



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Broad Community Support Voiced For New Smithtown Business District Sewer Plan

MARIO R. MATTERA | October 13, 2021

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On Tuesday, October 12th, a coalition of community leaders and elected officials met on the steps of Town Hall, to sign a letter to Governor Hochul, requesting support to make recharge land available, which will advance plans for long-awaited sewer infrastructure in downtown Smithtown.

The addition of sewer capacity to the Smithtown Business District, using a \$20 million NYS grant, can move forward if part of a derelict parcel at the former Kings Park Psychiatric Center can be used to recharge clean water back into the ground. The community has asked Governor Kathy Hochul to direct State agencies to support the sewer plan, advancing efforts already underway to transfer the parcel to Suffolk County for the project.

“For nearly 50 years, the goal of providing sewers for the Smithtown Business District has seemed out of reach, resulting in vacant storefronts in the downtown area and continued discharges of untreated wastewater into the environment. Now, at long last, a clear solution has been identified, and victory is in sight. This is an historic day for the Town of Smithtown,” stated Smithtown Supervisor Ed Werheim.

“Today is a great show of unity in the efforts to protect the \$40 million in state funding for Smithtown and Kings Park and I am proud to stand with all of the elected officials, chambers leaders, civic leaders and residents to show New York that we are ready to bring our region into the future. That togetherness will demonstrate our commitment, at all levels of government, to these projects and I thank Supervisor Wehrheim and all of the town leaders for bringing everyone together today. Their efforts will help protect our environment, enhance our local economy and create needed jobs for the hardworking men and women of Long Island,” stated Senator Mario Mattera.

Supervisor Wehrheim hosted a press conference with fellow elected officials and representatives from various organizations throughout Kings Park and Smithtown who also support the plan. The proposal is the result of a two year effort, by a Smithtown Sewers Working Group tasked with a mission to identify ways to overcome obstacles to connect the Smithtown Business District to sewers using a \$20 million grant from the State's Transformative Investment Program. The working group was established in 2019, and consists of environmental experts, planning officials and community members.

Under the Working Group's Plan, the derelict buildings which are a highly visible blight on the community will be demolished and removed and a small portion of the site will be used to return cleaned water to the ground using recharge beds that will not be visible from outside the site. Mature trees and steep slopes on the property will be preserved as open space along with approximately 15 acres of land.

"The Sewer Working Group is a great example of the community and government working together in a collaborative and constructive manner. I am thankful to both County Executive Steve Bellone, and Town of Smithtown Supervisor Ed Wherheim for allowing me to be included with this talented team. Together we have provided a solution to a decades old elusive goal of sewers within the business district. The project's value proposition for the downtown business district is just so strong. The project reduces nitrogen flowing into the Nissequogue River by 87% under current conditions. Downtown build out consistent with the draft Smithtown Master Plan reduces nitrogen by 71%. Additionally, the project fully enables revitalization and economic growth of the downtown business district. How can you not support the project?" said Timothy Small, Smithtown United Civic Leader, & Sewer Working Group Member.

"We owe a debt of gratitude to the members of our community who came together to establish the Working Group in order to provide focus and momentum to the effort to find a way to break the logjam that had prevented any real progress in using this \$20 million grant to get sewers for Smithtown. Thanks to their hard work, at long last, we now have a real plan to bring sewers to the Business District that the entire community can support. I am very thankful for the efforts of the Working Group," said Smithtown Councilman Tom Lohmann.

In 2017, Governor Cuomo announced two \$20 million grants under the State's Transformative Investment Program (TIP), one to connect the Kings Park Business District to Suffolk County Sewer District No. 6 in Kings Park, and the other to bring sewers to the

Smithtown Business District. While the Kings Park Business District project has been approved and is slated to move forward in 2022, the Smithtown Business District project has been unable to move forward, until now.

“To characterize it as a ‘win-win’ for the community really doesn’t go far enough in describing the tremendous benefits that the Working Group’s new plan will have for the environment, the economy and the quality of life of our community. Not only will this plan improve water quality in the Nissequogue River and unshackle the economic development potential of the Smithtown Business District, but it will replace derelict buildings that are an attractive nuisance and liability to the State and a blight on the community with 15 acres of dedicated open space that will be a community amenity,” said Tony Tanzi, President of the Kings Park Chamber of Commerce.

