

## Smithtown Town Board considers objection to Heartland

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The Smithtown Town Board is considering a proposal from its planning director to submit a formal objection to the proposed Heartland development in neighboring Islip, citing potential traffic problems.

Huntington may also formally object to the project.

According to county law, a municipality within 500 feet of a major project can make such an objection, which would require the project to be approved by the county planning commission.

Smithtown officials say they are concerned about the traffic implications of Heartland, which would be located in Brentwood near Islip's border with Smithtown and Huntington. The self-contained mini-city would feature 9,000 housing units, more than a million square feet of retail and 4.2 million square feet of office space on 472 acres, and would include movie theaters, restaurants and an aquarium.

Huntington has hired a consultant to look at the project, said town spokesman A.J. Carter. Supervisor Frank Petrone testified at an Islip public hearing in May that traffic congestion could overwhelm roads in neighboring towns, including Commack Road, Crooked Hill Road and the Long Island Expressway.

If Smithtown or Huntington objects within 20 days of being formally notified about the project by Islip, that would require the county to hold a public hearing, said county planning director Thomas Isles. The county's 15-member planning commission then would have to approve the project by a two-thirds vote.

Smithtown board members said they want more information before making a decision. Smithtown planning director Frank DeRubeis said the town has until July 28 to file an objection.

Heartland's developer says the project's concept reduces the need for a car since residents, mostly younger people and empty-nesters, could work, live and shop in the development. While the concept is a good one, said DeRubeis, he said there is no way to tell whether those living in Heartland would work there, and vice versa.

But Heartland developer Gerald Wolkoff said that there have been other places in the country where the self-contained town concept has worked, and residents will have little need for transportation outside Heartland.

"I think [DeRubeis and Petrone] are misguided," Wolkoff said, adding that he welcomes the opportunity to speak to Smithtown's town board before it makes a decision. "They just don't have the vision."

In 2006, Smithtown approved a project of more than 1 million square feet of retail space in the same area within its borders on Crooked Hill Road in Commack. Huntington sued Smithtown over the project, citing traffic among other concerns.

*With Jennifer Maloney and Deborah S. Morris*