

SOUTH COUNTRY SURVEY, DECEMBER 2003

Summary Report by Andrew Collver
June 15, 2004

Prepared for the
South Country School District Hamlet Study
for presentation to the Brookhaven Town Board,
John Jay LaValle, Supervisor.

Hamlet Study Chair, Herman Washington

Planning Consultant, Lee E. Koppelman

Committee on questionnaire and survey design:

Gail Ellis
Tony Gazzola
Claire Goad
Nancy Marr
Ann Meinhold
Fran Suk

Printing and mailing supported by corporate contributions and by
South Country Central School District, Michael C. La Fever, Superintendent.

For more detailed analyses and write-in comments, please contact the author.

Andrew Collver, Ph.D., Research Director
New Directions Community-Based Research Institute
Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Stony Brook University
68 Aspen Lane, Stony Brook NY 11790

Copies available at www.newdirectionscbr.org (Click on Library/Bookstore)

SOUTH COUNTRY SURVEY, DECEMBER 2003

Andrew Collver

To obtain broad community input for the South Country Hamlet Study, a survey questionnaire was distributed to the 11,469 mail boxes in the school district in early December, 2003, using the school district's bulk mailing system. By Feb. 22, 2004, the cutoff date for this analysis, only 556 questionnaires, 4.85 per cent, had been returned.

The geographic location of respondents was determined by asking which hamlet they lived in, plus noting the postal carrier route on which the questionnaire was distributed. The USPS supplied a listing of streets served by each carrier route. Response rates varied widely between carrier routes, from less than 1 per cent on two Patchogue routes to over 11 per cent on two Brookhaven routes. These variations strongly suggest wide geographic differences in the tendency to participate in community activities. Generally, the areas with the poorest living conditions had the lowest response rates, while the more comfortable and satisfied neighborhoods were more likely to be heard from. (See note at the end of Part I.)

Because of the small number of responses received, it is not possible to focus down to the level of geographic detail that was originally intended. In order to obtain large enough numbers to yield statistically reliable counts, it was necessary to group neighborhoods into crude larger areas that are scarcely recognizable as real places. The worst instance of this is the "Northern Area," which includes all of the Medford, Bellport and Yaphank addresses north of Sunrise Highway. In the "Central Area," between the railroad and Sunrise Highway, the numbers were too small to permit showing of the Patchogue and Bellport addresses separately, although we know that there are important differences between the two areas. See Map of Survey Tabulation Areas.

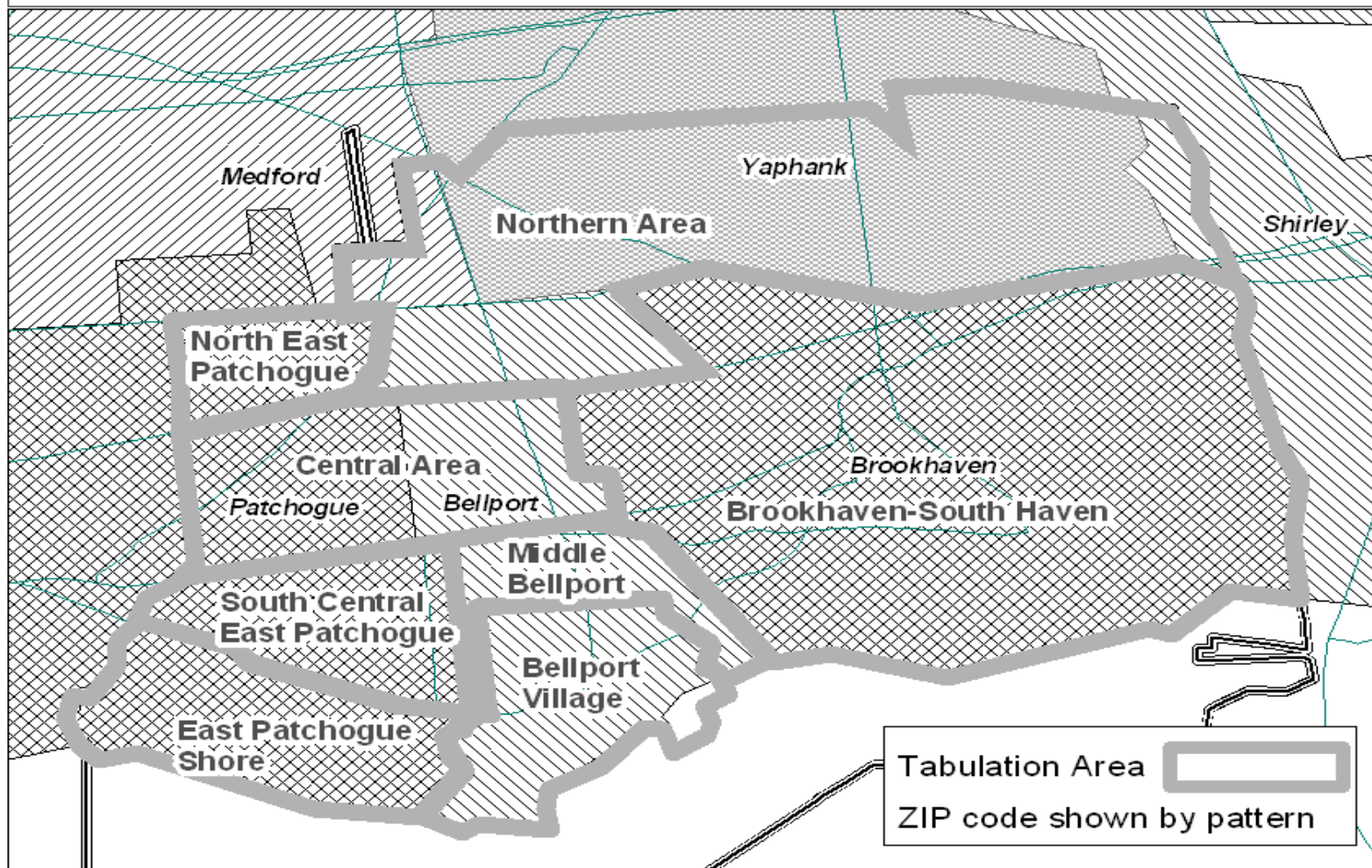
PART I. STATISTICAL REPORT

The survey included 51 questions about the local neighborhood. Answer categories for 44 of them were coded 1 Excellent, 2 Good, 3 Average and 4 Poor, and 8 were coded 1 Yes, 2 No. There were 15 questions about the South Country Community with the answer categories ranging from 1 Excellent to 4 Poor. The survey findings are reported in detail in a separate volume accompanying this report. This chapter's purpose is to summarize the highlights.

For the following analysis, the answers to all of the questions have been converted to only two categories, Yes, and Not yes. For the items that originally had four answer categories, the question becomes, Did the respondent answer either 1 Excellent or 2 Good? If so, the new code for the answer is 1. If not, it is 0. The 0 category includes non-responses as well as 3 Good and 4 Poor. If a Yes/No question is answered with a 1 Yes, the new code remains 1. If not answered Yes (including non-response), the code becomes 0. After the recoding there are 66 questions with their answers coded in the yes/no form.

It would not be practical to keep in mind these 66 different questions and compare the answers to each in eight different geographic areas of the community. Fortunately it turned out that many of the questions are about subjects that are touched on by other questions. There are 10 questions about street maintenance, including sweeping, snow removal, garbage pickup etc. In this general overview, there would be little if anything to be gained by discussing the answer to each of these questions separately. In the index of *street maintenance services*, they are added together and divided by 10 to obtain the average answer to the 10 questions. The same was done for 11 additional sets of variables.

