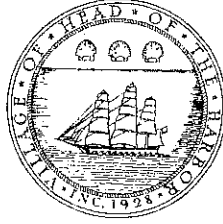


Village of
Head-of-the-Harbor



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May 26, 2021

VIA US POSTAL SERVICE

Hon. Edward R. Wehrheim, Town Supervisor
Smithtown Supervisor's Office
99 West Main Street
P.O. Box 575
Smithtown, NY 11787

Re: Gyrodyne subdivision, SCPC File No. 1178

Dear Supervisor Edward R. Wehrheim:

The Gyrodyne Flowerfield property is the last chance for an open space public park in St. James.

This letter is a follow up to my letter to the County Planning Commission and my testimony at the May 5, 2021 Commission's meeting regarding the proposal for commercial development of 75 acres of land along the border of our Village. The Village of Head of the Harbor website, www.HeadoftheHarborNY.gov, includes a Gyrodyne page of correspondence regarding this unwelcomed proposal.

In our message to the County Planning Commission, we suggested an open space park would be preferable to our community. A commercial development in a historic corridor, next to farms and a nature preserve, is inappropriate. The Planning Commission disregarded our testimony.

We still haven't gotten the message across. We request your help.

The residents of St. James would truly benefit from an open space park at Flowerfield in St. James. The benefits of an open space park, as opposed to a commercial office development, are well known to everyone, so I'll just summarize here.

A park provides space for community residents to interact with each other and to meet new people. It is a great space for events and for people to engage in recreational activities. This allows for the development of a sense of community. A park is a perfect place for a picnic, a concert, a farmers market, walking trails, a car show or whatever a community feels it needs. People want to live near a park and a park increases property values.

A park protects natural ecosystems. Natural habitats for many different animals are protected and air pollution is removed by trees. Trees also collect stormwater and limit erosion damage to our Harbor.

Open space improves our physical and psychological health and makes our neighborhoods more attractive places to live. Being outside and playing in nature is crucial for the healthy development of children. A park also provides great opportunities for parents to bond with children and for children to make new friends in the neighborhood.

Should these 75 acres be considered for parkland here are some additional thoughts.

I picked up the Sunday NY Times and on page one there was an article about the changing population demographics. The Times headline is the "World is facing a long slide in its population." Census data shows the rate of population growth has slowed significantly. Global communities are facing population stagnation with more deaths than births. This trend will reduce the workforce and increase the number of retirees. The Times reports Germany has thousands of properties that are no longer needed. These properties have been razed with the land turned into parks. In our country the ratio of workers to Medicare eligible use to be 15 to one. The ratio a few decades from now will be closer to one to one. Without a surplus of young people to carry the load, economies will have to adjust.

Add in the changes brought about by Covid-19, and retirees moving south to escape the high cost of living in New York, and you have to question the wisdom of building more office buildings and start thinking about alternative uses. Notice that Stony Brook University slowed down their development plans for the Gyrodyne property they took in 2006.

Another piece of mail came to my house last week, the Smithtown Recreation Program Guide. Smithtown has an extensive system of well-maintained parks, but I looked for open space parks near St. James for trail walking and found nothing. I looked for horseback riding and found it promoted in the Recreation Program Guide on page 33 where it says: "Breathe in the fresh air and feel the stress disappear as you enjoy an hour long, horseback ride in the beautiful, tranquil Connetquot River State Park Preserve." But not in St. James, and not even in Smithtown, the horse farm is in Central Islip.

The most fabulous park owned by Smithtown, with history, nature, concerts, trails, sports, and farm education is the 136-acre Hoyt Farm. But the Hoyt Farm is located in South Commack near the Northern State Parkway and is over 20 minutes, without traffic, from St. James.

We have noticed that some residents of St. James have found a private park nearby with nature and trails. Avalon Park located in Head of the Harbor is a popular place for St. James residents. Parking is along Main Street in Stony Brook and is free. Some St. James residents also park at Deepwells and walk or ride bikes along the shady, winding country roads of Head of the Harbor. Both groups frequent the shops and restaurants in Stony Brook Village. However, the on-street parking limits the number of visitors and their own open space park in St. James would be a welcomed improvement for the residents.

I also point to the 2011 Suffolk County Equestrian Task Force Report which gains relevancy should Flowerfield become an open space park. This detailed report was the result of much effort by county legislators, the directors of county planning, parks recreation, farm bureau and other leadership. Public meetings and public hearings were held and research of the equine industry in Suffolk is included in the report by the task force.

The report points out the challenges that are severely impacting the ability to continue the equine industry in Suffolk County. Lack of equestrian venues and a limited trail network were pointed out as challenges as was the need for funding of equine educational programs. The task force recognized the need to create a full-service county equestrian center to help foster the industry's growth. Without the venues and support the equestrian industry will continue to migrate to Virginia and North Carolina. Such a sad thought as we have equestrian history in the Smithtown community going back to the "gilded age". There was a driving park on Edgewood Avenue and Fifty Acres Road primarily used for harness racing. The Smithtown Hunt and the polo club riders also made use of the driving park. Famous trotting horses such as Lady Suffolk, Baronward, and Snowman, were well known bringing fame to St. James.

The Flowerfield property is large enough to handle a county equestrian center as well as provide space for equestrian events similar to the Hampton Classic. Imagine a St. James Classic horse show and how it would put St. James on the map as a destination. Living locally in our community are people who have the expertise to put on an equestrian event.

An equestrian center with horse trails is just one example of what could be done with the 75 acres as an open space park. By using our imagination, the wonders of having an open space park vital to our quality of life here in St. James can come to reality.

This is the last chance for an open space public park in St. James. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



Douglas A. Dahlgard
Mayor

<https://www.scnylegislature.us/DocumentCenter/View/3105/Suffolk-County-Equestrian-Task-Force-Report-PDF>

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 P. Romaine, Town of Brookhaven
Hon. Board of Trustees, Village of Head of the Harbor
Ms. Gloria Rocchio, President at Ward Melville Heritage Organization
Ms. Sara Lansdale, Suffolk County Director of Planning
Mr. Peter A. Scully, Deputy Executive, Suffolk County
Dr. Sally Lynch, Director, Old Field Farm Equestrian Park
Ms. Katharine Griffiths, Director, Avalon Nature Preserve