

Don't rubber-stamp terminal expansion

The United Riverhead Terminal is located in the hamlet of Northville on a bluff overlooking Long Island Sound. Nearby are a Riverhead Town beach, farm fields, vineyards, the newly acquired county park at the preserve and the long-established residential community of Northville Beach, which pre-dates the terminal. In the 1950s, many of those residents or their families — mine included — vehemently opposed allowing the terminal. It reputedly got through in a shady deal involving some greedy politicians. There was no zoning plan back then, but now there is — and it is apparently being mendaciously ignored as the terminal is smack in the middle of a residential zone. United Riverhead Terminal, Inc. seeks to expand its sleepy, nonconforming operation as a home heating oil depot into an active gasoline and ethanol storage, mixing and distribution center.

Its billionaire owner, John Catsimatidis, whose oceanfront home in East Quogue enjoys an unspoiled view and ambience, seems to have no interest in protecting the environment of the North Fork. Aside from the troubling issue of the mixing and storage of the volatile fuels ethanol and gasoline so close to a residential community, all Suffolk County residents should be concerned about the planned distribution of this gasoline.

United Riverhead Terminal, Inc. provided the town with a hastily prepared traffic study replete with errors and omissions. Even they concede the roads adjacent to the terminal are unsuitable due to the nature of the turns that must be made by these immense gasoline tanker trucks, which weigh 80,000 pounds and carry as much as 9,000 gallons of flammable gasoline. But beyond Northville, there is a greater issue of concern for all residents of the East End: The proponents have no idea how to get these trucks safely through the Town of Riverhead. On the fly, apparently playing a reality game of Chutes and Ladders, they toss out West Lane, Northville Turnpike, Edwards Avenue and maybe even right through the very busy Route 58 corridor.

The original suggestion that this proposal was motivated by a public clamor for gasoline after Superstorm Sandy has been revealed to be a subterfuge. The gas shortage problems post-Sandy were not due to a lack of gasoline, but rather a lack of electricity to pump the gasoline. Generators have prov-

en to be the answer. This expansion of the United Riverhead Terminal is not about public service; it is about Mr. Catsimatidis' bid to become the Gasoline Gatsby of Long Island and beyond. Note his recent acquisition of Hess. We wish him well, but not at the expense of the Town of Riverhead, the County of Suffolk and our precious resource, the North Fork.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation, the state entity charged with protecting the environment, without any significant environmental review, seems to have agreed to look the other way. And on Oct. 7 — based solely on materials provided,

not surprisingly, by the applicant, United Riverhead Terminal, Inc. — the Riverhead Town Board unanimously resolved that this project needed no environmental impact study. Really? Anyone who has dealt with the town on a site plan change knows it is never that easy, nor should it be. We urge the Town Board to prioritize the protection of what makes Riverhead and the North Fork so desirable to residents and visitors. Protect our environment! Preserve our way of life! This project is wrong for Riverhead.

Kathleen McGraw and Thomas Hughes are both retired. Ms. McGraw was an administrative law judge for Social Security. Mr. Hughes, formerly a morning anchor on All News radio in Atlanta, is now a writer. Ms. McGraw owns a home on Sound Shore Road that previously belonged to her mother.



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