

LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

Brookhaven seeks master developer to revitalize Mastic Beach's blighted downtown



Brookhaven Councilman Dan Panico said, "We're looking to create a vibrant, new downtown area for Mastic Beach." Credit: James Carbone

By Carl MacGowan

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With the right plan and enough money, Mastic Beach's blighted downtown business district could be reinvented as a Long Island version of a seaside Cape Cod village, Brookhaven Town officials say.

Town officials are preparing to take the next step in the South Shore hamlet's transformation by launching a search for a master developer to shepherd the project. The developer will be expected to prepare a comprehensive plan with proposals for housing, retail stores and restaurants that will rejuvenate the community and give it "a sense of place," officials said in a news release.

"We're looking to create a vibrant, new downtown area for Mastic Beach," said Brookhaven Councilman Dan Panico, who grew up in Mastic Beach and represents it on the town board. "We've cracked down on housing issues, we've taken down homes, we've preserved property, we've improved our park.

"It's the right time to go out to the development community to give Mastic Beach the downtown that it deserves."

Brookhaven last month released a Request for Qualifications seeking potential master developers. Bids are due by Sept. 13.

The half-mile-long downtown includes small businesses and decaying, abandoned commercial buildings. Redevelopment plans have been in the works for years and picked up steam after the Village of Mastic Beach disbanded in 2017 amid fiscal and political difficulties.

Neighborhood Road, downtown Mastic Beach's primary thoroughfare, was renamed Main Street to create a more business-friendly image, and a new \$9.5 million Mastic Beach Ambulance Co. headquarters was opened in 2018.

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Work has begun on a \$4.5 million project to convert the former village hall into a 7,000-square-foot annex of the Mastic-Moriches-Shirley Community Library. And plans for Suffolk County's new Forge River Sewer District will enable expansion of existing businesses and creation of new ones, officials said.

Panico said he envisions a truncated version of Patchogue's successful downtown redevelopment. Mastic Beach has a population of about 13,000.

"This is not Patchogue. This is a waterfront community that should have a good mix of uses, [such as] new housing, restaurants, shops, perhaps even medical," he said. "It's more along the lines of New England."

Former Mastic Beach mayor Maura Sperry said the downtown has tremendous potential and a huge need for new businesses and an updated look. But she cautioned that town officials must work closely with current business owners to ensure they are not squeezed out by new construction.

"These are the people who have been there for 20 [or] 30 years and have fought through all our problems, and I don't want to see them as losers," Sperry said. "I feel like it's going to be a success if they do that."

Richard Mazanek, owner of Dick's Bait & Tackle on Main Street, said the downtown could benefit from new ideas and updated infrastructure, adding that he's noticed "For Sale" signs in some older buildings.

But local residents will have to be patient, he said.

"It's not going to happen overnight. It's going to happen slowly," Mazanek said. "There's been more improvement in the last year or two than there has been for awhile. ... It could be a nice, quaint little small town."

Remaking Mastic Beach

Here are details of the town's plan:

DEVELOP a comprehensive plan "that will showcase a variety of land uses, including housing, retail and restaurants."

REPLACE "decaying and blighted structures" in the vicinity of Neighborhood Road, which has been re-branded as Main Street.

CREATE "vibrancy and a sense of place for the community."

LOCATION: Main Street/Neighborhood Road, west from Commack Road, east to Doris Drive, and streets north of Main Street such as Victoria Place and Linden Place.

Source: Town of Brookhaven

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Carl MacGowan is a Long Island native who covers Brookhaven Town after having previously covered Smithtown, Suffolk County courts and numerous spot news and feature stories over his 20-plus year career at Newsday.



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