Map 1. Survey Tabulation Areas, South Country Survey, 2003.



Twelve of the questions were the only ones asked about their respective subjects. For instance, there was only one question about public transportation. These 12 have been left separate. The result of calculating the 12 combined scores and keeping the 12 individual questions is a reduction of the 66 variables to 24, and these are the topics of the following discussion.

Open space policy

What to do with remaining open space. The future use of open space was the only public policy topic that was covered by direct questions. The general question was, "Should the remaining open land in this neighborhood be used for each of the following purposes?" Respondents could then check Yes or No to each of six listed land uses: agriculture, open space, outdoor sports, single family homes, higher density housing, and commercial and industrial. Each option was presented as a separate question to be answered independently, so that one could approve any number of the choices in any combination. It was not necessary to choose between agriculture and open space, for instance, because it was possible to choose one or the other, both or neither. In Table 1 the results are shown for each locality and for the total.

Keeping the land as open space was by far the most popular choice, being selected by 81.7 per cent. Next in order of approval were agriculture and outdoor sports, each with acceptance by about 47 per cent. Close behind at 44.4 per cent was development for single family homes. Developments of higher density housing and commercial and industrial sites were most unpopular, being approved by only 5.8 and 4.5 per cent.

Planning note¹: It appears likely that an aggressive program of open space preservation would have solid support of the citizens. This of course needs to be balanced with sensible filling in of vacant lots to complete the development of residential neighborhoods, production of affordable housing at appropriate locations, and expansion of needed services and employment opportunities.

Table 1. Preferred Uses of Vacant Land, by Place.
(Percent answering "Yes" to each use)

Place	Open, or little construction			Develop			Number of replies
	Agri-culture	Open	Sports	Single Family Homes	Higher Density Housing	Comm., Industr.	
Central Area	35.0	52.5	60.0	55.0	12.5	12.5	40
Middle Bellport	40.5	81.1	54.1	51.4	8.1	8.1	37
Northern Area	56.9	80.0	60.0	50.8	4.6	9.2	65
N.E. Patchogue	28.2	82.1	46.2	35.9	2.6	0.0	39
S. Cen. E. Patchogue	36.2	83.0	43.6	43.6	7.4	5.3	94
Brookhaven-S. Haven	71.0	93.5	42.7	41.1	3.2	1.6	124
E. Patchogue Shore	37.0	75.9	38.9	50.0	3.7	1.9	54
Bellport Village	41.8	82.7	42.9	38.8	5.1	3.1	98
Unknown	60.0	60.0	60.0	40.0	40.0	0.0	5
Total	47.3	81.7	46.9	44.4	5.8	4.5	556

Quality of life

The quality of life index. Taken all together, citizens' observations of conditions in their own neighborhoods and in South Country as a whole presents an impression of the quality of life as experienced by the residents themselves. A summary measurement of the quality of life can be calculated by adding together the scores on 18 different dimensions and dividing by 18 to yield a simple average. The results are shown at the bottom of Table 2. The index for all of South Country, which is 44, is the average of all the numbers in the last column of the table. The reader may want to keep in mind that this number is biased to the high side because of the higher rates of response from the higher scoring areas of Brookhaven-South Haven, E. Patchogue South Shore and Bellport Village.

In Table 2, the geographic areas are arranged in order from low to high on the quality of life index. On the left are places that have more problems and deficiencies, and on the right are places that have more prized assets to protect and where people are generally more satisfied with the living conditions. A visual comparison of the eight localities on the quality of life index is made in Figure 1, and the number of responses from each area is represented by the graph in Figure 2.

The 18 rows of Table 2 are graphically displayed in Figures 3-20. Each graph is briefly described below, and then some remarks regarding its implications for community planning are presented as a "planning note." These notes are not necessarily direct recommendations, but are rather things to consider when making choices for the future.

Three most important considerations are (1) what is the source of the problem that is being identified, (2) who, or what organizations or agencies might be expected to accept primary responsibility for its solution, and (3) what type of strategy or strategies might be most effective?

Neighborhood questions

Quiet and safe neighborhood. There are 5 items in this index: control of noise & loud music, enforcement against reckless driving, prevention of open drug sales, prevention of open prostitution, and safety for children. As illustrated in Figure 3, this index of peace and quiet begins at 26 in the Central Area and rises irregularly from place to place until it reaches its highest level of 71 in Bellport Village.

Planning note: What these problems have in common is that they are of a transient or "drive by" nature. By the time you call authorities, the perpetrator is long gone. The appropriate strategies are prevention and watchfulness. A Neighborhood Watch program is a step in that direction. The same applies to local crime, below.

Security from crime. The question asked was, "Were you a victim of crime in the neighborhood in the last 12 months?" Here it is reversed to give it a positive direction, showing the percent who did *not* report that they were crime victims in the last 12 months. In Figure 4, the Central Area as expected stands out as the least secure area, but the Northern Area turns out to be a little more crime free than Bellport Village. The progression between geographic areas is not at all regular, suggesting either that crime is not related to the other quality of life indicators, or that measurement over one 12-month period is not reliable enough to reveal any relationship.

Table 2. indicators of quality of life, from South Country Survey, Dec. 2003.*

(Figures are average percent of respondents replying "Excellent" or "Good" to 4-category items, "Yes" to yes/no items.)

Indicator	Central Area	Middle Bellport	Northern Area	N. E. Patchogue	S. Cen. E. Patchogue	Brkhaven- S. Haven	E. Patchg. S. Shore	Bellport Village	S. Country Total**
Quiet and safe neighborhood	26	31	48	44	41	59	56	71	51
Not crime victim last 12 months	82	92	95	90	94	92	85	95	92
Clean and orderly neighborhood	26	48	42	44	40	53	57	74	51
Pollution-free environment	28	27	14	15	29	21	39	56	30
Street maintenance in neighborhood	24	32	34	39	35	40	40	83	44
Walkable neighborhood	21	27	36	35	32	45	47	65	42
Public transportation in neighborhood	18	16	14	13	16	23	17	37	21
Family friendly neighborhood	27	43	58	54	53	78	85	88	66
Affordable and diverse neighborhood	28	23	29	33	19	17	19	17	21
Know of a civic organization	25	16	17	18	37	64	72	38	41
Neighborhood access to public places	20	20	33	28	39	63	55	83	50
Neighborhood access to services	38	56	52	64	55	57	59	84	60
South Country job opportunities'	5	11	14	23	15	20	11	21	16
Services for seniors and children	15	16	20	19	26	24	21	41	25
School, community and ethnic relations	27	35	32	37	35	30	36	34	33
Library services in SC	70	84	75	85	83	94	93	92	87
Community sports opportunities	9	12	13	19	21	19	22	30	20
Community recognition and events	18	29	21	24	28	43	44	58	37
Quality of life score	28	34	36	38	39	47	48	59	44
Number of Replies Received	40	37	65	39	94	124	54	98	556

* This table is the source for Figures 1-22 Indicators of Neighborhood and Community Quality of Life, by Place

The maximum technically possible score in each instance is 100.

