

Letter to the editor

February 21, 2011

To Saratoga TODAY:

"Everyone wants a downtown Malta, don't they?"

That was the rhetorical question posed by Malta's planning consultant in the opening presentation to the Town Board on the proposed downtown Master Plan. Everyone nodded yes as the consultant - filled with a sense of agreement - continued to explain a plan to "reset" the community vision so that downtown Malta would be a dense 1.8 mile long

city of 3 and 4 story buildings built 20 feet from the street edge - very much like Saratoga Springs. Buildout would result in a whopping 9,300,000 square feet of gross floor space, the equivalent of about 30 more Ellsworth Commons, (Ellsworth Commons is the 3 and 4 story apartment/retail complex currently being constructed across from Town Hall.)

Yes indeed, there is a community consensus for a downtown, but the grand urban vision of the planners is not even close to the desires of the residents. In e-mails, phone calls and conversations I

an urban downtown. They are particularly offended by the scale and density of Ellsworth Commons.

Surveys taken show only 6 percent of the residents want an urban area. The majority (76 percent) wants a hamlet-like downtown of 1 and 2 story buildings with sidewalks and green space in the front; yes, green space - nice tall trees that are in harmony and scale with existing buildings. The new 2 story Wilber Bank across the street from the Community Center is seen by the citizens as a nice model for Malta's downtown future.

Questions on the financial implications, traffic, parking and the pedestrian safety related to cross the 5 lanes of Route 9 have not been answered. Yet the consultant's report did offer a hint as to what is ahead; namely, hundreds of thousands of dollars in planning studies; redevelopment of our Town Hall (presumably we would tear down our current buildings and rebuild 4 story buildings of "mixed use" to match Ellsworth Commons across the street); bonding to build sidewalks to a width of 12 feet instead of the current width of 5 feet; converting Route 9 to an urban street and installing

Not recognized in the consultant's report are warnings from our fire departments that urbanization will force us from an all volunteer department to a costly paid department. Alarms and red lights should also be going off on the new costs for police and snow removal in an urban environment.

Who will pay for all of this? Consultants answer this by proposing a business assessment

district for the downtown area. My guess is that businesses on a tight financial plan to make ends meet will have something to say about this proposal. More likely, Malta taxpayers will pay the bill.

On March 7 at 6:45 pm, the Town Board will hold a public hearing on the proposed Master Plan. Come, listen, ask questions and share with us your opinion on the proposed downtown plan. If

you can't attend or feel uncomfortable speaking before large groups and "stuffed shirts," call Town Board members for a one-on-one conversation. Their phone numbers are on our Town web site: www.malta-town.org. Call me. I will listen.

Sincerely,

Paul Sausville,

Malta Supervisor