Councilwoman Kepert Proposes Code Changes to Accommodate Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

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September 18, 2009 Farmingville: At last night’s town board meeting Councilwoman Kepert introduced legislation that gives incentives to developers to build homes incorporating basic design features that make homes accessible to the disabled population and give them the ability to visit friends and relatives with ease.

Councilwoman Kepert was approached by the Suffolk Community Council and asked to consider enacting legislation to break the architectural barriers that exist in homes which impede access to an entire population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau of the 2006 American Community Survey there are 57,868 people in the Town of Brookhaven living with a disability, or 12.3% of the town's population. With this in mind, Councilwoman Kepert moved to put a team together which included the town's Chief Building Inspector, a disability specialist from the town's traffic safety division and an attorney from the town's law department to develop the code making it attractive for builders to design homes that are accessible to the disabled population.

Several supporters spoke in favor of the new legislation. Michael Watt, Executive Vice President of the Long Island Builders Institute stated, "The Long Island Builders Institute applauds the Town of Brookhaven and Councilwoman Connie Kepert for addressing the issues of universal design and visibility in a creative, pro-active manner that works best for Brookhaven residents and the building community."

Michael Valdone, Chair of the Task Force on Accessible Design and Smart Growth stated, "By adopting this legislation, Brookhaven Town will be taking an important step forward in its effort to meet the needs of our county's over 215,000 residents who are living with disabilities and, particularly, for the well over 57,000 who live right here in Brookhaven."

Judy Pannullo, Executive Director of the Suffolk Community Council stated, "The Universal Design legislation goes beyond advocating for a specific group of people. It goes to the very heart of how society can use new information, products, technology and design in the creation of equitable environments that provide access for all people."

The legislation creates a new permit for builders to apply for that will cost less than the standard building permits that do not require for universal features. Some of the standard design requirements to obtain the permit will be:

- Zero-step Entrance
- Doorways and passageways on the first floor shall have a minimum clearance of 34 inches.
- At least one room on the ground floor that can easily be converted into a bedroom.
- Sufficient floor space in ground floor bathrooms that will allow for individuals using a wheel chair or other mobility aids to enter into and exit out of facility.

"This important legislation will not only allow our seniors to age in place, but provides people with special needs the ability to visit friends and family without difficulty," concluded Kepert.