

Town Board Votes Unanimously to Approve "Blight to Light" Redevelopment Initiative

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Farmingville, NY - Following public hearings during the Brookhaven Town Board meeting on October 19, the Town Board voted unanimously to approve two local laws that create attractive private sector incentives for the redevelopment of blight. Supervisor Lesko proposed a "Blight to Light" scoring system back in April to encourage the redevelopment of blighted parcels. The vote on October 19 introduced new amendments to the Brookhaven Town code that will result in the scoring of projects to determine the incentives available to encourage redevelopment of blight.

"The incentives to attract private sector redevelopment of blighted properties are now part of our code and I challenge the development community to formulate creative solutions to redevelop blight. Eradicating eyesores in our communities will result in new, exciting destinations and the creation of jobs, which will thereby reduce property taxes," said Supervisor Lesko, "I also thank the Planning Department and the Economic Development Division for their hard and innovative work. This is a major step forward for Blight to Light and a game-changer for the Town of Brookhaven."

"The blight we have in Brookhaven is mainly attributed to poor governmental planning in the past. Now, with the Blight to Light initiative, we submit a new way to visualize and redefine where we propel redevelopment throughout our Township," said Deputy Supervisor / Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh.

"Nearly every community in the Town has been affected by blight and it's important that we remain pro-active in order to eliminate it," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "I support the Supervisor's initiatives and I look forward to working with him and the rest of the Town Board on more ways in which to solve the problem."

"Brookhaven must address blighted areas of our Town. Sound planning will ensure that what replaces today's blight will not end up as tomorrow's blight," said Councilwoman Jane Bonner.

"Anyone seriously concerned about potential impacts to our quality of life and those of us who consider ourselves environmentalists, always prefer to see "blighted" properties revitalized rather than the over-development of unspoiled forested open spaces and ecologically sensitive properties such as wetlands or other special groundwater protection areas. I support Supervisor Lesko's Blight to Light initiative and the incentivizing measures that will eliminate abandoned blighted eye sores while at the same time help to preserve open space," said Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld.

"The Blight to Light initiative provides the Town with the opportunity to transform parcels which have burdened communities for years, parcels such as the old K-Mart site in Middle Island, and the former U.A. property in Coram. I am looking forward to seeing those, as well as other parcels transformed into economically vibrant centers," said Councilwoman Constance Kepert.

Planning Commissioner Tullio Bertoli and Assistant Director of Environmental Protection Jeffrey Kassner presented the Redevelopment Initiative at the Town Board meeting. Testimony was given at the public hearings in support of the new code amendments by a number of prominent regional planning representatives including Dr. Lee Koppelman, Director for the Center of Regional Planning Studies at Stony Brook University, Michael White, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council and Christopher Jones, Vice President for Research at the Regional Plan Association, a private non-profit research and planning organization serving Long Island and the greater metropolitan area. Bob Wieboldt from the Long Island Builders Institute also testified and the New York League of Conservation Voters submitted a supportive statement.

"Supervisor Lesko's Blight to Light initiative is one of the most comprehensive plans that I have ever seen to address the issues of blight on Long Island," said Dr. Lee Koppelman, "These new incentives will certainly get the attention of the private sector, who may have been reluctant in the past to consider projects in Brookhaven Town. This should also serve as an example to other municipalities as to how local government can put forward innovative solutions to get things done."

"We applaud this enlightened redevelopment initiative which provides incentives to developers to revitalize

communities and accommodate growth without sprawl, improving our tax base and creating jobs. The LIRPC looks forward to working with the Town to make this happen," said Michael White, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

"The Blight to Light Redevelopment Initiative is an innovative approach to an increasingly serious problem that plagues not just the Town of Brookhaven, but much of suburban America," said Christopher Jones, Vice President for Research at Regional Plan Association. "By using criteria that balances evidence of blight, consistency with previous plans, community involvement, the type of redevelopment and the appropriateness of the location, it can become a model for other towns across Long Island and around the country."

"This creative approach will help transform the Town of Brookhaven into a community of tomorrow," said Marcia Bystry, president of the New York League of Conservation Voters. "We applaud Supervisor Lesko and all members of the town board for their commitment to a stronger, more vibrant and environmentally sustainable Brookhaven."

"We consider this an innovative and exciting initiative on the part of the Town and we hope it will sufficient incentive to stimulate builders investigating these sites and bringing forth applications," Bob Wieboldt, Long Island Builders Institute.

The new laws passed by the Town Board include waiving fees as part of the various incentive packages offered through Blight to Light and passage of the scoring system.

The new code amendments will introduce attractive private sector incentives for the redevelopment of blight. The code also directs development to blighted parcels and away from virgin land. Each project will be "scored" in three different categories: blight severity, location characteristics, and potential for re-development. For example, a project may receive points if the property has been vacant for decades and is a haven for crime, has community support, generates tax revenue and jobs, is a mixed-use project, is LEED compliant, and is located in a downtown or near a transit hub.

The combined "redevelopment achievement" score the project receives determines the level of the incentive package from the Town. The incentive packages, in order from the most basic incentive package to greatest incentive package, are:

- Illuminated Initiative Package: A redevelopment achievement score of 80-100 points.
- Bright Initiative Package: A redevelopment achievement score of 101-120 points.
- Radiant Initiative Package: A redevelopment achievement score of 121-140 points.
- Brilliant Initiative Package: A redevelopment achievement score of greater than 140 points.

If a project were to qualify for the Brilliant Incentive Package, the incentives under the Redevelopment Initiative, if adopted, could include:

- Expansion of uses in business zoned properties through a special permit of the Planning Board.
- Expedited review by all Boards and Departments in the Town.
- 100% waiver of Town application and permit fees.
- Building permit refunds for LEED certified projects.
- An increase in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) by 10%.
- Shared parking credits.

Town of Brookhaven Planning Department officials presented the Redevelopment Initiative, or Blight to Light code amendments, to the Suffolk County Planning Commission at their October 6, 2010 meeting, where the Commission unanimously voted to approve it 11 - 0. Suffolk County Planning Commission approval is necessary for the Town Code to be amended. Michael Kelly, Member of the Suffolk County Planning Commission representing Brookhaven said, "On the way to the Planning Commission meeting, I passed by the site of the former Bellport Outlets - which is a perfect candidate for the Redevelopment Initiative. I know this has been a priority for Supervisor Lesko and the innovative new redevelopment code amendments presented by Brookhaven are real incentives for the building community. I am proud to represent Brookhaven and hope other towns follow suit by offering incentives to the private sector, not punishing them, to eradicate eyesores in communities."

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 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 will be 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 Lesko and the Brookhaven Planning Department hosted a community meeting in July on the Ronkonkoma Hub and presented conceptual land use plans. 200 community members were in attendance at this meeting and many expressed their support. The Ronkonkoma land use plan is due to be adopted at the end of the year.
- At the August 17 Town Board meeting, 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.
- At the October 5 Town Board meeting, 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.

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