

Perspective

Gyrodyne's plans are bad for Smithtown and local waterways

Last month, as the Town of Smithtown prepared to accept the environmental engineering study completed for Gyrodyne's 75-acre Flowerfield subdivision on 25A, it received 66 letters opposing the development — and none supporting it.

Opposition came from environmentalists and civic leaders; regional infrastructure specialists and local government officials — and from within Smithtown as well as from outside it.

Despite the cascade of no's, the planning board is poised to adopt the developers finding statement allowing the project to go forward.

Approving this project would be a disaster. The planners' failure to take regional concerns seriously raises real questions about whether the Gyrodyne megadevelopment is really in the best interests of Smithtown and the North Shore. It continues a pattern of acting on questionable premises, overlooking expert opinions and ignoring inconvenient truths.

New York State law requires planners to reach out and communicate with community leaders and officials across local boundaries. Simply put: Planners cannot plan effectively in isolation. Yet Smithtown's planners have shown a blinkered vision, ignoring those not part of the "in group" in pursuit of what seems to have been

a foregone conclusion.

Regional environmentalists have scrutinized the study, and many contend it fails to adequately gauge risk to water and air quality, preserve enough open space or inadequately uncover past use of agricultural toxins. State Assemblyman Steve Englebright (D-Setauket), who chairs the assembly's standing committee on environmental conservation, warns that the sewage plant discharge may nurture enough algae to turn the harbor and local waterways green within three to five years. This would mean that swimming, boating and fishing will be banned and tourism dollars decreased. Astonishingly, his warnings have been ignored.

The project's anticipated impact on traffic has been vastly underestimated. The additional traffic generated will cause major traffic tie-ups at multiple choke points; redirect traffic onto local streets; and increase safety hazards everywhere. The ability of emergency vehicles

to navigate through the increased congestion has not been addressed.

The combination of additional traffic, out-of-scale commercial architecture and anticipated infrastructure expansion foretell a community in unwelcome transformation. For many of us, the region's vibrant connections to our colonial history matter enormously. George Washington did indeed ride along North Country Road (aka Route 25A) and we celebrate that. It's in our DNA.

Roiling the issue further are the multiple changes Gyrodyne has slipped into the project since the environmental study was completed.

About three weeks ago, Gyrodyne eliminated a proposed restaurant and conference center and announced that an assisted living center company was pulling out of the deal. Yet, no changes were made in the environmental statement. How can this be?

Perhaps the most mystifying aspect of all is the Lake Avenue sewage pipeline debacle. Town

Supervisor Edward R. Wehrheim (R) and town board members have touted the construction of a new sewage plant able to handle business-district waste. They constructed a \$4 million sewage connecting line before the project was even approved.

As many residents now know, Gyrodyne never applied for the county permit needed to legally process sewage from off-premises. Lake Avenue businesses would generate about 71,000 gallons per day, exceeding the plant's permitted 100,000-gallon capacity. In other words, Gyrodyne couldn't process their sewage even if the plant arose tomorrow.

Even if it could, would it be worth it? If the Gyrodyne mega-development gets constructed, it will batter life along the 25A corridor. We could expect snarled traffic well beyond rush hours; traffic redirection onto local streets; waterways closed to recreational use; loss of the region's colonial charm; and countless more subdivisions on former farms and nurseries.

Those who hope to preserve their community should contact Supervisor Wehrheim and the Smithtown town board members and urge them to vote "No" to Gyrodyne.

Cindy Smith is founder of United Communities Against Gyrodyne Development.



By Cindy Smith

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