

# Designing a Future for Riverside

## Residents share ideas for hamlet

By Rebecca Cooper

More than 100 residents took part in the Riverside design workshop at the Phillips Avenue School this week, giving the Southampton Town Planning Department their recommendations for what the community needs in a proposed hamlet center along Route 24.

Planning Director Jeff Murphree began the workshop on Monday evening, heralding the recently completed Flanders/Northampton/Riverside Hamlet Study as the impetus for the workshop.

"One issue that we got consensus on through that study was that this community needs a hamlet center," he said. "Now we want to know what you want to see there." The workshop was a three-day event including public comment Monday night, planning and design with public input all day Tuesday, and an announcement of preliminary plans on Wednesday night.

The proposed hamlet center would be located at the site of the old drive-in movie theater off Route 24 in Riverside, a property currently owned by developer Bruce Barnet. Mr. Barnet had originally applied to the Southampton Town Planning Board to put a light industrial park on the site, but has since agreed to allot part of the property for a hamlet center as part of a town-created mixed use planned development district.

The owner of an adjacent residential property, Tom McCarthy, has also expressed interest in making his property part of the new zone, Mr. Murphree said. The planner also pointed out that the proposed center would be across Route 24 from a proposed hotel/conference center on the Peconic River.

Ernie Hutton of Hutton Associates, the consulting firm conducting the design workshop for the town, then briefly educated the public about the site and its possibilities.

"We have several opportunities," he said, listing upgrading the Route 24 corridor, improving the surrounding residential homes, and creating a possible link to the Peconic River. A high priority, he said, is considering expanded uses for the drive-in movie site beyond those permitted by its current light industrial zoning.

Residents then broke up into four groups to discuss what they would like to see in a hamlet center. Representatives from the planning department asked them to envision their hamlet in 10 years, and think what they would hope to see.

Community members listed everything from cafes to supermarkets, from banks to movie theaters but no one mentioned industrial



Bryan McGowin and Janice D'Angelo of the Southampton Town Planning Department listen to Riverside residents' suggestions for a new hamlet center at a workshop on Monday night at the Phillips Avenue School. REBECCA COOPER

uses as a priority for the site.

"I'd like to see a boulevard type of scene, with grass and trees in the center island and park benches along the edge," one woman said.

Most residents agreed they'd like to see the "hamlet green" concept

### *Residents favored a park-like setting for a hamlet center at the old drive-in movie theater site.*

applied to part of the center, so that it was an attractive destination.

"I'm thinking of something nice, where you could sit down on a Sunday with a picnic and listen to the birds twitter," said Flanders resident and Bayview Pines Association President Carl Iacone.

Flanders resident Tom Weber also suggested a nursery for the neighborhood. "You put that in there, and then it's a lot easier to go out and get some forsythia or something to make your yard look nicer," he said, pointing out that it could help improve the aesthetics of some of the homes in the area.

"We just don't want to see it looking like a Centereach strip mall," one woman said. "We're at the edge

of the pine barrens. We don't want all blacktop and concrete."

Many residents also brought up the area's ongoing battle to be given their own zip code and post office, something which many view as key to establishing a community identity. "That would literally put Flanders, Northampton and Riverside on the map," said Northampton resident Chris Sheldon.

Residents also held lively discussion over what should be the anchor of the hamlet center. Many residents said they hoped for a grocery store, but Mr. Hutton told one group that the developer had thus far been unsuccessful in soliciting the larger franchises. "They seem to be concerned about the competition from other large stores in the area," he said.

"Well, then maybe a bank can be the anchor," Mr. Iacone said. "I don't have a crystal ball to say that definitely would do it, but we need an anchor in there to bring other businesses in."

Other suggestions included medical or dental offices, an affordable day care center, a dinner theater, an ice cream shop or other small, non-franchise businesses to increase tax rates.

After taking all these suggestions into account, the planning team spent Tuesday in portable classrooms behind the school hashing out plans to present to the public on Wednesday. The Wednesday night meeting had not yet been held at press time.