



PROPER PLANNING: During a public hearing on the Town of Smithtown master plan update at the Smithtown Senior Citizen Center Tuesday, August 3, Supervisor Edward Wehrheim (right) addresses the crowd while Head of the Harbor Planning Board member James Scully (left) addresses the board. **-David Ambro photos**

Gyrodyne top topic of master plan hearing

By **DAVID AMBRO**

A proposal to develop the 75-acre Gyrodyne property in St. James dominated the testimony at the Smithtown Town Board hearing on the draft comprehensive master plan update Tuesday, August 3.

St. James residents pushed anew for a moratorium on large development applications until the master plan is enacted by the town board, which is expected in the first quarter of next year.

The first speaker at the hearing, St. James resident and attorney Joseph Bollhofer, got right to the Gyrodyne issue. During his remarks, Mr. Bollhofer said the master plan should recommend that the 75-acre Gyrodyne property be rezoned to residential property like it was in the 1960s, a proposal greeted by applause from the audience.

Mr. Bollhofer also supported to applause a development moratorium until the master plan process is completed.

Mr. Bollhofer said the traffic impact of the proposed Gyrodyne industrial development is being understated. He cited a decades-old litigation between Gyrodyne and the State of New York and alleged that testimony by Gyrodyne expert witnesses at that time is completely at odds with what Gyrodyne is representing now in its environmental impact statement.

“Gyrodyne itself made the case against its current proposal,” Mr. Bollhofer said.

He cited Gyrodyne witnesses in the previous case who said the property is not suitable for commercial development and that it would have significant impact on traffic in the Route 25A corridor in St. James. He said, too, that it is inconceivable that the town can undertake a master plan without an expert traffic study, which includes the Gyrodyne property and parcels to be developed.

The last speaker of the hearing was James Scully, a member of the Head of the Harbor Village Planning Board and a life-long St. James resident, finished with the Gyrodyne issue. He commended the town board for initiating the process to update the

master plan. He complained, though, that the town left its incorporated villages out of the process.

Mr. Scully cited a lengthy letter from Head of the Harbor Village Mayor Douglas Dahlgard to the town urging that the villages be included in the

planning process. He said the town ignored the mayor’s letter, “which is upsetting to me.”

Mr. Scully also charged that the town has ignored requests by Head of the Harbor officials for a moratorium

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Supervisor has positive take on public input

By **DAVID AMBRO**

After more than two hours of presentation and testimony about the draft master plan update at the Smithtown Senior Citizen Center Tuesday, August 3, Smithtown Town Supervisor Edward Wehrheim said there were no surprises and that he was pleased with the level of input and decorum of those who spoke.

After a contentious start with the first speaker, St. James resident and attorney Joseph Bollhofer, Mr. Wehrheim said he didn’t think the night was going to go so smoothly. Things settled down though and dozens of residents got up and offered constructive criticism or support for the master plan.

During an interview after the meeting Tuesday, Supervisor Wehrheim said the public comment period will remain open through August 9. Written comments can be submitted to the Smithtown Planning Department.

After the close of the comment period, the master plan has received a “positive declaration” under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), which means it will now have to undergo an environmental impact statement, which will require another public hearing. Supervisor Wehrheim said the expectation is that the process will be completed and the master plan ready for enactment by the town board sometime in spring of 2022.

“I think myself and the board were

very pleased. It was very civil. So in that matter it was productive,” Mr. Wehrheim said. “I think it was a good meeting, very productive, and again I do want to compliment the people here. It was very civil and therefore very productive.”

He said, too, that the presentation by the town at the onset of the hearing was informative and enlightened the people about the master plan update.

The supervisor said town officials took a lot of notes during Tuesday’s hearing. “We will take a look at the comments, he said.

He said the Gyrodyne industrial development subdivision application has been a hot-button issue. “It always has been, so we understood why those folks were here,” he said.

