

Editorials & comments

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Lake Ave. sewer main a debacle...

By JUDITH OGDEN

At a time when many businesses are struggling to survive the economic disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the last thing that hard working small business owners deserve is to be misled about important issues that could significantly impact the future of their businesses.

Regrettably, at a time when the hard working owners of small businesses on Lake Avenue need honesty and transparency from government officials, they are instead being victimized with vague but decidedly inaccurate information by people who they should be able to trust, but can't. What they deserve is straight talk and a real plan to connect Lake Avenue to sewers.

There are important facts which seem to be deliberately obscured in public discussions. They are:

- Gyrodyne has not agreed to allow businesses on Lake Avenue to connect to its sewage plant within the proposed mega development. What the company has said in official documents is that it cannot be required to do so, but would be willing to discuss the possibility "under certain conditions... at a future time" (Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) Page 9-10). No one has ever suggested that Gyrodyne would pay the cost of sewerage Lake Avenue.

- Gyrodyne has made clear that it plans to build a sewer plant sized only to meet the needs of businesses on its own property, not a larger plant sized to accept sewer flows from Lake Avenue businesses currently, or an even larger plant for the anticipated growth that a Lake Avenue renaissance would create.

- No one has ever suggested that Gyrodyne would agree to pay for the larger plant to accept sewage from elsewhere, or for the expensive network of pipes that would be needed to connect individual businesses and pump sewage from Lake Avenue businesses to the Gyrodyne site.

- Because financial analysis of costs to business owners or affordability of connecting Lake Avenue

businesses required pursuant to Section 209-C of New York State Town Law has not been completed, business owners have no idea how much their taxes would increase if they were connected to a sewer plant at Gyrodyne. They deserve to know, and they deserve to know now.

- Two separate media accounts in recent weeks have quoted a Town official as saying that the alternative to connecting Lake Avenue businesses to Gyrodyne by building a separate plant would cost \$157 million. The problem is that there is no financial analysis, feasibility study or engineering report to support this statement. Instead, it appears to have been made out of convenience and without any facts to support it. If the Town has information to support this assertion, business owners on Lake Avenue and the general public deserve to see it immediately. If not, the Town should acknowledge that there is no basis for the \$157 million figure and apologize.

The hard-working small business owners who make our community special deserve honesty and transparency from government officials, and straight talk from the media when it comes to issues that can significantly impact their financial future – like what they would have to pay for sewers. Regardless of what option is ultimately selected, connecting Lake Avenue to sewers will cost tens of millions of dollars. There is no "sewers for free" scenario, and business owners deserve to be told the truth about the costs they will be expected to pay to be connected to sewers.

The Lake Avenue renaissance is much needed. The potential that a well-planned renovation could provide is exciting to look forward to. The idea that Lake Avenue is dependent upon the Gyrodyne mega-development is a myth. One exists independently from the other. Let's not put the cart before the horse, a clear well thought out plan is what is needed.

(Editor's Note: Judith Ogden is an elected trustee of Village of Head of the Harbor, a member of the St. James-Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition and a resident of St. James.)