

The Suffolk Times.

YOUR VIEW

Lessons learned from our activism

The forces driving development on the North Fork have a well-established playbook: They bring deep pockets, a team of consultants who know how to work the system, and a relentless focus to get what they want. And most critically, they count on an unengaged community.

Over the past few years, as project after project has been proposed in our back yards, their playbook is starting to fray in the face of persistent and well-organized community opposition.

We have seen it first-hand in our experience as members of Save Mattituck Inlet, a grassroots group formed in 2020 to raise awareness about the proposed expansion of Strong's Marine in Mattituck. That project would build two boat storage buildings, 52,500 square feet and 49,000 square feet, each 45 feet tall set on a 10-foot elevation. To build these structures, the developer would cut down more than 600 mature trees and excavate a hillside of 134,000 cubic yards of sand adjacent to a Mill Road Preserve, a 25-acre publicly owned woodlands.

Whether it's the Strong's project, the Enclaves, Brinkmann's Hardware, battery storage on Oregon Road, the proposed Mattituck Hotel, or so many others, our community is writing our own playbook, one that puts our voice in the center of the debate.

It is making a difference.

Each of these proposals is unique, complex and raises serious questions; together they could irrevocably remake our community. In response, Save Mattituck Inlet is one of several groups that have formed to bring oversight, awareness and our own expertise to the table. In our case, we see ourselves as an integrator, building coalitions of like-minded people, organizations and civics to ensure that the community's voice is heard.

In doing so, we've learned a few things worth sharing:

1. We are not alone. When people are aware of the stakes, they will share their time and talent.

2. It's hard work, harder than it should be. We have had to learn what can be an arcane process and pay relentless attention to detail in order to participate properly.

3. And it can be fun. We've established deep friendships, have been amazed by the talent all around us, have been inspired by the dedication sustained over years, and have laughed together a lot.

4. Deep pockets are second to deep engagement.

It's rare that a grassroots movement can compete on dollars, but we have different strengths — we have real skin in the game. There is power in that position.

5. The professional staff at the Planning Board has several major projects to manage at once. Be kind and be helpful. They are not the enemy. View them as partners.

6. You don't have to be an expert to participate. While you may be surprised at the ways your expertise can apply, it's your common sense that matters most. You know more than enough to have a meaningful point of view.

7. Be clear about what you care about. In our case, we are not opposed to thoughtful development and have no animosity toward the developer. Still, our list of concerns is long and familiar — impact on the environment, traffic, community character, public safety, to name just a few. (Read more at savemattituckinlet.com.) These are the things we talk about.

This is a crucial moment for the environmental review of the Strong's project. You can read the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement at southoldtownny.gov/270/Environmental-Impact-Statements.

We encourage you to send your comments to the Southold Planning Board

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and to attend the public hearing at 6 p.m. May 15 at Southold Town Hall to share your perspective.

We do not know how things will turn out with the many projects currently under consideration. We do know that it takes a clear public policy, government officials who act in good faith, and, most importantly, an active community to ensure that the North Fork grows responsibly while preserving what we love about its character.

And we know that investing our time and energy is well worth it. Our top lesson learned: Think deeply about what you care about, roll up your sleeves and join the debate.

The authors are members of the Save Mattituck Inlet organization.

GUEST SPOT

ANNE SHERWOOD
PUNDYK AND JEFF
PUNDYK

Opinion

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MATTITUCK

Marina expansion is a public nuisance

I live in a house that sits on Long Creek close to the Mattituck Inlet. I have lived here since 2004, and I plan to live here until I'm old and gray. The creek is an incredible thing to watch for all, and a distinguishing feature of the North Fork.

Therefore, I was compelled to hang a blue ribbon on my home. This, in fact, has been the single most important addition I have made to my property in 18 years. The proposed expansion and development of Strong's Marine threatens what we love about this area.

My concerns are based primarily on the scale of this development. It may seriously threaten the local ecosystem as the waterway is altered. The expansion includes a new 45-foot-tall building and not one but two new boat facilities — taking up a total of 101,500 square feet across 32.6 acres in the Marine II and R-80 residential-zoning districts. Executing such a large-scale plan could be catastrophic. The risk of erosion will rapidly increase with the loss of 500 trees and the removal of 134,000 cubic yards of sand (approximately 7,882 dump truck loads). Water quality will inevitably diminish with increased boat traffic, threatening marine ecosystems as well as osprey and other local wildlife habitats.

