



### Prior Planning Studies.

Over the past 40 years, several planning studies were completed that included the Village of Sag Harbor. Each contained specific and general recommendations which were considered applicable to the conditions found in the Village at the time. As commercial pressures have shifted, some of the more specific recommendations may not be considered appropriate today given the current trends in development. A review of the reports themselves illustrates over time there is a shift in recommendations - from the 1971 Koppleman Study, to the 2006 Suffolk County Planning Study - demonstrating the importance in keeping an eye on the current trends and reacting to them to protect the future of the Village.

However, the theme throughout all of these planning documents is clear - - Sag Harbor is a special place and efforts need to be undertaken to preserve its character.

Accordingly, from a historical perspective, the narrative that follows briefly discusses the recommendations of these studies.

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Under the direction of Lee Koppleman, in 1971 the Suffolk County Planning Commission completed a report entitled Sag Harbor - Study and Plan, 1971. This study was completed as part of the development of broad planning concepts for the Nassau-Suffolk Comprehensive Development Plan. It found that Sag Harbor is one of the most historic communities in the United States, with much of its character and spirit intact - - providing an enriching experience for people, whether they are residents or visitors.

In 1971, the Suffolk County Planning Commission recognized that the preservation of Sag Harbor needed to be considered. They found:

- < Its location in a potentially high growth region of Long Island necessitates planning that will preserve Sag Harbor's present appearance and activities.
- < The population of the Village was 2,350 persons, with a saturation population of approximately 5,850 persons (based upon the zoning in effect at the time.)
- < Much of the surrounding area is dependent upon the Sag Harbor central business district for goods and services.

The 1971 Sag Harbor Plan included the following four basic concepts or recommendations:

1. The plan will have to be conducive to the preservation of an historic district.
2. Sag Harbor was originally a water oriented community and with the help of the Plan should return to this theme.
3. Sag Harbor is a pedestrian oriented village and this quality should be emphasized in the Plan.
4. Sag Harbor must expand its commercial service areas to accommodate expected future growth without negating the previous three concepts.

The 1971 Plan goes on to break the Village into four separate areas, and provides brief recommendations for each, including simplistic views of expansion of the commercial district with department stores and office buildings, pedestrian

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walkways, new street systems and expansion of transient dockage. Several recommendations made have been implemented, including the creation of a sewage treatment facility, removal of the Mobil Oil fuel tanks from the waterfront, and the creation of a historic district.

In June of 1973, The Sag Harbor Preservation Commission engaged Robert H. Pine, AIP to complete an evaluation of the Village, entitled Sag Harbor: Past, Present and the Future. The report focused primarily on the importance of the historic architectural and aesthetic character of the Village, but it contained a few specific recommendations for the Business District:

1. Confine the business district to the existing area. (Do not expand the district as recommended in the 1971 study).
2. Create more efficient use of space and a better competitive position through: creating a traffic bypass route and eliminating all or most of traffic from Main Street; expansion and improvement of Village parking; restoration of lighting standards and construction of a pedestrian island in the center of Main Street; and the improvement of the rear facades and pedestrian access for the stores fronting the main parking lot.

In June of 1975, a further study was commissioned to evaluate the village commercial district entitled “Planning Study of the Sag Harbor Business District”



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prepared by Robert H. Pine, AIP. While a number of parking studies have been completed over the years, this was the only study solely focused on the Village commercial district.

The 1975 Planning Study was initiated in order to allow the Village to:

*“... undertake a planning study aimed at providing a physical framework for economic growth and normal change without, at the same time, altering the historic character of the Village in any major way.”*

At the time, the B-1 Business District encompassed approximately 50 acres of the central core of the Village, and containing approximately 3,000 linear feet of water frontage. Even in 1975, the main portion of the Sag Harbor Commercial District was developed - - less than 2 acres of land was available for development.

