

ROUTE 25A WADING RIVER LAND USE STUDY



Community Planning Forum and Business Focus Group Summary Report

Wading River, Town of Riverhead, New York

Prepared on behalf of:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

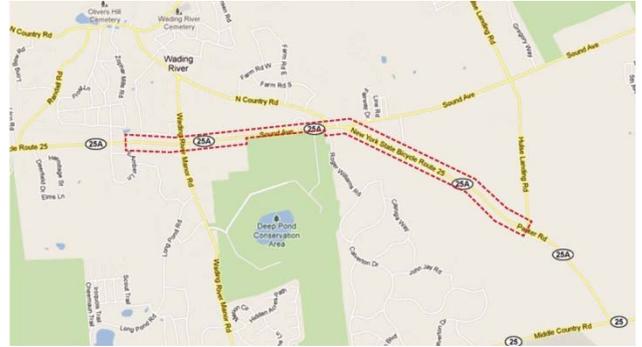
I. Introduction	1
II. Business Focus Group Session and Community Planning Forum	3
III. Public Comments	6
IV. Conclusion	9

I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2011, the Town of Riverhead launched the Route 25A Wading River Land Use Study. The purpose of the study is to examine current land uses along the Route 25A corridor, between the Town of Riverhead/Town of Brookhaven town line and Hulse Landing Road, and guide future development so that it is both economically sustainable and appropriate for the Hamlet of Wading River. Among the study’s goals is to allow for orderly growth and development while preserving and enhancing the quality of life and physical character of the Hamlet. Upon completion of a selective update to the Town’s Comprehensive Plan, the plan update will be the impetus for zoning changes that achieve the plan’s goals.

There are a number of vacant parcels along the corridor that are experiencing development pressure. The focus of the study is to resolve potential issues pertaining to these parcels, including land use, zoning, open space preservation, and design. Future development should be compatible with the rural character of Wading River, the current land uses along the Route 25A corridor, and its environment. At the same time, future development needs to be planned in a way that continues to ensure the economic competitiveness of businesses along Route 25A. The Town’s zoning regulations should be flexible in order to reflect this balance.

The Route 25A Wading River Land Use study consists of six tasks that will occur over an eight month time period. To date, the Town’s planning consultants, BFJ Planning, have collected and analyzed data pertaining to the Route 25A corridor and reviewed prior plans and studies. Two public forums have also been held, which included Wading River residents, community and environmental groups, and the business community. The community planning forums, which were held on October 19, 2011



Study Area

Study Goals

Prepare a Land Use Plan for the Route 25A Corridor that:

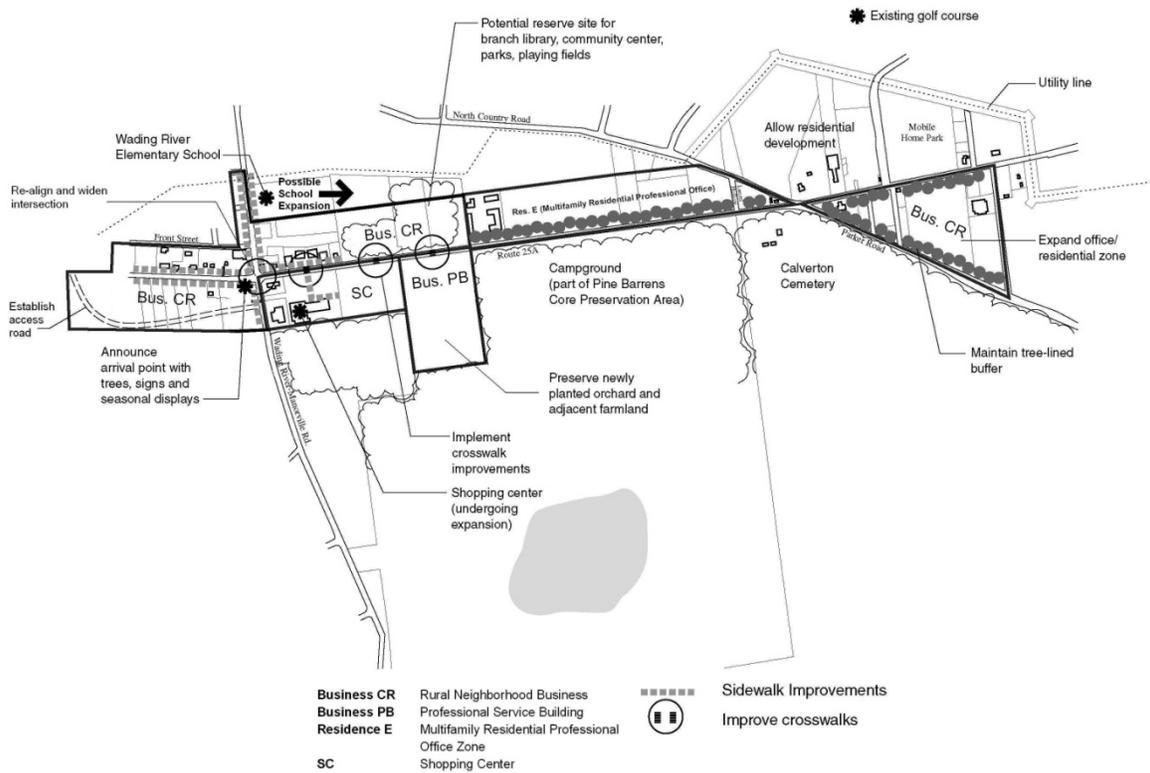
- Identifies potential development parcels
- Guides future development in a sustainable way
- Allows for orderly growth and development while balancing conservation and development
- Preserves community character and open space (and ensures compatibility)
- Promotes standards that enhance quality of life

