

# Vision for Jewett City streetscape outlined

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**Griswold** - It could be five or 10 years off, but if downtown turns out anything like the plan, it's going to transform Jewett City.

Brian Kent, of Mystic-based Kent and Frost Landscape Architecture, on Thursday presented a comprehensive master plan for redesigning the downtown Main Street stretch, a streetscape project that town officials hope will revitalize the old mill town.

The 80-minute presentation to business owners, town officials and residents outlined a detailed vision for the future of the downtown stretch of the borough that could rival similar projects undertaken over the last several years in other towns, including as Putnam and Willimantic.

Kent coupled his talk with architect Rick Gipstein, who has been hired to manage the plan's façade program - something Gipstein said was an important component in creating a unified, aesthetically pleasing downtown.

Right now, though, Kent said there's nothing in Jewett City that "on a visceral level says this is a cool, unique place."

Kent said the beginnings are in place, with a compact downtown, nearby neighborhoods, a river system and an interesting history.

Each end of the stretch, marked by two "gateways" Kent labeled Ashland-Main and Slater-Main, will have trees and benches to welcome visitors to town. Outside Town Hall, Kent envisions a park with trees, benches and an informational kiosk.

The mill history of the town could be weaved into almost every element of the plan, Kent said, from a river walk with informational plaques to an alley beside Arremony's Quality Bakery, designated for outdoor eating, named "Eliezer's Alley" in honor of the borough's namesake, Eliezer Jewett.

The history could be relayed to banners lining the road declaring Jewett City a "River Heritage Community," Kent said.

Similarly, Gipstein spoke of the beautiful old building storefronts and architecture downtown that could be revamped through a façade improvement program. Business owners, many of whom attended, would carry the cost of renovation, Gipstein said, an issue that could delay or stall the program.

A \$200,000 Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant helped get the project started, said Town Planner Carl Fontneau, and could be leveraged into further grants or private investment. Fontneau said he'll know in November if the town's been awarded a \$500,000 revolving loan.

The town has already purchased planter boxes, new American flags, benches and trash receptacles, which will be installed in the spring.

"I would say the façade program plus the Town Hall modifications are the two highest priorities," Fontneau said. "Those items would make the biggest change in appearance for the least public money."

Business owners said they liked the concept but seemed slightly skeptical. Dean Rubino, who's owned Dean's Corner diner for 10 years, said the gateways may be "a tough sell."

"I think it can work, it's just a matter of if they can get people to put money into their buildings," Rubino said after the presentation. "From these plans, it's spectacular, but what we can accomplish is another story."