

Roaming Around Reidsville

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When I first came to work for the City some 20 years ago, the old Southern Railway Passenger Depot was still standing. The depot had been built around 1914 by Norfolk Southern on Northeast Market Street and was used as a freight station until 1988. Unfortunately, the depot had fallen into disrepair, and the decision was made that it must either be moved or torn down because it created a possible hazard where it stood. The cost to move it was cost prohibitive, and although no one wanted to, the depot was eventually torn down in June of 1999.



While no longer there, the Depot has not been totally forgotten. The City of Reidsville has plans to make that area near the railroad tracks into a vibrant neighborhood of which the City can be proud. At its September meeting, the City Council approved staff's recommendation to hire the Design Workshop to create a Depot District Redevelopment Plan.

The Design Workshop was selected from among 13 firms that answered the City's Request for Qualifications (RFQ). City officials envision that this area will become home to mixed-use redevelopment that will be a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood focused on arts and entertainment while "providing residents with ample job opportunities and living quarters".

"The Depot District is going to be an eclectic mixed-use neighborhood that will draw not only visitors to the City but also permanent residents that are looking for trendy living quarters which have been successful in other cities large and small," explained Jeff Garstka, the City's Economic Development Director. "We already have a developer planning a large-scale multi-family residential project with restaurant and office components that will be a catalyst for the development of the Depot District. While projects like this are not an overnight success, we feel like the dominos will begin to fall quicker than we originally anticipated. Having a well thought-out plan from Design Workshop will be an important building block for pedestrian connectivity, development standards and design ideas for the future vision of the district. Once this area begins

to take form, it will become a transformative fabric of our downtown and the City as a whole,” Garstka said.

This new Depot District is separated by the City’s downtown area (also known as its Municipal Service District) by the active railroad tracks. It is hoped that this plan will not only mirror the Central Business District that covers the downtown area but also allow for uses that aren’t currently allowed in the CBD. This area is home to some of the oldest commercial buildings in Reidsville but also has some single-family residential units as well so all of these uses must be taken into account as the neighborhood plan is formulated.

City officials believe that the new Depot District will be a great addition to the downtown area.

“The Depot District will be a complement to downtown and will bring energy to the core of our City, noted Jill Weston, the City’s Market Square/Main Street Manager. “It will be an opportunity to expand our Project D.R.E.A.M. public art movement and public gathering places. Reidsville wants to be on the cutting edge of what’s happening in downtowns across North Carolina so we can become a premiere destination. These types of developments have become a very popular trend, and we know that this will be an exciting endeavor for our citizens and visitors.”

Public input, including that of area residents and property owners, will be sought as part of this process. City officials want local input so that everyone feels properly engaged in the planning process because we are all in this together as part of “Team Reidsville.” This will give the City the “nuts and bolts” needed to put together a game plan that will help determine the future direction of redevelopment and improvements in the Depot District.

I especially like that the City plans, if possible, to build a shelter in the Depot District that incorporates architectural elements into its design from the former train depot. This shelter ties into a CDBG-Neighborhood Revitalization grant of \$692,828 the City received earlier this year. The bulk of this money will go toward rehabbing privately owned dwellings that meet the criteria. City staff had already identified an inventory of eligible homes, which was needed as part of the grant application process. To qualify, homeowners must live on the property and be low to moderate income. The pre-applications for this assistance were due last month and will be reviewed by a Housing Selection Committee. No doubt that will be another future *Eden’s Own Journal* column from me.

In other news:

Playgrounds Have Re-opened.

When this column went to press, we were still in Phase 2.5 of the Governor’s re-opening of the State amid continuing COVID-19 concerns. One of the good things about Phase 2.5 is that

playgrounds in City parks, etc. were allowed to re-open. Enjoy some of that cool fresh air and get some of that energy out of the little ones!

Downtown Farmer's Market.

October is the last month of operation for the Downtown Farmers Market at Market Square. The market will continue to offer fresh fruits and vegetables to its patrons through Saturday, October 31. As we have noted in the past, entry into the market is different this season as visitors must practice social distancing rules. Hours are 7 a.m. until 1 p.m. Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

It's so important for TEAM REIDSVILLE!

Unfortunately, by the time this column went to press, we didn't know the final numbers on our 2020 Census participation, but we were nearing 62%. I know we bombarded you with phone calls and more urging you to fill out the Census because of its importance to Reidsville. We kept stressing the accurate reporting of our citizens in Reidsville because it helps us get part of the approximate \$675 billion the Federal Government gives annually to local and state governments. Thank you for your patience and especially, our sincere appreciation to those who filled out their Census forms, even in the middle of COVID-19. **THANK YOU, TEAM REIDSVILLE!**