

Village of Head-of-the-Harbor



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April 26, 2021

VIA US POSTAL SERVICE
AND ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

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Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and Planning
Division of Planning and Environment
PO Box 6100
Hauppague, NY 11788
Attn: Andrew P. Freleng Chief Planner

Re: Members of the Suffolk County Planning Commission
Comments for the May 5, 2021 Meeting
Gyrodyne subdivision, File No. 1178

Dear Commission Members:

This is the last chance for a large public park in St. James. Shame on us if we lose this opportunity.

I firmly believe the purpose of "planning" is to make the right decisions for the future generations, our children, and our children's children. Placing another commercial development along North Country Road in St. James on the last remaining piece of open space is the wrong decision.

I am turning 77 this year. I have been around and have seen the changes to Long Island in the name of economic development.

I grew up in the eastern portion of Queens during the 1940s thru the 1960s. I lived near the once tree lined Horace Harding Boulevard and saw it transition into the Long Island Expressway.

I watched the pouring of concrete and asphalt from west to east that allowed a migration of the crowded New York City way of life to a once rural Suffolk County.

Your first thought may be that I was disadvantaged growing up in a crowded city with pavement everywhere. You might think I had to play ball in the street — think again. I was a bike ride away from three great parks: Cunningham Park, 358 acres; Kissena Park, 235 acres and Alley Pond Park, 655 acres. Baseball, tennis, playgrounds, lakes & streams, hiking, concerts on summer evenings and walking my dog. Fresh air and family picnics. Today those parks in Queens remain thriving places of enjoyment and serve as escapes from crowded streets. People of all ages flock to enjoy these great parks every day.

The new Smithtown Master Plan mentions that St. James is a densely built up community with the least amount of open space and parkland. This leads to questions: Are we in St. James smart enough to realize that we lack sufficient open space for our next generations? Do we realize with the Gyrodyne proposal that we are down to the last piece of open space? Are we going to let developers do the planning for our community?

Remember when the Smithtown by-pass was built. My friend Ted was a NYC policeman who commuted from Port Jefferson to NYC in less than an hour using the by-pass. Today he would be lucky to reach Melville in an hour. We see that the Queens migration has reached our historic North County Road community. Residents on Stony Brook Road have a difficult time getting out of their driveways due to university traffic. School busses leaving Harbor Country Day School at afternoon dismissal wait in a line for a gap in traffic to make a sprint onto North Country Road.

Our historic, narrow, and winding country road is already overburdened, even before further development at Gyrodyne. We hear constantly from the residents of Head of the Harbor, St. James, and Stony Brook that they are frightened. They fear the permanent changes to their communities that are likely to result from the development of Gyrodyne. They have told us they just do not want this property developed. They do not want the added traffic, the loss of bucolic vistas of farms and historic buildings, or the potential environmental problems to Stony Brook Harbor. If this sounds familiar it has only been twenty years since the Stony Brook community protested the acquisition of 246 acres from Gyrodyne by the University for a research park. That battle was lost because of the University's political clout. To make matters worse, promises by the University of traffic mitigation and of filling up the research park have yet to be kept. Community residents cannot be blamed for being apprehensive at the prospect of losing the last remaining piece of open space. Additional commercial development just does not belong on North Country Road, it is the wrong place for an office park and hotel.

Acquiring the Gyrodyne property as a park would go a long way in curing the area's open space deficiency and stopping the momentum of over building. It seems the Town of Smithtown made a starting effort by proposing, in the new master plan, to re-zone the buffer along the Gyrodyne border as parkland. However, the subdivision map now in front of the Commission seems to be in conflict as the revised plan fills the buffer with leaching pools connected to the proposed sewage treatment plant.

The Head of the Harbor Board of Trustees feel what is important for our community's future is figuring out how not to lose this one-time opportunity to provide the St. James community with a public park. We ask that the Planning Commission vote against the Gyrodyne subdivision proposal.

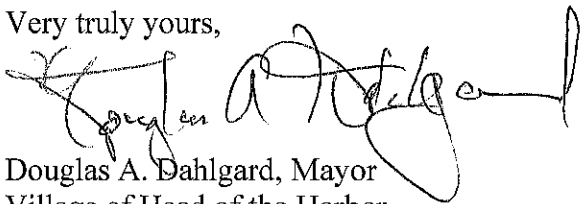
This is essentially our message, but let us address the matter of funding this park. Funding is not a showstopper. Let us put things in perspective. You remember when Stony Brook University moved to acquire the Gyrodyne land for their Research Park. At that time, 2003, a study claimed the University's impact on the Long Island economy was \$2.5 billion in annual revenue plus 47,000 jobs. In today's dollars the impact must have doubled or tripled. A significant portion of this billions of dollars are being taxed by the federal and state governments. We should ask for some of this to return to our community to fund a park. Every day of the week governments in New York State invest money preserving open space, why not here? In terms of size the 75-acre Gyrodyne property is not so large by comparison to be unthinkable. Almost five Gyrodyne 75-acre parcels would fit into one Cunningham Park.

An open space public park at Gyrodyne will enhance the quality of life in the St. James community for generations.

We ask that the County Planning Commission members find that an open space park is more important to our community than more commercial buildings. We ask that the Commission vote against the proposed Gyrodyne subdivision.

Shame on us if we lose this opportunity.

Very truly yours,



Douglas A. Dahlgard, Mayor
Village of Head of the Harbor

- Cc: Hon. Mario R. Mattera, NYS Senator, 2nd Senate District of New York
Hon. Lee Zeldin, Congressman, 1st District of New York
Hon. Steve Englebright, Assemblyman, Assembly District 4
Hon. Michael J. Fitzpatrick, Assemblyman, Assembly District 8
Hon. Steven Bellone, Suffolk County Executive
Supervisor Edward R. Wehrheim, Town of Smithtown
Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, Town of Brookhaven
Hon. Board of Trustees, Village of Head of the Harbor
Ms. Gloria Rocchio, President at Ward Melville Heritage Organization