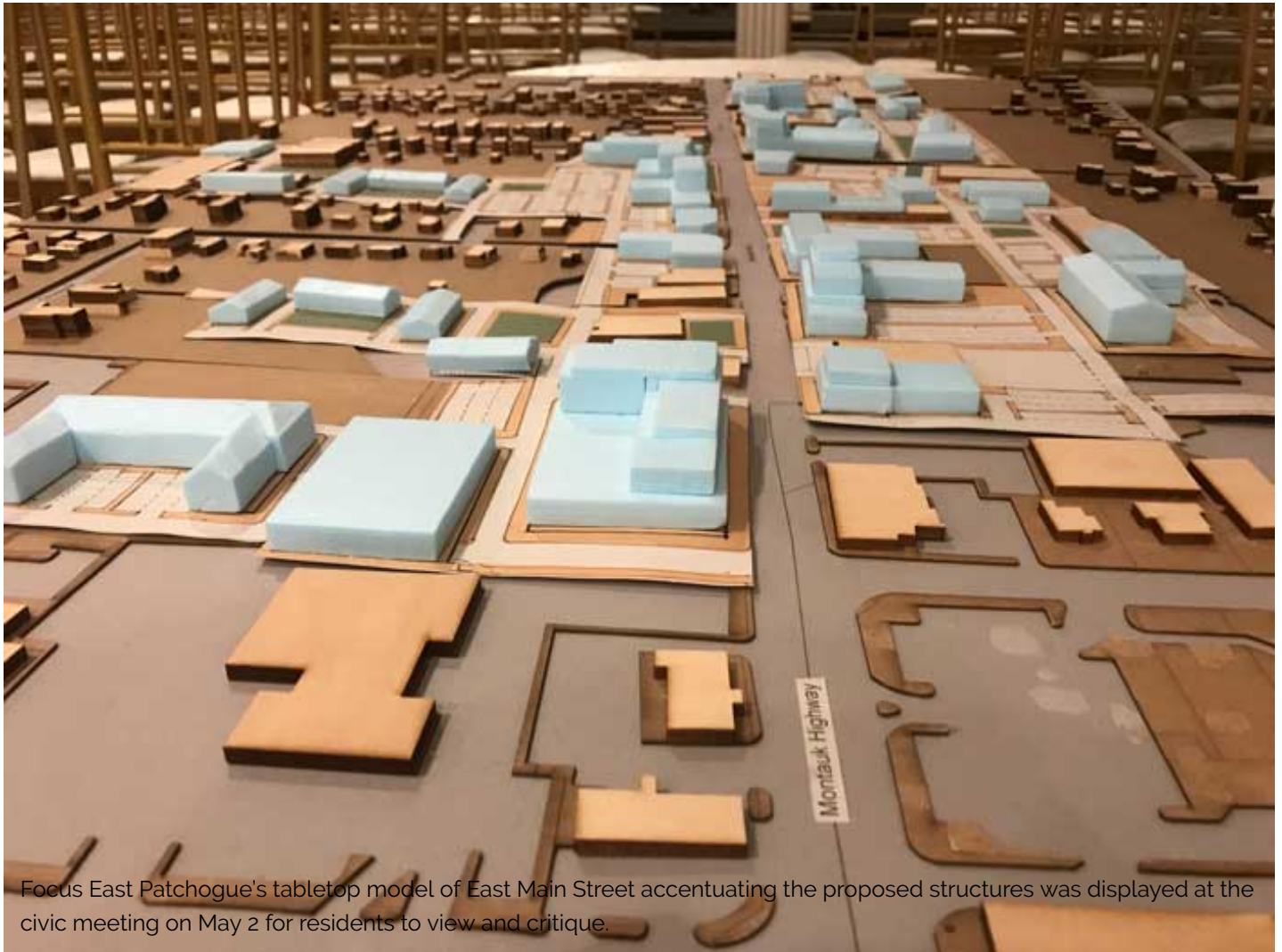


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Focus East Patchogue's tabletop model of East Main Street accentuating the proposed structures was displayed at the civic meeting on May 2 for residents to view and critique.