Consider changes to zoning regulations that accomplishes the above goals

Task	Description	2011				2012			
		Sept.	October	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April
Task 1	Draft Comprehensive Plan Update	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Task 2	Focus Group Meeting and Public Workshop		1	2					
Task 3	Final Comprehensive Plan Update				1	2	3	4	
Task 4	Zoning Text Modification					1	2	3	
Task 5	SEQR								Establishment of Lead Agency
Task 5.1	Preparation of Full EAF Part 1 and Attachments					1	2	3	4
Task 5.2	Preparation of Full EAF Part 2 and Negative Declaration					1/12	2/4	2/22	
Task 6	Town Board Work Sessions/Meetings/Public Hearing	1							Public hearing on Comp Plan update & zoning

Project Timeline

and October 24, 2011, are summarized below. The next steps consist of preparing a draft selective Comprehensive Plan update for Route 25A in Wading River that will update the 2003 plan. This task will be followed by zoning text modification and environmental assessment of the Draft Plan and zoning update as per the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR).



2003 Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan – Route 25A Wading River

II. BUSINESS FOCUS GROUP SESSION AND COMMUNITY PLANNING FORUM

Two public sessions were held as part of the Route 25A Wading River Land Use Study. The first public session was a focus group meeting with the business community held at the East Winds Catering Center on October 19, 2011. The second session, which was held at the Wading River Congregational Church on October 24, 2011, was a community planning forum that included Wading River residents, and neighborhood and environmental groups. The purpose of the sessions was to present the preliminary findings of the study, including the defined study area, the project goals and objectives, existing zoning and land use, and roadway conditions. The public sessions also allowed the public and the business community to provide information on the issues and opportunities facing the Route 25A corridor and how they envisioned the corridor in the future.

Each public forum began with an introduction by Town of Riverhead officials (Town of Riverhead Supervisor Sean Walter at the October 19th forum and Town Attorney Robert Kozakiewicz at the October 24th forum) and a presentation by the project consultants, followed by an interactive session with forum participants. A summary of BFJ Planning's presentation is below:

1) *Project Summary*

Frank Fish, FAICP and Todd Okolichany, AICP¹ of BFJ Planning provided an overview of the study, including the project team, the project schedule, and a description of the study goals. It was noted that the Route 25A study in Wading River is a continuation of a previous study for the corridor in the Town of Brookhaven, which included the hamlets of Mount Sinai, Miller Place, Shoreham, Rocky Point and Wading River (on the Town of Brookhaven side). The



¹ Mr. Fish attended the October 24, 2011 public forum, while Mr. Okolichany attended both public sessions.

objective of the new study is to prepare a selective update of the Town's Comprehensive Plan for the Route 25A corridor in Wading River and to consider changes to the Zoning Code that accomplishes the study's goals. It was also noted that BFJ previously worked on the 1988 Wading River Hamlet Study, which was broader in scope than the current study.

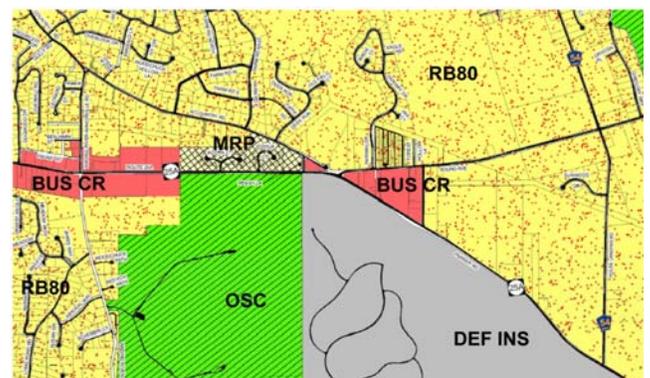
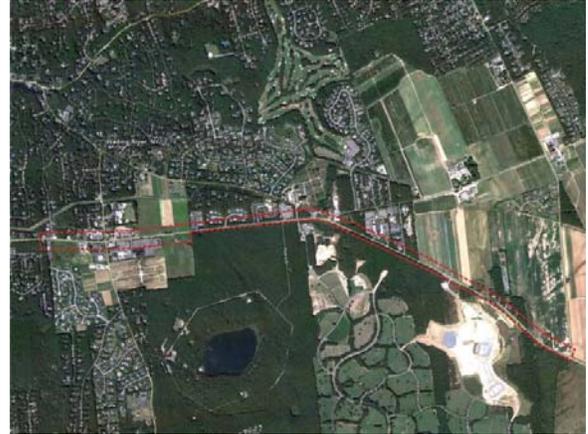
2) Study Area and Existing Conditions

