

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

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COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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BROWNING SECURES SEWER FUNDING

\$900,000 for Creation of Mastic/Shirley Sewer District



Hauppauge, NY – The creation of a sewer district for the Montauk Highway business district in Mastic and Shirley gained momentum today when Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) gained the approval of \$900,000 in funding for planning and design in Suffolk County’s 2011 Capital Budget. The money is needed to match a federal earmark that Legislator Browning applied for earlier this year.

In April, when County Executive Steve Levy removed \$3 million from his proposed capital budget that was designated for the project, Legislator Browning, fellow legislators, local labor organizations, and civic leaders immediately called for the restoration of the funding.

Legislator Browning has led the charge over the last three years to create a sewer district for the tri-hamlet peninsula. She has also worked with Legislator Edward Romaine to create a sewer district in Center Moriches and as far west as Bellport. The legislator directed the Department of Public Works to complete a feasibility study and draw up maps and plans for the new district on Montauk Highway. The feasibility study, maps and plans were completed in 2009. Also in 2009, Browning secured \$3 million for infrastructure improvements in the county’s 2010-2012 capital budget.

The need for a sewer district in the area dates back more than 60 years, but more recent events, which include the pollution of the Forge River and difficulties in attracting investment to the area, have made it even more imperative that sewers be constructed. This project would also bring much needed jobs to local labor during a time when unemployment is at record levels.

Earlier this year Legislator Browning applied for \$900,000 in federal funding to complete the planning and design needed to submit the sewer proposal to the state. The federal funding, if secured, will become available in 2011 and requires a 45% local match to be eligible. The funding removed by Levy in his proposed 2011-2013 capital budget would have killed any chances of the Mastic/Shirley area receiving this much-needed aid. By restoring the local match, the Suffolk County Legislature has shown a commitment to move forward with the project.

“I worked hard to lobby our federal officials to focus resources in the Mastic peninsula,” stated Browning. “They are listening, with the help of local civic leaders and environmental groups, but the County Executive put all of our hard work in jeopardy by removing the funding we need to match the federal funds, I want to thank all of my colleagues for restoring this project and making it a priority for our federal representatives.”

Local residents and organizations have been very vocal about the need for sewers. Save the Forge River, Inc. has worked with Legislator Browning to bring in federal support, and support letters from civic organizations poured in when federal money was applied for in January 2010.

“Save The Forge River has been advocating for the need to sewer since we first formed the organization,” stated Susan Wischhusen, Secretary and Project Coordinator of Save the Forge River. “We have an opportunity to begin the process. The time to start the process is now so that in the future we can begin to repair the damage. For years we have been a flush and flow community. We flush and it flows into the Forge River. Sewering will help in the river’s restoration so that this treasure can be enjoyed by the next generation.”

The business owners on Montauk Highway have also been calling on the county to create a sewer district in order to expand their companies, which would bring in more commercial tax revenue. Residents in the area have long complained that restaurants are not located close by because septic capacity is not sufficient to gain approvals. With the failing economy only starting to show signs of recovery, these types of projects are crucial in order to put local labor back to work.

The Long Island Lobby Coalition that brings Long Island’s most pressing needs to Albany every spring fought to include the Mastic/Shirley sewer district in the state’s agenda, which shows the wide range support this project has not only in Mastic and Shirley, but throughout Suffolk County.

“The Forge River has become the Long Island poster child for environmental, economic, and public health consequences attributed to a lack of sewage infrastructure in a densely populated community,” stated Maureen Dolan Murphy, Executive Programs Manager, Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “County funding is necessary as the first step to reversing the damages of this overloaded, failing river ecosystem. Creating a sewer district will protect public health and the health of the river, and will aid in the restoration of the South Shore Estuary Reserve. In 2010, the Long Island Lobby Coalition made sewerage around the Forge River one of its top funding priorities for all of Long Island.”

The project is estimated to cost \$1.7 million for engineering in 2011. The federal share will be voted on in the fall and Legislator Browning is confident that the county funding will help bolster the probability of Mastic/Shirley receiving the needed monies.

“The County Executive showed a lack of commitment for creating sewers in Suffolk County by removing the funds in his proposed budget,” stated Browning. “By restoring this funding we now have the leverage to move forward and garner the support of our state and federal agencies. I am confident that the legislature’s actions today will aid our application with the federal government.”

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