

Gyrodyne subdivision decision nears

Planning Board targets March 30 for public hearing

By David Ambro

While opponents continue to advocate for an alternative plan, the 75-acre Gyrodyne light industrial subdivision in St. James is facing a critical milestone at the end of this month.

Located at the southeast corner of North Country Road (Route 25A) and Mills Pond Road in St. James, the Gyrodyne site is zoned light industrial (LI). Gyrodyne has applied to the Town of Smithtown to subdivide the land, an application that has been the subject of an environmental impact statement under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and significant revisions from the original filing. The original plan was approved by the Suffolk County Planning Commission in 2017 and the revised plan in 2021.

The Smithtown Conservation Board September 16, 2021 approved a SEQRA finding statement related to the Gyrodyne Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which advanced the subdivision application to the Planning Board for its consideration. Embedded in the finding statement, which is a 15-page resolution, with 13 sections and 41 subsections, are the recommended development conditions of the town Department of Environment and Waterways.

During an interview Tuesday, March 7, Smithtown Planning Director Peter Hans said it is currently anticipated that the Smithtown Planning Board will act on the Gyrodyne application at its meeting Wednesday, March 30. The Planning Board will vote on the finding statement approved by the Conservation Board and hold a public hearing for preliminary subdivision approval. It is expected the Planning Board will grant preliminary approval for the subdivision.

The comments at the preliminary hearing will then be weighed and the Planning Department will finalize its development conditions. The Planning Board will then hold another public hearing related to final subdivision approval. The planning board meetings are held at 6 p.m. either live at the Smithtown, Senior Center, 420 Middle Country Road or live streamed on the town website, smithtownny.gov.



After final approval of the subdivision, potential development applications will then be submitted to the town for each of the lots.

Gyrodyne is proposing to subdivide the 75 acres into eight lots: two totaling 14 acres for the existing industrial buildings; 12.5-acres for the Flowerfield catering facility, 15.2 acres for an open-space conservation easement; 7.3 acres for a sewer treatment plant; and, 26 acres for three new light industrial development lots. For purposes of the FEIS, Gyrodyne's conceptual uses for the site are a hotel, medical office buildings and assisted living facilities, though once subdivided any LI industrial development plan that complies with the development conditions can be proposed to the town. The Smithtown Town Board has authority over the final site plans.

"This subdivision is just that—it is a subdivision of property and creating lot lines for future development, Mr. Hans said. "It is setting the threshold for future development with the environmental impact statement. So there is going to be a maximum amount of sanitary flow assigned to the property, there is going to be a maximum traffic generation for the property, but the uses that are proposed in the EIS are not necessarily what is going there. They are just used

for setting the thresholds."

"To be honest, it is probably very unlikely that some of those uses being proposed will go there," Mr. Hans said.

With the Gyrodyne application back on the public agenda after five months, the St. James-Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition has resumed its opposition. The Coalition was formed to oppose the Gyrodyne development plan and, as it contemplates litigation to challenge the subdivision, the Coalition is also advocating for a "compromise" development plan, which is gaining momentum and has the endorsement of State Assemblyman Steve Englebright (D-East Setauket), chairman of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee.

Under the new compromise plan, development would be clustered on portions of the property that are already occupied by parking lots and the industrial buildings that are part of the original development of the site, while the undeveloped open

space known as Flowerfield Fairgrounds would be left undeveloped to be used for car shows, equestrian events and other community activities. Under the new compromise plan, the Fairgrounds would become a new open space and made available for events such as car shows, horse shows, and other community events.

Mr. Hans said the plan backed by the Coalition is one of the alternatives reviewed in the FEIS. "With any EIS, you have to show alternatives. It is not that they are proposing those alternatives but you have to offer those alternatives and study those alternatives," Mr. Hans concluded.

"It has been clear for some time that the concerns of the community regarding the impact that Gyrodyne's massive development plan would have on both the environment and the quality of life are widespread and will likely lead to years of litigation to protect both what's left of the rural character of Head of the Harbor and St. James, and the pristine waters of Stony Brook Harbor," Assemblyman Englebright said. "The way to avoid a costly legal battle is to settle the dispute now instead of waiting for the litigation to begin. The new compromise plan would do that by providing a clear path forward for development of the property while also addressing the most significant community

concerns. Elected officials on all levels should work together to move this plan forward."

Head of the Harbor Village Mayor Douglas Dahlgard has called for the property to be preserved in its entirety as a park. The village is adjacent to the Gyrodyne site and Head of the Harbor Trustee Judith Ogden is a founding member and spokeswoman for the Coalition.

"The response in support of the compromise plan has been overwhelming," Trustee Ogden said. "With intelligent planning and some creative thinking, there is no reason why we can't have reasonable development of the Gyrodyne site, while also preserving Flowerfield Fairgrounds. This compromise plan will be a 'win-win' for Gyrodyne and the community, and will help to avoid lengthy litigation over the flawed environmental review of the current mega-development plan."

The Coalition is proposing that the town and village work together with Gyrodyne to flesh out the details of a compromise plan the community will support. "The beauty of the compromise plan is that it would require relatively minor changes to Gyrodyne's subdivision proposal but would address many of the community's most serious concerns, avoiding the possibility of costly litigation that could tie the property up for years," Trustee Ogden said.