



ANTHONY VASSALLO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Waldwick's historic train station building is the focus of improvement plans developed by the Waldwick Community Alliance.

MEETS WITH OFFICIALS

Group lays groundwork for improvements

BY SONIA KANIGEL
Of Suburban News

WALDWICK – Restoration of the borough's historic train station building is the first order of business for the Waldwick Community Alliance, a residents' group dedicated to improving the neighborhood surrounding the railroad tracks.

"They felt that that would be a focal point of what they're trying to accomplish," said Mayor Rick Vander Wende, who along with Borough Administrator Gary Kratz met with alliance members to discuss their plans for the historic district.

"They were very receptive –

almost surprisingly so," said Douglas Cowie, vice president of the Waldwick Community Alliance, which formed last year in the wake of community backlash to a borough redevelopment study of the same neighborhood.

"They did state that our plan is exactly what they were hoping to do, which I find a little bit odd, because I don't think you need a \$37,000 grant to do a study of what we're doing," Cowie said, referring to the state Smart Growth grant intended to fund the borough study. "We did our study for free."

"We're going very cautiously, but we are optimistic, and we're hoping that they're willing to work with us."

The train station building, which dates to the latter part of the 19th century, has fallen into disrepair along with much of the surrounding neighborhood. Alliance members hope to restore the building to its historical appearance while converting the interior to a museum, meeting place or convenience store.

The \$500,000 to \$600,000 restoration – of the station building alone – will depend upon the availability of grant money and the success of fund-raising efforts. The cost of improving the surrounding neighborhood has not been estimated.

In the meantime, alliance members will turn their attention to the

building's most basic needs.

"There's a hole in the roof," said Cowie. "We want to at least patch the roof and stop the decay."

Cowie said that the alliance could likely cover the cost of the immediate repairs through its own funds, if no others are available.

"It's going to take a while to acquire the grants, but it's in such bad shape that we want to at least put a Band-Aid on the building," said Cowie.

The ultimate use of the building may depend upon the will of the New Jersey Historic Commission. The station building has been listed on the state's historic register since the 1970s.

"Because this is a historic property, you're very, very limited in what you can do to the building," Cowie said.

"For example, the obvious thing would be to just put a piece of plywood over the hole in the roof, but the reality is there was no such thing as plywood in the late 1800s. Will they allow us to put that on the building? We would think so, but state agencies are a little bit finicky."

The alliance must also secure a lease of the building from New Jersey Transit before starting work. Preliminary discussions with Transit suggest that the alliance may have to renovate the building for non-profit purposes to secure such a lease, Cowie said. New Jersey Transit did not return calls for comment by press time.

"We're possibly thinking of a

historic museum or some other non-profit use," said Cowie.

During their recent meeting, alliance members consulted borough officials regarding sources of funding for the work – including the possible use of borough funds.

"We're looking at a couple of grants right now, and each day new things come out," said Kratz, who said the borough has no specific plans to fund the project, but that the ultimate decision would rest with the mayor and council.

"We had a very open conversation about what our priorities are and how we might be able to give them logistical support or procedural help," said Vander Wende. "They're very motivated, but obviously they've never done this before, and I think they came to appreciate that this is a fairly complicated process and could be an expensive process. But because they are so motivated and excited about making these improvements, I'm optimistic that they're going to make progress."

With the borough's support, alliance members intend to intensify talks with New Jersey Transit.

"There was no use spinning our wheels if we didn't have the town's support," Cowie said.

"We're told this process may take several years, but I think that has more to do with red tape than with our plans. On our end, we'd start tomorrow."

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