

Mastic Beach poised for improvement, Brookhaven Town says

Tackling blight and code violations will help the town market Mastic Beach as a “hidden gem” on the South Shore waterfront, officials say.

Carl MacGowan | January 21, 2017



Dan Panico, Brookhaven Councilman, left, Legis. Rudy Sunderman and Ed Romaine, Brookhaven supervisor, outside an abandoned house that was demolished in Mastic Beach on Jan. 17, 2018. Photo Credit: Randee Daddona

Less than a month after Mastic Beach Village disbanded amid financial struggles and political acrimony, Brookhaven Town officials are moving quickly to tear down blighted houses and improve the hamlet’s image in hopes of attracting new businesses and residents.

Town officials say as part of that effort, they are aggressively citing property owners for code violations as part of a campaign to clean up the South Shore community.

Officials also plan to tear down abandoned houses left vacant by foreclosures or damaged by recent storms. Demolition of one home took place last Wednesday.

Besides cracking down on blight, town officials have paid \$4,000 for full-page, color newspaper ads touting Mastic Beach as “a diamond in the rough” and “a hidden gem” halfway between Manhattan and Montauk.

It’s part of their plan to help developers bring small businesses to Mastic Beach’s modest downtown and attract young homeowners who can’t afford to buy houses elsewhere on Long Island, officials said.

“We want to spur interest and wake people up to the potential in Mastic Beach,” Brookhaven Councilman Dan Panico, who grew up in the hamlet, said in an interview. “There is an affordable, beachfront community in the center of Suffolk County known as Mastic Beach that we want to see young couples move into, plant roots in the community and get owner-occupied residences in the area.”

The village disbanded Dec. 31 after residents voted in 2016 to end their failed attempt at self-governance.

Mastic Beach had struggled with insufficient tax revenue and staffing, infighting among officials and a proliferation of vacant homes caused by the 2008 recession. Dozens more houses were damaged or destroyed by superstorm Sandy four years later.

The town’s efforts to spruce up Mastic Beach have already won over many residents — some of whom had voted to create the village in 2010 because they believed then that town officials had ignored them.

Most town board seats have changed hands since then. Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, elected in November 2012, has pledged to help upgrade the former village.

“The town is quietly coming in and addressing these quality-of-life issues,” former mayor Maura Sperry said. “I’m walking by houses that had four cars in the yard, and now there’s none.”

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Mastic Beach, a community of about 13,000 on a peninsula between the Forge River and Great South Bay, sits between the Hamptons to the east and Bellport to the west. While those areas attracted well-off residents and second-home owners, and thrived, Mastic Beach struggled.

But residents and town officials say Mastic Beach has untapped potential as an attractive place to live — especially for people who enjoy fishing, kayaking and swimming.

“It’s a hidden paradise,” Janice Schaefer, 72, a 48-year resident, said. “You have bay water, you have ocean water, lagoons ... Picture-perfect place.”

Mastic Beach will restore its luster if “you get rid of some of those eyesores, [and] you attract people back who are willing to put some money in to bring paradise back again.”

Real estate agents say Mastic Beach may be poised for a turnaround.

“It really is sandwiched between two different vibes, and maybe it needs to develop its own vibe,” said Judi A. Desiderio, president of Hamptons-based Town & Country Real Estate.

When it was founded in the 1920s, Mastic Beach was a summer community of bungalows owned or rented by working-class New York City residents. Newspaper ads touted its fishing and swimming holes.

By the 1970s, many homeowners had turned their cottages into year-round homes. As residents aged, some of those houses became vacant or deteriorated.

Now, residents and officials are pinning their hopes for a resurgence on the same qualities that attracted people to the area decades ago.

In addition to what being on the waterfront has to offer, Mastic Beach is near Smith Point County Park and historic sites such as the William Floyd estate and St. George Manor.

Desiree Lofredo, an agent with Douglas Elliman real estate who grew up in nearby Shirley, said Vogue editor Anna Wintour owns three properties in Mastic Beach and has held family weddings there.

“If she wants to live here, then why wouldn’t anyone else?” Lofredo said.

Homes are affordable, by Long Island standards, she said. A new three-bedroom house can be had for less than \$250,000, with property taxes under \$10,000.

MAKEOVER CHALLENGES

The community faces challenges as it attempts a makeover.

Its Neighborhood Road business district lacks sewers, limiting potential growth, especially for restaurants. The few existing businesses struggle, and some have closed.

Schaefer said Mastic Beach needs small businesses that cater to the needs of local residents. The nearest banks are four miles away in Shirley, she said.

“Everyone here sort of has to go up to Montauk Highway to bank,” she said. “Even if we had a little branch somewhere, it would be a plus.”

Panico said town planning officials are prepared to work with developers and “help guide them through the building and planning process” to create new businesses in the community. He added that a brewery recently showed an interest in Mastic Beach.

Former Mayor Bill Biondi, a resident since 1950, said Mastic Beach has a chance to recapture at least some of its former allure.

“It’s going to take time. It’s not going to happen overnight,” he said. “I want this place to look just like it did years ago and I want people to enjoy it the way I did. You can’t give up hope.”