

To: Kevin Stuessi, Mayor
Patrick Brennan, Deputy Mayor, and Trustee
Mary Bess Philips, Trustee
Lily Dougherty-Johnson, Trustee
Julia Robins, Trustee

November 13, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

On October 27, 2025, the Planning Board held an open forum with members of the downtown business community to discuss issues relating to zoning, planning, and potential development opportunities to help sustain a diverse and vibrant year-round commercial district. The discussion was well-attended and reflected a wide range of perspectives and concerns. While the meeting occasionally served as an outlet for broader frustrations, several consistent themes and areas of consensus emerged that merit the Village's consideration.

The Planning Board recognizes that many of the issues raised extend beyond the realm of planning and zoning and, in some instances, are matters best addressed collaboratively within the business community itself—whether through the Business Improvement District (BID) or another common organizational structure such as a Chamber of Commerce. Nevertheless, it is important for the Village administration to be aware of these concerns and, where appropriate, to work with the business community to identify constructive responses. The Planning Board also notes that many of the potential solutions discussed align with concepts already reflected in the *Policy and Implementation Framework* transmitted to the Trustees in late September, which proposes a series of zoning code updates for consideration by the Trustees in order to address, among other things, several of these recurring themes. This correspondence is also intended to supplement that document by providing additional community feedback and perspectives that should be taken into account as the Trustees review and discuss the matters identified for consideration in the *Policy and Implementation Framework*.

1. Year-Round Vitality and Economic Diversity

Participants in the meeting emphasized the importance of strengthening Greenport's economy beyond the summer season. There was broad agreement on the need to create reasons for people to visit downtown in the off-season, including periodic pedestrian-oriented street closures, potential parklet areas and community events that offer distinctive experiences such as musical or art events, house tours, waterfront activities and holiday strolls.

Beautification and maintenance efforts—such as consistent street cleaning, improved curbs and sidewalks, garbage collection, and visible enhancements like flower boxes and planters—were viewed as essential to improving the overall experience for visitors and residents alike.

2. Vacancies and Underutilized Properties

Vacant and underused commercial spaces were identified as major detractors from the downtown district's vitality. Several properties were cited—including The Arcade (14 Front Street), the Ice House (414 First Street), the Gusmar Building (110 Front Street), Sweet Indulgences (200 Main Street), and Emilio's Pizza (400 Main Street)—as long-term vacancies or limited-use sites that negatively affect surrounding businesses.

While there was some discussion of the use of eminent domain or condemnation proceedings in respect of vacant or underutilized properties, participants acknowledged that such measures require careful consideration and might be challenging. The Planning Board recognizes that current Village resources limit near-term feasibility of these types of actions, but also believes that in cases where a clear public purpose can be demonstrated—such as a project advancing community, economic development, or housing objectives—the Village could explore bonding or other financing mechanisms to support strategic property acquisition for use for public purposes.

There was strong interest as well in pursuing alternative or complementary approaches, such as incentives for redevelopment (including tax holidays or reductions and fee rebates), temporary activation programs (use of properties for pop ups or art installations), or a vacancy registry to improve transparency and opportunity. The Planning Board notes that concerns about vacant and underutilized properties have been a significant recurring theme in conversations across both the business and residential communities. The Board encourages the Trustees to actively engage on this issue and to work with Village Counsel and other stakeholders to identify practical ways to address community concerns and promote the productive use of these properties.

3. Code, Process, and Incentives

A recurring topic of concern was the speed and complexity of the site-plan review process and the perceived rigidity of parking requirements within the current zoning code. Many business owners expressed that these provisions can deter investment or delay projects. The Planning Board supports continued review of these regulations to identify ways to make them more easily understood, efficient, and aligned with the Village's broader economic and planning goals. The Policy and Implementation Framework propose certain Code amendments that are intended to address some of these concerns and issues.

A key issue identified during the discussion was the need for consistent and transparent application of the Village Code, site plan review, and related enforcement processes. Participants expressed concern that uneven enforcement or lack of follow-up on complaints can undermine confidence in Village operations. The Planning Board emphasizes that equal enforcement of the Code and compliance with applicable site plan and/or conditional use approvals for each property are essential to fairness, public trust, and accountability. The Board further stresses the importance of transparency in the Building Department's activities—particularly regarding change of occupancy or tenancy, building permit applications, and complaint investigations—and recommends that these matters be clearly documented in the statutorily required public

reports so that the community remains informed and assured that Code provisions and approvals are being properly applied and enforced.

There was also discussion of exploring financial or economic incentives (such as tax rebates or holidays, reduced filing fees etc.) to attract and retain businesses that contribute to a balanced, year-round economy.

4. Parking, Traffic Flow, and Enforcement

Attendees noted that traffic and parking concerns, while primarily seasonal, continue to affect both residents and businesses. Several participants raised the issue of the Village's paid-parking program, expressing frustration that inconsistent enforcement and unclear communication create confusion and negative impressions for visitors. One business owner observed that they often spend time explaining parking rules to customers, which detracts from the visitor experience. The consensus was that the Village should clarify and standardize the parking program—ensuring that policies are consistently enforced and clearly communicated, or else consider eliminating paid parking entirely if equitable implementation is not feasible.

5. Housing, Workforce, and Creative Economy

Participants reiterated that housing availability and affordability remain among the most critical issues affecting both residents and local businesses. Employers consistently report that the lack of attainable housing options for employees is a major barrier to staffing and retaining workers, particularly during the off-season. There was strong support for efforts to encourage residential units above commercial spaces, the development of workforce and mixed-income housing, and zoning provisions that make such projects feasible. Expanding opportunities for accessory dwelling units or smaller-scale apartments within the business district was also discussed as a way to strengthen year-round activity.

In addition, attendees highlighted the importance of fostering an arts, artisanal, and creative start-up community to attract and retain younger residents. Supporting co-working, maker spaces, galleries, and incubator-style ventures could help sustain a new generation of entrepreneurs and creators who contribute to Greenport's cultural and economic vitality. Some of the buildings that were highlighted as vacant or underutilized could offer a great opportunity for creating a combination of housing and studio space to attract these types of businesses and provide housing to start-up business owners.

6. Community Character, Safety, and Cleanliness

Participants highlighted the importance of maintaining a clean, safe, and welcoming environment throughout the Village. Concerns were raised about street cleanliness, litter, loitering, and the need for greater enforcement and visible police presence. These issues were viewed as critical to both the perception and reality of downtown as a pleasant, family-friendly destination. Loitering and homelessness is seemed as increasing in the downtown commercial district and as something that should be addressed by the Village as a priority.

7. Overall Observations

It is clear that the downtown business community is diverse and that there are differing visions among its members, including within the Business Improvement District itself. Nonetheless, there was shared recognition that Greenport's continued vitality depends on collaboration between the business community, the BID, property owners and Village leadership to balance the needs of residents, visitors, and local enterprises.

The Planning Board appreciates the Trustees' ongoing efforts to address these complex challenges and hopes this summary helps inform continued discussion about how best to foster a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable downtown.

Best regards,

Patricia G. Hammes, Chairperson, Village of Greenport Planning Board

Shawn Buchanan, Member, Village of Greenport Planning Board

Daniel Creedon, Member, Village of Greenport Planning Board

Elizabeth Talerma, Member, Village of Greenport Planning Board

Frances Walton, Member, Village of Greenport Planning Board

cc: Candace Hall, Village of Greenport Clerk

Richard Vandenburg, President, Village of Greenport Business Improvement District