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East Deck Motel Redevelopment Praised, But On Hold In Montauk



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By Michael Wright

The East Hampton Town Board last week expressed support for plans to redevelop the East Deck Motel in Montauk but held off on approving a change of zone for the property after a residents' advocate asked that the agreement specifically bar the use of hardened protective structures along the shoreline of the property.

The board is poised to approve the change of zone, from resort to residential, which would allow the 29-unit oceanfront motel overlooking the famed Ditch Plains surfing spot to be demolished and replaced by four approximately 1-acre housing lots. The proposal has been widely applauded as a substantial concession by the owners to the community in the wake of

outrage over plans to redevelop the motel as a lavish private beach club.

At the public hearing on the zone change last Thursday night, January 21, the lone speed bump to the zone change came from Jeremy Samuelson, executive director of the Concerned Citizens of Montauk, who was also one of those closely involved in the negotiations that led to the new redevelopment proposal.

Mr. Samuelson asked that the board include a covenant in the zoning change proposal that would expressly, and permanently, prohibit any sort of shoreline hardening, even though existing covenants in the agreement would seem to effectively do so.

“We’re 98 percent of the way to the best proposal,” Mr. Samuelson said. “But I feel there is one last component needed.”

Supervisor Larry Cantwell said that the board would not want to risk spoiling the deal over a small detail but agreed to hold off on approving the zone change to allow a discussion with the owner’s representatives.

“The redevelopment potential on this property is pretty significant,” Mr. Cantwell said. “If you look at what the potential for this property was ... and look at the environmental benefits of what is proposed ... in so many ways this is a major improvement over what potentially could have been there.

“The property owner should be commended for having worked with the community to bring it to this point,” he added. “Having said that, I wonder if we can get this one last piece resolved.”

Leonard Ackerman, an attorney for the property owner, an LLC reportedly backed by Vitamin Water billionaire J. Darius Bikoff, said that he presumed that the Planning Board would be the more appropriate agency to deal with limits on erosion control structures.