

Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Mazzei Announce Title of Plaza Theater Transferred to the Town of Brookhaven

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Town moves closer to demolition and redevelopment of blighted property



Farmingville, NY - Supervisor Mark Lesko and Councilman Tim Mazzei have announced that Suffolk County Supreme Court Justice John C. Bivona signed the Vesting Order in regard to the condemnation of the Plaza Theater on January 25, 2011. The order was entered, and the vesting map was filed by the Suffolk County Clerk's office on March 4. The action, which transfers title of the property to the Town of Brookhaven, comes nearly 18 months from the October 2009 start of condemnation proceedings by the Town against the former owner, East Main Realty Corp. Brookhaven Town offered to purchase the property for \$1,190,000 from the owner, but the offer was rejected.

The Plaza Theater site was one of the first properties targeted for redevelopment in Supervisor Lesko's "Blight to Light" initiative. Built in 1962, the Plaza Theater served the greater Patchogue community until the early-1980s, when it closed due to the advent of multiplex theaters. Since then, the building has remained empty.

Supervisor Mark Lesko said, "With title in our hands we are one step closer to knocking down the blighted eyesore that is the Plaza Theater. The deteriorating, abandoned Plaza Theater has been an obstacle hampering the revitalization of East Main Street for far too long. I look forward to the day this monument to blight finally comes down so the Town can continue to partner with the community, Village, and County to redevelop it."

"The demolition of the Plaza Theater has been a top priority of mine since taking office in 2003 and now that the town owns it, we can finally get the job done," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "I give a lot of credit to the people from FOCUS East Patchogue for their determination to keep up the fight for so many years. They can now celebrate this victory and look forward to continued revitalization of the East Main Street Corridor."

"This project has had my wholehearted support from its inception, and this is welcome news to see that years of hard work by the county and town have come to fruition," said Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy. "Our efforts to extend the revitalization of Patchogue Village eastward had been hampered by this gigantic, empty eyesore sitting in East Patchogue for too many years. With title to the property now in the hands of the town of Brookhaven, we look forward to moving ahead with our town and village partners in removing this blight and breathing new life into the East Main Street corridor."

"I am delighted to see that this issue is finally coming to the right close. The town is taking the property; the owner of the Plaza Theater is not fighting the action; and the community can look forward to something fresh and new. This was one of my big promises to the Patchogue community, and I look forward to working with Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Mazzei to the eventual redevelopment of the property. It just goes to show that when politics are put aside, people win," said County Legislator Jack Eddington.

"The demolition of the Plaza Theater, the sewer extension and the economic re-development of East Main Street are key elements to the further revitalization of Patchogue Village," said Patchogue Mayor Paul Pontieri. "As the eastern gateway to the village, it has a tremendous economic impact on our downtown business district and I will continue to work with Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Mazzei to move these initiatives forward."

Marita Morello, President of FOCUS East Patchogue, the civic group leading the charge to demolish the Plaza Theater said, "I feel a great sense of accomplishment that after 25 years of fighting to do something about the Plaza Theater, it is finally happening. I never gave up the battle and was so excited when the order was signed. It shows that if you keep up the fight, you can make a difference."

Tom Berger, Secretary of FOCUS East Patchogue said, "We are rejoicing, glad, delighted, you name the adjective. Thanks go out to so many, beginning with the people of Patchogue who have supported this effort for so many years. As a community we extend our thanks and appreciation to our elected officials who have supported and helped make this day a reality. Councilman Mazzei who began the moment he took office, former Assemblywoman Pat Eddington, County Executive Steve Levy and Legislator Jack Eddington who began the eminent domain process, followed by Supervisor Lesko and the Town Board for supporting this sensitive legal process." He continued, "We cannot forget the special support from Barbara LaMonica of the old Suffolk Life and Linda Leuzzi of the LI Advance for always being there to get the word to the people. God bless everyone for this victory for the people!"

The next step in the process is for both parties to resolve compensation, which requires a fixture inventory of what is in the building to help determine the total value of the property. Demolition of the building is not contingent on the compensation agreement and the Town plans to demolish the eyesore shortly after all asbestos is removed from the site. Suffolk County will loan the Town \$350,000 for asbestos removal and demolition, and if the Town realizes a profit from the redevelopment of the property for economic development purposes, the County will be paid back. The Town hopes to redevelop the half acre property as part of the economic revitalization and blight remediation of the East Main Street Corridor.

Revitalization of the East Main Street Corridor began when the Town made a series of purchases of buildings along Montauk Highway on Swan Lake, which were demolished to create a park along the shore. The East Patchogue Sewer Improvement Area, a special district that was created following a public hearing by the Town Board, extended the commercial sewer district from the eastern limits of Patchogue Village along Main Street through the East Patchogue business district. Construction of the sewer is still underway and also includes extensive roadway and sidewalk reconstruction. Recently, the Town purchased the former Nesenger auto dealership property, which is in an environmentally sensitive area adjacent to the Swan River and just across Montauk Highway from Swan Lake. The Town's Department of Waste Management will demolish and dispose of the remaining structures and parking lot so the property can be returned to its natural state, thus expanding the Town's open space program.

ABOUT BLIGHT TO LIGHT

On April 26, 2010, Supervisor Lesko proposed the Blight to Light initiative. Lesko and the Brookhaven Industrial Development Agency premiered a film, "Blight to Light", at Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center, which for the first time ever portrayed blight as opportunity. The film is available on youtube and can be accessed through the Brookhaven Town website at www.brookhaven.org. Following the premiere of the film, Supervisor Lesko identified "monuments to blight" in Brookhaven and introduced new proposals to provide incentives for redevelopment in the town, including a blight study, a sewer analysis, and new redevelopment incentives in the Town Code. Since April 26, Blight to Light has had several successes including:

- Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Tim Mazzei announced the redevelopment of the former graffiti-ridden Home Depot on Route 112 in Patchogue, which is now a Raymour & Flanigan furniture retailer.

- Supervisor Lesko and Councilman Dan Panico celebrated the groundbreaking of the new Buckley's Irish Pub in Center Moriches, which was destroyed by a fire nearly five years ago.
- Supervisor Mark Lesko and the Planning Department held various community meetings on the Ronkonkoma Hub and the Town Board accepted a draft Land Use Plan. A Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) was issued on March 7, 2010 to determine the private sector's concept and vision for the framework of a Request for Proposal for a Master Developer. Responses to the RFEI are due on June 30, 2011.
- The Town Board awarded a contract to consultants to conduct a sewer analysis. The study will help to determine where sewers exist, where sewers are needed, who owns them, and if there is any opportunity to tap into excess capacity.
- The Town Board accepted the Draft Blight Study in a resolution. The study is a comprehensive document that defines blight, prioritizes properties for redevelopment, identifies blighted properties, and introduces redevelopment tools.
- The Town Board adopted the Blight to Light code amendments, which scores projects and offers various incentives for redevelopment.

Division of Public Information * Office of the Supervisor

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