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Business group pursues opportunities

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HUDSON— After meeting for four months, local business owners, commercial property owners and civic leaders have formed the Hudson Business Association to help expand economic and cultural opportunities downtown.

Michelle Ciccolo, the town's community development director, said the association's short-term objectives are to fill vacant storefronts, market existing businesses, increase more visitors and shoppers, improve the aesthetic appearance of downtown, and promote cultural resources.

The long-term goal, she said, is to help with professional development and business retention and expansion.

"It's pretty exciting, all the things that are happening downtown. The HBA formed because they want to get the word out about what Hudson has to offer," Ms. Ciccolo said.

During the past decade, a lot of private and public money has been pumped into making the downtown area more attractive. Several commercial property owners have also taken advantage of grants and other funding to gut and totally restore their buildings. When the renovations were completed and the buildings put back into use two years ago, the economy slowed.

About 15 buildings still have some vacant portions. Pictures and information about the available commercial space is on the association's Web site: <http://www.hudsonbusinessassociation.com/>.

"We have a lot of beautiful premier buildings, some completely restored with old woodwork and architectural details intact and with upgraded cable and networking capacity," Ms. Ciccolo said.

Unlike many towns, part of Hudson's downtown is a historic district. "We have beautiful, preserved old buildings with a lot of charm. All the merchants have flower boxes in their windows. It's really quite lovely," Ms. Ciccolo added.

Alleys have been beautified by private business owners for shoppers going from parking lots behind buildings to Main Street.

Eighteen months ago, the town installed a walking path along the Assabet River, from Main Street to South Street, and the new Cellucci Park at South and Houghton streets.

The park, named for the late Argeo R. "Junior" Cellucci, father of former Gov. A. Paul Cellucci, opened June 7. It has a skateboard park, water splash area, a bocce court and a pavilion where free concerts are being held on Saturday afternoons during the summer.

The town is finishing a \$500,000 project to completely redo the South Street parking lot, including landscaping, granite curbing and decorative lighting similar to what has been installed on Main Street.

Another attraction is the new 5.5-mile Assabet River Trail that comes from Marlboro through downtown Hudson, ending just shy of the Stow line on Route 62.

Ms. Ciccolo said the downtown area has a lot of foot and vehicular traffic that gives potential business owners a tremendous amount of visibility.

The new association is soliciting input from residents and consumers about ways to improve downtown. A survey can be downloaded from the HBA Web site. Other ideas can be sent to Ms. Ciccolo at surveys@ciccologroup.com. Other initial projects include production of a map and brochure highlighting downtown establishments and available parking. The group is also working on promoting arts and activities downtown, as well as marketing local services and products.

Anyone interested in more information or becoming a part of the HBA may contact Ms. Ciccolo at (781) 307-7330 or by sending e-mail to michelle@ciccologroup.com.

The founding members of the group are: Arthur Redding from Hudson Appliance, president of the association; Michael Murphy of Murphy Insurance Agency, vice president; Chuck Randall of Randall Properties, treasurer; Richard Frias of the law firm Moreira and Frias, secretary; Mark O'Connell, president of Avidia Bank; Barbara and Nick Kasseris of Stasio; Lizette Frias of S&F Concrete; and Anthony Antico of Sandra & Anthony Antico Real Estate.