** Total includes 5 from Unknown place.

A. Collver, 5/28/04. File SC Means.123

Clean and orderly neighborhood. Seven questions go into this index: control of illegal rentals, prevention of cars on front lawns, keeping abandoned vehicles off neighborhood streets, keeping dogs under control of owners, cleanup of litter at private homes, circular and paper delivery, regulation of home businesses. The geographic distribution of this characteristic, shown in Figure 5, is very similar to that of *quiet and safe*.

Planning note: What these issues have in common is that they involve offensive, annoying, property-value-reducing behavior by one's neighbors. Most people want to keep good relations with their neighbors and will not risk a direct confrontation that will only cause hard feelings without resolving the problem. This type of situation requires enforcement of applicable regulations by the appropriate agency. From the survey it is evident that these issues are very commonly left unresolved.

Pollution-free environment. One question was asked about environmental pollution in the neighborhood (landfill, etc.). Here a geographic pattern appears that does not follow the overall quality of life index (Figure 6). Judging from the residents' own replies, the least pollution-free areas (the most polluted) are N. E. Patchogue and the Northern Area in the industrial belt between the two great highways, and in Brookhaven-South Haven, which is impacted by the Town landfill, recycling facilities, composting and sewage treatment.

Planning note: This issue is very different from the category of offenses by neighbors. In the case of the landfill, the major polluter is perceived to be the Town of Brookhaven itself. Other polluters are business firms, some with very large organizations capable of considerable influence. Enforcement may have to come from state and federal agencies, if a mutually satisfactory solution cannot be reached by negotiation and citizens' demands. Citizens should first get together and agree on what they are concerned about and what results they want, and devise a strategy for achieving it.

Street maintenance. Ten neighborhood questions are included in this index: garbage collection and recycling; leaf and brush pickup; enforcement against dumping; appliance pickup; snow removal; water drainage; storm drains; street sweeping; street lighting; street sign maintenance; street paving and pothole repairs. Although the Central Area has the least satisfactory street maintenance (Figure 7), it is only a little worse off than the other Brookhaven Town-serviced areas. The dominant fact of the chart is how Bellport Village stands out above all other parts of the community.

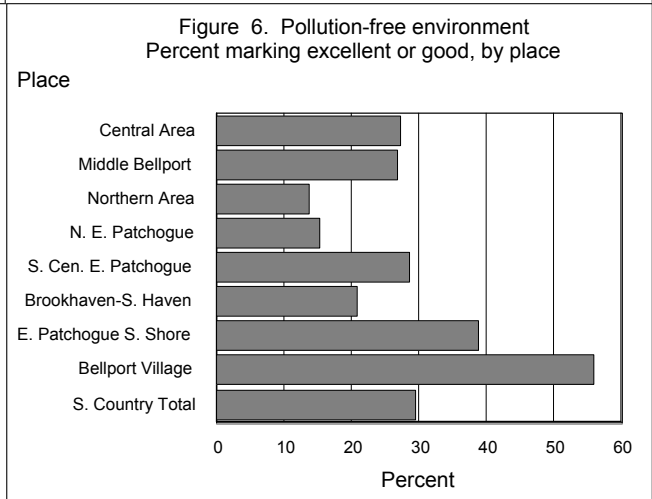
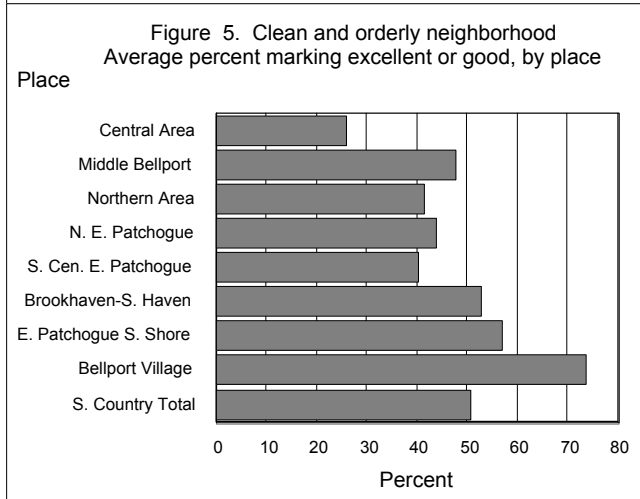
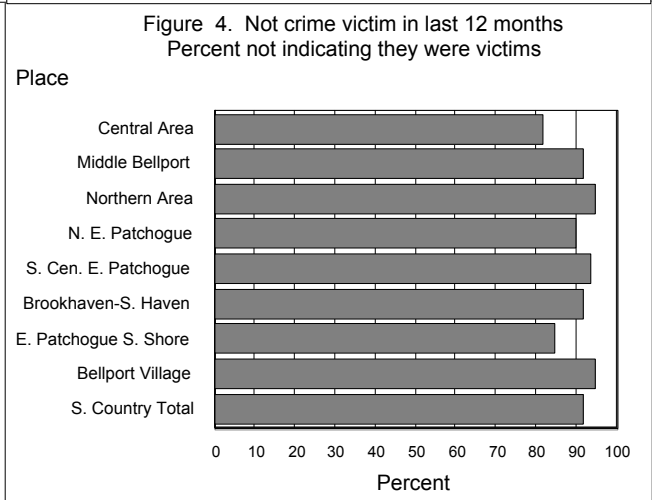
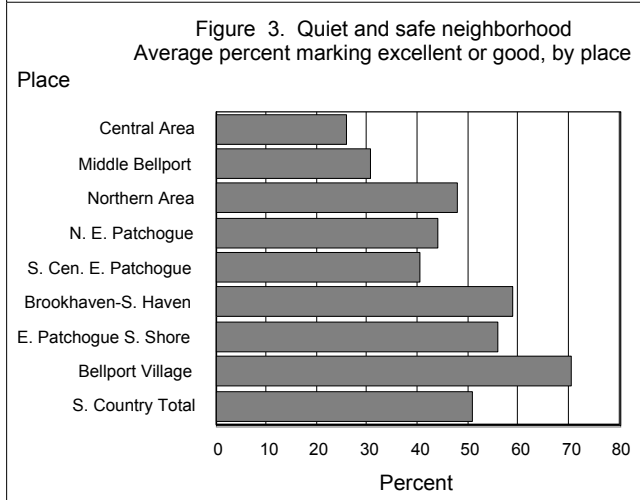
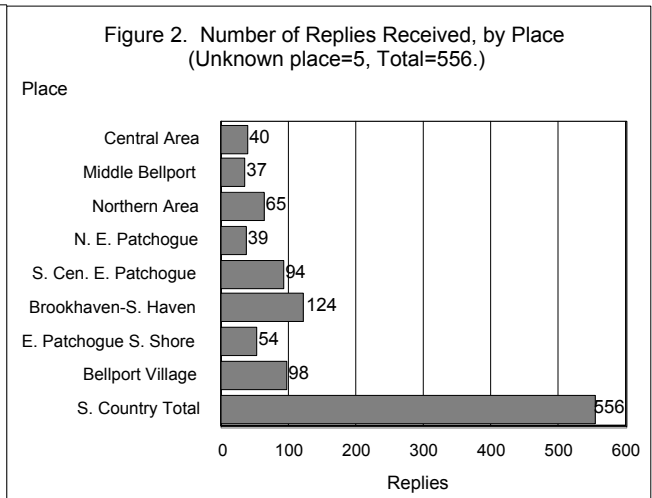
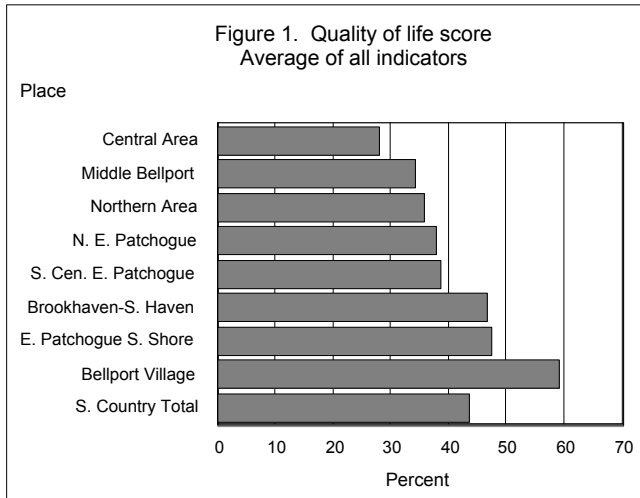
Planning note: Clearly, the town's street maintenance services fall far below those of the Village of Bellport in terms of customer satisfaction. What the taxpayers outside of the village have a right to expect is that the town focus on providing better service.

