Rent County Rews

Architect proposes Park Row Revamp Grants eyed as funding source

15 October 2009 By Peter Heck

Public Library on High Street to solicit the opinions of

members of the Chestertown Garden Club, which

voluntarily does a significant portion of the upkeep and

landscaping in the park. He came armed with drawings

and description, and a healthy dose of enthusiasm for the

needs and dreams.

CHESTERTOWN - Architect Peter Newlin has a allowing residential occupancy of the ground floors of neighborhoods such as Park Row." vision. That shouldn't surprise anyone. Visions of how Park Row buildings and arguing against off-street parking something might look are an architect's stock in trade. in a "pedestrian district." But they would also require residential use of the ground floor of any of the buildings. Newlin and his colleagues spend a lot of time and study several physical improvements such as brick sidewalks working up images of buildings that fulfill someone else's and tree wells along the street, and a major change in

traffic patterns. Newlin's key idea is to make Park Row a one-way In this case, though, Newlin proposes redesigning a central part of Chestertown: Park Row. And his design street, with traffic flowing from Cross Street to Spring is not for a single building, but for the entire street that Avenue. There would be diagonal parking on both sides borders Fountain Park on its east side, connecting the of the street, and a single lane of traffic down the middle. courthouse and the post office. Both ends of the street would be narrowed to shorten On Oct. 8, Newlin took his designs to the Kent County crosswalks and to slow traffic. And the battered concrete

> The change would supplement zoning modifications needed in the Park Row area, Newlin said. In the document describing his project, he proposes " a new zoning class, HD-MU, Historic District Mixed Use to nurture the preservation and economic revival of

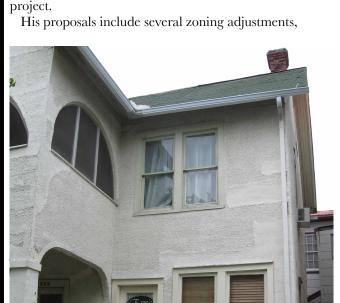
> sidewalk on the east side of the street - away from the

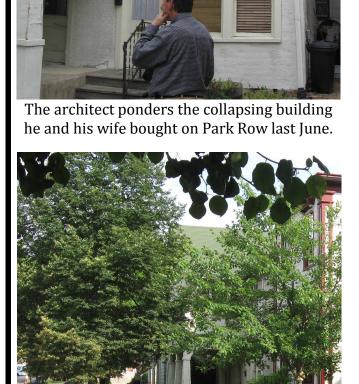
park - would be replaced with brick.

The current zoning of the street is C2, which prohibits That prevents their use as B & Bs or apartments, which might make sense given their central location. Newlin notes that "all of the historic structures of Park Row are fundamentally residential." The exception, he says, is the building he now owns: the stucco building at 302/304 Park Row. It was built as a home office some time in the 20th century. He describes it as "structurally failing", and as "out of scale" with the rest of the neighborhood.

Newlin also argues that "Park Row is in deep trouble as a business district" His handout indicates that the offices and retail establishments are open less than one-third of the time. Part of the reason, he says, is that the structures area't designed for retail occupancy, and have been allowed to deteriorate by absentee owners.

He cited the concrete sidewalks as "an environmental cue- you won't find much of value in this direction."





The brick sidewalks stop at Park Row, a signal to visitors there's not much of value going on here.

shortcut to avoid the traffic lights on High Street, resulting in high volume of traffic at speeds that reduce the safety of pedestrians. The absence of any crosswalk at the Spring Avenue end of the street is also a safety issue,

Newlin suggested replacing the asphalt pavement of Park Row with permeable paving blocks, similar to those project might be the kind of project Main Street Historic in the courthouse parking lot, to enhance stormwater management. Under his plan, the street would be closed market or music in the park setting up on the grass, they at this stage. would use the street, reducing wear and tear on the grass. organization, did not attend the Oct. 8 meeting.



THE PAVER PLAZA VIEWED FROM CROSS ST

Newlin's 3D computer model shows how Park Row can be recreated as a one way street with projecting peninsulas to slow traffic and new brick sidewalks along the building side to match those of the park. "Our plan allows the Farmers Market, for example, to serve customers on both sides," Newlin says, adding: "It will more than double Park Row's capacity to host special events like 'Artin the Park' and Craft Fairs, which attract wallets and purses downtown to feed our Art Galleries, Merchants and Restaurants. We need our leaders to invest in the pedestrian infrastructure and landscape like this, if Chestertown is to to ever have a thriving downtown marketplace. Our pedestrian environment is our primary competitive advantage.'

The garden club members had mixed reactions. Several said the plan "doesn't look like Chestertown," comparing it to an urban mall. Newlin suggested that town's future both in terms of historic preservation and of anyone whose first reaction was negative take time to let economic vitality. "We now suspect Park Row is a the idea take shape in their minds. He said that his own first reaction to most of his ideas was "no," but that after a couple of days he was often able to see their benefits

The garden club members also had questions. How Newlin noted that the street is commonly used as a much would the project cost and how much would it be financed? Newlin said his engineer has estimated the street work at \$200,000 if done without the permeable pavers, \$250,000 with the pavers and stormwater capture. The total doesn't include design or installation of landscaping, or street lights, he said.

Chestertown would support, and said the organization might have access to grants for such a project. However,

Newlin's ideas for Park Row remain in the formative stage, but he sees them as raising larger issues on the microcosm of downtown, in the sense that the troubles we are discovering here, to varying degrees, may be dragging other neighborhood[s] down, too," his brochure

Newlin's handout concludes by asking how the community can organize to accomplish this agenda. A lot of that depends on whether he can enlist key decision makers in the project. And while he says that he has begun those conservations, they are still in the initial stages.

Mayor Margo Bailey was "noncommittal," he said. He Newlin said that this sort of downtown improvement has also had individual conversations with members of the planning commission. And while some were enthusiastic, others were unconvinced, he said. He said he had not spoken to town manager Bill Ingersoll, or to during public events in the park. Instead of farmers Main Street officers declined to comment on the project anyone from the post office, which would have to Holly Geddes, president of the approve moving and rearranging the mailbox island at the Spring Avenue end of the street, as Newlin proposes.