

New Rochelle Business Improvement District (BID)

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New Rochelle BID announces “Downtown Artist Spaces Program”

The New Rochelle Business Improvement District (BID) announced a new development initiative, the “BID Downtown Artist Spaces Program” that will bring together property owners with long term vacant upper floor space and artists and arts businesses seeking to lease affordable studios.

Ralph DiBart, Executive Director of the BID stated: “The BID will work with Downtown property owners to help them renovate vacant space to be attractive to artists and arts businesses. The specifications are intended to keep required investment modest and therefore rent affordable. In addition, the BID will also help artists interested in Downtown New Rochelle find appropriate studios. Once the BID establishes a critical mass of artists in Downtown it will work with these artists to help them promote their work and to organize activities to bring the public to Main Street. The BID Artist Spaces Program grew out of conversations with downtown property owners and a Downtown Retail Assessment Study the BID completed with a NY State grant.” Mr. DiBart reported that “the BID plans to offer studios starting at \$350 per month and expects to have 10,000 square feet of vacant upper floor space rehabilitated through this program by the end of the year.

Mr. DiBart, who had worked with the City of Peekskill in creating its Downtown Artist District, stated: “Our New Rochelle Downtown Artist Spaces Program has been designed to meet several BID goals. The program will help property owners renovate and lease long term vacant upper floor space thus preserving the City’s tax base. In addition it will attract scores of artist businesses thereby promoting economic development and supporting downtown restaurants and stores. Finally it will help emerging artists pursue their careers in a Downtown with a long and distinguished history in the arts, insuring that New Rochelle’s future will match its past. Studies have shown, Westchester businesses and residents rank the arts high as a factor contributing to the excellent quality of life that makes the County a popular place to live and work.”

Ivar Hyden, Chairman of the Municipal Arts Commission and owner of Backstreet Gallery & Framing, a Downtown business on Lawton Street, who helped advise the BID on establishing this program stated: “The BID’s Artist Spaces Program will insure that young artists with fresh vision as well as established professionals will have an opportunity to work in a mutually supportive environment. This is exactly the program we need to bring culture and traffic to our downtown!”

New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson stated: “The arts serve a critical role in bringing economic vitality to cities. The BID’s Downtown Artist Spaces Program will build on New Rochelle’s rich tradition of artistic and cultural excellence and help ensure that the ‘creative class’ has a valued place in shaping our future.”

Scott Seaboldt, a New Rochelle painter who participated in one of the BID’s test marketing meetings stated: “The studios being created through the BID Artist Spaces Program are outstanding. They will attract a wide array of artists to downtown. I am particularly excited about the BID’s plan to sponsor artist events which will encourage an even wider involvement of artists and attract the public downtown.”

To help offset some of the costs of renovating long term vacant upper space for artist studios and thereby help keep rents reasonable, the BID has secured limited funds for matching grants. However, use of the grant money is not required for participation in the BID Artist Spaces Program. The grant money is available to eligible property owners in a Target Area roughly defined as the Main Street neighborhood from Maple Avenue to Memorial Highway. The matching funds come from a grant the BID won from the New York State Housing Trust Fund Corporation’s New York Main Street Program.

The BID will assist property owners in recruiting artists interested in leasing studio space. It will work with property owners to test market the space in their buildings before construction commences. Property owners located outside the Target Area, those who do not require grant money, or those who prefer not to apply for grant funds, are all still eligible to work with the BID to help recruit artists for their vacant space.

Mr. DiBart stated that the program will not only help promote the arts but will increase the diversity of activity and therefore attract more people downtown. The BID has been active in the promoting downtown with its popular Summer Music on the Green, Outdoor Movies and BID Family Saturdays. Mr. DiBart noted that the BID is exploring other venues encouraging people to frequent downtown. The BID’s goals are to promote economic development, provide sanitation services, beautify public spaces, create enhanced technology services, pursue the historic restoration of building facades, and support the attraction of new and the retention of existing businesses in Downtown New Rochelle. In its eight year history, the BID’s efforts have resulted in \$80 million of new, private, taxpaying downtown development.

Additional information is available at www.NewRochelleDowntown.com
