

[About us](#)[Advertising](#)[Print issue](#)

Mattapan leaders plan to seek Main Streets designation

By [Rochelle Ballin](#)

December 22, 2008

In a time of looming economic gloominess, a number of Mattapan business owners are banding together in hopes of winning a city-designated Main Streets district in the new year. Advocates for the idea have set up a working committee to lobby for the city's support for a Mattapan designation. The group met last Tuesday to discuss the pros and cons.

"There are people on the committee that have worked on the [Mattapan Economic Development Initiative] who worked on the plan to change the economic face and structure of Mattapan", said Spencer DeShields, director of the Mattapan Community Development Corporation. "We have had meetings with other places that have instituted Main Streets. They have given us the pitfalls and the accomplishments so that we know what we are up against."

More than a dozen Boston neighborhoods have instituted the Main Streets program - some with strong success. The program first came to Boston in Roslindale in 1993 under the supervision of Mayor Tom Menino, then a city councillor. Under Menino's administration - and in conjunction with the National Trust for Historic Preservation - the Main Streets program has been broadened into a citywide initiative under the Department of Neighborhood Development. Its goal is to revitalize struggling commercial centers by improving older storefronts, assisting in marketing and networking and introducing new businesses into the area. City applications for the Main Streets program will be available at the beginning of the year and supporters say Mattapan will be first in line to sign up.

The neighborhood is one of the few in the city that has never hosted a Main Streets district. In 2006, Mayor Menino launched the Mattapan Economic Development Initiative (MEDI), which spent the past two years developing an agenda on how to revitalize the Mattapan Square, Blue Hill Ave., Morton St. Village area of the neighborhood. The project has been supervised by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

Lucy Warsh, a spokesperson for the city's Department of Neighborhood Development, said that the agency was aware of the growing interest in a Main Streets in Mattapan.

"City representatives have been out on several occasions to talk with the Mattapan's business community about the possibility of starting a Main Streets district that would include Mattapan Square and other nearby

commercial districts," Warsh said in a statement sent to the Reporter. "We look forward to continuing this conversation about developing a public-private partnership with Mattapan's small businesses."

Dana Whiteside, who supervises the MEDI project for the BRA, said this week that a Mattapan proposal for a Main Streets designation is "viable."

"I think the resources are there for - as far a community perspective - the neighborhood and the people who care," said Whiteside. "I think the biggest resource needed is people who can collaborate and because of that I think everything else can fall into place."

"One of our issues that we are working on is parking," DeShields said. "One of our issues is lighting. [It's about] the façade of the exterior and interior of the buildings. [We want to] provide the services so that the 30,000-50,000 cars a day that go through Mattapan will want to stop and shop."

Mattapan's effort is being anchored by the Morton Street Board of Commerce, headed up by Danny Hardaway.

The plan, like any large project, is not without its drawbacks, however. In order to support a Main Streets district, a neighborhood-based board will raise operating costs, as the city only provides \$30,000 for the program.

"There's always problems as to why you can't get something done," he said. "We are in a can-do mode. We have been helping ourselves during this process as opposed to sitting back and waiting for someone to bring this fix to us. We have people who are very good at getting funds from external resources. The Mattapan CDC is a convener of external resources. That's what we do."

The Main Streets program is not only about beautifying the neighborhoods; it also would provide jobs and help to stimulate the local economy.

"One of the things about retail management is that you have to be able to convince people to get out of their cars and come in to your establishment and purchase your product," DeShields said.

According to research by the Tufts University Urban Planning department, Main Streets were only supposed to be funded by the government for four years, in which time the neighborhoods should have raised funds to help sustain the program. That has not been the case, as all the current Main Streets districts are still being funded by the city.

There has been opposition to a Mattapan program in the past, but according to DeShields and Hardaway, there is growing consensus for the program by both business owners and Mattapan residents alike.

"You have the problem of galvanizing a neighborhood because Mattapan has historically been fragmented," DeShields said. "Over the past year or two we have drawn the community groups and the stakeholders and the residents to start working on how to make Mattapan a better place to live."

"You have to plan for the future and this is the future for Mattapan," said Hardaway.

| Villages: [Mattapan](#) | Topics: [Business](#)

[FACEBOOK](#)

[EMAIL](#)

[K](#)

[TWITTER](#)

[PRINT](#)

FROM LOWER MILLS TO
THE POLISH TRIANGLE,
FRANKLIN PARK TO
PORT NORFOLK...

**WE'VE GOT
YOU COVERED**

SUBSCRIBE

Dorchester Reporter

[to post comments](#)

Copyright 2022, Boston Neighborhood News, Inc. [About/Contact us](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertising](#)