

# WINDSOR-HIGHTS HERALD

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## Revitalization efforts crystalize in borough

By Suzanne Spinelli  
Staff Writer

**HIGHTSTOWN** — Business owners and community members in the borough are banding together to form an Ad Hoc Improvement Committee, hoping to work together to find ways to bring the town to life.

The committee, formed by Michael Page and Jeff Jones, owners of the Great American Saloon and Eatery, are having a series of four meetings to discuss ways in which the borough could be improved. Over 25 community members and business owners have gotten together to share ideas in a unique step towards leading Hightstown into the future.

The committee brought in Donald Smartt, a professional town improvement facilitator, who organized similar efforts in Freehold, Cranford, Madison and other towns across the state.

"We're really just in the brainstorming stages right now," Mr. Page said. "Jeff and I had been involved in the improvement committee in Freehold and thought that this might be a good thing to explore for Hightstown."

After the four initial meetings, the group will decide whether this is something they want to act on. Based on the positive feedback of meeting attendees, the decision to act appears to be the next step.

"We've been sharing some excellent ideas and its a good working group," said Harry Sackowitz, owner of the Shoebuckle shoe store. "It's a start. It's better to be doing something than nothing. There's a great interest in furthering business in Hightstown."

Michael Pane, a local attorney with offices in Hightstown, said he was impressed by the diversity of business owners who

attended the meetings.

"We had representatives from Coca Cola, PSE&G and Core States Bank, as well as small business owners and borough officials," he said. "By getting together people who have invested in the community in different ways, we get a broad forum of views."

He said the overall perception of the group is that the borough needs to focus on communication and reaching out to the community, before addressing physical improvement issues.

"I think forming this committee is a real positive step," he added.

Mr. Page pointed out that the committee offers an alternative to the traditional route of looking to local government to make improvements.

"Improvement efforts done by local governments are always underfunded, undermanned and never perpetuated," he said. "We can't rely on them. They don't have the time, money or the resources. The community needs to take care of itself."

Mr. Smartt said the purpose

of the initial meetings is simply to share ideas. Once the committee decides they want to take action, then they will work together to develop a list of improvements in order of priority, he said.

"The whole improvement process takes at least two years," Mr. Smartt said. "My task will be, if there is interest in going ahead, to help develop an improvement plan."

"We want to foster a better business climate in the community," Mr. Page added. "This committee is the first step toward making it happen."

Mr. Page also said that any business owner or community member interested in participating are welcome to come to the next meeting, although a date has not been scheduled.

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Local Attorney

