



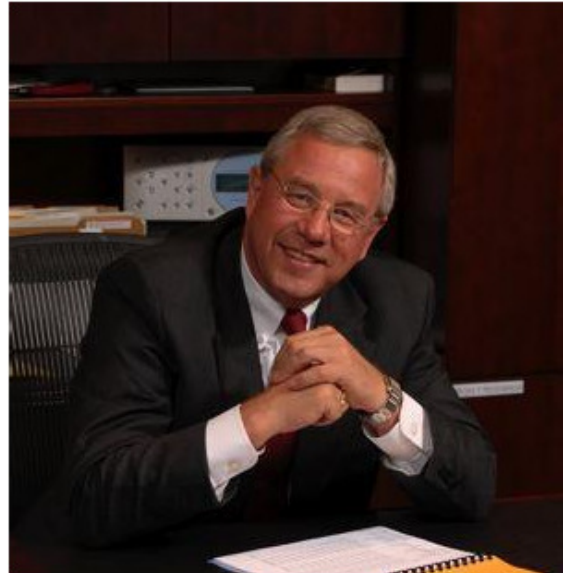
Zachariasse Shares Vision For Downtown Leesburg

By Kara Clark
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Jan Zachariasse says he has lived in a Leesburg thousands of miles away. The Waterford Development president and CEO recalls his youth in his native Holland, where every little town is reminiscent of the one celebrating its 250th anniversary this year, the county seat of Loudoun.

"Holland is a country where you have hundreds and hundreds of little Leesburgs. I have an affinity, a connection, a natural tie to that type of environment. I know what it feels like to live in a town that has 1,000 to 1,500 years of history. Leesburg has a couple hundred years, but the principle is still the same. The town has evolved over time to new visions, new thoughts, new ideas, new technology and different needs of the people. It is a living and breathing town that continuously evolves. I have seen how the old can be preserved and the new can be inserted. I see how people live there," Zachariasse said.

Zachariasse proudly shows his company's plans for Leesburg, where he currently has two downtown projects, totaling over \$100 million in private investment, in the site plan review process. One, he boasts, will provide Leesburg with the Class A office space it lacks in a 51,447-square-foot building, complete with an underground parking structure, on Wirt Street. The other, he says, will create a walkable, lively environment, providing restaurants with outdoor seating, a community gathering space along a Riverwalk environment and 502 more parking spaces in a structured parking garage to allow residents to park their cars off Church Street.

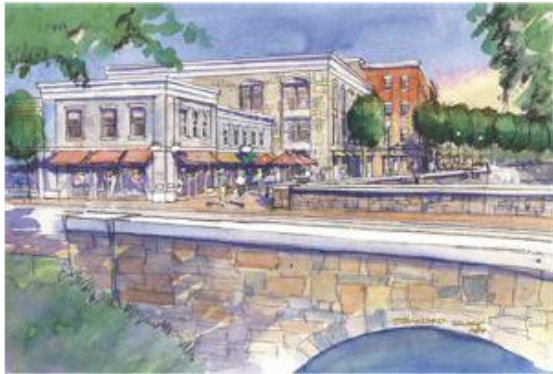


Zachariasse is confident that the two projects will create an emotional connection for those in the town to live, work and play, something he recalls fondly from his days in Holland. He sees the projects keeping the streets lively and the merchants faring well in their businesses. And the timing could not be better.

"We truly have I believe an unprecedented opportunity to reshape Leesburg into a new vision," he said.

Zachariasse points to the flood in Frederick, MD, back in the 1970s, that jumpstarted that town's downtown revitalization process. Now, many point to Frederick as an example of a successful downtown with heavy foot traffic, popular restaurants and a thriving performing arts community.

"We have our own flood albeit a very different flood," he said. "Our flood is residents leaving, retail moving out to business centers, town centers that are being built all the way around Leesburg and businesses that are leaving Leesburg because there's no expansion possibility. People don't want to look in the mirror; they don't want to see what is happening. We have to first acknowledge in any revitalization where we are is not a good place and where we are going is not necessarily a good place. We have to get everyone together and say what is a good place then there has to be a resolve to get behind the vision, get on the bus to jointly move to the same place."