The project consultants continued with a description of the study area, which is bound by the Town of Riverhead/Town of Brookhaven town line to the west and Hulse Landing Road to the east. Although the study area focuses on properties that front 25A, it excludes the Deep Pond Conservation Area and Calverton National Cemetery, which are located on the south side of Route 25A.

The consultants then reviewed several maps that were shown to illustrate the character of the Route 25A study area. Maps identified the corridor's existing traffic volumes, roadway conditions, land uses and zoning.

It was noted that there are higher volumes of traffic at the western portion of the study area, including an average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume of 15,000 to 20,000 vehicles. The AADT volume is reduced to 10,000 to 15,000 vehicles between Wading River Manor Road and the Sound Avenue/North Country Road intersection with Route 25A. At this point, traffic volume declines even more to an AADT of about 5,000 to 10,000 vehicles.

In terms of land uses, the study area is reflective of the current zoning, which permits neighborhood businesses (zoned Neighborhood Rural Business) toward the western portion of Route 25A, a mix of office uses, single-family homes and attached residences (zoned Multi Family Residential Professional Office) in the middle portion of the study area (on the north side of 25A), and a gas station, beer distributor,



and the East Winds Catering Hall (zoned Neighborhood Rural Business) located near the intersection of Route 25A with Sound Avenue/North Country Road. Single-family residences generally surround these uses with the exception of the Deep Pond Conservation Area (designated Open Space Conservation zone) and Calverton National Cemetery (Defense Institutional zone) located on the south side of Route 25A. Also, there are agricultural uses interspersed throughout the corridor, including the westernmost and easternmost ends of the study area, and adjacent to the neighborhood commercial development that terminates at the middle portion of the study area. These agricultural areas, as well as several vacant or undeveloped parcels, will become the main focus of the study.



3) 2003 Comprehensive Plan

The project consultants concluded the presentation by reviewing a section of the 2003 Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan that concentrated on Route 25A in Wading River. The next step will be to update this section based on the issues and opportunities that face the Route 25A corridor in Wading River today.



III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Following the presentations given at the business community focus group session and community planning forum, attendees participated in a question and answer session. The purpose of the session was to solicit public input on how they envision the Route 25A corridor in the future. Participants were asked what types of land uses are appropriate for the corridor, if existing zoning regulations were achieving the desired outcome in terms of allowable uses and bulk and design requirements, what aspects of Route 25A they want to retain, the issues affecting the corridor, and possible solutions to improve the corridor.

The following is a summary of the salient points made by the public at both of the public sessions:

Business Focus Group Session – October 19, 2011

1. **Private property rights** - Members of the business community were concerned with how the Route 25A study may affect existing zoning, including permitted land uses, and noted that as private property owners, they have a right to develop their properties within the allowable zoning and legal framework.
2. **Desired land uses** - This group was generally satisfied with the current zoning code but was amenable to changes to the code that would expand some of the permitted uses. Several new land uses were suggested, including destination retail, boutique shops, age-restricted residences, and mixed-use commercial/residential (two-story height). One participant commented that Wading River currently is a tourism based industry that includes agritourism, family-owned shops (e.g. ice-cream) and destination retail. Additional desired land uses consisted of restaurant uses located on the same lots as other retail uses.
3. **Incentive zoning** – The idea of incentive zoning, which was supported by several participants, is to allow developments to exceed allowable building coverage in exchange for certain benefits, such as a public plaza.
4. **Development moratorium** – All participants were against a development moratorium in order to complete the Route 25A study.
5. **Future Route 25A improvements** – Although out of the purview of the Route 25A study, participants expressed their concern with any potential future roadway improvement plans by the New York State Department of Transportation; particularly, any potential future widening of 25A that may take a portion of their properties in order to accommodate roadway improvements.

Community Planning Forum – October 24, 2011

1. **Development moratorium** – Contrary to the business community, participants at this session were in favor of a development moratorium. The reason for the moratorium would be to wait until the Route 25A study is completed so that strategies could be developed to improve the corridor and direct future growth and development. There was a concern that the current zoning would allow uses that are not compatible with

Wading River's rural and residential character and that the remaining vacant parcels and open space could be developed with undesirable uses. At the same time, participants recognized the right of private property owners to develop their properties.

