

WESTERN TOWN GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY (WESTERN GEIS 1993)

The draft Western GEIS was initially undertaken in 1989 as “A Comprehensive Plan Initiative for Groundwater and Pine Barrens Forest Preservation.” The Western GEIS examined the area lying within the Town’s Aquifer Protection Overlay District on the Town of Southampton Zoning Map encompassing the Central Pine Barrens area lying within the western portion of the Town.

The Western GEIS was an in-depth environmental study of the Town’s Pine Barrens Preserve Plan which examined the cumulative impacts of dispersed growth patterns and future build-out on the pine barrens ecosystem and the community’s ability to sustain and provide for efficient and less costly infrastructure and services. According to the purpose statement in the document, “the Town desired to take a hard look at the natural resources of the region and search for improved ways to deal with the inevitable development that would take place in decades to come.” A land use strategy advocated by the Western GEIS was utilization of the transfer of development rights (TDR) process, whereby areas deemed critical to protect are preserved by having their rights transferred to an area more suitable for higher density development.

The overall objective of the Western GEIS was to equitably meet the economic and environmental needs of the present and future generations, and achieve sustainable development. Specific plan objectives included, among others:

- Maintain and preserve the Central Pine Barrens ecosystem.
- Protect and enhance native forest resources.

- Implement a tentative preserve plan to manage conservation lands and provide areas suitable for recreation, education, and research
- Address landowners’ rights and equity by providing for public purchase of private lands and transference of development rights to achieve goals of pine barrens preservation and ecological restoration
- Facilitate economic incentives for recreation and eco-tourism and resort development
- Provide a holistic approach to development by developing a comprehensive plan for shifting private development rights from the pine barrens forest preserve concentration (core preserve) to outer ring locations (acceptable receiving areas) and to locations outside of the Central Suffolk Special Groundwater Protection Area (SGPA) where access to existing infrastructure and efficiencies of development would be realized
- Address social and economic dimensions by breaking the vicious cycle of development sprawl and environmental destruction by working towards economic growth solutions that promote pine barrens protection and sustainable livelihoods
- Ensure legal mechanisms through enactment of effective environmental legislation consistent with the environmental standards, management objectives, and priorities reflected in the Town’s Pine Barrens Preserve Plan.

Within the Western GEIS is a “Speonk Development Proposal” which notes that New York State (in its contemplated Central Pine Barrens Act) designates the area west of Speonk Riverhead Road as a compatible growth area, despite the Town’s 1992 Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet

Study Future Land Use Plan Proposals seeking open space designation for this assemblage of property. The Speonk-Remsenburg “Receiving Zones” for transfer of pine barren development rights (as recommended by the 1992 Hamlet Study) are situated as far south of the groundwater divide as possible with access to all three proposed receiving zones from Old Country Road, with one zone also having access to Speonk-Riverhead Road.

The Western GEIS also proposed a 278.50-acre residential receiving zone in the Westhampton Beach School District distributed across 31 privately held properties on the north side of Old Country Road in Westhampton, which includes the former Bomarc Missile Base (now owned by Suffolk County).

In addition, the Western GEIS recommended a “Suffolk Country Airport Development Proposal” to accommodate transfers of development rights from the Pine Barrens Preserve via 50-acres of obsolete military buildings to be razed and its area designated for a commercial / industrial technology park. (Southampton Town and Suffolk County have subsequently authorized a Planned Development District (PDD) Zoning Map Overlay for this 50-acre portion of the airport property, which allows various commercial, industrial, recreational and other non-aviation related uses.)

The Western GEIS also recommended alternatives to “residential receiving areas” such as “resort receiving areas” as a means to accommodate pine barrens development rights transfers and preserve ecologically sensitive lands. Various outdoor recreational amenities are explored in the study including golf, stable facilities and horseback riding. Lodging facilities such as hotel uses, resort villas, inns, hunting lodges, and campgrounds are also explored, as is residential development. The Western GEIS notes that the 1992 Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet Study Future Land Use

Plan recommends recreational use of several mining sites and a junkyard in this area.

