Fiore-Rosenfeld Dedicates the 252 Acre "Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve" along Belle Mead Road in East Setauket

posted on 10/14/2009 3:49:22 PM

SETAUKET - For several years, Town Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld has advocated for securing the long-term preservation of the largest public landholding in the northwestern part of Brookhaven Town. Tuesday evening, the Town Council is scheduled to formally dedicate the 252-acre "Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve," on Belle Meade Road in East Setauket.

"In our past history, the people of Three Village fought against another large subdivision bulldozing our precious natural resources - which a large chunk of this preserve could have been," said Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld. "The Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve recharges an estimated 143 million gallons of clean drinking water annually for the health of our families. It is home to a wide variety of migratory songbirds, woodpeckers, game birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and numerous invertebrates. The people of Three Village desire compatible passive use recreation with our 'bedroom' community. Now, forevermore, Three Village residents will be able to run, jog, walk, and bike through beautifully preserved woodland and its trails.

"This dedication means we will protect and preserve the largest public landholding in perpetuity. It means we will provide passive recreation opportunities while maintaining the ecological features of the preserve. Today is a great day for the Three Village community."

A chunk of the property was deeded to the Town in the 1980s by a developer (AVR) who instead "transferred the development rights" and built elsewhere in the Town.

State Assemblyman Steve Englebright noted that the Town of Brookhaven would be preserving one of nine Special Groundwater Protection Areas (SGPA) on Long Island.

"By dedicating the Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve, the Town of Brookhaven is ensuring that clean water - millions of gallons annually - is recharged in perpetuity," Assemblyman Englebright said. "And this is one of three Deep Flow Recharge Zones on Long Island, which transmits high quality water into our drinking water aquifers. The preservation of the Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve also protects a museum piece of our terrestrial natural history and insures that future generations will leave permanent access to a stunningly beautiful glacial moraine woodland."

The 13 miles of trails in the Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve will be maintained by C.L.I.M.B. (Concerned Long Island Mountain Bikers). C.L.I.M.B. maintains about 150 miles of trails across Long Island that are owned by various municipalities or non-profit entities.

"This dedication is great for the community because it's nearby recreation," said Michael Vitti, the president of C.L.I.M.B. "The people of the Three Villages don't have to drive their bikes an hour anymore."

The resolution to be voted on Tuesday is the result of collaboration between the Town Council and Brookhaven's Division of Environmental Protection, Supervisor Lesko said.

"The Town of Brookhaven recognizes the need to preserve our precious nature preserves," Supervisor Lesko added. "I want to commend the leadership of Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld and John Turner, director of the Division of Environmental Protection, for identifying the Laurel Ridge-Setauket Woods Nature Preserve - and fighting to preserve it in perpetuity. Generations of residents in the Three Villages will be able to enjoy the beauty and passive recreation as we have had."

The name "Laurel Ridge" comes from the fact that the preserve is situated on the Harbor Hill Terminal Moraine. The woodlands on the parcels are dominated by a pine-oak forest, comprised of a canopy of pitch pine and a variety of oak species as well as an extensive understory of Mountain Laurel, which forms one of the typical upland community types in the Long Island Pine Barrens.

Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld added that Tuesday's dedication is the culmination of a years-long effort that began with the late former Brookhaven councilman and private attorney-advocate, Neal Capria.
"Neal Capria deserves significant recognition for his incredible work on behalf of our community and our environment," Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld said. "His legacy will live on this glacially created woodland."