

Halifax's Agricola Street evolving into an urban epicentre

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New retail moving in beside bars, restaurants



Walking down Agricola Street, which has long been known for its popular restaurants and bars, there are an increasing number of placards that tout progressive business practices.

North End Halifax's Agricola Street has been creating a lot of buzz for bars and restaurants, but it is evolving into an urban epicentre with places to practice yoga, buy local produce—even do a little shopping for high end clothes.

Sattva boutique owner Sarah Bannerman Andrews opened her store on April 8, and according to the North End Business Association website, is the latest addition to the 62 businesses on Agricola.

“My store is all about connecting people to the products they are buying,” Andrews said on Thursday. “And along with that goes this greater sense of community.”

This sense of community can be felt by taking a stroll down the street, beginning from Young to the Halifax Common. Urban buzzwords like “sustainable”, “raw”, “craft beer” and “locally sourced” are scrawled across chalkboard signs signalling a theme of commonality.

Local Source Market and enVie are the home of wellness, health and vegan options aplenty. Trendy bars and restaurants like Lion & Brig and Agricola Street Brasserie are the home of communal eating and brunch. And by taking a few steps, a local can shop for their baby at Nurtured, buy a sofa at furniture store 31 Westgate or go shopping for themselves at Sattva boutique.

“It's good for all our businesses and it makes it easier for our customers,” said Andrews.

One attraction of Agricola Street is it's not a main traffic artery. A huge draw for small businesses here is the lack of available parking spaces downtown.

Andrews says she considered opening up shop in the downtown area but quickly changed her mind because of the lack of parking and constant construction.

The North End Business Association has been keeping busy over the last few years, as the area has attracted young entrepreneurs who are opening restaurants, cafes and artisanal breweries. Executive director Patty Cuttell-Busby calls the addition of retail stores the “natural evolution of development.”

She says once the place became a vibrant arts and culture destination, it immediately became a good place for retail. “We are seeing unique, independent retailers choosing to locate here,” she said. She thinks they are making the move because of the neighbourhood and the people who live in it.

Cuttell-Busby describes the north end population as a generally younger community (think young families, with an average age from 30 to 45 years old). She says this population is interested in an urban lifestyle, one where feeling part of a community is very important.

This creative, friendly vibe—one that also exists on neighbouring streets like Gottingen, Young and Robie—has attracted people from outside the city. “It’s turned the north end into a destination,” said Cuttell-Busby.

Retail is growing in the area, and Andrews hopes to see more retail stores soon.

“We think a retail store can serve a bigger purpose,” said Andrews. She wants customers to feel as though they are apart of something larger.

Nurtured has a similar mantra, and its located just a few blocks from Sattva, between North and Charles. The store sells products for parenting, and their mission is to reduce the impact consumers have on the environment. They also specialize in parenting advice, integrating that word “community” into the standard definition of what retail means.

Nurtured moved from their home on Robie St. to Agricola St. back in 2014. “We wanted parking,” said owner Jolyn Swain. Nurtured shares a parking lot with neighbours Cyclesmith and the NSLC. She also wanted to stay in the neighbourhood because it was up and coming at the time, and showing signs of development.

“We didn’t come to the neighbourhood because it was a retail sector, it was becoming a business sector,” said Swain.

Swain sees how Agricola’s clientele is growing, but she is skeptical of it transforming into a “sceney neighbourhood.”

“The business owners here have to be invested in seeing the neighbourhood, meet the needs of people who are local as well as the destination it’s becoming,” said Swain, adding she is confident that Agricola businesses are up for the challenge.

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