

CONTACT: Mike Deery
516-812-3310

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 6, 2005

TOWN UNVEILS LATEST EFFORTS TARGETING WEST HEMPSTEAD HOTEL

Hempstead Town Supervisor Kate Murray and Councilman Edward Ambrosino have called a hotel in West Hempstead a scourge on the community and have bolstered efforts to close the facility. Murray and Ambrosino have commissioned a "blight study," which could provide the town with legal ammunition necessary to seize the tattered hotel and turn it over to a private developer. "The blight study that is being conducted is just the most recent initiative in a comprehensive effort to remove this community eyesore," stated Murray. "We expect a report within a week, and I am optimistic that the study will give us the authority to move forward and redevelop the Courtesy Hotel in harmony with the priorities of the residents of West Hempstead."

Under the law, municipalities can seize blighted property and turn it over to the private sector for redevelopment. Murray and Ambrosino are confident that the long history of criminal arrests at the Courtesy Hotel clearly presents blight conditions. Arrests for prostitution and drug-related activities and other offenses have been prevalent at the seedy structure. Murray and Ambrosino 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. Condemnation proceedings under which a facility is seized and used for a government purpose increases the tax burden faced by local homeowners and businesses. Given the size and location of the Courtesy Hotel as well as the depth of the local tax base, condemnation for a governmental purpose could have a dramatic effect on West Hempstead taxpayers.

"We know that working to condemn the Courtesy Hotel under blight provisions and then turning it over to a responsible private sector developer will be in the best interest of local neighbors," said Murray. "West Hempstead residents would have the benefit of ridding their community of this unwelcome neighbor without adverse property tax consequences."

Recently, town officials succeeded in condemning the Oceanside Motel, which will be redeveloped as a municipal parking lot. Town officials stated that this option would not be welcomed in West Hempstead. Local residents have spoken out against a parking lot, indicating a preference for other uses at the site. Additionally, the lower estimated value of the substantially smaller Oceanside Motel and the larger local tax base will allow that community (Oceanside) to absorb the modest tax impact.

Hempstead Town has also 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

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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 end the Courtesy Hotel's 'reign of terror'."

Murray has responded to recent criticism from Nassau's Tax Assessor that the town has not done enough to close down the hotel. The Supervisor pointed out that Nassau's Tax Assessor has failed to initiate an action to close down the hotel, despite the fact that Nassau County has its own public nuisance law. "It's sad really that the Assessor has attempted to deflect attention from his own failure to pursue court action on this matter," commented Murray. "Rather than pointing fingers, he should support Hempstead Town as we continue to pursue every legal avenue to close the Courtesy 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."

Murray and Ambrosino have stated that they will continue to work with West Hempstead residents and they will not rest until the Courtesy Hotel is closed. "Together, West Hempstead neighbors and the town will prevail in this battle," concluded Murray. "We will continue to do whatever it takes to make our neighborhoods safer and preserve their suburban character."

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