

# The Suffolk Times.

## Guest Spot: Rally behind disputed waterfront plan

By: Bob DeLuca 9/8/2014 8:00am

Over the last 30 years, I have reviewed hundreds of development applications as an environmental analyst with the Suffolk County health department and as president of Group for the East End.

In doing so, I have supported numerous community groups and members of the public who have rightly opposed irresponsible development throughout the region.

So when the efforts to redevelop the New Suffolk waterfront were met with skepticism, I wasn't too surprised. In fact, good questions and a little suspicion can be a very healthy thing.

But as the project has come into sharper focus, it is now undeniably clear that the New Suffolk waterfront project will guarantee a massive and permanent reduction of the site's legally allowable development potential — and that is something we should all get behind.

No private developer would ever volunteer to abandon the sweeping construction and commercial use potential that is fully allowed in the site's all too generous "M11" zoning category. But, thankfully, because the New Suffolk Waterfront Fund is a community-based organization, it has focused on making the project a community asset and not just a financial asset, and that makes a world of difference.

In addition to substantially reducing the project's potential size and scale, eliminating a range of potentially obnoxious and polluting commercial uses, restoring the community marina, renovating and moving the Galley Ho building and pulling it back from the shoreline, addressing site runoff and installing a new septic system (which will reduce bacterial loads and provide improved attenuation of nitrogen before it reaches surface waters), the waterfront fund has also made extensive efforts to secure additional community input and incorporate that input into the final plan.

As result of this community feedback, specific changes have been made to further improve the site plan in an effort to address reasonable concerns about the location of structures and the protection of visual resources and to expand open space protection. The sponsors have also agreed to set specified limits on events to reduce the overall activity at the site.

Despite these measures, it's clear that some folks will surely feel that no effort is sufficient to address their concerns and that the dilapidated waterfront should somehow just always remain as it is, and that is their right. However, having dealt with the real consequences of land use decisions left to chance for three decades, I am far more hopeful about the future of the New Suffolk waterfront in the hands of a community-based organization than I am counting on luck or miraculous fortune to determine the future of this valuable commercial property.

So let the review of this project proceed, and let the Town Planning Board do its diligence to assure that all the mitigation offered by the New Suffolk Waterfront Fund is incorporated into the final plan. And then, let us all make the effort to help this project live up to its full potential as a community asset for the people of New Suffolk, as it was always intended.

*Bob DeLuca is an East Marion resident and president of Group for the East End, an environmental advocacy organization.*