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INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER MANNY DEMUTIS ON THE FUTURE OF PHOENIXVILLE



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT By Barry Cassidy

Q: I have received many questions about all the boarded housing on Bridge Street. Are there any future plans for those buildings?

Manny DeMutis: Yes, they will be torn down soon as we begin development of the Steelworks Project, along with the old slaughterhouse in the back. There have been many issues surrounding the project, and for the most part they have been addressed; we are proceeding with the building permit.

Q: They said the property had contamination; is that true?

Manny DeMutis: Yes, like all the properties that composed the old Phoenix Steel property. There was some asbestos contamination that we needed to clean up, as well as floodplain in the footprint.

Q: I know there have always been issues with infill construction on old industrial sites. What are you planning to build on the site? What is Steelworks?

Manny DeMutis: 375 market-rate units will significantly increase the density footprint in Phoenixville's downtown. In addition, those units will be located above 40,000 square feet of ground-floor retail. It is a large project. I believe that when this project is done, downtown Phoenixville could have about 700 more people in the arts and entertainment district. It will have a positive impact on current street retail, leading to an increase in sales volume.

Regarding the streetscape's physical appearance, we will run the electrical wires in conduit beneath the sidewalk rather than on poles along Bridge Street to provide a cleaner, crisper look. We will then install the blue light poles to match the rest of the town, and we have made some improvements to make the corner where Nudy's is located a little more pedestrian-friendly.

Q: What do you envision for the retail portion of the site?

Manny DeMutis: There will be a couple of restaurants and some highly curated retail to complement existing businesses and offer a wider selection of goods. Apparel is always sought after, and there may also be some experience-based attractions that have been popping up in downtowns across the country. Vibrant businesses will thrive in Phoenixville.

Q: How is your hotel in Cape May doing?

Manny DeMutis: Things are going well at the Inn at Cape May. It is mid-summer, and the weather has been nice. The historic hotel is doing good business. I am spending a lot of time there; celebrities are in and out, and cocktails at the bar. It is a very interesting time, and I have a house right across the street.

Q: Do you have entertainment?

Manny DeMutis: Yeah, we have some local and regional bands there on the lawn. If the weather is right and the waves are crashing in the background, it creates a great sense of place. Being a significant historic resource in the hotel, it has a presence in downtown and is a landmark for visitors.

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DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from page 48)

You would be surprised how many people have been coming to the hotel since they were children. Some people come for a week every year during a week that they have set aside for vacation.

The hotel holds many memories for people who have attended events there, had their wedding reception there, or used it as a destination wedding venue. There was a guy the other day who remembers when they made the movie "The Prowler" at the hotel. Bikini-clad ingenues being chased by a guy with a pitchfork.

August is going to be a good month, and we have room for anyone from the 422 Business Advisor area to come down for a visit. We are right on the beach and offer surface parking for our guests. I always thought the days were magical with the cool ocean breeze, but I have come to realize the nights are equally exciting, as Cape May offers a plethora of stores and exceptional places to eat.

Q: Do you have exotic dancers there?

Manny DeMutis: No, we are a family place, but we do have some talented people that dance to the music the bands play. Some guy took over the dance floor last month and danced the flamenco — said he was the next Farruquito. He was very engaging, and people gave him a round of applause when he completed his brief rou-

tine. I was not there, but the manager said he gave him a beer to cool him off after he finished. Stuff like that is an everyday occurrence; the place is a magnet for creative expression.

I. One last question. What about the train? Is the 'ville going to get train service? With all these new people coming to Phoenixville, it appears you are providing what will become Transit Oriented Development.

Q: I have not been too involved in the process, but it is coming. I believe it is the number one train project in Pennsylvania. I know the Mayor and the County Commissioners are working hard to secure passenger rail service. It is something that, like the Steelworks project, takes time and patience to get through the approval process.

When you examine the regulatory environment and approval timelines, it is hard to get things through the system. All well-meaning people are doing what they think is right, so we are in good hands with people looking out for citizens' well-being. The track is there; the scheduling is possible; the signaling has been installed and is complete. I wish you had stayed with the project.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.

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