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Smart Development And Improving Schools: Two Pillars In The Rebirth Of Yonkers

By Dan Murphy

The renaissance underway in the City of Yonkers is real, and is based on two key components: attracting smart development and investment throughout the City, and to increase achievement in the Yonkers Public Schools.

Under the leadership of Mayor Phil Amicone, the City of Yonkers has already seen progress on both fronts, and has a specific plan moving forward to achieve both goals, which



Mayor Phil Amicone

only a few years ago would have been considered unreachable.

Development in the City continues to attract the best developers, interested in transforming downtown Yonkers and the waterfront. The Struever, Fidelco, Cappelli (SFC) \$3 Billion redevelopment plan for downtown Yonkers would breathe new life into an underutilized part of the City.

New residential housing on the waterfront, the opening of the Saw Mill River, and a new retail center, firehouse, and minor league stadium are all planned for downtown Yonkers.

Successfully completed projects downtown include the Hudson Park apartments, riverfront bars and restaurants, the Trolley Barn and 66 Main Street commercial/residential buildings, and the Yonkers Riverfront Library and Board of Education.

Further north, a plan was proposed last month to redevelop 112 acres of industrial properties along the Alexander Street corridor which would provide new residential and retail proper-

ties, and parkland.

These ambitious proposals are part of the vision Mayor Phil Amicone has laid out to the residents of Yonkers, who have voiced their overwhelming support. Amicone believes that new, smart development will increase the city's tax base and financial condition. New jobs and activity in the downtown will provide opportunities and dollars into the local economy, helping existing businesses. New parkland and walkways along the waterfront benefit all Yonkers residents.

In northeast Yonkers, Ridge Hill Village is under construction, which will create a residential, commercial and entertainment destination.

Some of these projects are before the Yonkers City Council, which is beginning its public review. The Council's input on these projects is important and, together with public comment, will likely result in positive modifications and better projects.

But one thing is clear – the perception of Yonkers has



Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio

changed. Mayor Amicone, together with the City's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) led by Ellen Lynch, has created a positive economic climate that continues to attract investors eager to join the city's rebirth.

Creating this climate is the most significant accomplishment of Mayor Phil Amicone, who has dared to dream, but is turning those dreams into reality.

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The only alternative to not moving forward with development would be to do nothing. The residents have spoken; they want these projects to move forward.

Improving the Yonkers Public Schools is the second key component to Yonkers re-birth. Test scores have gradually improved on all grade levels.

Mayor Amicone restored the trust of the parents, students and staff in the Yonkers Public Schools by choosing Bernard Pierorazio as Superintendent. Pierorazio served for years in the school district before becoming Superintendent. He has both the cooperation and respect of the staff, parents and city government.

Pierorazio has been able to stabilize the Yonkers Public Schools, enabling it to achieve success in most areas. This positive environment has laid the foundation for the YPS to improve achievement to higher levels in the years to come.

Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE) is a private foundation set up to inject private monies and new ideas into the schools. Free SAT prep courses, and a recent Education Summit with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, are just a few of YPIE's positive additions to the YPS.

Pierorazio was able to secure a \$900,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create a College Board Academy, the first of its kind in Westchester, for grades 6-12. This preparatory school is open to all students, and will have high standards and expectations of students, who will be

taught in smaller environments, with a commitment to low-income and minority students. Innovative ideas to age old problems are being considered and implemented in the Yonkers Public Schools.

Innovative ideas to age old



Yonkers High School Student Stephy Sunni's (middle) recent trip to the White House (above) and SFC's proposed Gateway Center for downtown Yonkers (below) are two examples of Yonkers bright future.

