

12.13.2020 FEATURED STORY

Opposition to yacht center project in Mattituck grows

By Tara Smith



A view of the Strong's Yacht Center in 2018. (Credit: Randee Daddona)

Neighbors once again took to a virtual hearing to express their concerns about a proposal for two boat storage buildings at Strong's Yacht Center by the Old Mill in Mattituck. Among the detractors is a local environmental group.

Louise Harrison, New York Natural Areas Coordinator for Save the Sound, highlighted the organization's top concerns during Monday's hearing, urging the Planning Board to consider scale, forest and soil removal, potential for slope failure and impacts to the nearby Mill Road town preserve.

"In the town of Southold, in all of its agricultural beauty and waterways and wetlands, there are very few native forests left," Ms. Harrison said. "They exist as patches in the landscape. Removal of four acres of forest may not seem like much, but in the context of the native forest cover in the town, it's significant."

The applicant, Strong's Marine, is seeking to expand its yacht center by adding two boat storage buildings at 52,500 and 49,000 square feet, along with water supply, sewage disposal, site grading, drainage, lighting and landscaping improvements. According to owner Jeff Strong, the buildings would be approximately 45 feet in height.

The development is proposed on their 32-acre property on the west side of Mattituck Creek, which is currently zoned Marine II.

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The applicants have said the new buildings are needed in order to provide indoor, heated winter storage for yachts that are typically transported to warmer climates due to a lack of available local storage.

Mr. Strong has also said the expansion would add 15 careers to the current full time-staff of 13. The 13-month construction period would include excavating 134,000 cubic yards of soil and sand and 493 trees.

Ms. Harrison added Monday that the forest removal will open up the edge of the preserve to a “gaping hole” and ultimately “tarnish” the view from the town preserve.

“We actually would rather [the Planning Board] encourage the applicant to withdraw the proposal,” and work with local entities on preservation, Ms. Harrison said.

Several other local residents detailed their concerns about the project, which many said doesn’t fit in with the character of the neighborhood.

Russ Bates said the storage buildings would disrupt the “unique beauty” of the inlet, but conceded that Strong’s has been a “very good corporate citizen” and urged them to come up with a scaled back plan.

Maureen Fritch said she and her husband recently moved to the area, drawn to the tranquility and charm.

“I don’t have anything against anyone trying to advance their business,” Ms. Fritch said, noting that she owns a business as well. “However, I don’t think the inlet is the place for a project of this size.”

In August, the Southold Town Planning Board issued what’s known as a positive declaration which requires the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

The document, which is being prepared by an outside consultant paid for by the applicant, must address all potential adverse impacts, possible mitigation measures and reasonable alternatives to be considered.

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A draft report prepared by P.W. Grosser Consulting of Bohemia indicates that water quality, flooding, air quality, impacts to native plants and animals, community character, traffic, noise and light will all be evaluated.

The draft scoping document specifically states that both traffic and ecological impacts will be studied. Traffic conditions will be studied via site visits and reviewing data from the state Department of Transportation, county Department of Public Works and town's highway department, while a qualified biologist will conduct site inspections to inventory flora and fauna, as well as potential threats to fragile native plant and animal species.

The plans would still be subject to additional approvals by the Planning Board beyond the environmental review.

Planning officials said Monday that public comments would be added to the scope for consideration and vice chair James Rich said he anticipates the final scope to be ready by Jan. 11, 2021, despite some resistance from Charles Cuddy, an attorney for the applicant, who questioned the delay.

Mr. Rich said planning staff needs adequate time to prepare the document. "We owe it to both the public and to Strong's Marine to do the best job that we can on this," he said.

Tara Smith is a multimedia reporter who joined the Times Review Media Group in 2018, covering everything from local government and environmental issues to breaking news and features. She's a Riverhead native and 2015 graduate of Arcadia University.

