Some shop owners see drop in business from Revitalization construction

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BELMONT — Owners of business along Belmont's Main Street said they are feeling the pinch on their bottom line as they wait for the town's Revitalization Project to finish up construction work in front of their stores.

Currently a large portion of Main Street is nothing but dirt road, with traffic backing up on a daily basis as motorists are either slowed or detoured down a side street.

Owners of the Belmont Village Store and Belmont Hardware said they have noticed a decrease in business as residents have been staying away from the village area to avoid the construction.

In the case of the Village Store, owner Ramzi Alshawafi said he has seen a 40 percent decrease in business since the project began. "From now until this weekend, I am not sure how I am going to make it," Alshawafi said dejected.

"For the past six weeks, since construction started, my business has seen a decline of 5 percent per day. If they keep it up, my business might be in danger," Alshawafi said.

Alshawafi was clear that he doesn't blame the construction workers themselves, saying, "they are trying to help."

Alshawafi said that with many of his usual customer base is evaporating because of the construction, though, he added that many of the construction workers have started to get their lunch
and do light shopping at the store. The construction workers business does little to mitigate the overall damage done by the project to his bottom line, Alshawafi said.

Because of the traffic created by the construction, and the rough condition of the road, "People try their best to stay away, it is really hurting me a lot," Alshawafi explained, adding, "It is very difficult for people to stop by to get what they need. My lunchtime is now mostly the construction workers, but for others it's very hard to stop by due to the traffic and detours."

As to whether or not the completed project will bring an increase in business to his store,

Alshawafi was skeptical saying, "It will take awhile if that happens. A lot of customers might get used to the new route they take to avoid this way, and others might not even know the construction is over when it's finished."

While construction is not scheduled to end until spring, Alshawafi said construction workers told him that the section of Main Street in front of his house should be paved by this weekend and any digging that will need to be done by his store will be finished by then as well.

Alshawafi said he has talked to other business owners in the area and said that they are experiencing the same problems.

Steve Woodbury, part owner of Belmont Hardware said that his business has seen a dip as well because of construction but not on the level of the Village Shop.

"When people need to come here they come with something in mind, it's not convenience shopping like over there," Woodbury explained.

However Woodbury did call construction an inconvenience, saying, "traffic gets tied up a lot and people don't want to" deal with it.

Woodbury said the worst part of the construction is when traffic backs up, and that for his business the construction couldn't come at a worst time because it is the season when people need both lawn mowers and snow blowers.

Customers Jason Perkins and Nick Bilodeau of Laconia were picking up equipment from the hardware store and had difficulty with parking because they couldn't park on the street while loading the equipment they needed.

Despite the inconvenience, Perkins said he hasn't noticed the construction too much but said it is probably a different story for locals.
"A lot of people say they plan to come in but see the traffic and think again," Woodbury said.

While noticing a dip in business, Woodbury said it hasn't severely impacted his bottom line.

One business owner, who says he sees no difference created by the construction, is Peter LaPointe of LaPointe Barber Shop.

"I haven't seen much impact, they do the best they can and I think they are doing a good job. In this business it's hard to say if it is hurting me, there are seasonal changes, and I can't pinpoint if it is hurting me," LaPointe said.

The Revitalization Project is a plan to add a service and recreational center to the Village area of Belmont while also moving the location of the bandstand. Busby Construction, who is also handling repairs on the still closed Tioga Bridge on Church St, is handling construction for the Revitalization Project.