Zachariasse said the rise of special interest committees or commissions has contributed to a "fragmented vision" for what the town should be and said that the rise of the Downtown Improvement Association has its roots in the need for a unified vision.

"People that hear of fragmentation are going to take it personal. It is something I feel and I have seen, something I have learned is not necessarily helpful. Building relationships and carving a common vision all of us can buy into is what I'm all about," he said.

And that vision is one that is shared by the DIA. Lisa Capraro, who serves as executive director of the downtown stakeholder group, said that Zachariasse's vision of a more walkable, vibrant downtown with a broadened amenity base and expanded floor plans for companies are in keeping with goals shared by DIA and recommendations offered by the Urban Land Institute. Of the Church Street project, which will contain the Riverwalk environment, Capraro predicts it would "really energize that corner" of downtown.

"It's really going to refocus some energy into that corner," Capraro said. "It helps broaden the Historic District in keeping with what the Urban Land Institute is telling us needs to happen. The way it ties into the Crescent District is going to be critical."

Zachariasse admits that he is taking "a huge risk" with his two projects in downtown Leesburg and said this is the first time when that emotional connection prevailed over dollars and cents.

"This is very the first project I have ever done where I bought into Leesburg on an emotional basis rather than pure economics. I felt I could really make a difference with these projects," he said.

He said he is warmed by the partnership that has been forged between the town and Waterford

Development and was happy to hear that a discussion was already had at town council to initiate future public hearings on the potential of increasing maximum heights in parts of the Crescent District, a planned redevelopment zone where one of Zachariasse's projects is located. Town council members enthusiastically endorsed the two projects, with both receiving unanimous approval. But Zachariasse said he hopes town residents and stakeholders will buy into the vision he sees for downtown.

"Downtown Leesburg has to become a town center in its own right and we have something that nobody else has; that is character, historic value and a certain diversity that is already there. We just need to improve all these individual components. These two projects are a great start in revitalizing and recreating a true town center," he said.

Zachariasse is quick to point out a distinction between downtown Leesburg and surrounding town centers, which he refers instead to as "development centers," as the downtown core is housed in a true town, rather than the development centers that instead choose to mimic the look of a real town. Zachariasse said that town centers and mixed-use areas where people can live, work and play seem to be a preferred choice of individuals these days.

"It has been said that a one-horse town is a one-store town," Zachariasse said. "What mixed-use projects create is multi-horse towns with multiple stores. It provides more opportunity and more people. In the existing tightly woven fabric you have to add people to the mix. Successful retail, business environment and residences come out of that. They all work together in unison and make the streets come alive. That's the vision for Leesburg. People want to integrate all in one environment. If that is where the future of development lies wouldn't Leesburg be one of most phenomenal places? We don't have to build a new town. There is already a town. We can combine the old and the new. That's why the future of Leesburg is so incredibly bright and exciting."

Zachariasse said that Leesburg's potential is "way ahead of every other environment I can think of" and said that he sees his two projects as catalysts for attracting businesses to set up in the town, as well as increasing downtown foot traffic. He predicts that the success of the two projects can only further the successes being seen by current downtown merchants and he is making sure the retailers who set up shop in his Church Street development will not impinge on the business of other merchants.

"To bring people to the street is the most important thing I can do for all retailers and add things that are not existing," he said.

Zachariasse said he has "got to do this right" before he can think about future projects in Leesburg, but said he "wont stop here" if these two projects prove to be successful.

Zachariasse is the first to admit that he cannot be held wholly responsible for the revitalization of downtown Leesburg but he hopes his two projects can "jumpstart the engine."

"I can't [achieve downtown revitalization] all by myself," he said. "But I can make a dent. I'm only a piece of the puzzle, but pieces of the puzzle are numerous and have to start someplace."