Walkable neighborhood is measured by a combination of traffic on one's own street, safety for pedestrians and bicycles, police presence and effectiveness, and control of drugs & crime. This index, shown in Figure 8, has nearly the same geographic pattern as *quiet and safe* and *clean and orderly*.

Planning note: It is fair to say that pedestrians and bicyclists have received little consideration in the planning and construction of roadways in the community. Perhaps the important first step here is to see to it that the voices of pedestrians and bicyclists be listened to seriously around the drawing boards.

Public transportation was touched on by only one question. Only 21 per cent of respondents marked public transportation as excellent or good. Village residents gave it somewhat higher marks, but even there it reached only 37 per cent excellent or good. See Figure 9.

Indicators of Neighborhood and Community Quality of Life, by Place South Country Survey, December 2003.



Planning note: Public transportation begins with pedestrian access, and has to be connected to a system of neighborhood safe walkways. For more on this, see the separate chapter on transportation.

Family-friendly neighborhood is measured by questions on the neighborhood as a place to raise children, as a place to grow old, attractiveness to new home buyers, reputation as a place to live, and condition of homes & yards. This index, seen in Figure 10, follows the familiar stair-step progression from the Central Area to Bellport Village.

Planning note: This index basically measures the attainment of the American Dream. It is what suburbia is all about. What makes a neighborhood high or low on this scale? Can the community be planned to make its neighborhoods more family-friendly?

Affordable and diverse neighborhood was derived from two questions, the neighborhood as a place for low-income families, and the neighborhood racial and ethnic mix. These are both desirable neighborhood traits, judging from everyday conversations, the news media, and written comments by survey respondents. And some of the areas of the community that are disadvantaged in other ways hold an advantage here (Figure 11). They offer affordable housing and ethnic diversity.

Planning note: As shown in the survey, affordability and diversity are associated with low income neighborhoods and low scores on the quality of life index. A planning question to consider is whether there may be a way to break this connection.

Know of a civic organization. This was a simple question with a yes or no answer. Brookhaven-South Haven and E. Patchogue South Shore both have strong and well known civic organizations. In Bellport Village, the Village government in many ways takes the place of voluntary activities, leaving the civic association with a less prominent role. See Figure 12.

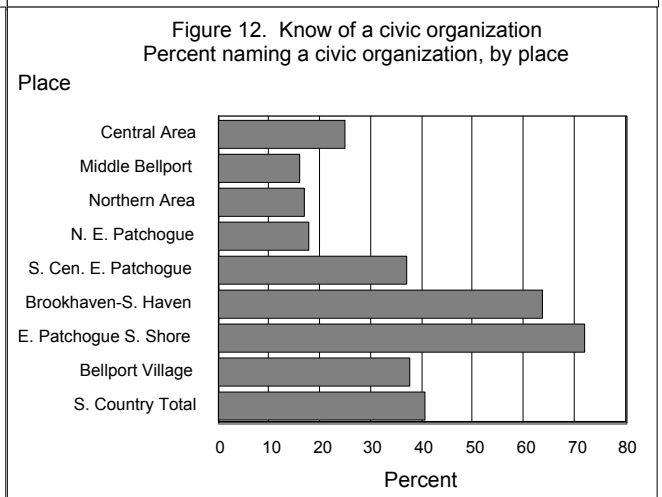
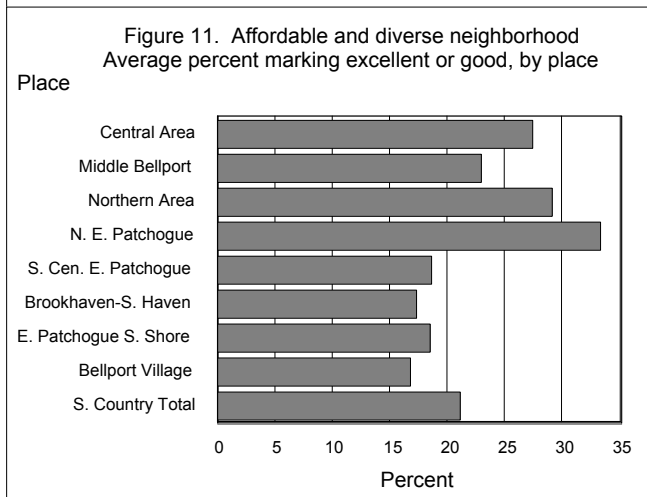
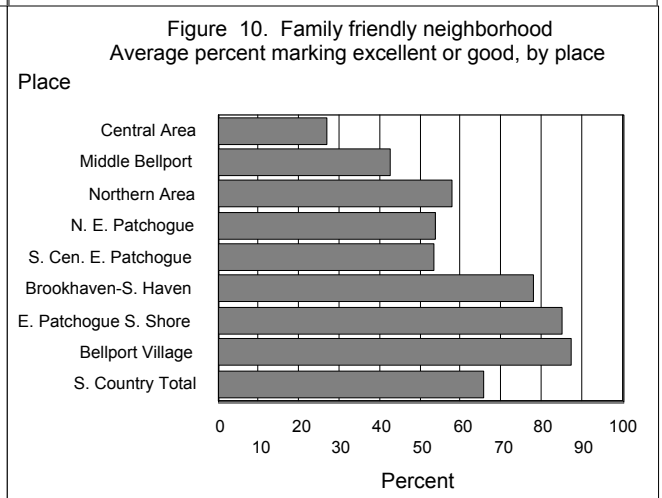
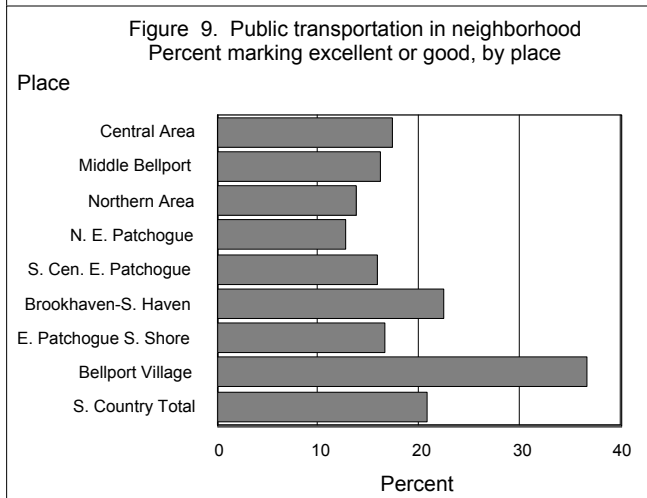
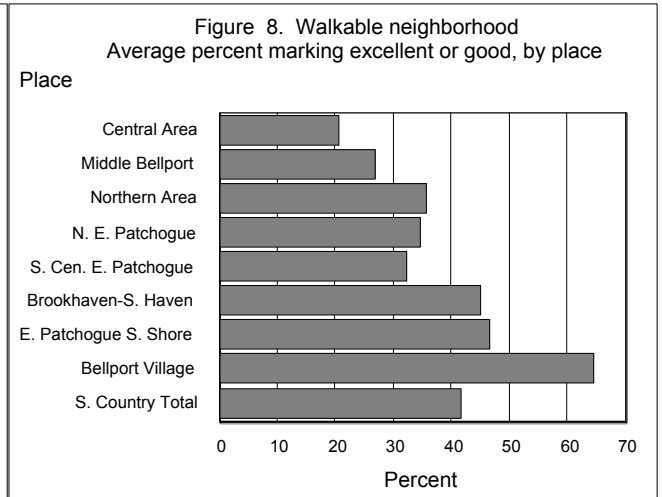
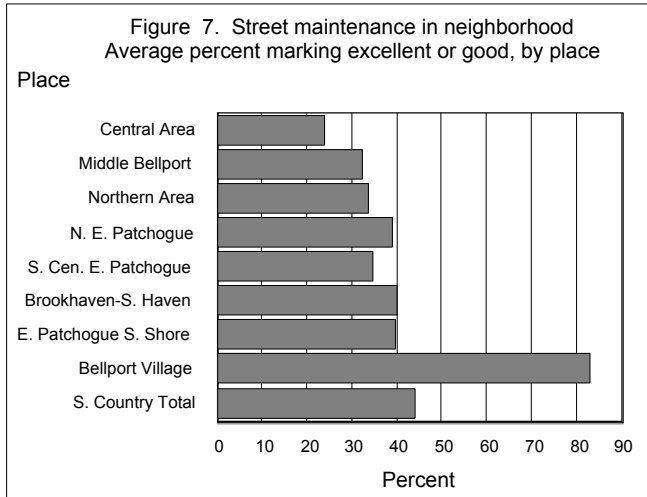
Planning note: Grassroots planning does not end with a Hamlet Study such as this. The few people who participated in the study can provide background information and suggest ways to address the problems and opportunities that are revealed. In the long run, however, this can become truly a plan only if there is broad citizen participation in deciding what the people want and mobilizing the efforts that will be needed to see that the plan is carried out. Civic associations can form the foundation for this long-term effort. It is something to think about, that the areas most in need of material improvements have the lowest levels of civic organization.

