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ONE DOLLAR

Inn Asks For New Zoning

Historic complex is on the market

BY ERIN MCKINLEY

The owners of a 67-room inn on Hill Street are asking to have the 5.2-acre property rezoned by Southampton Village officials to meet current uses and entice potential buyers.

The Village Latch Inn, which is owned by Marta and Martin White, is currently zoned for residential use, with a certificate of occupancy allowing the business to run as an inn. Now, Mr. and Ms. White—who are hoping to sell the property to retire and pursue other interests—have asked the Village Board to change the zoning to motel/

hotel, a move that would reflect the current use and allow future owners to operate it as a five-star hotel with a spa and restaurant.

At a public hearing last Thursday evening, October 10, village trustees heard commentary both for and against the proposal and took no action, opting to hold the hearing open for further comment.

“The purpose of this application is to ask the board to place the zoning of the property the way all of the planning studies have recommended for many, many years,” Nica Strunk, an at-

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Public hearings are being held regarding the proposed rezoning of the Village Latch Inn.

DANA SHAW

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torney representing the Whites, said during the hearing. "This will allow the property to continue operating moving forward as a viable hotel option, which it has been for a century, and the Village of Southampton will need moving forward."

Located on the north side of Hill Street just blocks from Main Street, the main house for the Village Latch Inn, built at the turn of the 20th century, is known for its Great Gatsby-esque appearance. The large white, green-shuttered mansion sits toward the front of the property and is surrounded by shrubbery and nestled between two large, neatly kept lawns.

One of eight buildings on the property—the others include the Terry Cottage, the Potting Shed, two "Homestead" buildings that house guests, the Vice President Suite, a Victorian green-house and a seventh, unnamed building—the main house was designed by architect Stanford White and originally served as the Grand Annex of the famed Irving Hotel, which was across the street. With its purchase by the Whites in 1974, the Grand Annex was saved from the fate of the Irving Hotel, which was used as a controlled-burn house for a fire department drill.

At the hearing, some Hill Street residents raised concern that a developer could purchase and possibly demolish the century-old buildings. The structures, though listed on the village historic registry as contributing historical structures, are not landmarked buildings.

Meanwhile, to help find a buyer, in the last few years Mr. and Ms. White have had several artists' renderings made to demonstrate the potential of the property. The drawings, which are not up for consideration by any village regulatory board because they are not official plans, show the potential for a spa and restaurant on the property.

"This will allow for a bigger place in what is still a residential neighborhood," one resident, Susan Stevenson, said. "I am against the change in zoning, because it does not protect these homeowners."

Also during the meeting, Dede Gotthelf, the owner of the neighboring Southampton Inn, requested more information about the project, noting that it raises concerns about the zoning for her property. She echoed the sentiment that it would be a shame to demolish the century-old structures to clear the way for a motel.

"I love the Village Latch," Ms. Gotthelf said. "I love that it is the western entrance to the village, and I would love to show hospitality, but I am concerned that there is not enough information about the proposal yet, particularly on my part, including rami-

fications for property next door."

Although trustees did not comment on the application at the public hearing, Village Mayor Mark Epley has supported the proposal in the past, saying a five-star resort is needed in Southampton Village as the municipality moves toward becoming a year-round destination.

"Anyone who has gone on this property will realize the value of it," he said.

The public hearing is scheduled to resume at the October 22 work session at Village Hall.

Konrad Receives Check

Also at the village trustees' meeting last week, Southampton Village resident Evelyn Konrad read into the record a request she filed with Judge Joseph Bianco in August asking for an order of protection against Mayor Epley and several current and former village trustees, all of whom are embroiled in a lengthy legal battle with Ms. Konrad.

The court case stems from approximately 17 claims that originated from a 2005 village zoning ordinance. It altered the village code to allow construction of homes with a living space exceeding 4,500 square feet, and that change paved the way for homeowners in the Rosko Place subdivision, where Ms. Konrad lives, to alter or build homes much larger than previously allowed. According to Ms. Konrad, it changed the "character of the Rosko Place subdivision."

Last Thursday, Ms. Konrad said the order of protection became necessary after she received a check in the mail that she did not solicit from the village attorney. Ms. Konrad did not cash the check, which was for \$6,568.33. She added that both she and her accountant, who was not named, were harassed to return the check. She did not return it but had it voided at the bank and provided documentation to attorneys.

Mr. Epley said he was unaware of the situation until she brought it to his attention, but that he has since learned the check was, ironically, meant to pay David Arntsen—the attorney representing the village in its legal battle with Ms. Konrad.



Nica Strunk, the attorney for the Village Latch Inn, presents plans to board members.

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