



Our View: Move ahead on market plan at Union Station

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Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente's plan to pump life into the long-vacant Railway Express Agency wing at Union Station is a no-brainer. The Bagg's Square area around Utica's train station has shown steady revival, and creating another venue to attract people can only add to the growth.

Now is the time to move ahead with the plan. It's not the time to bicker over the idea to eventually add a regional market there because it might "compete" with the Utica Farmers' Market at nearby Chancellor Park. That's parochialism at its worst.

The ideal solution would be for the Utica Farmers' Market to be folded into a regional market in the 35-bay wing that has sat vacant for decades. Picente said the county is working with Cornell Cooperative Extension and an outside company to market his idea, and it could be ready to go by the end of June.

This makes sense. It provides a well-known, central location that could become an attraction for visitors from throughout the region. Picente's plan to create a venue for vendors and artisans to sell their wares, complemented by the opportunity to buy fresh, local produce, would provide more fuel in the effort to revitalize the Bagg's Square area.

That effort has grown in recent years, spurred on by the county's decision in the late '90s to relocate several offices, including the Department of Motor Vehicles, to that site. That was followed by an on-site restaurant — now the Blue Flag Room — and several smaller venues.

Other redevelopment in the area includes the former Hurd Building, owned by brothers Tony and Vincent Esposito, whose company, JetNet, is located there, along with two loft apartments; the Doyle Hardware building, purchased in 2007 by Manhattan developer Stuart Bannatyne and now home to a new upscale nightclub, Pier's & Blake; nearby, Michael Pezzolanella and his son, Francis, have remodeled the former Cobblestone Building at 401 Broad St., which now includes businesses, loft apartments and a café. Meanwhile, the Children's Museum, at 311 Main St., remains an anchor in the area.

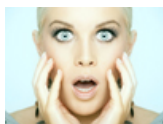
Redeveloping the Railway Express Agency wing is a natural next step. While it might start out as a seasonal attraction, it could be expanded down the road as the plan takes root. Having a centrally located farmers market as part of that package can only strengthen it.

If Utica wants to maintain its own separate farmers market on Wednesdays — Picente is talking about a Friday or Saturday event — so be it, both can operate. But many farmers markets appeal to families, and holding it on Saturday would attract larger crowds. An added benefit is that if kids grow up picking and eating local food, they will carry that appreciation — and healthy habit — into adulthood.

Participating farmers spend a great deal of time and energy to travel and set up, and while some might choose to attend both, there's also the likelihood two events could end up less than what one solid market could be. Picente's plan is a good one, and it needs to go forward.

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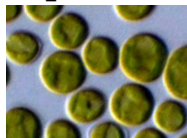


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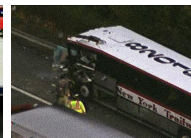
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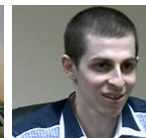
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