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Originally Published: 7/26/2011

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## Loan for GoggleWorks Shops a welcome development (7/26/11)

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**The Issue:** The nonprofit Our City Reading has received a \$1 million state loan to fill empty retail space at Entertainment Square.

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**Our Opinion:** Bringing in more restaurants and shops is critical to achieving the dream of a thriving arts district downtown.

**TOWN SQUARE**

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August marks the third anniversary of the Reading Movies 11 and IMAX at Second and Washington streets, and the nearby GoggleWorks Center for the Arts has been around since 2005. Yet the Entertainment Square district is still very much a work in progress.

Harry J. Deitz Jr. on Facebook

Some aspects of the project have proved more difficult than anticipated, yet local retailer and civic booster Albert R. Boscov is still pushing to achieve his vision of a thriving downtown district filled with restaurants, shops and entertainment destinations.

Construction has begun on the \$16.7 million, 59-unit GoggleWorks Apartments, a long-awaited project aimed at attracting middle-class residents to the neighborhood. The city also is spending money on improving housing in the Ricktown Arts District in the same part of the city. Again the goal is to encourage people who typically gravitate toward the suburbs to consider moving into the city.

The latest news is that Boscov's nonprofit Our City Reading received a \$1 million low-interest state loan to fill perhaps the most gaping hole in the Entertainment Square District: the retail spaces in the Albert Boscov Plaza parking garage at Second and Washington streets. The retail space is now known as the GoggleWorks Shops. Until very recently the only tenant there was WFMZ Channel 69, which has its local studios at Second and Court streets.

Just about everyone downtown, including owners of existing restaurants, recognized the need for more dining and retail options in the vicinity of the movie theater and GoggleWorks to make the area a more attractive destination for suburbanites. Yet Boscov has had a difficult time finding qualified restaurateurs willing to locate there.

It didn't help that the timing of the project coincided with the economic downturn - when the restaurant industry was contracting rather than expanding. In the early going, Boscov said, most of the people seeking to locate in the space lacked experience and money. He is determined to provide the spaces to businesspeople who are likely to succeed.

Boscov expects to use the money to attract restaurants and help them keep prices down.

Signs of progress were visible even before the loans were announced. The first restaurant in the space, Panevino, opened in the spring. Many movie fans are coming out to the theater to enjoy this summer's hot films. And the GoggleWorks remains popular as it approaches its sixth anniversary in September.

We hope the infusion of funds will help Boscov's organization fill in the missing pieces at Entertainment Square and entice people to stop and enjoy the city on the way to or from their movie or GoggleWorks event.

Once that's done, there's plenty more to be done in Reading. We look forward to seeing work begin on another of Boscov's pet projects: the hotel across from the Sovereign Center. With revitalization on one end of Penn Street and in the middle, perhaps good things will happen along the rest of the street without a push from a government or nonprofit entity, and downtown Reading can rebound in a big way.

*The Reading Eagle Editorial board consists of editor Harry J. Deitz Jr., managing editor David S. Mowery, editorial editor James S. Homan and Mark Nemirow.*

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