The new construction will damage our beautiful views; the increase in large boat traffic will affect kayaking due to the larger wakes. These changes will change the way of life and the environment we have enjoyed for so long irrevocably. All of this would only allow for 15 more full-time jobs at most. There is no upside to this project.

Strong's Marine has not consistently shown a sufficient regard for local residents. For years, I have filed noise complaints regarding the excessive noise from live music emanating from the marina, often as late as 10 p.m., including Sundays. The noise is often so loud I can hear the lyrics of the songs from my home, a quarter-mile away — even with all windows and doors closed. These complaints have led to zero action in response from the marina. Evidently, they put the entertainment needs of out-of-state visitors ahead of the comfort of local residents.

I urge the Mattituck community to join me in convincing the Southold Town Planning Board to deny this expansion of Strong's Marine, as it will diminish the environment and peaceful way of life on the North Fork and reflects a dangerous trend. Please follow @save_mattituck_inlet on Instagram for more information. Hang a blue ribbon from your property. Most of all write to the Southold Town Planning and let your voice be heard.

John Marra

Opinion

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YOUR VIEW

MATTITUCK

This treasure must be protected

There is a treasure in the Town of Southold, located on Mill Road in Mattituck. It is called the Mill Road Preserve.

The property was purchased by the town in 2002 and is 27 acres of idyllic, mature woodland and shrubland. The preserve is filled with wildlife, abundant natural beauty and serenity. It is what a nature preserve is meant to be and thank you to the town for creating it.

Incredibly, this preserve is under dire threat. Here's why: Adjacent to the preserve is a 37-acre property. It is equally idyllic and filled with life. There are osprey, hawks, owls, turtles, rabbits, fox, deer, and more, all living in this gorgeous woodland. The property runs down to Mattituck Inlet and could not be more unspoiled and lovely.

But a developer wants to destroy all that, for the Strong's Marina boat

storage project. In order to build two huge marine storage buildings, the developer would strip mine and destroy this woodland. The developer would destroy the habitat of the animals that live there, imperil the inlet that is directly connected to this natural area and detrimentally impact the adjacent property, which the town has so thoughtfully preserved.

It is heartbreaking that this proposal would even be considered. I would ask everyone in the town to take a look at the property at risk. To walk the preserve and feel the beauty that it represents. Then we need to choose. If your choice is preserving and protecting our natural resources and our environment, please let your elected officials know. Thank you.

Marge McDonnell

Opinion

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2021 | SUFFOLK TIMES

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YOUR VIEW

MATTITUCK

A critical moment

Steve Wick's article about the death of one South Fork bayman is a timely cautionary tale ("In a bayman's death is a lesson for us," Oct. 28). We have all seen the impact of big money on the South Fork and struggled to find the right balance between thoughtful development and preservation here on the North Fork.

What is the formula for getting this balance right? It takes well-articulated public policy, government officials who act with transparency and an active community with the platform to make its voice heard. Our own experience over the past year as members of Save Mattituck Inlet has shown us that it can work — but that it takes relentless oversight, persistent pressure, and strategic coalition building to even have a fair shot.

In short, it is hard, hard work — far harder than it should be if we are to preserve the beauty and quality of life of our community while managing its growth. One year ago, Save Mattituck Inlet formed to raise awareness about the proposed expansion of Strong's Marina. As proposed, the project

would build two oversized boat storage buildings, 52,500 square feet and 49,000 square feet, that will each be 45 feet tall (set on a 10-foot elevation). Along with the size, it's the location of these buildings right on the inlet, and the developer's plans to cut down over 500 trees as well as excavate an entire hillside of 134,000 cubic yards of sand, that initially raised a red flag with the Town of Southold's Planning Board. Save Mattituck Inlet is working to support the Planning Board's environmental review of the proposed project.

The project as planned will impact a 33-acre wooded lot on Mattituck Inlet adjacent to Mill Road Preserve, a 25-acre public woodlands. The ecological, safety, traffic and quality of life implications are too many to list here. (See our website, savemattituckinlet.com, for more detail.)

Today we have more than 2,000 supporters — a number growing every day. And, to the point of Steve's article, together we found a larger purpose: to ensure that the community's voice is active in the oversight of development of and around the Inlet by advocating for its transparent and responsible development.

The Strong's project is still under consideration. We do not know how things will turn out. But we do know that an active and involved community can make a difference; and we do know that exactly how the future of the North Fork will look requires a true partnership between government, responsible commerce and the public.

Without it, we too will go the way of the baymen and the South Fork.

