

Fighting Suffolk's fees

Support for bill to limit charges to actual costs

BY RICK BRAND
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Protesters Tuesday night attacked the county for imposing millions in excessive fees and backed proposed legislation they said would rein the costs in.

Toting signs including "Suffolk Stop Stealing Our Money" and "Justice for Suffolk — Fight the Fees" protesters endorsed a measure sponsored by Legis. Robert Trotta (R-Fort Salonga) that would limit fees to the actual cost of services. Six of the two-dozen protesters spoke at a news conference in Hauppauge prior to the county legislature hearing on the proposal.

"Suffolk County has made a decision to steal from the taxpayer," said Brandon Muir, executive director of Reclaim New York Initiative, a nonprofit group that organized the event, which included the display of an oversized \$70 million check with the notation "paid in protest."

Melissa Jennifer Shea, head of the Long Island Real Estate Investors Association, said the high fees are making people who fix and flip zombie homes look to go where fees are far more reasonable. "It's a short-term cure, but a long-term loss," she said.



Brandon Muir of Reclaim New York Initiative at the rally on Tuesday. ■ Video: newsday.com/suffolk

"These are nothing more than taxes in hiding," said Trotta noting state law bars local governments from imposing fees that exceed the cost of the service provided. "What we are trying to do is provide transparency of what these fees actually cost."

The proposed local law would require the county executive in his proposed annual operating budget to list in a separate section all fees charged by the county, the services provided for each fee, and the county cost of providing the service.

The proposal also mandates the director of budget review to determine if the fees charged for county services are calculated to cover the cost without generating surplus revenue. The law would also bar excess revenues from fees from funding any other county expense.

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copogue) said he opposes the proposal and maintained the fees are legitimate. "We have to let it play out in court," he said.

Critics say the fees connected

to mortgages can often multiply when a house is on multiple lots, or when people are both buying and selling. They also say the fees are a hardship for first-time home buyers, or when people are paying off a home-equity loan or putting a home in trust for an older parent.

Muir said their group has sent out a mailing and made calls to its 750 local members and done cyber ads to attract attention.

Trotta acknowledges that he has an uphill battle to win passage.

Oyster Bay's sale of preserved land on hold

BY TED PHILLIPS
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The possible sale of Oyster Bay town-owned parcels purchased in 2006 for preservation was put on hold after the town board on Tuesday tabled a resolution to appraise the property, overlooking the federally protected Mill Pond.

The board delayed the measure without discussion. Town Clerk James Altadonna Jr., who records the votes but does not himself vote, told the board afterward that before it approves money for an appraisal of the property, it should know that town records show "that this is parkland."

The property — 3.1 acres in

the hamlet of Oyster Bay — was bought for \$4.5 million. At the time, the purchase of the land from Elia Lizza was hailed by town officials and local groups as an environmental triumph in the face of a proposal to develop the property into nearly 70 residential units.

"We should make every effort that we reasonably can to protect what little precious open space we have left," then-Town Supervisor John Venditto said at the April 25, 2006, meeting at which the town board approved the purchase, according to a transcript. Venditto said officials were protecting the land "for our children and for our children's children and beyond."

David Relyea, co-owner of

local shellfishing company Frank M. Flower & Sons Inc., according to the transcript, said that "this piece of property is essential in maintaining the ecological integrity of the Mill River Watershed."

The preservation of the property had been pushed by several groups, including the nonprofit Friends of the Bay, which had hired a consultant to produce an ecological study of the property.

After purchasing the land, the town board in 2007 passed a law that rezoned the property from residential to recreational. Then, using \$59,000 of New York State grant money, the town had proposals prepared that would have created the Mill Pond Overlook as a mix of habitat preservation

and public access, with walkways to the wetlands below.

The proposals stalled, and today most of the land sits behind a dilapidated chain-link fence.

This year, Joseph Saladino's administration has called for appraisals of six town-owned properties for possible sale. Some of those proposals — which were expected to raise millions of dollars for the town — have been met with opposition. The town dropped the proposed sale of a parcel in Syosset on Terrehans Lane last month because it was protected by the state from development. Another proposal, the sale of the town's dog park in East Massapequa, drew protests from area dog owners.

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1789 President George Washington declared Nov. 26, 1789, a day of Thanksgiving to express gratitude for the creation of the United States of America. (In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.)

1955 "Captain Kangaroo" and "The Mickey Mouse Club" premiered on CBS and ABC, respectively.

1967 Folk singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie, best known for "This Land Is Your Land," died in New York of complications from Huntington's disease; he was 55.

1981 Irish nationalists at the Maze Prison near Belfast, Northern Ireland, ended seven months of hunger strikes that claimed 10 lives.

1995 The jury in the O.J. Simpson murder trial in Los Angeles found the former football star not guilty of the 1994 slayings of his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and Ronald Goldman.

2003 A tiger attacked illusionist Roy Horn of the duo "Siegfried & Roy" during a performance in Las Vegas, leaving Horn in critical condition on his 59th birthday.