“We knew that the hearing would have a lot of people speaking about Gyrodyne, Fort Salonga civics, and Nesconset/We Are Smithtown. Frankly, we understand they have their concerns and we try to address them the best we can, but they are looking at this town quite differently than I am,” Mr. Wehrheim said. “If elected again for another term, we are going to take our vision and keep doing what we feel is right.”

“When we poll our residents, just as they do, we come out on the positive side,” Mr. Wehrheim said. “We are trying to keep young people here. That industrial park is vital to the health of this community and you heard it in the presentation. They are concerned about the residential homes. We’re not

touching any residential homes.”

Mr. Wehrheim said the purpose of developing blighted sites such as the Tesla and the old Smithtown Concrete property is to be able to maintain the strength of the single-family neighborhoods.

As for the critics of the apartments that are being proposed, Mr. Wehrheim said they are being occupied by Smithtown residents who no longer want to live in a house but who don’t want to move out of town. He said the 98 apartment units at Fieldstone on Jericho Turnpike in Commack, once the site of a derelict motel, will be totally occupied by August 25.

Supervisor Wehrheim said there were a lot of Head of the Harbor Village residents who spoke about Gyrodyne. He said that he told Mr. Bollhofer in the past that if they want the site preserved as open space to come up with the money and buy it. “You will not hear opposition from me if you make it open space and buy it,” he said. “But we can’t dictate to a commercial property owner what they can do with it. We can’t.”

In conclusion, Supervisor Wehrheim said there was a lot of good input at the hearing and it showed that the community at large is pleased with the way the master plan is progressing. He said the town Department of Environment and Waterways will now begin to prepare the draft environmental impact statement in advance of the next public hearing.

Residents express concerns about land use issues as town moves to final stage of master plan process

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on development and a request to change the Gyrodyne site back to residential have also been ignored by the town. "I'm not so sure it is an example of coordination and partnership and I would ask that in further planning it be done in conjunction with villages like Head of the Harbor," Mr. Scully said. "In addition, I would ask that local municipalities play an active and integral role in the planning process."

While Gyrodyne was the foremost issue of the hearing, there were others raised. Kings Park resident and businessman Larry Flynn spoke at the hearing about the entrepreneurial spirit in the downtown Kings Park central business (CB) zoning district, and he said that business owners there have been investing in improvements to their businesses. He urged the town board to keep the downtown in the CB zone and not to change all of the downtowns to neighborhood business (NB) as the draft master plan suggests.

"Central business has been working in Kings Park for 70 years," Mr. Flynn said. "To change it to something else at this point in life I think is a mistake."

Another speaker, Kieth McCartney, President of the Fort Salonga Association and a Bread and Cheese Hollow Road resident since 1957, raised concern about a proposal to build an organic yard waste processing facility on the land of Toby Carlson on the Sunken Meadow Parkway and Meadow Glen Road. He strongly opposed changing the zoning on the Carlson site to heavy industry, which drew a round of applause.

He said the organic waste facility was proposed in September 2018, and that Mr. Carlson has applied to bring a railroad spur to the site. He said at the Commack and Kings Park master plan forums last year there was significant objection to the organic processing facility proposal. He said there are environmental concerns, the Carlson property sitting atop the Long Island groundwater aquifers, and he said there will also be air pollution from such a facility.

"We are already bombarded by other businesses in that area," he said.

We Are Smithtown Civic Association Vice President Patty Stoddard called the draft plan a "love letter to apartments." She said it will

result in Smithtown becoming the sixth borough of New York City, which drew applause.

She said 77% of Smithtown residents want to retain the residential, single-family character of the community and she said the master plan should strive for that. She also said traffic should be addressed.

"It's time that we listen to the residents and have a plan that reflects our needs," she said.

We Are Smithtown President James Bouklas also criticized the apartment component of the master plan. He said it would result in three-story apartment buildings, 1,000 units of apartments in Hauppauge Industrial Park, which he is opposed to.

Another We Are Smithtown Vice President, Phyllis Hart, said the draft master plan caters to developers and their lobbyists. She said, though, that the residents will have to live with the results. "We need to pause this process and go back to the drawing board," she said. "We deserve a master plan that will reduce density and traffic, not make it worse. We should be focusing on affordable single-family homes, not apartments, to preserve the suburban character of Smithtown."