“We are thrilled to sign this letter, which catapults the game changing wastewater infrastructure into an attainable reality for Downtown Smithtown. Currently, our small businesses are barely keeping head above water, having endured the economic struggle, and coronavirus pandemic. All while being told they can not expand, renovate or improve their business models because of antiquated septic systems restricting their capacity for growth. This letter is so much more than a plea for help from our Governor. This letter is hope for a great future, for both the communities of Kings Park and Smithtown, for our environment, and our future generations,” said Barbara Franco, Smithtown Chamber of Commerce, Executive Director.

“It’s easy, sewers are good for the environment and for the economic health of downtowns. With fifteen acres of the property becoming a passive park, contiguous to the Nissequogue River State Park, steep slopes and mature woods being protected, and the school district being kept whole - it’s a win all around,” stated Kings Park Civic Association President, Linda Henninger.

A Working Group composed of community leaders, Town and County staff worked for nearly two years examining alternative approaches to bring sewers to the Smithtown Business District. After deliberation and analysis, the group has concluded that the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial plan would be to connect the area to the existing state-of-the-art treatment plant at Kings Park. In order for the project to move forward, a small parcel of land will be needed to return water treated by the plant to the ground.

After completing investigations of a half-dozen different sites for use as recharge beds, the Working Group identified a parcel containing a vacant, unsecured, derelict building, owned by the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) at the former Kings Park Psychiatric Center, as the only viable location for the recharge beds.

The Working Group's examination concluded that the OMH property was a suitable location for numerous reasons, including:

Use of the site to facilitate the sewer project will eliminate the use of cesspools and septic systems, reducing nitrogen loading to the Nissequogue River, which is protected under the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act, by 87 percent

The property is located outside environmentally sensitive areas including the State of New York's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act Corridor and Town of Smithtown Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) Conservation Area.

Recharging cleaned water at the site would use just one and half acres of the 17 acre site, placing recharge beds in the footprint of the vacant and derelict buildings, which would be removed, and preserving the remainder of the property as open space.

“The Working Group found that connecting to the existing facility is the only way to advance sewers for Smithtown in a reasonable time frame, because finding a site for a new plant in a fully developed community like Smithtown would be extremely difficult, would take many years if it were possible, and would add at least \$20 million to the cost of the project. This common sense plan is strongly supported by the community, and will make sewers for Smithtown a reality at less cost in a much shorter time frame,” said Smithtown Councilman McCarthy, Liaison to the Department of Environment and Waterways, and the Planning Department.

“It is poetic, the way the people of two hamlets have come together in betterment of not just our local economy, but in protection of our ecosystem, drinking water and environment. If you mentioned installing sewers in any one of our three downtowns four years ago... most people would roll their eyes with uncertainty. Today, we’ve proven the naysayers wrong. This is what real community activism looks like. I know I am inspired to get to work at the Assembly and I’m certain that our Governor will equally be motivated by this show of solidarity,” Assemblyman Michael Fitzpatrick.

“We have come here today to support the sewerage projects of two hamlets in the township of Smithtown ; Kings Park and Smithtown. Both main streets are struggling economically due to regulations in the sanitary code that restrict seating in restaurants to protect the aquifer. A better way to protect the aquifer is through sewerage . It will have a positive impact on the elevated groundwater levels in surrounding communities . Our restaurants will be able to expand, our medical and sanitary waste will no longer discharge directly into our drinking water untreated, and our main streets, our economic engines will be able to support a thriving economy. Governor Hochul, please follow through with our request As soon as possible! Thank you,” stated Suffolk County Legislator Leslie Kennedy.

Under the Working Group's plan, the \$20 million TIP grant would be used to connect the Smithtown Business District to an existing state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant at Suffolk County Sewer District No. 6 in Kings Park. The facility was upgraded to comply with new more stringent nitrogen discharge limits enacted as a result of the Long Island Sound Study, and treats wastewater so effectively that the effluent is cleaner than required under its operating permit. During the upgrade process the plant was designed to allow for expansion of treatment capacity to accept additional wastewater for treatment.