Access to public places. The places in question are parks and playgrounds, beaches, boating and fishing, and places for local meetings and events. Nearness to the shore clearly gives an advantage in this area (Figure 13).

Planning note: Equitable access to the shore and marine activities is something that needs to be addressed in any plan for the area. The majority of residents, who live outside the village, are in effect second-class citizens in terms of access to the water. For other activities, a centrally located community center, developed jointly by the town, school district, non-profit organizations and charitable contributions might go a long way toward removing the differences between the different neighborhoods.

Access to services. Three topics are included: neighborhood shopping, maintenance and attractiveness of local businesses, access to shopping for weekly basics, access to medical and health services, and emergency services. Bellport Village scores more than twice as high as the Central Area on this measure (Figure 14), while the other areas are all in a range near the South Country average.

Indicators of Neighborhood and Community Quality of Life, by Place South Country Survey, December 2003.



Planning note: A major need identified in the survey is for the full utilization of vacant commercial properties such as the old Caldor store and the Bellport Outlet, and renovation of the commercial corridor along Montauk Highway. Well-planned placement of business and services in these areas would not only remove visible blight but increase the access to services for many residents.

Community questions.

South Country job opportunities. Besides the objective labor market facts, the perception of local job opportunities depends on the types of jobs that one is interested in or qualified for and on the ability to travel to and from work. Very few people (16 per cent) rated the local job market as excellent or good as seen in Figure 15. Again, the Central Area falls lowest, at only 5 per cent. This, incidentally, was the area that was supposed to be helped by the Economic Development Zone project.

Planning note: According to the survey, past efforts at improving job prospects in the Central Area have yielded very little. Perhaps it is time for a review of the kinds of jobs created, their location, hours of operation and accessibility by public transportation, and the ways in which opportunities are advertised to the neighborhood.

Services for seniors and children covered in the survey were organized recreation for kids, recreation for senior citizens, child care centers and nursery schools and senior citizen housing. Bellport Village residents were about twice as likely as the unincorporated places to rate these services excellent or good (Figure 16).

Planning note: Here again, the community center idea comes to mind.

