

Consider code update for WSI zone category

By DAVID AMBRO

It's been talked about before but now Smithtown Town Councilman Thomas McCarthy wants to amend the zoning category of the "car-row" district in Smithtown.

For decades a foundation of the Smithtown tax base has been a strip of car dealerships on Middle Country Road (Route 25) from Terry Road to Route 347, an area in a wholesale and service industry (WSI) zoning category specially crafted for the automobile industry. For the past two years, however, as a result of the economic downturn, many of the automobile dealerships have been shutdown and there are numerous large vacant

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Town Board eyes renewal in WSI zone category

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buildings on the strip, a major contributor to an unprecedented \$2.75 million erosion last year in the town's tax base. Among the vacant sites are two large businesses from which Mr. McCarthy once operated his Mazda and Mitsubishi dealerships.

In an effort to stimulate business interest and economic development in this district, Councilman McCarthy is now proposing that the Smithtown Town Board hire an outside planning consultant to completely re-write the WSI zoning category to open it up to more diverse opportunity for redevelopment of the vacant sites.

"I think our Planning Department, our Department of Environment and Waterways, the Town Board and the Planning Board are all too close to it. I think we need an outside consulting firm do this," Mr. McCarthy said during an interview in his office Monday, February 8.

Mr. McCarthy said the objective of the consultant would be to redraft the town code related to the WSI zoning category to bring it up to date in a way that will help spur economic development. "The current zoning is outdated and large vacant tracts of property are sitting dormant with no interest of redevelopment. We need there to be other permitted uses that will bring in tax dollars to the town to offset the revenue that we have lost

from the current economic crisis," Mr. McCarthy said.

Mr. McCarthy said that his goal would be to craft legislation to amend the code in a way that will stimulate interest in the vacant sites in the long term while at the same time set a foundation for economic stability in the future. "We need to plan for the future and still try to prime the pump for the present," he said.

After Councilman McCarthy made his proposal to hire the outside consultant at the town board work session Tuesday, Town Planning Director Frank DeRubeis asked the town board to hold off for a few weeks. Mr. DeRubeis said he has no problem with hiring an outside consulting firm, but he said that his office is about to complete a report that reassesses all of the town's zoning categories, which is part of the ongoing master plan update. Mr. DeRubeis said that in addition to the report the planning staff will be proposing to conduct a corridor study of the WSI zoning district, which runs along Route 25A from Route 111 east to Route 347 and from Old Willets Path west to Commack.

According to Mr. DeRubeis there has been a contraction in the automobile industry and that it appears some of the dealership closures will be permanent. He said car dealership present a dilemma in the east end of the corridor where there are narrow, deep "bowling alley" lots while in the

west end of the corridor there are strip lots along the road that are under developed.

During an interview in his office after the town board work session Tuesday, Mr. DeRubeis said the study his office is about to release shows that WSI is not the most underdeveloped zoning category in the town. He said

the light industrial district outside of the Hauppauge Industrial Park is more abundant and underdeveloped than the WSI zone. He said that the study to be released in two weeks will provide a comprehensive analysis of each zone, the levels of development and recommendations for land uses in the future.