



Suffolk County Voter

www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org

September 2008

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CHECK

THE DATE

Wed. Sept. 17

LWVSC Board Meeting—Riverhead Library 10:00am-12noon

Suffolk County BOE makes many efforts to ensure a smoothly-run 2008 Election Day

With voter registration at an all-time high and a new ballot marking device that will be accessible for the handicapped voters in each polling place, there has been some concern whether voters will have trouble casting ballots on Election Day. We in Suffolk County are very fortunate that our BOE has been working diligently to make sure that everything will run smoothly on Election Day. The County had received all 370 of the ballot markers that have been ordered. These were tested in Albany and also here. There were only modest problems on a few machines that have now been corrected. These ballot markers are complicated and it is important that staff be ready on Election Day to help the voters who will be using them for the first time.

We have been assured that there will be two coordinators at each polling site who have had extensive training in operating these machines. Whereas the usual training for poll workers is one three-hour class, these coordinators have had two three-hour sessions on just this device and have had hands-on experience. Only voters who

need ballot marker devices should be using these machines. In fact, since all other voters in Suffolk are being discouraged from using them, there should not be long lines. The rest of us will be using the lever machines with which we are familiar.

Indeed, there has been an increase in voter registration during the past 7 months. On January 3 there were 832,843 registered voters in Suffolk County. As of Aug. 1, there were 853,405 registered voters, an increase of just under 3%. This percentage should increase over the next two months with so many planned voter registration drives. With the increased interest in this presidential election, the percentage of registered voters actually voting should be higher than usual. However, unlike other counties where they are having a poll worker crisis and are desperate to sign up new workers, Suffolk County DOES have enough trained poll workers for this year's election.

What about the statewide voter registration database, *NYSVoter*, that is a *(more on page 2)*

Preliminary Report - Riverhead Resorts Project

LWV of the Hamptons' Natural Resources Committee has begun research into the recreational project in Riverhead which will be the subject of an educational forum sponsored by the LWVH on November 10, 2008 at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center in Hampton Bays.

Developers have contracted with the Town of Riverhead to purchase approximately 750 acres of land, part of a much larger site which had been used by the US Navy and Northrop Grumman Corp for assembly and testing of military aircraft and which was deeded by the US to the Town of Riverhead in the late 1990's for purposes of economic development.

The proposed project envisions eight themed resorts, convention and family entertainment center, a year-round 350-foot indoor ski mountain and an indoor waterpark, 1,150 hotel rooms and 500 timeshare units. At the present time, the developers are conducting feasibility studies; they hope to begin construction in 2010 and open for the winter holidays in 2012.

There is no question that the effect of the project will be profound. The Town of Riverhead and the project developers think that the effect will be good, bringing economic benefits to the region. Environmentalists and some surrounding towns think that the project will be harmful to the environment, bringing traffic, undermining critical habitat and endangering sources of drinking water.

Members of the committee have spoken to representatives of the Coalition for Open Space at EP-CAL, and the Town of Riverhead. In addition, we have reviewed many relevant documents. What follows is a summary of the information we have obtained so far; it is not a final report on a completed study.

Position of the Town of Riverhead:

This development is being planned pursuant a 1996 "Comprehensive Reuse Strategy" report, which recommended that the property contain an industrial business park, a theme park and a sports park, and that approximately one-third of the property be open space. *(more on page 2)*

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Board of Elections, continued

requirement of HAVA and will be operational and in use for the first time this year? Again, we in Suffolk County are fortunate. Vijay Kumar at the Suffolk County BOE (who is responsible for their computer facilities) participated in the pilot effort to create the state database. In fact, Suffolk County has been connected to the network since May 10, 2007. At the BOE in Yaphank, a staff of about 30 people enters the data included in the voter registration form into a local database and the voter database in Albany (and to no other databases) The data entered is confirmed in seconds from the state BOE. The state BOE also has a direct connection to the state DMV, the Federal Social Security database, the state Department of Health and the Office of Court Administration. The county does not have direct access to any of these four sources. However, the Suffolk County Department of Health sends death records to the state Dept. of Health and specific information is sent back to the Suffolk County for validation at the BOE. The Office of Court Administration sends information to the state BOE of convicted felons who may not vote and this information is sent to the county BOE who notifies the felons. Once they have served their parole, they need to reregister in order to vote.