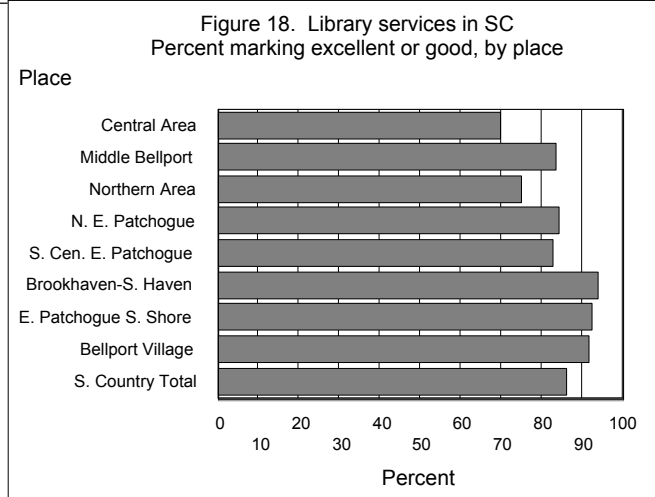
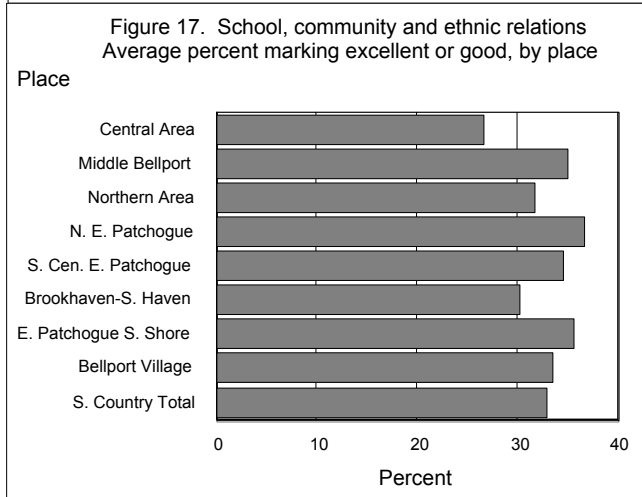
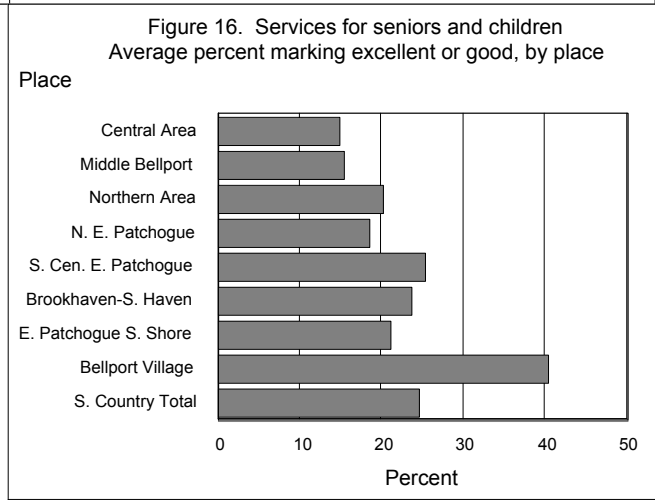
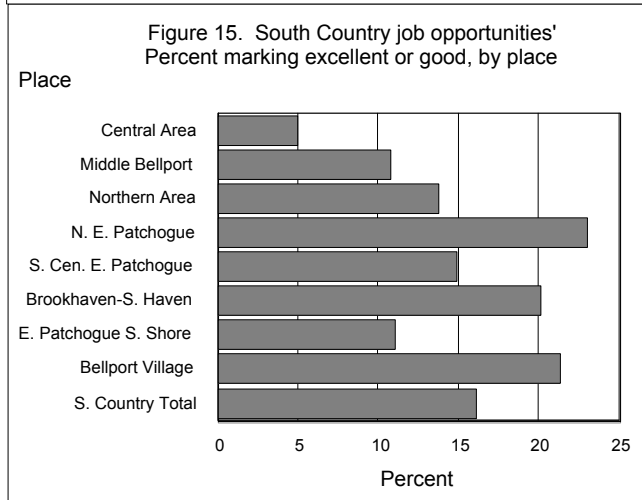
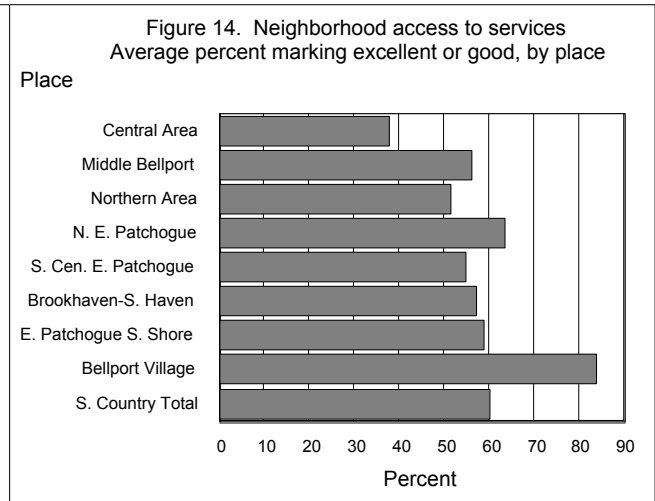
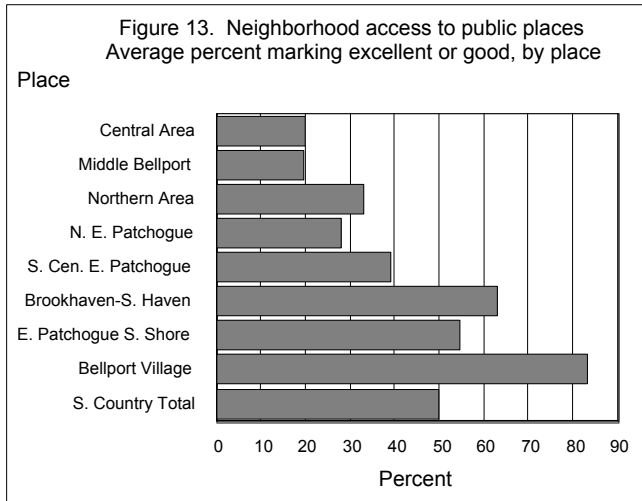
School, community and ethnic relations. This index is made up of three questions: the quality of South Country schools, school-community relations, and racial and ethnic relations. There is quite a high degree of agreement between the areas on these questions, as can be seen in Figure 17. The three questions are closely associated, probably because more interracial contacts occur in the context of the integrated school system than in any other setting. Only an average of 33 per cent of respondents marked these three items as excellent or good.

Planning note: These issues are being considered in school district planning.

Library services in South Country were evaluated by a single question. The libraries turn out to be the most appreciated of any institution in the survey, rated far higher than the public schools, and there are but minor differences between places on this question. See Figure 18.

Planning note: The library has to be considered an example of good planning and execution.

Indicators of Neighborhood and Community Quality of Life, by Place South Country Survey, December 2003.



Community sports opportunities has two parts: indoor sports opportunities, and outdoor sports opportunities in the community. See Figure 19.

Community recognition and events is an index made up of residents' impressions of attention given the community by public officials, coverage of community news in the media, preservation of historic places and buildings in South Country, and performing arts events in South Country. See Figure 20.

These two indexes are very thought-provoking. The pattern is consistent with the notion that there are places inhabited by "insiders," places that are inhabited by "outsiders," and places that are in-between. A survey question on the face of it asks for objective facts about indoor and outdoor sports opportunities, or about job opportunities, or coverage of community news in the media. Any of these could be measured by independent observers using a straightforward supply-and-demand analysis. Different people following this procedure would likely come to about the same conclusions.

When residents are asked to evaluate opportunities, however, there is a wide range of disagreement, which is understandable, because they have not gone through the fact-finding procedure mentioned above. What is remarkable is that the disagreements are systematically associated with where people are located geographically and socially in the community—a clear pattern of differences between those who are in the center of things in the community and those who are farther out, less informed and less able to take advantage of opportunities.

Planning note: Isolation can perhaps be reduced by development of a community center that would be a large and visible source of opportunities for all kinds of activities, and by formation of active and representative civic associations in all the neighborhoods that would help to spread information among neighbors.

A note on quality of life and survey response rates

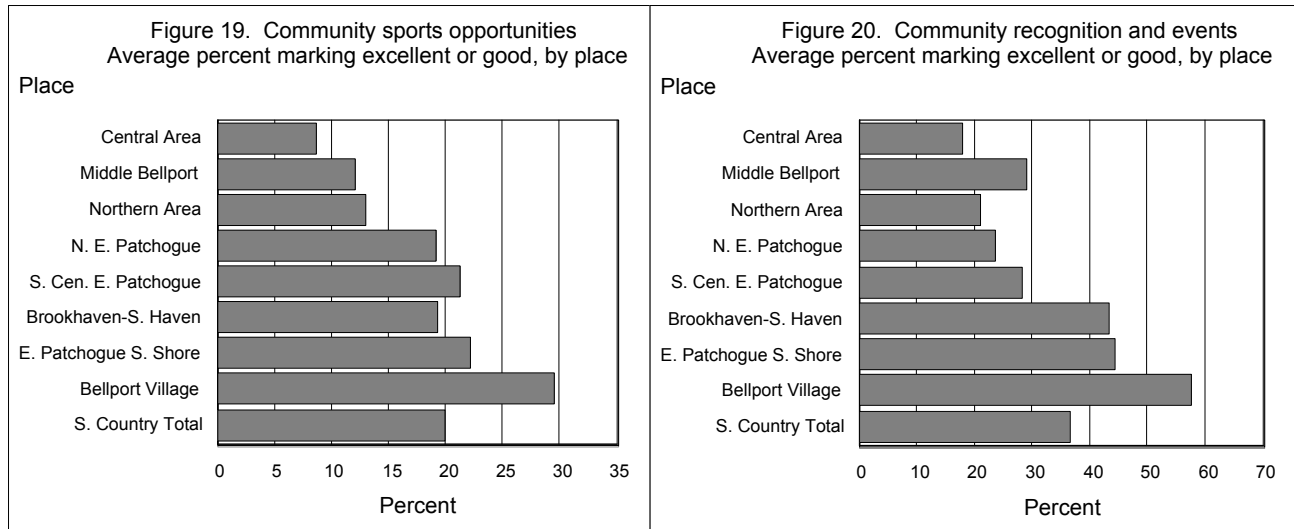
It was previously mentioned that the levels of satisfaction were higher in the more comfortable and satisfied neighborhoods and lower in the areas where the living conditions are not as good. Although it was not a question on the survey but is something of a byproduct, the response rate itself may prove to be a useful measure of neighborhood satisfaction. In Table 3, respondents have been divided into three groups depending on whether the percentage of questionnaires completed on their postal carrier route was low (0.62-3.99), medium (4-7.99) or high (8-11.45). Comparing these three categories we can see that the quality of life score is lowest in the low-response group at 40, rises slightly to 42 in the medium group and jumps to 50 in the high group.