Jeff and Anne Pundyk

The Suffolk Times.

YOUR VIEW

MATTITUCK

Strong's project is wrong for the inlet

I am a resident on Westview Drive in Mattituck. I am also a member of Save Mattituck Inlet. I have the blessing of living on the inlet and have a dock. The peace and tranquility of this hidden gem is a true gift of nature. Our friends and family come to visit to enjoy the peacefulness of the inlet but even more so to enjoy the wildlife. We are fortunate to not just have deer, but wild turkeys, ducks, osprey, hawks, bald eagles and two beautiful white swans, who my grandchildren have come to name "Mr. and Mrs. White."

The fish are in abundance, as well as the clams and mussel beds that surround our property. On a typical day, you have a view of nature at its best. The trees do not just provide beauty but oxygenation to our environment as the wind gently rustles through the leaves and those leaves shade us from the harsh sun.

We live in a time of increasing pollution and a disregard for the contamination of our environment. It is our responsibility and duty to protect and ensure that what little amount of natural environment remains does not get replaced by commercialism. As a member of Save Mattituck Inlet I have stated to destroy this land to build two oversized hangers is a disservice to our duty to protect this hidden gem. Not to mention, the safety issues that have been raised for the Mattituck residents.

There are many more suitable places for this project than on a small, unique and hidden inlet, that we do not own, but is valuable to our community, our visitors, our ecosystem and our planet. All businesses are entitled to make a living but isn't our environment worth

more in the bigger picture to all than what will be gained by only a few. I am sure Strong's project will be better served on an industrial piece of land that would be more conducive to their needs.

Maureen and Joe Fritch Jr.

The Suffolk Times.

YOUR VIEW

MATTITUCK

This proposal will hurt Mattituck Inlet

My family and I live directly across from Mattituck Inlet on Jackson Landing. My husband and I grew up here on the North Fork all our lives and are fortunate enough to raise both our children (ages 12 and 14) here as well. We are still trying to fully grasp just how fortunate we were to grow up here as kids. We want our children to have the same opportunities we were afforded one day as well. That cannot be done if we do not fight to preserve as much of this precious land as possible. So much has changed already, especially the traffic. It has become so dangerous to walk or ride a bike within our own community with the ever increasing rise in tourism.

I understand that local businesses need to thrive but at some point we need to slow down and humble ourselves. I want to fight for the environment and the safety of our children who ride their bikes in our neighborhoods and where they wait for the school bus each day. The Strong's storage buildings development plan wants to:

- Cut down almost 500 trees
- Haul away approximately 134,000 cubic yards of sand

- Exacerbate an already unsafe residential traffic issue
- Remove a natural feature that protects against the effects of climate change
- Impact a significant coastal fish and wildlife habitat.

We are not okay with this. Please help us fight!

The Nieves family

The Suffolk Times.

Translate to ▼

YOUR VIEW

MATTITUCK

Climate change will exacerbate impact of marina project

As a Mattituck resident and homeowner, I am writing to express my concern at the proposed Strong's storage buildings project, which would have adverse impacts on a 33-acre wooded lot on Mattituck Inlet that is adjacent to public woodlands — the Town of Southold's own Mill Road Preserve. Although awareness of this project has already generated considerable public concern, I am compelled to focus my own concern on how climate change will impact the developer's proposal to cut down almost 500 trees, replacing nearly four acres of a native forest with two enormous buildings for yacht storage.

Mattituck is my home, my only home. I live here, within walking distance of the proposed construction the Mattituck Inlet, and am horrified that these noble trees are in danger of being destroyed. Five hundred trees with their life-affirming benefits of providing shade and cooling at the same time as they sequester carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. It's not only the absence of these trees that is so alarming, it's their removal that will disturb the soil and release carbon that would otherwise remain in its right and proper place — the soil.

Standing as they now do, the trees and forest create a natural corridor for the inevitably rising seas, mitigating the effects of future flooding. They also provide a protective buffer for terrestrial and coastal wildlife against rising levels of sun, heat and wind that we know our immediate future will surely bring.

To remove the 500 or so trees and haul away a hill of sand, 134,000 cubic yards of it, for profit — replacing them with two enormous propane-heated structures — is simply a travesty against nature and against our human and natural habitats. The proposed project flies in the face of everything that science, our lived experience and plain old common sense is telling us. Climate change is teaching us that we must protect and preserve our natural world if it is to protect us and the generations to come. We cannot afford to ignore such clear teaching.

Hazel Kahan