The trends in land use observed in 1975 include the following:

*“The filling-in and development of the area’s last remaining marshlands; this has occurred mainly in the area north of Spring Street, west of the Main Street shops. While the impact of this development has largely been on surface drainage in the area, the addition of the new Post Office, facing both Long Island Avenue and Nassau Street, when added to the existing supermarket, drive-in bank and garden apartments in the immediate vicinity, and the traffic already in existence at the foot of Main Street, could accentuate traffic and pedestrian circulation problems already becoming evident in this area.*

*“Apartments - These have taken the form of conversion of existing single-family houses to two or more apartments, the construction of apartments over Main Street shops and the recent construction of 32 new garden apartment units on the westerly border of the business district. There are currently some 67 apartment units in and around the Main Street shopping area in various forms and structures. This trend is marked for having taken place in the face of a zoning ordinance which explicitly prohibits any kind of residential use in the business district.*

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*“Conversions to Commercial Use - As retail-commercial space have become more and more difficult to come by, there has been a mounting trend (although one which was always present in Sag Harbor) toward the conversion of old, often historic, houses to retail or business use. This has occurred along Main Street, as in the case of the Latham House, on Division Street, as in the Tinker Alley Tavern, and in other parts of the business district. This natural trend indicates that there exists a reservoir of potential commercial structures in existing residential pockets within the business district, both east of Division Street and west of Main Street, in which at least some of the districts’s future expansion needs might be met. With adequate controls, these ‘adaptive’ uses could be made to serve the cause of preserving old and historic houses and along with them, the visual quality of the Sag Harbor business district.”*

The 1975 Planning Study includes as Figure 3 the existing land uses contained within the “core” commercial districts of the Village. In comparison to the Existing Land Use Map prepared by the Town of East Hampton Planning Department for the Village of Sag Harbor, the general changes found in the Village are identified as follows:

- h** The boundary of the business district is delineated differently to follow the pattern of existing development.
- h** Several of the vacant properties have been acquired by the Village of Sag Harbor and converted to parking fields (Meadow Street and Rector Street).
- h** Heavy industrial uses along Bridge Street have been eliminated.
- h** A small park parcel located off of Long Island Avenue, fronting onto Sag Harbor Cove is now in private ownership.
- h** The Grumman Plant at Long Wharf has been converted to a series of waterfront commercial shops, restaurants and a performing arts theater.
- h** The industrial use at the Bulova Watchcase Factory site has been abandoned.

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- h** The sewage treatment plant has been established, and the Mobil Oil terminal has been dismantled.

While changes have occurred with the passing of time, in general a review of the Land Use Map contained in the 1975 Sag Harbor Business District Study did not find a dramatic difference to what exists today. The commercial district has demonstrated a stability over the years.

The guiding principles established in the 1975 for the proposed zoning code amendments that would affect the future growth and development of the business district were as follows:

- h** Attractiveness as a shopping area - variety and good pedestrian circulation;
- h** Good internal circulation and external access;
- h** Compactness - “walkability”;
- h** Adequate space for seasonal and possible long-term expansion;
- h** Residential use - its density and control.

Those separate principles established for the waterfront business district were as follows:

- h** Preservation of view and open space;
- h** Encouragement of marine-oriented commercial and recreational uses;
- h** Improved public access and facilities; and,
- h** Compatibility of commercial and recreational uses.

The underlying theme in the study acknowledges the importance of the shopping and commercial center found along Main Street in Sag Harbor as an economic factor for the summer resort and tourist visitors. The 1975 study lead to a series of recommendations to the Board of Trustees of the Village of Sag Harbor:

- A. The creation of the “Waterfront Business District” as a separate area having specific zoning requirements.
- B. The creation of a “Business Sub-District” located to the west of the Main Street business area. Within this

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area special standards were recommended for drainage control, as well as performance standards be established for development and re-development projects, as it relates to traffic generation, parking, and landscaping.

- C. The redefining of the boundaries of the “General Business District” to include areas that had been previously zoned residential, however non-residential uses were occurring therein.
- D. The preservation of the historic and architectural qualities of existing structures in any conversion or development plan to the extent feasible.
- E. Creation of special permit uses to establish controls for certain land use changes - such as conversion of residences to apartments.
- F. Restrict business growth north of Spring Street due to low elevations and poor (marshy conditions). Subdivisions and site development would need to address drainage control.