Vijay Kumar met with our LWVSC webmaster Adam Gaus on August 4 and not only explained how the database works, but also

gave Adam the opportunity to view a typical screen for a voter. Adam reported that the software has been well designed and is easy to read and understand. The signature from the voter registration form has been scanned and entered into a field for comparison at the polling place. The voter's Election District is determined locally and stored in the database and will not change before 2012 when the results of the next census will be available.

The BOE's biggest problems in maintaining the voter database are moves and dual residences. No longer will people who have two residences in the state be able to vote at both. Before the database was created, it was difficult to find if a voter had two residences. Although now the voter may vote in one location one year and then change their address to vote at another location the following year, they will need to pay attention to the time when they change their address so as to not lose their right to vote. However, the database insures they will not be able to cast 2 votes in an election. ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE -- the way it should be.

Election Day, November 4, 2008 should run smoothly in Suffolk County. Special thanks to Commissioner Anita Katz, Commissioner Cathy Richter Geier, Vijay Kumar and all the Suffolk County BOE staff, and thank you Adam for getting this pertinent information.

Judie Gorenstein

Riverhead Resorts, continued

The property is now zoned for industrial use (approximately 500 acres); light industrial (approximately 300 acres) and recreational use (approximately 750 acres). Present plans call for, and relevant statutes require, that approximately 1000 acres will remain undeveloped. Requests for proposals for the development of the recreational acres resulted in two viable plans: the Riverhead Resorts plan and a proposal for a racetrack. The Town Board voted in favor of the Riverhead Resorts plan.

Environmental Concerns

A coalition of environmental organizations object to the proposed project, and seek to protect approximately 62% of the parcel from development. The Coalition points to the fact that the site provides water habitat for the eastern tiger salamander (a NYS Endangered Species) and to five other Species of Special Concern. In addition, the site contains the largest remaining grasslands habitat on Long Island, providing habitat for at least one Threatened Species and five Species of Special Concern. More recently, it has been discovered that short-eared owls, an endangered species, forage at the site.

In addition, there have been concerns expressed by the Coalition and the Town of Brookhaven that the project will result in a significant increase in traffic, potential groundwater and surface water quality impacts, and problems with energy use, solid waste generation and management.

The observance of short-eared owls and northern harriers prompted the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to assert jurisdiction over the parcel, and it requested that all development stop pending a comprehensive assessment of the site. The Town states that it is cooperating with the DEC on this assessment.

Response of Developers and Town to Environmental Concerns:

There does not seem to be any dispute that a new EIS will be required for the project a process which will be triggered by the

filing of plans, which is expected in September.

The Town of Riverhead is seeking lead agency status in that process. The Coalition claims that this is a conflict of interest because of the town's monetary stake in the project. The Town responds that lead agency status is usually awarded to the zoning agency, and that lead agency status does not confer approval power. In addition to SEQRA, the project is required to obtain a multitude of state, county and town permits.

Riverhead Resorts' plans include a representation that it plans to seek LEED certification for the project. In addition, its website claims that attention will be paid to energy efficiency in construction, waste and water management heating and cooling; multi-modal transportation (including a link to the LIRR).

The Developers:

The project developers are a consortium of several companies. (The project website: www.riverheadresorts.com links to the websites of all members) The lead builder is a small Scottish company Baldragon Homes Ltd.; a second builder is the Bayrock Group LLC, which has more experience in large developments and hotel management and has developed at least three Trump properties. The websites of the other partners: LEDO International (planners, managers and/or operators of resort destinations); HOK (architects), EDAW Inc (landscape design) and Cameron Engineering all reflect concern about and attention to environmental concerns, with most reflecting corporate philosophies expressing dedication to the principles of sustainability and environmental integrity.

Economic Benefits:

According to the Riverhead Resorts website (to which we were referred by the Town representatives when we asked some of these questions) Town of Riverhead stands to gain large increases to its property tax base, thousands of construction and permanent full time jobs as well as the spill-over economic boom associated with the influx of many people.

Carol Mellor