



BRIANNE LEDDA PHOTO

The ‘Save Mattituck Inlet’ group has distributed blue ribbons in a campaign to raise awareness about development proposed by Strong’s Marine.

# ‘Save Mattituck Inlet’ effort grows

## Campaign continues against Strong’s Marine proposal

BY BRIANNE LEDDA  
STAFF WRITER

Environmental advocacy group “Save Mattituck Inlet” is distributing blue ribbons to raise awareness about proposed development by Strong’s Marine along West Mill Road in Mattituck.

The proposal, which has been in the works since at least 2018, includes construction of two one-story buildings — 52,000 square feet and 49,000 square feet — to store yachts during the winter, according to a December draft environmental impact statement. Both buildings would include “radiant heating,” which the DEIS said is “essential for maintaining electrical systems in the types of vessels to be stored.” An estimated 88 yachts could be stored in the structures proposed for the 32.96-acre parcel.

Save Mattituck Inlet, founded in December 2020, has raised concerns about how the construction will impact the environment and surrounding community. The group began to emphasize the blue ribbon campaign around its anniversary “as a further

way to raise awareness about the project and continue to get community support,” said its steering committee co-chair Anne Sherwood Pundyk.

The group launched a petition on Change.org that has gained more than 2,200 signatures in 10 months. The blue ribbon campaign was inspired by a similar campaign conducted several years ago. “Symbolically it’s like we’re connected through this,” Ms. Pundyk said.

The group’s “primary mission is to raise awareness in the community that this project is being considered,” she added. This project, along with others in Southold Town, indicates “a real surge in development” and the proposed facility could have “potentially catastrophic, irreversible, environmental impact on the inlet and our whole neighborhood, not to mention anyone on the North Fork who uses the inlet,” Ms. Pundyk said.

The group does not “object to positive commercial growth,” she noted, but believes projects should be consistent with the character of the North Fork

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Ted Wells

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and benefit the community. The group wants to make sure the Southold Town Planning Board, which will evaluate the project, and the community have "as much information as possible."

Ms. Pundyk said 30 or 40 ribbons have been distributed so far. People have indicated interest by emailing the advocacy group or reaching out via social media.

Among the concerns identified on the group's website are the number of mature trees that would be cut down, the amount of sand to be hauled away and the project's proximity to the public Mill Road Preserve.

The project's DEIS indicates development will result in the "physical disturbance and permanent loss" of several acres of vegetation, including as many as 650 trees, although the DEIS notes that field adjustments will likely reduce that number. A spokesperson for Strong's Marine said the number of trees planned for removal is 634.

The DEIS also estimates that nearly 135,000 cubic yards of material would be removed from the excavation area, using a newly constructed "haul road" to West Mill Road.

The project would result in a new forest edge approximately 105 feet from Mill Road Preserve along about 99 feet of the shared property boundary, according to the DEIS. The new forest edge could cause "potential changes to the forest microclimate and increased abundance of invasive plants and wildlife species" on a little more than a third of an acre in the 25-acre preserve.

"The proposed act would not be expected to have significant adverse impacts on the forest habitat quality or composition through the large majority of the Mill Road Preserve," the DEIS says.

Ecological surveys did not observe any endangered, threatened or rare species or significant ecological communities at the project site, although the DEIS acknowledges forest loss would "likely decrease the abundance and diversity of the plant and wildlife species that utilize the site."

Jeff Strong, owner of Strong's Marine, said the project is 100% compliant with Marine II industrial zoning, state Department of Environmental Conservation and Southold Town Trustee regulations and site-specific local waterfront revitalization program recommendations.

"All we're trying to do is manage our business in what we believe is a prudent way," he said.

The storage buildings would be built like potato barns, into the sand behind existing waterfront buildings, he added. Sand would be removed to prepare the building site for construction.

According to a fact sheet sent to The Suffolk Times, Strong's Marine plans to plant more than 100 new trees on site after construction is completed and hopes to work with the town to identify further opportunities to plant trees in the community. The document also says all trees with a diameter of six inches or more are included in the property's tree count.

The Strong's fact sheet says construction of the new buildings "will shift the edge of the existing forest closer to the Town's Mill Road Pre-

serve," maintaining a "minimum 105 [foot] buffer between the project limit and the Preserve." Part of the project includes "planting native trees and vegetation along the new forest edge to minimize" potential impacts to the preserve.

Mr. Strong declined to comment on the blue ribbon campaign but said his family has been in Mattituck since 1965 and has been in the marina and on-water business since 1945. His family has lived on Mattituck Inlet for the last 40 years and has been involved with Cornell Cooperative Extension on water enhancement and improvement projects since the mid-1990s. Recent efforts have grown more than 10 million clams in the past four years at the yacht center, he said.

"From our perspective, we know and we've got a very long history of being good neighbors and good commercial stewards of the waterfront and that's near and dear to us," he said. "We're not going to do something that's going to negatively impact the inlet because it would negatively affect my family."

While he's sure the protests have been "well-intended," he said not all arguments have been accurate.

"Because everything we own is on the water, we've been through the kinds of things before and the e's not a project that we've built since 1965, which would be now 57 years, that people haven't said after the project was built, 'Oh wow you guys really did do exactly what you said, you did wind up making our community better,' and this project we believe will be no different than that," he said.

"We're totally appreciative of our neighbors. Many of them have been friends and customers over the years. Everybody's entitled to their different viewpoints. But this project will be good for the community, will be good for the town, will be good for the waterfront, just as every other project we've done since 1965," Mr. Strong added.

Ted Wells, who lives on Cox Neck Road, has hung a blue ribbon to protest the Strong's project.

Mr. Wells, who is 85, said he's lived in Mattituck all his life and lamented development in town. He criticized the lack of local competition for Strong's Marine.

"What they're doing now, they want to turn around and move all the sand out of the Mattituck Inlet marina, which is Strong's, building this and building that. What it means is that big business wants to come in and just eat you right up. To me it's wrong," Mr. Wells said.

Cherie Rexroad, who lives near the marina, has also hung a blue ribbon. The boats are loud, she said, especially since the outbreak of the pandemic. She expressed concern about how the Strong's project would impact birds and other wildlife in the area.

"We have to pay really close attention and preserve what we have or it will be ruined and there will be no getting it back," she said.

Ms. Pundyk said the approval process includes opportunities for the community to submit public comments.

"We as a community will be talking to the [Planning] Board again," she said. "There's a process for this dialogue to happen."

'This project will be good for the community.'

Jeff Strong

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