In May 2006, the Suffolk County Department of Planning prepared a report entitled “Shopping Centers and Downtowns, Suffolk County, New York”. This document examined the shopping centers and central business districts throughout the County, in an effort to update the County’s retail center inventory. The purpose was to examine the trends in square footage, the vacancy rates, and issues that affect retailing in Suffolk County. Their general findings were as follows:

- h** Population in Suffolk County continues to rise modestly, while real incomes have declined since 2000.
- h** The 803 shopping centers in Suffolk County contain 37.1 million square feet of retail space, and nearly half of that space is in large community shopping centers.

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- h** 35% of Suffolk’s shopping center space opened before 1970 but since 1990 shopping center space has increased by 36%.
  - h** While population has increased by 15.5% in Suffolk County during the past 25 years, the amount of shopping center space has increased by 87%.
  - h** Suffolk County’s shopping center square footage per person was 11.3 in 1970, and was 25.2 in 2005.
  - h** Since 1990, retailing has been characterized by an influx of large discount and “big box” retailers and larger stores overall.
  - h** The percentage of vacant stores in downtown districts in 2005 was 7.3%, a slight improvement over the year 2000 figure (8.1%) and significantly better than in 1996 (11.5%).
  - h** The percentage of vacant stores in shopping centers in 2005 was 7.8%, an improvement over the year 2000 figure (12%) and much improved from the 19% vacancy rate in 1996.
  - h** The amount of shopping center square footage currently proposed but not yet built in Suffolk County totals 7.0 million square feet.
  - h** Significant shopping center space presently exists in Suffolk County. Significant additional space added at this time could contribute to an increase in retail vacancies. An emphasis should be placed on redeveloping or occupying existing retail space.

While the 2006 Suffolk County Study focused on commercial districts and shopping centers throughout the County, it contained some specific findings regarding the Inc. Village of Sag Harbor and its commercial district:

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- h** Their inventory<sup>1</sup> found that the Village contained approximately 233,000 square feet of commercial space in 137 stores. These structures are located on properties that encompass approximately 17 acres of the commercial districts of the Village.
  - h** Of the 137 central business district stores, 92 stores were retail (67%), 40 structures were used for non-retail uses (29%), and only 5 stores were vacant. This resulted in a vacancy rate of 4%, which is well below the average for Suffolk County (7.3%).

The Suffolk County Department of Planning study contained recommendations for downtowns, including:

*“At one time, more retail trade activity in Suffolk County occurred in its downtown central business districts. Due to changes in retailing and in the role of downtown business districts in Suffolk County, downtowns are no longer the important economic centers they once were, and they are not likely to be so ever again. Today, regional malls, large category killer and discount chain stores dominate the retail market, and the average size of anchor stores and satellite stores in shopping centers continues to grow. It is difficult for downtowns to accommodate today’s big stores because the downtown is somewhat constricted by the existing street system and small land parcels.*

*“Many of Suffolk County’s downtown areas have evolved and are showing strength. In the field surveys of 1996, 2000 and 2005, vacancy rates in downtowns were lower than vacancy rates in shopping centers, and vacancy rates in downtowns continues to improve. Downtowns are often viable retail locations because they are close to more densely populated areas and are therefore still convenient to many residents. In addition, more downtowns are becoming oriented toward more services, tourism or specialty*

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<sup>1</sup>Note that the study area used by the Suffolk County Planning Department did not include the entirety of the Village Business District. Therefore, the numbers and calculations taken therefrom differ from the site-specific assessment completed for this study.

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*boutique shopping. Shopping in a downtown area offers an ambiance different from shopping in a shopping center, especially in nice weather.” (Pg. 65)*

In many ways, Sag Harbor is different than other small villages and downtown areas - - its isolation from large commercial shopping centers and malls, its attractive and friendly waterfront location, its walkability and the diversity of retail stores and restaurants allow it to sustain itself as a viable commercial shopping area.

