

Home Town Gazette

Saranac Lake—serving the public

An independent Editorial publication

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Area Shoppers Impressed with Variety, Value!

Unfounded rumors have spread far and wide: “You can’t buy it in Saranac Lake!”

Of course, what “it” is varies according to the speaker, but it might be underwear, it might be electric shavers, it might be a necktie or a watch, a towel or bedsheets. It would seem— if one were to listen to and believe these rumors— that the Saranac Lake region of the beautiful Adirondack Park has no retail shops at all, and no merchants ready and willing to assist shoppers. That would be a sad state of affairs.

“Not So” say merchants, shoppers

In the face of such accusations, local merchants and their customers have spoken up, and put their opinions to the test! Under the leadership of a single volunteer, local resident Ms. Gloria Volz, area merchants were asked to complete lists of the kinds of merchandise they carry for their valued customers.

The responses poured in. Merchants, recognizing that they had inadvertently failed to reach all potential customers, compiled their lists and returned them to Ms. Volz and her corps of like-minded volunteers.

A Herculean task

The accumulated data presents a difficult—but worthwhile, according to Ms. Volz—job: sifting through the information and making it available to the public.

Thanks to the thoroughly modern convenience of the computer, however, and the donated time of the volunteers, the job is getting done, even as of press-time of this edition.

And others have stepped up to help. The newly formed Local Merchants Association (LMA) of the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce fully supports the efforts and has undertaken its own plans to spread the word about the friendliness, variety, and vitality of downtown businesses.

While the volunteers have been gathering information, Ms. Volz and her friends have reported interesting findings. In many instances, the price charged for an item locally matches or beats that of a “Big Box” retailer in a distant shopping destination such as Plattsburgh, Malone, or Burlington.

The values of local merchants are also much more in tune with those of local shop-

pers.

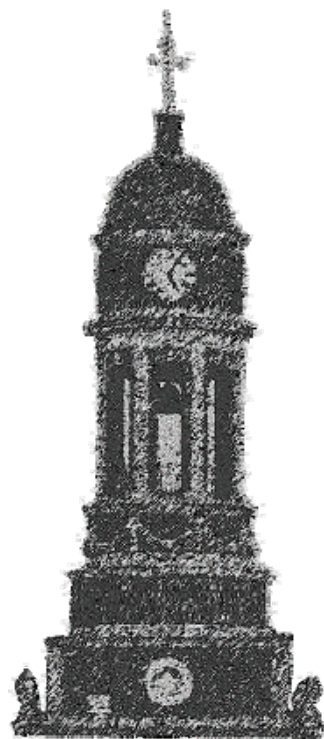
“Sure, you have to go to a few different stores to get different items, but we get to deal with our neighbors—the folks that run and work in these stores; we also don’t have to look at another cookie-cutter ugly box in a massive parking lot—that’s not a bad trade-off” said one consumer.

What to expect

Between Ms. Volz’s group of volunteers and the Chamber’s LMA, the plans are unfolding. There’s already a partial list of all the merchandise shoppers can find locally in the form of a work-in-progress brochure. Some volunteers are also working on a website—even a local search engine—so shoppers may simply type in the item they’re looking for, and find a list of stores that carry that item.

Meanwhile the LMA has already held one “familiarization tour” for people wanting to learn more about local stores; additional similar opportunities are planned in the future.

So take heart, shoppers, don’t listen to naysayers! Saranac Lake has almost all of what you need, and at very affordable prices!



Reasons to SHOP LOCALLY

- **More of your money stays local!**
- **Local merchants support local charities, teams, and other causes.**
- **Local merchants can respond to your needs and special-order.**
- **Local merchants are more likely to help you find what you need, even directing you to another area store.**
- **Local merchants are less likely to force manufacturing jobs overseas!**
- **Local merchants demand fewer municipal services: waste disposal, water/sewer, law enforcement, etc., putting less strain on your tax dollars.**

WANTED: DEPARTMENT STORE, BUT WHAT KIND, WHERE, AND HOW BIG?

It’s no surprise, and just about everybody in this region will agree if asked: we need a department store. But the term can have a range of definitions—and can either help or harm our local economy, infrastructure, downtown, tax base, and historic community character.

Some say “the bigger the better”, and want our area to look like “every-town USA” with sprawling shopping centers on the outskirts of

town.

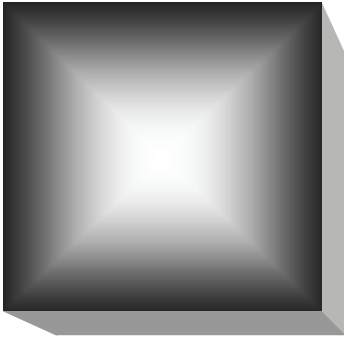
But others urge caution, say “Stay real, Saranac Lake”, and encourage a sense of scale befitting our small-town life.

Some concerned citizens continue to press local leaders and community developers to make sure new growth reflects our community’s size—and to locate it in or near our downtown shopping district.

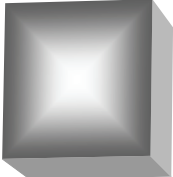
65% of members respond-

ing to an informal Chamber of Commerce survey indicated a preference for any store to be no larger than 60,000 sq. ft.

There are even those who want to consider a community co-operative department store, something that’s worked successfully in many rural regions of this country. Options and creative alternatives exist. Our local government should approach this issue with great care and caution. But will they?



