

Main Street

Let's imagine a new generation of interconnected enterprises reviving Main Street. What would that look like? Jane Jacobs can be our guide here, as our science advisor Sally Goerner explains: "You don't just want to build a restaurant over here and one-off enterprises there. You want to build a whole network of mutually supportive endeavors. These relationships among local businesses and (perhaps, one day) local farmers will help keep money circulating locally, which helps keep good jobs, good schools, and general economic vitality local as well."



The Stadium Theatre's 11,000 square feet of blank canvas could be ground zero for the reinvention of Tottenville.

A New Life for the Stadium Theatre

A locally anchored business can, theoretically, be housed either in a strip mall or on a Main Street. But a side-walked, human-scale Main Street, even a down-at-heels one like Tottenville's, provides something more than a strip mall's drive-through culture ever could. Main Streets are where a community's informal social encounters happen, where people are likely to stop and linger leaving cars parked to run errands, where conversation flows, and ideas are hatched.

It's true that few people walk along Tottenville's Main Street these days, where many buildings stand vacant and many have been boarded up for years. But Linda Cutler Hauck is one of those stalwart few. And on one afternoon this past summer she happened to bump into Robert Pelosi standing in front of the Stadium Theatre building he owns at 217 Main Street.

Linda had heard that Robert was planning to demolish the structure and construct a mixed-used space in its place. The huge ground floor theatre footprint, she had understood, was to be replaced by a smaller commercial space and an enclosed parking area. Apartments would be built on the second and third story. The city had already approved the building plans.



A stereo console, perhaps from the days when the theatre functioned as a rock music venue.



The interior demolition of the theatre revealed the structure's good bones.



Layers of plaster evoke the Stadium's multiple entertainment uses over the decades.

The Stadium Theatre had a long and storied history on Main Street. Built in 1927 and operated as a movie theatre until 1957, it later became a rock music venue and finally a roller rink in the 1970s. It also operated as a community center for a variety of organizations and causes over the years, including war bond drives and salvage collections during World War II. During the 1950s students from the local Catholic school attended classes in the theatre during construction of their new school building. Its doors have remained shuttered to the public since the 1980s.

As it turns out, the news Robert had to share with Linda was music to the town historian's ears. He had had a change of heart, he explained, after beginning the interior demolition and marveling at the building's good bones and solid construction. He was now thinking about restoring and repurposing it.

Linda immediately realized what an opportunity this might be for Main Street's revival. "The Stadium Theatre is probably the most beloved building in Tottenville, even though many locals living here today have never stepped inside," she says. "It evokes, for everyone, fond memories of a simpler life and time, happy moments spent with friends and family, and a world that no longer exists today. We cannot recreate this 'anew.'"

The Regenerating Tottenville project began a conversation with Robert that led to a meeting with Munroe Johnson, of New York City's Economic Development Corporation, and a group of his colleagues. Before that meeting took place, Robert had already resubmitted plans to restore the building. The new plans would leave the 11,000 square feet of ground level space intact. 22 apartment units on 2 floors would be created above. Robert reported that city planners were delighted with this plan and were eager to see it come to fruition. At the meeting with NYCEDC, Robert learned that he might be eligible for a new Emerging Developer Loan program the city was offering, part of a \$10 million commitment to pilot financing for smaller-scale, mixed-use industrial and commercial projects. The program would cover funds for pre-development expenses and some technical assistance.

Construction financing assistance from the city will indeed be welcome. But to realize their plan, Robert and Felice Pelosi, co-owners of the building, also need collaborators and seasoned advisors who can partner with him to conceive and carry out a viable business plan for the theatre's 11,000-square-foot ground floor blank canvas. What happens next at the Stadium theatre site could potentially transform Main Street and prove to skeptical Tottenville residents that the City of New York has not forgotten them after all. "Refurbishing this building would be something the community could be proud of," Linda believes. "It could spark the revitalization not only of Main Street, but our entire community."

Watch this space as the story of the Stadium Theatre continues.



Felice and Robert Pelosi, owners of the Stadium Theatre, are eager to create a space that will contribute to the regeneration of Main Street.

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THE FIELD GUIDE TO A REGENERATIVE ECONOMY

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