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Port Washington building moratorium extended until October



The waterfront business district along Main Street in Port Washington, Thursday morning, May 16, 2019. Photo Credit: Danielle Silverman

By Dandan Zou

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Updated June 19, 2019 10:17 AM

North Hempstead Town officials extended a building moratorium for three more months Tuesday to allow time for the public to review changes to the proposed zoning code regulating the waterfront business district in Port Washington.

In a public hearing that lasted two hours, several people said the proposed code would make it nearly impossible for any development to take place while others said the code didn't go far enough to protect residents' quality of life. The building moratorium, which was set to expire on July 1, was adopted in late 2017 to prevent overdevelopment along the waterfront area and give officials time to review the code.

"We've been struggling for 18 months to try to find a place where we can make everyone happy, and we've arrived at the place where we've made no one happy," said Councilwoman Dina De Giorgio, who represents Port Washington.

Tuesday's hearing came after two public meetings and 18 months of deliberation on the town's part to come up with a new code that would allow development without losing the area's small-town character.

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Members from the business community, however, criticized the town for failing to provide that balance.

"There's a concern about overdevelopment. But with this zoning code, there is going to be no development," said William Cornachio, of Manhasset, who spoke on behalf of Manhasset Bay Yacht Club in Port Washington. "Basically what you've done with this zoning code is sterilizing the most valuable property in Port Washington forever."

Under the proposed code, residential development would be banned, and no structure could be taller than 35 feet in the 11-acre waterfront district that runs along Main Street from Sunset Park to Dolphin Green. The code would also limit buildings in the district to two floors.

New language was recently added to cap hotel capacity at 35 rooms per acre.

Residents who spoke Tuesday night said the code still left gray areas that could allow larger, denser development at the expense of the residents.

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"Residents and community organizations have repeatedly expressed opposition to another building such as the Knickerbocker," said Lori Rothstein, who lives off Main Street. "I am not convinced that the proposed code can truly prevent that." The Knickerbocker Yacht Hotel on Main Street is the only three-story building in the district; its second and third floors are residential condominiums.

Area resident George Mousouroulis said he lost his water view when construction for the Knickerbocker building began in 2012. he cited quality of life concerns.

The town "should really take into consideration the 500-plus families that live along the water who do not need increased traffic when they try to pick their children up from school or buy groceries or run errands," he said.

The board voted to continue the public hearing at their next meeting on July 9. The question of what happens next was left unanswered.

But the moratorium can't stay forever, Town Supervisor Judi Bosworth said, and "at some point, a compromise does have to be reached."

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