There were also those who spoke in favor of the draft master plan.

Celebrate St. James Past, Present and Future President Patricia Clark spoke in favor of the draft master plan, which said it lays out a plan for revitalization of the downtown while maintaining a strong property tax base.

Kings Park Chamber of Commerce President Anthony Tanzi, a member of the Smithtown Board of Zoning Appeals, also spoke. He said the comprehensive plan has been talked about for years and years and that it is good to see it finally coming to fruition. He commended the town board for the open and transparent process it used to prepare the plan.

Town Planning Director Peter Hans offered closing rebuttal and remarks about the hearing testimony. He said the master plan has not been updated in more than 60 years because it is not an easy process.

"We are trying to prepare a plan that we believe will be a balance between preservation and development," he said, adding that all of the local officials involved in the process are town residents.



UNSAFE STREETS: Colette Porciello, of Head of the Harbor, told the Smithtown Town Board Tuesday, August 3 that she was injured while bike riding on the busy roads around the Gyrodyne property.

He said the town is committed to the vitality of the downtowns. "The supervisor and the town board have made it clear that the downtowns are the lifeblood of the town," he said. "We are committed to trying to bring sewers to Kings Park. We are working every week and having meetings with the county to work out sewers in Smithtown."

At the town's master plan forums, Mr. Hans said a majority of people said they wanted the downtowns to be cool like Huntington, Patchogue or Northport. "That is what we have been trying to do with the concepts," he said. Mr. Hans said the master plan only proposes increased building heights in the downtown near the railroad station near town hall to facilitate transit oriented development.

He said the Hauppauge Industrial Park is the

economic engine of the town and there would not be many jobs here without it. He said the town amended the zoning code to allow mixed use buildings on 13 sites in the park. He said one application had been submitted but it has subsequently been withdrawn and there is not currently any application for a mixed use building with apartments in the industrial park.

As for the organic waste processing facility proposed for the Carlson property in Kings Park, Mr. Hans said there was an amendment being considered but in the last week town officials suspended that review and it will not permit organic waste processing facilities in the town. There was a round of applause for that announcement.

About the CB and NB zoning, Mr. Hans said there is some confusion about that.

He said the zoning in the downtowns will become NB but what is being proposed is to eliminate the CB zoning classification but still allow the same zoning as there is currently in the downtowns.

"What we are proposing is not a one size fits all. Kings Park is very different than Smithtown, Smithtown is very different in character than St. James," he said. "So what is happening is that we are crafting individual zoning for the downtowns."

He said Kings Park will have four different zoning categories for downtown Kings Park alone. He said the new NB will essentially be the current CB. "So if you look at what CB is now there will be parts of it that will remain but it will be called NB," he said. "I really think if you look at it side-by-side on Pulaski Road or on 25A it is really the same thing but we are calling it something else to avoid confusion."

Mr. Hans said Gyrodyne is like poking a hornet's nest. He said the Gyrodyne proposal is a subdivision application that is pending before the Smithtown Planning Board and that residents will be able to make their comments to the board once a hearing is scheduled.

Mr. Hans said the uses in the plan are conceptual and that Gyrodyne currently has no contracts in hand for developers for the lots in the subdivision. He said the hotel and other proposals were in demand when the application was submitted, but that COVID has changed the land-use landscape and it is uncertain what will be developed on the site.

"What this is meant to do is establish a threshold for the environmental impact study. If adopted by the Planning Board, and I'm not saying it will be, this will be the maximum threshold for development," Mr. Hans said. He pointed out that the intent of the master plan is to preserve the character of the Route 25A corridor in St. James.

The public hearing was adjourned by the town board Tuesday but the record remains open until August 9 during which time residents can submit written statements to the Smithtown Planning Department, 25 Redwood Lane, Smithtown, N.Y., 11787. Mr. Hans also encouraged residents with questions to reach out to the Planning Department.