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MURRAY AND AMBROSINO BUOYED BY SUPREME COURT DECISION - TOWN MOVES FORWARD TO CLOSE DOWN COURTESY HOTEL

Hempstead Town Supervisor Kate Murray and Councilman Edward Ambrosino are moving forcefully ahead with plans to shut down West Hempstead's Courtesy Hotel, buoyed by a June 23rd U. S. Supreme Court decision. The decision gave greater rights to local governments to condemn property for private development. "This decision is good news for West Hempstead residents and bad news for an unwelcome neighbor, the Courtesy Hotel," said Murray. "The legal ruling gives the town's plan to shutter a local eyesore the support of the highest court in the land."

The two officials will utilize the court's decision in concert with a recently commissioned town "blight study" as the basis to seize the tattered facility and turn it over to the private sector for redevelopment. Removing blight and revitalizing neighborhoods are grounds upon which local governments can condemn properties and effect private development.

Murray and Ambrosino stated that conditions at the site, along with criminal arrests that have occurred at the location, clearly present blight conditions. The Supervisor and the Councilman pointed out that a benefit of seizing the hotel under blight provisions and having it redeveloped by the private sector is that it would not add to the local tax burden of the community. Rather, a new developer would support the local tax base.

"Condemning the Courtesy Hotel under blight provisions and turning it over to a responsible private sector developer will be in the best interest of local neighbors," said Murray. "Our plan will rid the area of a bad neighbor without increasing the local property tax burden," added Ambrosino.

Hempstead Town anticipates that the blight study will be completed within the next few weeks and the officials plan on holding a West Hempstead community meeting shortly thereafter. "As soon as we receive the Courtesy Hotel blight study, we will meet with area residents to discuss plans to redevelop the site in harmony with their priorities," stated the Supervisor. The Councilman added, "We are excited to be working with neighbors to bring a 'good neighbor' to this location."

While the Supreme Court decision has bolstered the town's legal standing in its efforts to close the Courtesy Hotel, Murray explained that the town has taken several other steps to close the building during her tenure. Specifically, the town has been aggressively working to close the Courtesy Hotel under provisions of its public nuisance law. The local ordinance provides for closing properties where multiple criminal arrests for activities such as prostitution and drug-related activities have occurred. In fact, the town's case against the Courtesy was certified for trial in May of this year. In the spring of 2004, the town sought a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction against the hotel's owner. The judge in the case denied those motions, which would have immediately closed the hotel. "We are serious about this case and are moving forward to stop this threat to local quality of life," said Murray. "We will use all means at our disposal to close the Courtesy Hotel."

Nassau County also has a public nuisance law; however, Nassau officials have apparently declined to take steps to close down the Courtesy Hotel under its legal authority. In fact, Hempstead Town is the only government that has attempted to close the hotel.

Beyond efforts under the public nuisance law and the blight study, Murray and Ambrosino are working to create a stronger police presence at the Courtesy Hotel. The town officials are working with State Senator Dean Skelos and the Nassau County Police Department to locate a police booth immediately adjacent to the hotel. "An enhanced police presence at this site would be effective and welcomed by the community," said Ambrosino. "This is just one more approach we are using to attack the dangerous and unpleasant activities that have been occurring at the Courtesy."

"Ironically, disrespect and courtesy are two terms that go hand in hand when it comes to the Courtesy Hotel," concluded Murray. "With the support of the U. S. Supreme Court, Hempstead Town will make sure that the Courtesy Hotel will no longer disrespect local neighbors. We will not rest until this hotel is closed and a good neighbor is in its place."

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