The Western GEIS also articulated concern about the existing sand mines located in the Special Groundwater Protection Area, four of which are located in the Speonk and Westhampton area. “Sand mining is a non-conforming use and present and future sand and gravel mining operations threaten, in varying degrees, the integrity of the central pine barrens ecosystem and its biodiversity.” The Western GEIS indicated that “large unrestricted mining operations take irreplaceable natural resources out of the Town, with little or no reciprocal benefit to local residents, and intensified by the impacts of traffic generated by mine hauling trucks.” It was noted that, to minimize any potential environmental impacts associated with reclamation, “both the Town and private mining companies must take serious federal, state, and local requirements for reclamation of the abandoned mining pits.” The Western GEIS also pointed out that it may be appropriate to consider adaptive re-use of some of “the abandoned mining areas for intense recreational improvements or even off-road vehicle and/or motorized dirt bike parks.” Three sand-mining operations and the junkyard in the Speonk Development Proposal should be eventually phased out, according to the Western GEIS. Within the Central Pine Barrens Compatible Growth Area, “as an alternative to making each a sending site for TDRs, these disturbed areas, which lie well away from the local plan for planned residential neighborhoods, might be considered as sites for recreational uses of public or commercial value.”

A Sunrise Highway exit at Speonk-Riverhead Road is noted in the Western GEIS “Speonk Development Proposal”¹ as advantageous for travel patterns that would allow access to

¹Western GEIS, pp. 7-146-7-148.

Suffolk County Community College to the north and the planned receiving zones to the south.² The GEIS did not envision it as a cloverleaf pattern, but noted that a simple diamond system should be adequate. The latter would cause the least disturbance to the pine barrens ecological systems. The Western GEIS did not recommend extension of highway service roads from County Route 111 or development in the northerly area abutting Sunrise Highway. It indicated that “the open space along the Sunrise Highway’s south border is intentional to protect the deepest aquifer of this area, broaden unfractured woodlands and fortify the scenic qualities of this forest system as seen from Sunrise Highway.”

Although used as a reference material by Town Officials and planning staff, the draft Western GEIS was not adopted in a final form by the Town of Southampton, due to the advent of other regional planning efforts and required ratification of the New York State Central Pine Barrens Plan. Most of its recommendations for natural resource protection and viable receiving sites to facilitate transfers of development rights were transcribed into the New York State Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

CENTRAL PINE BARRENS COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN (1995)

The Long Island Pine Barrens is a unique ecosystem that is recognized as a natural area of great value and significance.

The Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan (the Pine Barrens Plan) resulted from earlier legislation, the Long Island Pine Barrens Maritime Reserve Act, and expanded on the 1993 Western GEIS. The intent was to protect Long Island’s underground drinking water, preserve its natural resources, and enhance its economic well-being.

²Western GEIS, pp. 7-152-7-160.

Article 57 – Long Island Pine Barrens Maritime Reserve Act, (New York Environmental Conservation Law (ECL), Act of 1990, as amended in 1993), was established for the purpose of preserving the Long Island Pine Barrens-Peconic Bay maritime region. The enactment of ECL Article 57 created the third largest open space preserve in New York State and established that compatible economic development is to be accommodated and directed to less sensitive areas through the use of conservation easements, transfer of development rights, and similar planning mechanisms. This law set forth the need for a comprehensive plan to oversee development and preservation within the Pine Barrens region.

The Pine Barrens comprise a 50,000-acre Core Preservation Area (CPA), where development is prohibited, and a 50,000-acre Compatible Growth Area (CGA), in which development is permitted, but highly controlled. (In the Study Area, the Pine Barrens comprises approximately 3,300 acres of Core Preservation Area and roughly 1,600 acres of Compatible Growth Area.)

In 1995, the Central Pine Barrens Commission officially adopted the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which outlined goals for the Central Pine Barrens (CPB) area in general, for the Core Preservation Area (CPA), and for the Compatible Growth Area (CGA). (See Exhibit II-2) The overall goals stated in the Plan were to:

- Protect, preserve and enhance the functional integrity of the Pine Barrens ecosystem and the significant natural resources, including plant and animal populations and communities, thereof;
- Protect the quality of surface water and groundwater;
- Discourage piecemeal and scattered development;