

NEWS RELEASE

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OFFICIALS LIMIT PUBLIC INPUT ON WADING RIVER LAND USE STUDY

Promised Public Workshop Removed from Schedule Despite Public Outcry

January 3, 2012: Citizens concerned about over-development in a 1.5 mile stretch of Route 25A in the hamlet of Wading River have been calling on the Riverhead Town Board to restore a promised Public Workshop at which citizens could express their vision and concerns about land use directly with the planning consultants who are conducting the Corridor Study. They fear that development recommendations are being produced by BFJ Planning without the essential public input, yet the Walter administration appears to be intransigent.

The Public Workshop was promised in October as part of a nearly \$50,000 Planning Study to evaluate land use in an area that could soon be impacted by over 190,000 square feet of proposed new commercial development – fully 50% more than what currently exists.

Jenn Hartnagel, Environmental Advocate for the Group for the East End and resident of neighboring Shoreham, noted, “The whole purpose of the study is to produce a land use plan that balances commercial growth and helps protect the rural charm of Wading River. That’s not going to happen if the public is not fully engaged.” The Town Board now wants to limit public participation to attendance at a regularly scheduled work session of the Town Board and the legally required public hearing of the final plan. “We have repeatedly implored the Town Board to restore the planned Public Workshop to be held in Wading River at night so that citizens can help shape these recommendations, as we were able to in Brookhaven,” she added.

Many have said that the strength of a similar study by BFJ for the Brookhaven portion of Route 25A was its focus on community input. “I participated throughout the process and was impressed with the quality of the resulting land use recommendations,” said Richard Amper, Executive Director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and a nearby resident. “Riverhead Town was commended for embarking on the much-needed study, but

its success was predicated on full community participation in the planning process,” he added.

Despite pleas from over 30 residents and, weeks earlier, a formal letter from the Riverhead Neighborhood Preservation Coalition, Wading River Civic Association, Group for the East End and professional planner and former East Hampton Planning Director Lisa Liquori all asking for the Public Workshop to be reinstated, the Walter Administration made it clear at a Town Board meeting held December 27, 2011, that they it did not intend to hold the Public Workshop. The Public Workshop the public claims it was promised is described in detail on the quote accepted by the Town Board (see excerpt below), was discussed with Save Wading River leaders, and appeared on BFJ’s timeline as of late October.

The second meeting will be a public workshop that will be expanded to include residents and business owners within the entire Hamlet of Wading River. At the public workshop, BFJ will give a PowerPoint presentation that introduces the study to the public and reviews preliminary recommendations to the Town of Riverhead Zoning Code. After the presentation, participants will break into roundtable groups to discuss the preliminary strategies and help gain consensus on the study. Participants will then select a “reporter” from each table to report back their findings to the overall group. BFJ will then prepare a summary report after the workshop.

RNPC president Dominique Mendez noted, “First the Town approved Knightland without waiting for the results of the study and now intends to have a public hearing on the study without having fully solicited the public input that was supposed to shape the recommendations. It looks as though the Town is once again poised to act prematurely, to the detriment of the broader community.” Community leaders state that a presentation by the consultants at a Town Board Work Session will come too late in the process for public input to shape land use decision-making. “One has to wonder why the Walter Administration is going out of its way to limit public input into the process. It is extremely alarming, on many levels.”

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