

NEWS RELEASE

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LATEST WADING RIVER LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS RAISE EYEBROWS WITHIN CIVICS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS

While eliminating some retail zoning, plan could increase overall development

February 10, 2012: In the days following the much anticipated and highly-attended public meeting held in Wading River on Saturday, February 4, discussing land use in Wading River, the coalition leading the “Save Wading River” effort has looked closely at the revised recommendations and has expressed serious concerns about the direction the study appears to be taking.

“We were cautiously optimistic after the version of the recommendations we saw on January 12, but BFJ Planning has since made significant changes and it now appears to be a plan for more development,” noted Riverhead Neighborhood Preservation Coalition (RNPC) President Dominique Mendez. One of the most significant shifts in the recommendations, the removal of the split zoning on four key parcels, would effectively allow 44% more land to be developed within those properties next to and across from the CVS pharmacy. That translates into approximately 13 additional 10,000-sq.-ft. one-story office buildings or approximately 72 additional multi-family residential units compared to BFJ’s preliminary recommendations presented at a Town Board work session on February 4. Saturday’s version of the plan would also bring that development very close to, and within clear sight of, Wading River’s historic district on a very bucolic stretch of North Country Road.

According to Jenn Hartnagel, Environmental Advocate for the Group for the East End, “We struggled to identify the supposed balance between conservation and development when all that seemed to be proposed was more construction.” Although the plan, right now, does suggest the elimination of 24.5 acres of BCR (Business Country Rural) retail zoning (many in the public have been calling for a significant reduction in the amount potential retail development), it still leaves over 18 acres of BCR zoning in the corridor. This amounts to approximately 120,000 sq. ft. or 12 CVS-sized buildings filled with stores, restaurants and banks. “That fact wasn’t made obvious during Saturday’s public workshop and I expect many left there with the impression that this plan might not allow any more stores in Wading River, except possibly the Knightland project; though this is certainly not the case,” continued Ms. Hartnagel. Richard Amper, Executive Director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and a nearby resident, added that “This was not billed as a four-parcel study,

it's supposed to be a study of the entire corridor and right now the planners seem solely focused on a few parcels, while glossing over the big picture and the impacts of future projects like the Venezia shopping center and the currently disputed Knightland tourist mall."

"Unless the goal of the study is to increase the density of the development and provide a windfall to a handful of property owners at the expense of the larger community, the recommendations as they currently stand are going in the wrong direction," said Ms. Mendez.

The RNPC's steering committee is proposing that the split zoning remains and that additional open space be set aside to address the community's express desire for open space and limited development. They are also proposing mandatory age restrictions and realistic size limits on senior condominium units to ensure that any multi-family building is a tax positive to the Shoreham-Wading River school district and to keep inappropriately large homes from being erected. "Imagine a modest number of senior condos set back behind wide evergreen buffers and connected by sidewalks to the central shopping area of Wading River. If done right, it could be an asset to the community, providing a new option for aging residents who want to stay in Wading River without having to maintain their larger homes," said Wading River resident, Dr. Barbara Fontana.

"On closer inspection of the fine print, we also noticed that rental units are also under consideration now; though the existing MRP zone only allows owner-occupied condos," noted Ms. Mendez. "That in itself is very alarming."

"Of course, if this process works as it should, BFJ Planning will significantly revise the proposed plan in response to hearing the overwhelming sentiment that the community wants to preserve the country charm of Wading River while strictly limiting development," said Mr. Amper. "And since the law protects the developers' rights, their interests will not be compromised. I'm much more worried that the interests of the community will be ignored and that their views will fail to be incorporated into the final corridor plan."

The spokespeople for the "Save Wading River" effort refrained from making any snap judgments on BFJ's latest recommendations since they were seeing them for the first time. "The public workshop was the community's first real chance to speak and we did not want to dominate the conversation," noted Ms. Mendez. "Besides, we really had to pour through it carefully and crunch the numbers to see all the implications."