2. **Incentive zoning** – Participants were generally amenable to incentive zoning if the end result was appropriate for Wading River.
3. **Destination retail** – Commenters were against destination retail shops along Route 25A in Wading River as they felt that this type of use was not within the character of the study area. They also asked that the Neighborhood Rural Business (BUS CR) zoning district be clarified to differentiate between local and regional retail uses. Several participants stated that the study area had enough retail uses and no more are needed. Furthermore, several participants noted that Wading River is not a tourist destination but rather a quiet, small community with farms and local businesses that serve its neighborhoods. Small neighborhood stores were preferred over regional stores and commercial strip development.
4. **Rural character** – Attendees viewed Route 25A in Wading River as a rural and residential community supported by businesses that serve the local community. One of their priorities was to preserve open space and agricultural uses if possible. Preservation of the Zoumas, Condzella Farm, and Partridge family properties were identified as priorities.
5. **Desired land uses and zoning** – One participant asked whether the group was satisfied with the existing zoning and suggested that future zoning considerations should ensure that there are community benefits, such as attractive building design and landscaping. Participants agreed that the amount of density should be considered, as well as the number of school children that a residential development project may induce. Several attendees stated that low density senior housing may be appropriate for the Route 25A corridor.

One participant suggested expanding the Multi Family Residential Professional Office (MRP) zoning district on the north side of Route 25A, up to the Sound Avenue intersection in order to create a larger transition area between the Neighborhood Rural Business (BUS CR) zoning district to the west and east (also recommended in the 2003 Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan). Other suggestions included active recreation, open space, and active farming along 25A. It was noted that parcels along the Route 25A corridor contain prime agricultural soils that should be preserved.

Another participant suggested multi-family or Next Generation housing for the vacant property owned by Joseph Vento, next to Mays Farm. However, it was noted by Town Planning Director Rick Hanley that due to zoning and Suffolk County sanitary requirements, the south side of Route 25A could only accommodate one dwelling unit per acre, which would exclude multi-family housing as a feasible land use for this parcel. Another suggestion for possible zone changes for the western portion of the study area included implementing an overlay zone similar to the one proposed as part of the Draft Route 25A Land Use Plan for Mount Sinai to Wading River in the Town of Brookhaven.

The overlay zone sought to preserve the character of existing residential areas and also established a farmland preservation overlay zone that would incentive residential clustering and open space preservation.

6. **Traffic** – Traffic congestion along 25A was viewed as a concern and participants were in favor of types of development that would minimize traffic. One participant asked that seasonal traffic be considered in addition to annual average daily traffic volume (AADT).
7. **Proposed Applications** – Participants asked that existing development applications for several undeveloped or underutilized parcels be re-examined as part of this study. These applications included the proposed 32,500 square foot (SF) Knightland commercial retail and restaurant application by Kenn Barra, the 52,000 SF Central Square commercial application by John Zoumas, and the 42,000 SF Venezia Square project by the Northwind Group, led by Joseph Vento. Condzella’s Farm, located on the north side of 25A across from the Zoumas property, as well as Mr. Barra’s undeveloped parcel and the Partridge family parcel (both located next to the Condzella’s Farm), were also mentioned as parcels that should be further studied.

Participants expressed concern with the proposed Knightland application for the corner of Sound Avenue and Route 25A. Participants stated their desire to retain Wading River’s rural character, while either limiting future retail development or only permitting some new retail development that only serves the local neighborhoods. There was a question as to whether Mr. Barra’s application included local retail uses or retail uses that would attract regional shoppers. While recognizing private property and development rights, attendees were concerned that too much retail along Route 25A would destroy its character and impose hardships on existing businesses. It was noted that several businesses were just “getting by” in terms of paying their rent and being profitable.

8. **Impacts on water and sewer** – BFJ Planning suggested that in addition to land use and design impacts from zoning it was equally important to understand the impacts of land uses on water quality and sewer demand.

IV. CONCLUSION

The business focus group session and community planning forum were successful in identifying issues, opportunities and possible strategies for the Route 25A corridor. Despite the different views of participants of both sessions, the sessions provided a starting point for which the Route 25A study can build off of. Several key themes emerged that should be addressed in the selective Comprehensive Plan update for the Route 25A corridor. The Plan update will need to balance economic development and conservation so that Route 25A remains sustainable for years to come. Potential zoning changes will also need to occur to achieve the community's vision for the corridor and ensure the continued quality of life shared by the hamlet's residents and business owners. The next step in the planning process will be to draft preliminary recommendations for the Route 25A corridor and present them to the Town Board and public. This action will include potential sections of the current Town Comprehensive Plan that could be amended or examined further in order to satisfy the goals of the study and vision for the Route 25A corridor.