden walls to exhibit community art. Brattleboro area Art Fits exhibit, our local participation in a statewide project suggesting the fit between the arts and communities, was on display in the River Garden during the month of February. Student art is on display for area middle and high schools during the month of March and in the month of April Windham Childcare Association will celebrate the month of the young child with a month long exhibit.
- BaBB is in the process of organizing monthly exhibits to be unveiled at gallery walks on the first Friday and displayed throughout the following months.

- Ninety five local events took place during calendar year 2008. Community Events and significant functions of note include the Winter Farmers Market 2008/09, the celebration/welcome home to the BUHS Band following their participation in the 2009 presidential inauguration, Art Fits exhibit, Student Art month exhibit, celebration of the young child exhibit, Art of Action Exhibit scheduled for September 2009 among others.
- A plan to install storage units in the basement as an income producing endeavor and a resource for downtown tenants and businesses is scheduled for the end of March.

Develop, encourage and facilitate projects that support downtown beautification and cleanliness.

Proposed outcome: The downtown will be perceived as cleaner with less trash on the ground, fewer cigarette butts on the sidewalks and graffiti will be removed and discouraged.

- BaBB partnered again with the town Public Works Department during the summer of 2008 to focus on routine downtown clean up by providing funding to support temporary summer employees with responsibilities specific to downtown.
- BaBB planted the hayrack planters in Pliny Park with summer annuals as well as fall chrysanthemums. With support of a generous donor BaBB also planted and maintained the hayracks on the lower Main Street Bridge.
- BaBB is currently meeting with a newly formed downtown Beautification Committee in order to set priorities for the upcoming season of warm weather. Early discussion includes a priority of keeping downtown clean. In addition there are ideas for incentives and support of merchants and property owners to clean up, freshen up, plant and maintain the streetscape. "CUB", (clean up Brattleboro) is a campaign in the works.....stay tuned.
- The Design Committee of BaBB is in the process to identify then clean up and publicize a network of "pocket parks"; some to include public art to be unveiled this summer/fall to enhance our downtown. A walking tour of these parks will be complementary to the Brattleboro Town Tree Tour and will be offered as a brochure in the fall.

Implement strategies that support business efforts in the downtown.

Proposed outcome: Main Street business will increase as a result of BaBB's efforts to coordinate and capitalize on new and existing promotional efforts that feature Brattleboro's unique offerings drawing local and regional visitors.

- BaBB organized an outdoors fair that was held at the Robert H. Gibson River Garden on Saturday, May 4th, during May Magic promotions weekend, May 3rd and 4th, featuring the variety of ways that people enjoy the outdoors in our community.
- Sidewalk Sales took place again in July with increased participation in coop advertising. Event evaluation concluded that the most likely indicator of a successful weekend is the weather, the gloomier is better.
- The Literary Festival took place the weekend of October 4 – 6, 2008. An event originally started by BaBB, the organization capitalized on the speculated 3,000 to 4,000 thousand people who attend the event by reminding merchants of the opportunity offered by this event and these visitors and by compiling a listing of restaurants that included a map of their locations to be distributed at the event.
- In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and BDCC, BaBB met with representatives of RSN TV41 to discuss promotion of Brattleboro, and in particular

downtown Brattleboro to the resort crowd, to visitors and to second home owners. BaBB took the lead by hosting presentations at the River Garden to introduce business owners and others to advertising packages offered and their potential markets. BaBB organized an arts focused piece in order to feature this unique aspect of Brattleboro, in the interest of attracting visitors and finally partnered with the Chamber to film a Brattleboro overview segment. This show aired throughout the winter season. In addition, BaBB has done multiple live Saturday AM shows on the station inviting Mt Snow visitors to come down to experience Brattleboro. Mt Snow continues to attract skiers in this down economy and hosts a large potential market of potential visitors.

- Decemberfest took place throughout the month of December. The Pliny Park tree was again lighted to kick off the season with an enthusiastic crowd in attendance. A window decorating contest resulted in a creative and festive downtown display and many merchants took advantage of group purchase of small evergreen trees. Decorations are again appreciated and Entergy's support was pivotal in making the lighting display possible. December sales results were surprisingly strong again given the economic situation.

- BaBB capitalized on the comeback of the Harris Hill Ski Jump in February with a promotion called "Ticket to Rewards". By working with the ski jump committee BaBB was able to capitalize on their extensive public relations network to promote downtown Brattleboro as a destination. The promotion included the use of ski jump admission ticket as a ticket to savings or other rewards at participating downtown businesses. Details were featured on the websites of BaBB and the Ski Jump. In addition, BaBB organized a torch light parade of jumpers past and present on Friday evening before the jump. The event that immediately followed at the River Garden was well attended by community members. BaBB is currently working on strategies to capitalize on crowds that gather annually for the Strolling of the Heifers to take place June 4th this year.

- BaBB is working throughout this year to collect zip codes in order to determine who does and does not shop downtown. This information will be used for future efforts "to put more feet on the street" in downtown Brattleboro. In addition it is developing an "e" campaign to reach out to visitors and downtown shoppers keeping them advised throughout the year of upcoming events, promotions and other downtown opportunities. This out will be in place by summer.

Successful Main Street programs are the result of multiple, modest but ongoing efforts primarily in the areas of promotion, design and economic restructuring. BaBB believes it is making headway in these areas. We encourage town meeting representatives as well as other interested parties to feel free to contact Andrea Livermore, Executive Director at 257-4886 or at babb@sover.net for additional information, to get involved or with suggestions. For more information on the Main Street Program model visit www.brattleborovt.org and go to DID. Links are provided there. Thank you.