

# Reedsville revitalization revs up

## Buildings may come down by October

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REEDSVILLE — Things are looking up in Reedsville.

And some things are coming down.

A committee of town officials and business owners is working to spur economic growth and improve the look of the crossroads town.

Plans were spurred by Friends of Deckers Creek (FODC), a nonprofit watershed preservation group that received a \$5,000 grant from the

Brownfields Foundation for Overcoming Challenges and Utilizing Strengths (FOCUS) in West Virginia. FODC has been meeting with the community for a year to address barriers to development at the four-way intersection that is at the heart of Reedsville, and to solicit input for other improvements.

When the meetings began, a troublesome intersection and an abandoned gas station's underground storage tanks were the focus. The tanks have since been removed. Rumble strips have been installed in the intersection to slow traffic. And plans are in motion to remove two dilapidated buildings

at the intersection.

Bryan Radabaugh, of the state Department of Transportation, said he hopes the buildings will be gone by the time the Preston County Buckwheat Festival begins Sept. 30 in Kingwood.

Sarah Veselka, executive director of FODC, said her organization's role in the redevelopment is drawing to a close and "we're kicking the fledgling [committee] out of the nest."

The committee will continue to target development opportunities. Veselka, who lives in Reedsville, said she'll keep working with the group, to help the town "realize its poten-

tial by increasing public green space for recreation and education, and supporting development opportunities that are good for the environment and our community." She said she hopes to help obtain funding this summer to improve sidewalks.

### Survey says

A recent survey conducted by the committee — now known as the Reedsville Revitalization Group — drew more than 100 responses. One in three respondents cited the intersection as the chief dis-

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advantage. They characterized it as unsafe and mentioned the need for a traffic light.

"I'll die there," one said. Only one person argued against a traffic light. Others mentioned the buildings, the distance to work, the distance to large stores and to things to do.

Sixty-one percent of those who took the survey said the town needs a restaurant. But participants were divided on whether it should be a sit-down restaurant (one in three) or fast food (one in eight).

Respondents also asked for more shopping opportunities, including more grocery, clothing, hardware and discount stores.

FODC helped the committee design a brochure to promote the community. It lists area attractions, including the rail-trail and the proximity to whitewater rafting, kayaking, fishing, skiing, hiking and other outdoor activities. The town is within an easy drive to Arthurdale, a historic New Deal community, Cheat Lake, Interstate 68, the Monongahela National Forest and Morgantown.

The brochure also

includes available parcels of land where businesses might relocate.

Reedsville Council Member Anthony Perris encourages every community to get organized.

“I suggest any small town that wants to improve its image form such a group. It’s a win-win for everyone involved.” He said the revitalization group will apply for government and foundation grants to improve the community. Funds are out there, he said, “to help communities that really care about themselves.”

Trellis Smith, marketing manager of Trellis Cafe at Tatham’s Garden Center, is also a member of the group. He said he’d like “to see the group use its energies and efforts to try to figure out ways to promote and enhance the community — writing grants, speaking to homeowners about cleaning up their properties and enhance existing businesses.”

Grant money obtained by FODC helped start the cafe, which also hosts live music. Tatham’s also hosts workshops for gardeners and do-it-yourself landscapers.

Promoting the community might also “get businesses to open in vacant buildings and the empty land along the road in Reedsville,” Smith said.

### **The future**

Perris said one idea he'd like to see come to fruition is a town center, a focal point at the entrance to the community. Once the red brick building is torn down and the intersection widened, there's space for a Veterans Memorial Garden. Mary Luckini, a landscape designer who works with Friends of Deckers Creek, has done a rendering of what's possible there, and at other now-unused areas in town.

An empty auction house adjacent to the rail-trail could be a pit stop for bicyclists, complete with a bike repair shop, she said.

The RRG welcomes input from "everyone who is dedicated to making Reedsville a better place to live," Perris said. "We're not looking to appease a bunch of special interests. But every resident of Reedsville is welcome to voice an opinion."

The committee will meet at 7 p.m. on June 16 at the Reedsville Fire Hall.