*“It is difficult for downtowns to accommodate today’s big stores because the downtown is somewhat constricted by the existing street system, and small land parcels.”*

The nearest shopping center (KIMCO Plaza, on Montauk Highway in Bridgehampton) contains approximately 288,000 square feet of retail space - a near equivalent to all of the Village of Sag Harbor - however in composition it’s quite different. The 288,000 sq. ft. offers only 39 stores, vs. the approximately 167 commercial spaces, stores and shops (including several residential uses) found in



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the Village in 2007. Many of those found in KIMCO Plaza are larger-scale, destination-oriented shops -- King Kullen, K-Mart, Banana Republic, Victoria's Secret, Rite-Aid, Talbots, Williams-Sonoma, the Gap, etc. -- these larger stores are not typically associated with a small commercial walking district such as that found in Sag Harbor. The Plaza consists of a collection of larger, less diverse, uses that are considered more destination-oriented. They clearly serve an important function to the East End community, but while the overall commercial space is similar in size, this shopping plaza does not define/create a "community". Nor does it create a commercial district that as a whole is a multi-use, diverse, commercial destination similar to that found in downtown hamlets.

The 2006 Planning Department Study writes that *"the downtown is the core of the community, and it reflects the community's identity and character."* This statement could be considered as describing the essence of the issue before Sag Harbor's Main Street commercial district -- how can the Village maintain the character and identity of the community, through protecting the character of its core downtown area.

*"The downtown is the core of the community, and it reflects the community's identity and character."*

The 2006 Planning Department Study contains a number of recommendations - a few of which are applicable to the issues facing Sag Harbor.

- h** "Downtowns should focus on their strengths, such as architectural and local heritage, reasonable rents in some cases, close proximity to nearby residences, and access to sewers in some cases. The downtown business district's role as center of commerce and community can be strengthened in several ways." (Pg. 66)
- h** "... In some communities, the existing zoning code should be modified to encourage mixed use development: retail uses on the first floor, and apartment units above." (Pg. 67)
- h** "Municipalities should acquire key parcels near downtown areas for parking and greenspaces where needed, and coordinate parking within downtowns." (Pg. 68)
- h** "Encourage destination uses to locate in downtown areas." (Pg. 69)

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***Downtowns are more than centers of activity. In many cases, they are the heart and soul of the community.***

This recommendation goes on to state:

*“Downtowns are more than centers of activity. In many cases, they are the heart and soul of the community. Yet many of the activities that take place in some downtown areas are daytime activities such as medical offices, dry cleaners and hair and nail salons. Certain types of destination uses will draw consumers at many times of the day and can increase the downtown’s vibrancy at night. Restaurants are one way to increase nighttime visitors to a downtown. In addition, outdoor dining could be encouraged to promote an inviting and lively downtown.*

*“Arts and entertainment uses, such as movie theaters and performing arts theaters have been successful in some downtowns. Chain retailers can attract customers but chain retailers should not dominate a downtown and detract from a downtown’s authenticity. Other destination uses that some downtown areas may want to attract include: coffee shops, DVD/CD/game retailers, drug stores, antique shops and specialty food markets. Downtowns in higher income areas can also attract uses that can’t be found in shopping centers and malls such as high end dog food and accessory stores, boutique clothing stores and stores selling handmade items.”*

Many of the themes contained within these prior studies are consistent with the concerns of today - - government should focus efforts to ensure that the commercial districts are regulated in a manner that is both fair to the property owner, yet establishes sufficient controls that will maintain the vibrancy and diversity of the commercial/retail district. Yet in order to protect the small-town feel of the commercial district, it is believed that at least one recommendation (to encourage destination uses to locate in downtown areas) should be further refined to the specific objectives in Sag Harbor. While destination uses are encouraged within the commercial district (thus not drawing away from the downtown

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shopping area), their size and scale are extremely important - they need to fit within the context of the Village and not become “superior” to any other use within the Village. This allows the downtown shopping area to remain the draw - not a few individual larger stores or shops.

