

Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Panico Announce Town's Plan to Purchase Over 69 Acres in Forge River Watershed for Open Space

posted on 12/8/2011 8:32:34 AM

December 6, 2011

Suffolk County and New York State to contribute \$12 million toward cost of acquisition



Aerial map of property in Mastic to be purchased by Town for open space preservation.

Farmingville, NY - At the December 6 Town Board meeting, a resolution was unanimously adopted authorizing the Town to acquire 69.23 acres of land in Mastic to be preserved as open space, adding to the 51 acres that had previously been preserved. In addition, the Town's abandonment of streets and acquisition of out-parcels through condemnation, brings the total to 151 acres of land to be preserved as open space. The acquisition is significant because the property is one of the largest undeveloped parcels in the Forge River watershed, which is the focus of a multi-level government restoration effort. The property is currently owned by Beechwood Moriches Building Corporation, and could have been the site for development of hundreds of attached residential units that are permitted under PRC (Planned Retirement Community) zoning. The property's overall value and significance has been recognized on a statewide level and included in the New York State Comprehensive Open Space Plan.

"This acquisition will assist in our efforts to restore the Forge River back to health and it will eliminate any adverse impact that development of this property would have had on the watershed. Now, 151 acres in Mastic will be forever preserved," said Supervisor Lesko, "All levels of government worked together to protect this large tract of open space and I thank Suffolk County and New York State for their support."

"This is a significant acquisition in terms of protecting and preserving the Forge River watershed," said Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy. "Suffolk County has been able to leverage its buying power by partnering with the

Town of Brookhaven, through Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Panico, and with the aid of a New York State grant, and I am pleased to see this resolution passed by the Town Board tonight so that future generations will be able to enjoy open spaces and clean waterways."

"I have made the restoration of the Forge River a priority and this acquisition is another step toward realizing that goal," commented Councilman Dan Panico. "Earlier last year I successfully addressed the largest single point source of nitrogen loading into the river, helped preserve land in the adjacent area and currently chair the Forge River Task Force. It is my hope next year to partner with the County of Suffolk to unveil a new bold initiative to further aid in this goal."

"Six years ago the community rallied against the development of this land and the negative impact it would have had on the already impaired Forge River," stated Legislator Kate Browning. "One of my first actions as a county legislator was the introduction of a planning steps resolution to preserve these 69 acres. I want to thank the Town of Brookhaven for partnering with Suffolk County to make the preservation of this land a reality. We have more to do, but this a major step forward toward protecting the Forge River for future generations."

"For those of us who have been working to advance a cleaner future for the Forge River, this is the best holiday gift we could ever have imagined," said Peter A. Scully, Regional Director of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and Chairman of the Forge River Protection Task Force. "The headwaters of the Forge will be better protected for future generations thanks to the efforts of Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Panico. While much more remains to be done to protect the Forge, this is an historic day, and a cause for celebration."

The property is situated north of Sunrise Highway, east of Brookhaven Calabro Airport, south of Moriches-Middle Island Road and west of Weeks Avenue. It is an extensively wooded wildlife habitat, located in the headwaters of the western fork of the Forge River and is estimated to discharge approximately 33 million gallons of clean water annually into river.

The Forge River has a history of water quality issues and is classified as "Impaired Waters" due to the excessive levels of nitrogen entering the river. Nitrogen sources include storm water discharges, unsewered high density residential development and the River's own sediments, which were deposited during decades of extensive duck farming that employed minimal waste treatment.

The Town of Brookhaven and the US Army Corps of Engineers are cooperatively working to develop a Feasibility Study that will identify existing conditions in the Forge River and then identify a range of opportunities that will be the basis for recommendations to address the River's impairments. Some of this work will be supported by a financial contribution by Suffolk County. This project will build upon the Watershed Management Plan that the Town is developing with funding from the New York State Department of State. A public hearing on the Draft Plan, which is available on the Town's website, was held on December 6 and written comments will be accepted until December 16. The Feasibility Study will provide the basis for development of plans and specifications for projects that will address the impairments.

During Supervisor Lesko's administration, the open space preservation initiative has resulted in the acquisition or purchase of development rights for hundreds of acres of ecologically sensitive land, including many parcels in the Pine Barrens and the Carmans River Watershed, as well as large tracts of farmland throughout the Town. Including the Beechwood property in Mastic, since 2009 the Town has preserved over 350 acres of open space. The total purchase price of this most recent acquisition is \$20 million, with the Town contributing \$8 million, the County \$10 million and the remaining \$2 million provided by a grant from New York State.

Division of Public Information * Office of the Supervisor

One Independence Hill • Farmingville • NY 11738 • Phone (631) 451-6595 • Fax (631) 451-6258