

In Brookhaven, the sod hits the fan

By **DAVID WINZELBERG**

A long-debated plan to build a smart-growth village center in Shoreham may finally be derailed by a Brookhaven Town board member who favors already-approved zoning for 283 single-family homes.

The site is a 320-acre sod farm and golf course that the Garden City developer Ornstein Leyton Co. wants to turn into a so-called "planned development district," complete with much-needed rental housing units with office and retail.

The developers argue that there is strong community support for the center, which would provide a boost of \$500,000 per year to the Shoreham-Wading River School District through new property taxes. Conversely, the school district would face increased costs of as much as \$4 million annually from the influx of students that would come if the single family homes are built, according to a study by Rutgers University.

But Brookhaven Town board member Kevin McCarrick said plans for the center, dubbed Tallgrass, have simply grown too big.

"The planned development district that they want to drop in here in our little hamlet of Shoreham is, by size, tremendous," McCarrick told Long Island Business News. And local residents who turned out for public hearings on the development are also opposed, according to McCarrick.

"Overwhelmingly, people have said they want to preserve the property, but they also said they don't want this planned development district," he said.

Larry Feldman, an attorney with the Uniondale law firm Farrell Fritz, which represents the developers, argues the point.

"We've done more community outreach on this project than any other proj-

ect on Long Island that I know of," he said. "This project had two public hearings within a month of each other and only 50 people came out. Out of the 50 people who came out, a good majority were in favor of the plan."

Feldman said a dozen different configurations of retail, office and residential have been presented to the town and that McCarrick consistently opposed any alternative that had a commercial component.

"For some reason, he kept pushing for alternatives that didn't include any commercial," Feldman said.

Town board member prefers 283 new homes to smart-growth plan.

Critics say retiring councilman putting family business first.

Politician cites size of proposal, denies any personal motivation.

Others are a bit blunter in pointing out that the McCarrick family owns several Rocky Point businesses within a mile's drive of the sod farm, including McCarrick's Dairy, McCarrick's Professional Office Park and McCarrick Realty.

If the village center plan is scrapped, "You'll have 283 single-family homes, and they either have to go shopping in Rocky Point or they have to go all the way out to Wading River," noted resident John Ratto, a member of the Shoreham Civic Association and an ardent supporter of the village center plan.

McCarrick denied that personal business has anything to do with his opposition to the Tallgrass center, noting that the family dairy has been in business for more than 60 years.

"I don't think I'm too concerned about competition," he said.

Further complicating the deal is State Sen. Kenneth LaValle, who has urged the

Town of Brookhaven to purchase and preserve the site, which is currently comprised of a sod farm and golf course. Citing high costs – the property is worth as much as \$60 million – Brookhaven has twice passed on that opportunity.

Feldman, the developers' attorney, said his client isn't interested in selling and will pursue single-family development if approval of the town center plan is not forthcoming. McCarrick wants to push the issue to a vote at the next board meeting on Tuesday, but he accuses Brookhaven Supervisor Brian Foley of trying to delay a vote until after the November elections.

McCarrick is not running for re-election. Foley told LIBN that the 283 "McMansions" would place a "crushing burden on school taxpayers."

"The Tallgrass property is a critically important North Shore parcel," Foley said. "We have gone through a thorough and intensive community-based planning process.

"The next step is to get the findings back from the planning department, which will happen in the near future," he added.

Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island, a smart-growth not-for-profit that conducted the Tallgrass visioning process, agreed that there is a community support for the village center. Alexander estimated that twice as many speakers appearing at Tallgrass public hearings were for the center than were against it.

But Alexander noted that the developers have increased the number of residential units and the size of the project's commercial component since the visioning process ended in the spring – and that has caused "anxiety" in the community.

"There's been a lot of conflicting information," Alexander added. "It's up to the town to provide clarity."