Courtesy photo

Plans to develop east of Route 112

Story By: **RANDALL WASZYNSKI**

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Revitalizing economic development in East Patchogue has been a topic of conversation long before Patchogue Village started to garner attention with its downtown attraction. And now a major project on East Main Street involving improvements to multiple parcels east of Route 112 has entered its proposition stage, with an emphasis on gauging public interest.

The macroscopic plan, which includes hypothetical ventures for the long-term future, features both a proposed 80-unit residential complex and a three-structure media arts center at the Grove/Avery Avenue intersection with East Main Street. Developers for the housing project and the media arts center have been presenting their plans to the public since the beginning of April. The overall plan was showcased and displayed during Focus East Patchogue's May 2 meeting at Mediterranean Manor.

In constructing an aesthetic and seamless business-to-business mold, mandating guidelines for building developers is a method that elicits results for the Regional Plan Association, an urban research and advocacy organization involved with the project that serves the tri-state area, dedicated to improving economic development. One pertinent mandate mentioned was to enforce inter-entity uniform setback from the road.

"When people come in to redevelop their property, they little by little can be doing things in a coordinated way, so that the whole thing adds up to something more than just a whole bunch of little developments sprung along the highway," said Rob Lane, a senior fellow for urban design at RPA.

Another particular piece of this method in creating a "downtown" atmosphere is requiring developers to keep parking lots off the street, and a series of cross easements between these setback parking lots would alleviate traffic congestion on East Main Street, he said.

"People wonder why the traffic is so bad," Lane continued. "A lot of it is because we're making all these crazy movements, where cars have to go in and out just to get from one place on the corridor to another. If you make it possible to drive parallel to [East Main Street] and between the properties, we can eliminate a lot of that traffic."

East Main Street has been in Suffolk County's sights as a revitalization project since the commencement of county executive Steve Bellone's Connect Long Island Plan in 2012. The Suffolk Industrial Development Agency has sponsored the project, working with RPA since 2016 to spur community-based planning in hamlets and villages with open arms to the project.

"[The idea is] to solve problems and come up with solutions for the future: how you want your community to grow and what you want it to look like," said Kelly Morris, deputy executive director of the IDA.

Six other Suffolk communities to date have undergone opportunity analysis conducted by the RPA through IDA funding for the purpose of revitalizing economic development in the area. Legis. Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue) has vouched for East Patchogue as a target community and began seeking aid from the IDA on the project more than two years ago.

Both Morris and Calarco noted the importance of Brookhaven Town's involvement, as completion of the overall project would rely on multiple approvals from the town council.

Fundamentally, revitalizing consumerism would increase density on East Main Street, which currently has a traffic congestion problem, explained councilman Neil Foley, whose council district includes both East Patchogue and Patchogue. He has expressed particular concern with the density of The Grove housing complex, as the proposed 80-unit project exceeds residential spacing policy, as per town code.

But the transformation of East Main Street east of Route 112, Foley said, is a key project overall and stressed the importance of balancing the needs of the various components that would be affected.

"The key here is trying to find a happy medium of density, parking, traffic and retail, compared to nonretail," Foley said.

Calarco also acknowledged balancing density and traffic, but emphasized the foundational necessity of increasing density to move toward the overarching goal.

"If you want to have your Main Street corridor to be vibrant, like you look at in Patchogue Village, you have to have some density that comes along with it," Calarco said.

Morris, Calarco and Foley each highlighted the pertinent role of support that local civic groups, like Focus East Patchogue and the Miramar Beach Civic Association, have provided throughout this ongoing conversation. And by extension, the residents' input is vital.

"If you want to make a project work, and if you want developers to come in and do a project, the best way to have that happen is for them to know what it is the community is looking for," Calarco said.

RPA and the developers have worked closely with Focus East Patchogue as well. The combined efforts allowed for the creation of a tabletop model of East Main Street accentuating the proposed structures — along with a multitude of hypothetical building projects that exemplify the corridor's potential for development — which was displayed at the civic meeting on May 2 for residents to view and critique.

"If you do not have a capable civic partner on the ground, you're finished," Lane said.

The civic group has directed residents to submit questions and comments regarding the revitalization project to comments@focuseastpatchogue.com.

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