110,000 SQ. FT "BIG BOX"
EXAMPLE: TICONDEROGA
WAL-MART



40,000 SQ. FT. COMPARISON
EXAMPLE: PRICE CHOPPER IN
LAKE PLACID



"TYPICAL" SARANAC LAKE
RETAILER, APPROXIMATELY
3-4,000 SQ. FT.

(THESE EXAMPLES DO NOT ADDRESS
 PARKING LOT SIZE REQUIREMENTS;
 THE BIGGER THE STORE, THE MORE
 MASSIVE THE PARKING LOT...)

*"A TYPICAL
 WAL-MART
 DEPARTMENT
 STORE—NOT EVEN
 A SUPERCENTER—
 WOULD BE
 ALMOST THREE
 TIMES THE SIZE OF
 THE LARGEST
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 THE AREA—PRICE
 CHOPPER IN LAKE
 PLACID."*

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

Start by using your imagination.

Imagine a large Big Box store on the outskirts of town. Now imagine the traffic flows—or more likely the traffic back-ups. Imagine being a first time visitor and your first impression. Imagine predatory pricing doing its best to pull revenues from local shops to consolidate them in the coffers of a major corporation with no local roots. Imagine the added strains on our local waste management system, our local police department answering all those calls about shoplifters, fender-benders, or other demands that simply add up to more than a tightly staffed de-

partment can realistically deal with. Imagine the parking lot lights glowing all night long.

Imagine an area set aside in our village's Master Plan designated to be used for residential purposes suddenly rezoned for commercial use, leaving the local workforce to seek farther away for an affordable place to live.

If these or other scenarios make you stop and think twice about the wisdom of locating a Big Box Department Store on the edge of town, you don't have to sit by and watch it happen. Here's what you can do:

Educate yourself. Learn more about the Big Picture—it's not as simple as wishing for a De-

partment Store.

Talk to your local government representatives. Let them know your concerns, encourage them to look at all aspects of what our area has, and what it needs.

Talk to and respect your neighbors. Communication is important, even if we have differing perspectives.

Write to the local newspapers. If you feel people might be missing some important points on the issue, illuminate them.

Attend Village Board and Planning Board meetings. Learn how the process works, ask questions if you have them.

A BIG BOX HERE—WHAT'S THE LOGIC?

Some members of local governing bodies seem convinced that at least one Major Retailer is ideally suited for the Saranac Lake area. They seem ready to let the developers working at the behest of that Big Box call the shots, pushing for the rezoning of an area designated in our Village Master Plan for future residential use—to allow construction of a department store—and some say a big one at that. Exploratory inquiries are said to have mentioned something in the range of 110,000 sq. ft. If that's hard to imagine, let's put it in perspective:

It would be almost three times the size of the Price Chopper in Lake Placid. It would be approximately one-third larger than the entire local shopping center that currently houses seven existing businesses, some of which could be threatened by such a

large store..

Now, a store that size would certainly employ a good number of people—many of them by company policy would work less than what most consider full-time, and would depend on County, State, and Federal programs for health care. Much of a Big Box's benefit package will be essentially *funded by our tax dollars*. So the price tag on any given item in a store might be low, but the ultimate price is much higher.

With limited workforce housing, a Big Box will compete for a limited number of employees (at base pay, how far would you commute?) so other employers would suffer or have to close.

Some say they want a Big Box for the better prices, so they won't have to travel out of

town—but *such stores charge prices based on the local competition, so prices here will be higher than those charged at the same company's store in Plattsburgh*. People will still travel out of town for lower prices, not to mention even more variety and a change of scenery.

The site in question—currently the Village sand lot—abuts the historic railway corridor, and the historic Will Rogers complex. Commercial development on a major scale would *almost inevitably take away from the community character* we seek to enhance.

A big box on the outskirts of town would redirect traffic away from downtown; something smaller but developed downtown could boost growth where we most need it, where locals and visitors could enjoy a vibrant, bustling business district.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BIG BOX

So, if we decide to stick with the Master Plan and develop workforce housing at the sand pit—how do we develop a department store in Saranac Lake?

Well, it's a tough question, but if the local governments are proactive, and the people of our area get involved, a creative plan can and most assuredly will be the result. It's called self-sufficiency, it's called creative thinking, it's called building on your strengths, it's called Community!

Adirondackers have traditionally

chafed at being told what to do by "outsiders". This will be an opportunity for you, your neighbors, friends, co-workers, and others—who live here because we love it, to think years into the future.

If you are concerned that commercial development remains in keeping with the scale, the history, and the character of Saranac Lake, let your opinion be known. Opinions cover a wide range, but by sharing our visions in an open forum, a consensus vision can emerge.

Existing Movement

This is nothing new to local leaders and planners. Suggestions for commercial size limits have been around for years, and there's no time like the present to proceed.

Encourage our area to put a moratorium on major development as a unified Town/Village Master Plan is created, and encourage planners to cap new store development at 40,000 square feet—or new plaza development at 68,000 sq. ft.—a size limit used successfully in many communities

our size.

This is not a new issue for this region. Big Box development has been spurned by our neighbors in Lake Placid. They've sent out feelers in Saranac Lake before. And each time the issue has arisen, we've let the opportunity slip by without using it.

You can volunteer to participate in future Master Plan updates. Call the Village or town offices to let them know you're interested.

Our community just wouldn't be the same without you!