



## **The current conditions of the Ronkonkoma Station provides the opportunity for future vitality**

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What is the busiest train station on Long Island with more than 14,000 riders per day, who only have to travel about an hour to get to Manhattan?

It's not Huntington or Babylon-the surprising answer is Ronkonkoma. However, the 50-acre area in the town of Brookhaven around the Ronkonkoma train station is unsightly-blighted even-and the thousands of commuters that drive there every day have no reason to stick around.

Ronkonkoma has the greatest potential on the entire East Coast to become a premiere transit-oriented development because of several unique characteristics that sets it apart from other big projects that have not succeeded on Long Island.

First, the community is behind the revitalization. The town has held numerous community meetings over the past few years and worked with the local civic association to develop a land use plan. The land use plan was the basis for a "request for expression of interest," or RFEI, issued by the town in the spring to solicit creative ideas for the hub. We received four submissions that are full of interesting ideas that provide a starting point for the town to name a master developer. The people of Ronkonkoma know that the acres around their train station can be far better utilized than they are now. The local civic leader even led a site tour of potential developers of the site. At the Ronkonkoma Station, current blight provides the opportunity for future vitality.

Second, the town, the jurisdiction that controls land use, is driving the process and is proposing a "form-based code" for the Ronkonkoma hub, which will set guidelines for the design of the buildings, but not necessarily their use. Brookhaven Town would be the first municipality on Long Island to adopt a form-based code. This is the next frontier of zoning and has the potential to buck the trend of segregated zoning and sprawl that has made Long Island known for its strip malls.

Last, but equally important, is proximity. Right around the corner is MacArthur Airport that hopefully will be expanding in the near future. Its close location to major research institutions like Stony Brook University and Brookhaven National Laboratory could make it the next cool destination for many bright young people. Some of them might even want to buy or rent a home there.

Ronkonkoma is a unique opportunity to create a destination unmatched on Long Island. Like similar locations throughout the U.S., the region must leverage the untapped potential of Long Island's most dynamic transit-hub to create a location full of energy and excitement. We must seize this opportunity now.

Mark Lesko is the supervisor in the town of Brookhaven.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540