

# THE SUN

## Summit to seek answers for Westerly's downtown

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By EMILY DUPUIS / Sun Staff Writer | [5 comments](#)

WESTERLY - Reviving Westerly's struggling Main Street will be at the center of talks this week.

Organized as a "Downtown Summit," the Thursday morning forum is expected to bring together business and property owners, town officials and state representatives.

"My goal is to bring attention to the challenges and promise of the downtown retail community," said Town Manager Steven Hartford. "I have noticed a lot of vacancies and it has become an area of particular concern."

Hartford said he hopes to hear what, if anything, the town can do to play a "meaningful" role in improving opportunities for downtown retailers.

"Because things, at this point, do not seem good in terms of the vacancies and turnovers," he said.

Some 75 property owners and 40 business owners from Broad, High, Main and Canal streets and Railroad Avenue have been invited to participate.

The summit is also expected to feature a panel comprised of Washington Trust Company Executive Vice President Michael Rauh, Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation Director of Business Development Katharine Flynn, Rhode Island Housing Executive Director Richard Godfrey, Greater Westerly-Pawcatuck Area Chamber of Commerce Director Lisa Konicki and Sun Publishing Company President and Publisher Timothy Ryan.

The meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. Thursday on the third floor of the Westerly Public Library.

"A lot of people believe, and I agree, this is the heart of the town," Hartford said of the riverfront shopping and dining area.

The downtown's health is important to the overall quality of life in Westerly, he said, adding, "It always has been and it always will be."

Hartford first announced the idea of holding a local forum to address the struggles of downtown retailers, restaurateurs and property owners in October, following the closure or relocation of several businesses.

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