Lesko, Walsh, and Mazzei Announce Next Step in Revitalizing the Ronkonkoma Hub
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The Town invites developers to participate in one of the most exciting redevelopment projects in its history

Form-based zoning model proposed to facilitate redevelopment, a first for Long Island

Farmingville, NY - On March 7, 2011, the Town of Brookhaven issued a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) for developers to present the Town with a concept plan for the Ronkonkoma Hub transit-oriented development, which is one of the most significant opportunities in the region to create a beautiful new transit-oriented downtown.

Supervisor Mark Lesko, Deputy Supervisor/Councilwoman Walsh, and Councilman Mazzei are taking proactive steps to create what planning experts and elected officials say Long Island desperately needs - a cool destination point with housing, restaurants, and shops that will attract young people to live and work here. What makes Ronkonkoma unique from other transit-oriented development projects is the fact that the Ronkonkoma Railroad is within steps of the proposed redevelopment area and has just over an hour commute to New York City; the community and property owners have been engaged in the process, working with the Town to establish a vision through a land use plan; and the Town would be the first municipality on Long Island to utilize form-based zoning. The Ronkonkoma Railroad is the busiest station on the entire Long Island Rail Road with 14,000 riders daily.

Through the RFEI, the Town is now engaging the development community to propose innovative concepts for the Ronkonkoma Hub, which will be used to create the framework for a Request for Proposals scheduled to be issued later in 2011. It is the goal of the Town to select a master developer to develop the property.

Supervisor Mark Lesko identified the Ronkonkoma Hub in his "Blight to Light" program as a priority.

"The Ronkonkoma Hub is bursting with potential to create what may be the most exciting transit-oriented development location on the entire East Coast, said Supervisor Mark Lesko, "This regionally significant project should be attractive to the private sector to develop a creative proposal on what is essentially a clean slate. The best part is we will not be building on virgin land to create a new destination - the properties around the Ronkonkoma Train Station are blighted and we will be turning disconnected eyesores into a beautiful, new gateway to Brookhaven."

Deputy Supervisor/Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh said, "The redevelopment of the Ronkonkoma Hub will have a significant impact throughout the entire region, not only Brookhaven Town. Innovative projects like this serve as models for revitalization and the inspiration for other communities to follow. Once complete, it will vastly improve the quality of life for people in the surrounding community and generate substantial economic growth."
"This area has been a target for 'smart growth' development for many years," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "Its proximity to the Ronkonkoma train station, MacArthur Airport and the Long Island Expressway make it an ideal location for people to live and work. We expect to see some very innovative concepts as a result of the RFEI and I look forward to getting this exciting project off the drawing board and started as soon as possible.

"A hundred years ago the railroad station in Lake Ronkonkoma was a vital and dynamic component of our community," stated Lake Ronkonkoma Civic Organization President, George Schramm. "We have an opportunity now to re-establish those qualities and create once again a transportation center that not only benefits Lake Ronkonkoma, but also the surrounding region. The Civic looks forward to continuing to work with the Town and the chosen developer to bring this opportunity to fruition."

Over the past year, Supervisor Lesko, the Planning Department, and Councilmembers Tim Mazzei and Kathleen Walsh have attended numerous meetings with the community and property owners to discuss the transit-oriented development project. The Town Board accepted the draft Ronkonkoma Hub Transit-Oriented Development Land Use Plan for the redevelopment and revitalization of the 54 acre area surrounding the LIRR in September 2010. The RFEI reflects the goals of the Plan as identified by the community, most importantly a mix of uses within walking distance to the train station. Any proposal must present the highest quality design and should include progressive planning ideas that foster quality of life such as walkability and "green" design techniques. In addition, any responder to the RFEI must address the need for housing that is affordable and attracts young people and a talented workforce.

The Land Use Plan also proposes Form-Based Zoning to make the redevelopment of the Ronkonkoma Hub a reality. If implemented, this would be the first time Form-Based Zoning is used on Long Island.

Form-based code zoning is different from conventional zoning in that it emphasizes building form and appearance rather than specifying and distinguishing uses. Although Form-Based zoning offers flexibility in use, it focuses on regulating the location of the building in relationship to the street, the designation of civic spaces, streetscape standards, and creating a sense of place rather than a series of unconnected projects. The Town Board would have to amend the Town code to implement form-based zoning.

A development team may obtain the RFEI by contacting the Purchasing Department at (631) 451-6252. The responses are due by June 30, 2011. There will be a pre-bidders conference on March 28, 2011 to answer any questions and potential respondents are invited for a tour of the Ronkonkoma Hub area on May 2, 2011. Developers or development teams who respond to the RFEI will receive greater weight in the RFP process.

The RFEI requires developers to include a conceptual site plan, a description of the housing type and target market for any proposed housing, a description of their qualifications and financial capability, and an acquisition plan for property currently owned by multiple private owners.

It is the Town's hope to receive many creative proposals that will guide the RFP, which is anticipated to be issued later in 2011.

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