The Village-specific evaluation that has been prepared for this study allows for the development of recommendations that are appropriate given the trends that have been observed in the Village and on the East End and provides them at a scale that is appropriate to this Village.

The 2007 Long Island Index, published by Rauch Foundation, Garden City, New York, identified what was considered as the key characteristics of a vibrant downtown center, based upon meetings with planners, community groups, historical preservationists and others.

These included:

Physical Characteristics:

- < Pedestrian friendly environment.
- < Clean, well-maintained streets and sidewalks.
- < Incorporation of trees, shrubs, flowers and planters as part of the landscape.
- < Traffic “calming” features that force drivers to slow down through the town center.
- < Availability of public restroom facilities.
- < Street furniture, such as benches, lighting, garbage cans.

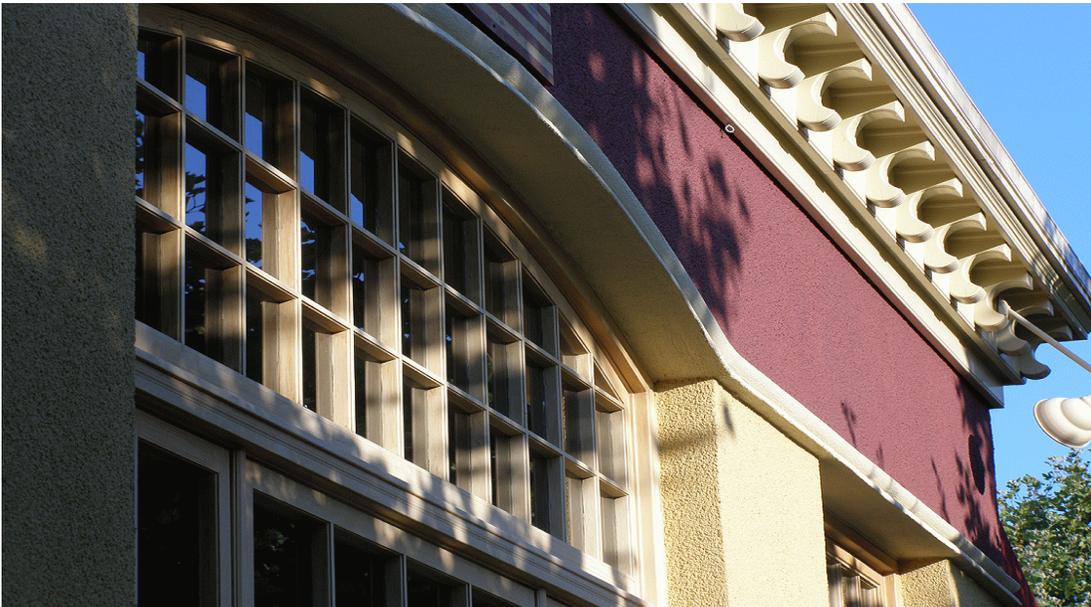


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- < Good lighting.
  - < Directional signage (where can I park, where is the town hall, etc.)
  - < Easy access to adequate parking facilities, frequent and reliable public transportation, bike paths/bike racks for bike riders.
  - < Open space: public greenspace, shoreline.
  - < Preservation of historic character including historic sites and reuse of existing buildings, maintenance of a consistent scale.
  - < Outdoor cafes, ice cream parlors, water fountains, etc. that draw patrons outside; increase pedestrian traffic and create a gathering place.
  - < Attractive store fronts which allow for window-shopping.

Businesses:

- < A continuous line of store fronts closely clustered together with few gaps between buildings and roughly in line with each other.
- < Variety of businesses including:

**h** Retail and non-retail stores and services.



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- h** Unique, one-of-a-kind “Mom and Pop” shops.
  - h** Basic necessities such as food stores, drug stores.
  - h** Quality Restaurants.

Another recommendation made was the “inclusion of a range of housing choices in the downtown area (such as: higher density housing, affordable housing, artist lofts, etc.)”.

The character of the stores and the high quality restaurants found in Sag Harbor’s downtown area follows to a large measure the characteristics identified as important in the 2007 Long Island Index Study.