Some of the items in the index have steep slopes in the table. *Quiet and safe neighborhood* rises from 42 to 60 as survey response rate increases. *Clean and orderly neighborhood* goes from 48 to 61, *family friendly neighborhood* from 52 to 81.

The response rate appears to show the degree of connectedness of neighborhoods. If they are *walkable* places, there is more chance that neighbors will meet. If they are family-friendly, connections will naturally form between children who attend the same schools and play along the neighborhood streets, and their friendships will bring parents together. Similarly, access to public places opens further chances to make acquaintances and to strike up conversations about matters of local interest.

Refusal to participate in a community survey, then, is an expression of disconnection from the community and from local civil society, and it is a symptom of weakness of channels for participation.

**Indicators of Neighborhood and Community Quality of Life, by Place
South Country Survey, December 2003.**



A. Collver, 5/25/04. File SCMeans.123

**Table 3. Indicators of quality of life
by response rate of postal carrier route**

Indicator	Percent responding on carrier route			
	0.62-3.99	4-7.99	8-11.45	Total
Quiet and safe neighborhood	42	49	60	51
Not crime victim last 12 months	95	91	90	92
Clean and orderly neighborhood	48	47	61	51
Pollution-free environment	29	27	35	30
Street maintenance in neighborhood	42	43	48	44
Walkable neighborhood	37	38	51	42
Public transportation in neighborhood	20	18	28	21
Family friendly neighborhood	52	63	81	66
Affordable and diverse neighborhood	27	21	17	21
Know of a civic organization	34	34	58	41
Neighborhood access to public places	38	47	64	50
Neighborhood access to services	56	60	64	60
South Country job opportunities'	14	16	19	16
Services for seniors and children	24	24	28	25
School, community and ethnic relations	38	33	31	33
Library services in SC	85	83	94	87
Community sports opportunities	17	20	22	20
Community recognition and events	31	33	47	37
Quality of life score	40	42	50	44
Number of Replies Received	101	302	153	556

A. Collver, 5/25/04. File SCMBYRESPNSG.123

PART II. WRITE-IN COMMENTS

There were four “essay” questions on the survey, with ample space to write in thoughts on these questions:

76. What are some things you like most about YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
77. What are some things you’d like to see improved in YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
78. What are some things you like most about the SOUTH COUNTRY COMMUNITY?
79. What are some things you’d like to see improved in the SOUTH COUNTRY COMMUNITY?

Below are some highlights of written comments on the more frequently mentioned topics.

Downtown Bellport or Patchogue. Bellport’s downtown received numerous favorable comments, such as,

“Having a real downtown center & sidewalks, sense of community, shared concern for character of the village.”

Some residents evidently appreciate downtown Patchogue more for its potential than for its actual attainment:

“Downtown Patchogue. I think it has great potential. Great housing stock, right on the bay, easy access to ocean. Think Greenport.”

Or again:

“Downtown Patchogue is depressing. The old Caldor is a terrible eyesore. New business needs incentive to move in. Patchogue & East Patchogue should aspire to become a destination like Huntington & Huntington Village.”

Planning note: Downtown Bellport has an integrity and unity that comes in part from being entirely within one incorporated village. Patchogue in contrast is under divided jurisdictions, with the Village of Patchogue having control west of Bay Ave., and the eastern part being in the unincorporated hamlet of East Patchogue. Would it be feasible to set up some form of Greater Patchogue Business Improvement District for a more integrated and orderly management of business development and revitalization?

Businesses & shopping. The area continues to be blighted with vacancies. Recently Swezey’s closed on the west side of Patchogue. A True Value hardware store in East Patchogue has been closed for some time, as has Caldor’s on Montauk Highway at Rte. 101. The Bellport Outlets center is largely deserted. Many of the comments have to do with bringing back some of the retail services that were once available.

Planning note: In view of the large amount of vacant commercial space within South Country and nearby in Patchogue and East Patchogue, a substantial amount of commercial improvement could be accomplished without new construction. The aim should be to attract businesses that will fill the needs of the community while at the same time achieving conservation of the existing commercial properties.

Open space, parks & housing density. One person summed up the South Country way of life as: “A lot of trees. This is how Long Island was when I was a kid. Keep this sense of ‘country’ living. Very charming. Love it.”

Planning note: South Country has an opportunity to preserve its “country feel” and open spaces if action is taken quickly. An inventory should be made of available open spaces for acquisition and protection under the existing open space programs. The tendency in suburban development is to build houses on all the available land, and unless land is set aside, taken off the market in time, the opportunity to save open spaces will be lost.

Marina, boating and beach facilities. The potential resources for recreation, fishing, water sports and just getting close to nature are rich and abundant. There are, however, some difficulties in gaining access to these resources if you are not a resident of Bellport Village or a beach front property owners association. As one citizen put it:

“Access to Great South Bay and beaches is difficult but wonderful—wish we had more access.”

One access point mentioned is a little waterfront park at the ends of Bay View Ave. and S. Dunton Ave. in E. Patchogue.

“I would like the beach at the end of Bayview to be more accessible. We should be able to park down there and it should be better maintained.”

Another is just west of the school district boundary:

“Public beach end of Rowe Ave.”

Several people mentioned access via the Carmans River at the foot of Beaver Dam Rd. There were some appeals for improvement of access by dredging the river, for example:

“Our area, on the Carmans River at the eastern end of Beaver Dam Rd., has an ideal boating advantage. It would be beneficial to those who enjoy sailing & motor boats to dredge the river so that one could get in and out when the tide is low.”

Planning note: Cut a Long Islander off from the water and you have reduced him or her to second-class citizenship. Maybe it should be declared a basic right of the South Country residents to have access to the water. Put in policy terms, this means that there should be ample accessibility and physical space for residents to enjoy sunning and swimming at beaches on the bay (without the added expense of the ferry to the ocean beaches), boat launching and parking. This may require new waterfront land acquisitions and/or new development and improvements of public waterfront facilities.

