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Opinion

Guest Editorial

Waterfront Round Table

There is no shortage of waterfront planners. The difficulty is getting them all in the same room to share a common vision for our harbor complex which has been officially designated a "Regionally Important Natural Area." Currently, several overlapping downtown revitalization, historic preservation and harbor management plans exist. No wonder citizens are frustrated and confused about who is in charge.

There are 10 incorporated villages, two counties (Nassau and Suffolk), two towns (Huntington and Oyster Bay), plus several New York State Departments (DEC, DOS, Parks) and Federal agencies (EPA, F&W) having waterfront or watershed jurisdiction around the Oyster Bay - Cold Spring Harbor ecosystem. In addition, there are various civic associations, user groups and single issue advocates.

The problems include water quality, habitat loss, sewage treatment, best management practices for shoreline homeowners, preserving the working waterfront, overcrowded public launching ramps, neglected parks and declining downtown commercial centers.

Friction over use of limited resources can erupt when you mix the concerns of the lobstermen, shellfish harvesters, fishermen, sailors, rowers and swimmers with the needs of land based apartments,

restaurants, small stores, families with children and sightseers.

We have made a good start. The Town of Oyster Bay adopted the Hamlet Plan in May 2002. Admittedly, its recommendations are more diagnostic than prescriptive, but at least it highlights the issues of traffic, parking and connecting the village to the waterfront.

In March 2006, the town received a \$37,000 Environmental Protection Fund matching grant from the NYS Department of State to begin a two-year zoning and development study for the Eastern Waterfront. Their scope extends roughly from the Roosevelt Launching Ramp to the Oyster Bay High School. Since they have yet to appoint an official steering committee, an ad-hoc Eastern Waterfront planning group (open to the public) was convened by Friends of the Bay and has been meeting for more than a year.

Often a cheap, quick-fix is all that is needed to resolve conflicts. For example, at the Waterfront Center, overcrowding of people, boats and cars is an accident waiting to happen. By simply painting parking stripes in the Beekman Beach parking lot and installing official stop signs, safety would be improved. The addition of a graded ramp and low floating launching platform for non-motorized vessels (children's Optimist sailboats, kayaks and rowing shells) would also separate user groups from their conflict on the unmanaged beach.

Some other old ideas which should be revived include: building the bike trail to Bayville along Shore Road; enforcing boat speed limits; protecting the Diamond Back Terrapin breeding habitat; installing fish ladders; finding a safer boat launch in Cold Spring Harbor; and holding on-the-water Oil Spill drills.

Some new ideas include: mapping a "blue-way" water trail for kayaks; building a lighthouse-themed observation tower harbor master's office at the Roosevelt Boat Basin; providing a dock in Cold Spring Harbor for the oyster sloop Christeen to pick up school groups from the Whaling Museum; and creating public access bird watching boardwalks in coastal marshes.

Comprehensive waterfront planning requires big picture mentality and interagency coordination. We need an official round-table waterfront oversight committee, consisting of agencies, villages and user groups, similar to the one in Hempstead Harbor to ensure that all constituent voices are considered. Once again, Friends of the Bay deserves praise for its leadership in waterfront

management in our community.

- Caroline S. DuBois