

FOCUS ON DOWNTOWN

[A new column begins today to discuss the recently organized Downtown Brandon Alliance (the “DBA”). The DBA, an arm of the Brandon Area Economic Development Committee and the Town of Brandon, focuses on issues affecting the design, quality-of-life, commerce and the community in downtown Brandon. This column will report on activities already underway as well as plans for the future. The following article offers an overview of the DBA and how it plans to make downtown Brandon a more vibrant location for residents and visitors alike. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.]

Last year the Town of Brandon formed the Brandon Area Economic Development Committee. That Committee, in turn, formed four sub-committees to address discreet components of our local economy and how they might be improved as economic engines for the town: agriculture, industry, commerce and our downtown. The DBA is the downtown committee and is charged with improving the vitality and quality-of-life affecting the central business district. The DBA seeks to enhance and promote our downtown so that residents and visitors alike will visit Brandon to experience its opportunities for shopping, dining, entertainment and services.

Brandon’s central business district enjoys status as a Designated Downtown. The Designated Downtown Program (the “Program”) is a statewide initiative designed to help historic Vermont towns, such as Brandon, to maintain, reclaim and improve their viability and attractiveness in a business and development environment that tends to ignore the benefits of a walkable and human-scale public environment. Brandon’s status as a Designated Downtown means that funds are available to help modernize and renovate existing structures and to focus on the enhancement of transportation projects.

There is an official map for the Designated Downtown and can be viewed at <http://www.historicvermont.org/images/Brandon%20map.pdf> At least one Brandon downtown property owner has brought a formerly (largely) lifeless building back to full use and occupancy under the Program. That building now provides goods and services to our community and to visitors, and also has increased the tax base of the Town.

In the few months since its inception, the DBA has initiated or supported a number of projects that will have a direct impact on the downtown's appearance and vitality. They include:

- **A dog-waste receptacle in Kennedy Park:** An attractive receptacle for dog waste, a DOGI-POT will be installed soon in Kennedy Park. The receptacle is designed to encourage dog walkers to properly dispose of their dog's waste so that park visitors can enjoy the beauty of the waterfalls and the garden without worrying about "landmines." Other locations are also being considered and suggestions for future sites are welcome.
- **Love-a-Park Program:** The first two events of the new Love-a-Park program were highly successful. Volunteers turned out in April to weed and clean-up the town's several park areas. In June, flowers, both annuals and perennials were purchased from local greenhouses and were planted in the parks and mulch was donated for Crescent Park. The program is under the direction of an intrepid Brandon Master Gardener. There will be opportunities over the summer to help water and maintain and a big event in the fall to put the parks to "bed" for the

winter. Direct participation by a group would be a wonderful activity; Love-A-Park could become Adopt-a-Park! Watch for details.

- **Dine B4 U Dash Bash:** Lake Dunmore hosts four triathlons every summer attracting hundreds of athletes and their families to the area. On July 16, the DBA hosted a pre-race high carb spaghetti dinner, a DINE B4 U DASH BASH for the athletes and their families at the Green Park in downtown (and will host another on August 6). The DBA expects that the Dash Bash will introduce many athletes (and their families and friends) to Brandon and will encourage many of them to stay and shop in Brandon during the weekend events, or return to participate in a Brandon event in the fall or winter.

- **Route 7-Segment 6 Improvements.** The effect of the Route 7 improvements through Brandon's business district is a source of concern to everyone: property owners, businesses, the churches and residents. Not surprisingly, construction and altered traffic flow can have significant adverse impacts on downtown businesses. The DBA plans to work in concert with the Town to minimize and mitigate the adverse impacts of the improvements on the downtown business community through improved communication with all the parties involved. Likewise, the DBA plans to keep the business community informed of the timing, sequence, and operational elements of the improvements so that the business community can plan accordingly.

The DBA conducts its meetings every second Thursday of the month at 9:00 at the Brandon Library (and on the fourth Thursday as necessary). Residents are cordially invited. For more information please call Steve Beck at 247-3635.