



St. James horse has its head returned

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Demonstrators on Main Street in Smithtown Friday, February 26 support the Smithtown Fire Department decision to reverse an earlier determination and return a blue-line flag to the back of one of its fire trucks. See story, page 7. -David Ambro photo

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Civics stepping up opposition to Gyrodyne development plan

By DAVID AMBRO

During a presentation about the master plan by the civic organization We Are Smithtown Monday, March 1, Head of the Harbor Village Trustee Judy Ogden announced a stepped up community effort to oppose the controversial 75-acre Gyrodyne development plan.

On a mostly pastoral site on the southeast corner of Route 25A in one of the most rural and historic areas of St. James, Gyrodyne proposes to build a hotel and convention center, two assisted living facilities, two medical office buildings and a sewage treatment plant, to which the Town of Smithtown wants to connect a \$4 million Lake Avenue sewer main. To advance the development plan, the town is requiring Gyrodyne to undertake an environmental impact statement to comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

We Are Smithtown is opposed to the Gyrodyne project and it was a major topic of discussion during the civic association's hour long presentation at Monday's forum. Civic President James Bouklas called Gyrodyne the wrong development in the wrong place, "a disservice and disrespectful to the people who live there."

If approved by the town, Mr. Bouklas said the

Gyrodyne development will send the community cascading into development—"a Domino effect," he called it—that will destroy St. James.

Trustee Ogden was the first speaker after the civics' presentation, which was held via Zoom. She disclosed that she is a Head of the Harbor trustee and lives near the Gyrodyne site on Route 25A in the Mills Pond Historic District, "which is being overlooked," she said. Trustee Ogden thanked the civic association for its presentation and said she was at the meeting to join in the Gyrodyne fight.

Trustee Ogden said the draft master plan update under review by the town reports that St. James is the second most densely populated hamlet with the least amount of open space, 1.6% compared to a town wide average in other hamlets of 18%.

She said the group with which she is active, has been writing letters to the town opposing the Gyrodyne development plan. She said the town has not responded. She also cited a town Zoom meeting she was involved with last month about the draft master plan update in St. James at which she and other residents expressed concerns about the Gyrodyne development plan.

"We started an organization that I want to let people at tonight's meeting know about," she said,

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Gyrodyne in crosshairs of new St. James civic coalition

Master plan forum used to rally troops to oppose St. James development plans



The We Are Smithtown draft master plan Zoom forum Monday, March 1

(Continued from page 1) and introduced the Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition.

She said the coalition is urging residents to call and email Town Supervisor Edward Wehrheim and town board members to lobby for a development moratorium until the master plan update is finalized, so it can be followed. During his presentation, Mr. Bouklas cited several ways in which the Gyrodyne development plan is in conflict with the Gyrodyne plan. We Are Smithtown has for two years been calling for a moratorium on development during the master plan update process.

Trustee Ogden said the St. James-Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition was formed to fight the development of Gyrodyne and other surrounding sites, including the nine-acre Bull Run Farm on Mills Pond Road where an assisted living facility is planned, the cascade effect Mr. Bouklas had spoken about. Trustee Ogden accused the town of poor planning related to parks, but said there is still land left in some areas that can be used for parkland.

According to Trustee Ogden, Town of Smithtown planners disclosed during the master plan Zoom meeting that BB & GG Farm was going to become parkland and the development rights are being purchased on it.

"They spoke too soon. It was inappropriate for them to speak. It was a negotiation that was being

worked on and it has fallen through," she said. "I bring it up because when our representatives and when our community speaks they need to speak honestly about what is truly happening. They say things out of convenience but they aren't always truthful."

Trustee Ogden expressed hope that the BB&GG Farm project can be reconsidered and that it can still become a park. She cited open spaces along the Route 25A corridor that are threatened with development. She said it is going to be a tough fight and urged residents to get on board and help. "We know it's going to be a tough fight," Trustee Ogden said.

Mr. Bouklas thanked Trustee Ogden for joining the meeting. He said We Are Smithtown knows what's at stake, was the first group to call for a moratorium, and supports the coalition in the fight against the Gyrodyne development plan.

In other matters, the We Are St. James presentation at Monday's Zoom meeting, which was attended by 85 people, was harsh in its criticism of the town. Civic Vice President Michael Cooley led the presentation and criticized the town resoundingly. He provided a recap of the town's master plan deliberations, which included before and after public outreach and public comment periods that are ongoing. He said it hasn't allowed for enough public involvement. He said the master plan update has been

prepared by H2M, which he referred to as a New Jersey company, although it is a Melville-based firm.

Mr. Dooley also criticized the town for not imposing a moratorium during the master plan process, for not forming a residential advisory committee in the master plan process, and for rolling out the red carpet for developers.

We Are Smithtown founding member and another of its officers Phyllis Hart spoke about housing. She said the market right now for single family homes is as hot as it gets, homes selling at above the listing price and within a day of going on the market.

She said there is no mass exodus from Smithtown neighborhoods yet they are only lip service in the draft master plan.

There were also a number of speakers after the presentation, one resident proposing that there be a bicycle master plan created, another urging the senior center to be reopened, and another St. James resident, Michael Sassone, a contractor and fisherman in Stony Brook Harbor, who expressed concern about overdevelopment, and Cindy Smith, of Stony Brook, who closed the meeting repeating the rally cry against the Gyrodyne development plan and the proposed moratorium.

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