Roadway construction and maintenance. Evidently the Village of Bellport has set a standard that Brookhaven Town would do well to aim for. Outside the Village, the roads are a major cause for complaints. Here is just one example:

“The roads need to be paved on a regular basis. This particular neighborhood has not been paved for at least 5 years or more. They sometimes do patch work that never holds up, so the streets are basically back to where they started, in poor condition.”

Planning note: We suggest that the Town Highway Dept. study the practices of Bellport Village and of surrounding towns to discover ways that may be applied to bring better roadway construction and maintenance to South Country.

Pedestrian & bicycling facilities. Except in Bellport Village, suggestions for improvements to pedestrian and bicycling access far outnumber the favorable comments about what exists now. From the Central Area came one compliment and eleven suggestions for improvement. Here is one of them:

“Dunton Ave. needs sidewalks for the safety of the children. A lot of the homeowners scream at the children if they walk on the grass and the children are forced to walk in the street where the cars speed up and down Dunton Ave.”

Planning note: The ideal might be a system of bicycle-pedestrian paths, adequately separated from auto traffic, with strategically placed stop signs, crosswalks and lighting. These paths should lead to and interconnect key points such as bus stops, schools, medical services, shopping, churches etc.

Recreation. This is a very diverse topic, including suggestions for all kinds of sports and recreation for all ages.

Planning note: A community center, centrally located, with some of the facilities that are needed such as a basketball court, indoor swimming pool, meeting rooms, classrooms, teen center, etc. might be a way to deal with a wide range of recreational needs. Perhaps it could be a joint project of the school district, local government, nonprofit organizations and voluntary contributors.

Buses & public transportation. There are suggestions for increased rail service at Bellport Station and for improved bus service and better public information about what is available:
“Public transportation seems non-existent. Have not seen any schedules, bus stops or maps.”

Planning note: For details on how the above requests might be satisfied, see the separate report on transportation.

Housing standards & enforcement. This section contains a large number of comments on a wide range of things: absentee landlords, affordable housing, code enforcement, illegal apartments, boarded up houses, etc.

Planning note: After years of work by all levels of government and a great many nonprofit and voluntary organizations, the area between Montauk Highway and Sunrise Highway, often called “North Bellport,” remains the focus of many of the comments on housing. This area is notorious for a low percentage of home ownership, absentee landlords who charge extremely high rents and fail to provide maintenance services, abandoned and boarded up houses, and perennially vacant lots. Citizens throughout the community want to see better living conditions in this particular neighborhood. We therefore recommend that intensified effort be put into the improvement of this neighborhood, for the benefit of its own residents and the entire South Country community.

Exclusiveness, territorial. There were many comments decrying the exclusion of non-residents from Bellport Village facilities. Possibly the following came from Middle Bellport, but the writer’s location was not clearly indicated:

“We don’t seem to ‘belong’ to anybody. We don’t belong to Patchogue and we certainly do not belong to Bellport. Although Bellport enjoys our spending our money in their town, God forbid we try to go down to the docks for a few minutes. Patchogue is very limited to us. What do we do?”

From a resident of Middle Bellport:

“The village is great and has a lot to offer but not if you live outside the village. Last summer the kids wanted to crab at the dock but were chased off by the guard because they lived 4 houses outside the limit. How unfair.”

And one more from Middle Bellport:

“A playground or beach access not just for Bellport Village residents. We are surrounded by water but can’t get any access to beaches.”

A villager defended the exclusion policies, saying:

“Summer time, no one who lives outside the Village of Bellport should be allowed to ride the ferry to the beaches unless there is room. This should be addressed by only boarding outside people after it is obvious that no one else in line lives in the Village. This is not fair to Village taxpayers, especially on holiday weekends.”

A Brookhaven-South Haven resident threw a different light on the fairness question, saying that
“A look backward would reveal the Town of Brookhaven paid for [the Bellport Dock Area] originally.”

While many respondents appealed for more open access, one individual in Brookhaven advocated restricting access:

“Maybe make Brookhaven Hamlet an incorporated village in order to privatize the end of Beaver Dam Rd. (By Squassix landing) which would cut down on fast traffic from visiting neighborhoods who fish all day long, every day, at the end of this road.”

Planning note: This topic looks like a good candidate for discussion in the South Country Community Circles. Second, if the Town of Brookhaven would make a more equitable provision of services and access privileges for its taxpayers outside of the incorporated villages there might be less reason for the kinds of resentment and jealousy that have been expressed in the above quotations.

Unity and community identity. The South Country Hamlet Study was initiated as part of the “Discover South Country” program, one purpose of which is to develop awareness of the interdependence of the widely diverse parts of the school district. The comments assembled in this section show both unity and division. One writer rejects the notion of a unified community altogether:

“I have little involvement in “South Country Community.” It is not a community but a collection of separate hamlets. South Country is not a hamlet.”

Instead of finding ways to unify the district, one writer suggests that it be officially cut in two:

“Make area south of Montauk Hwy. a separate school district.”

Another, in Middle Bellport, wrote:

“I wouldn’t describe this as being a “community” however. This area [ZIP 11713, served by Bellport Post Office] is seriously divided into 3 distinct entities: the incorporated Village of Bellport, North Bellport and those of us living in the fringe outside the Village.”

A small corner of Medford is included in the district and a note from that area reads:

“Since we live in Medford but we attend South Country School District it makes it hard for us to get the full sense of a neighborhood. At times we seem to go back and forth between the two communities especially since my spouse is very involved in the Volunteer Fire Department which is in Medford. I’d like to see all the lines that make up our neighborhood be the same.”

Another note from north of Sunrise Hwy. recognizes divisions but seeks to rise above them:

“Each section seems to stick to themselves and sometimes you lose the true sense of community. Although I have never had trouble being involved, I know many people who find they cannot mingle with all the people involved. We need to find a way to unite all.”

Planning note: Unity will follow if there are advantages and benefits to be gained by it. We suggest that not only the school district administration but also Brookhaven Town and Suffolk County officials and agencies recognize and treat the community as a whole, just as the Town is doing in recognizing this community-wide planning study.

Home maintenance. By and large, the residents of South Country neighborhoods are satisfied with the way their neighbors maintain their houses and yards. There are exceptions, nonetheless, and they are not easy to deal with. For example:

“One home on Party Drive is a disgrace. Trash, old cars, old furniture are always in their front yard. What is most unfortunate is that this home is on a main road. Visitors get a poor impression of our neighborhood.”

Planning note: The damage felt by neighbors when a property is neglected could be put aside as trivial, or “only” questions of taste. Beauty, as they say “is in the eye of the beholder” and can not be put down in black and white in Town ordinances. Still there are real losses and disappointments involved when the quality of a neighborhood is tarnished by one neglected property. There is a real economic cost to the extent that surrounding property values are lowered. Maybe all we can ask is that the Town be sensitive to these costs and lend whatever help it can to the affected neighborhood.

Commercial strips. There is a high level of agreement on this topic. One comment from S. Central E. Patchogue pretty well sums it up:

(NI) “East Patchogue through Brookhaven Hamlet along Montauk Hwy. All businesses new and old need more curb appeal. Plant street trees. Basically this section of 27A is ugly and a little scary. Any new businesses or renovations should require some form of landscaping as per Town of Brookhaven. Old Caldor building a disgrace to the community.”

Planning note: Although there are pockets of commercial blight here and there throughout the community, most complaints and advice focus on the Montauk Highway corridor. This is where a thorough campaign of commercial cleanup and beautification would have the most impact and be the most appreciated by all the residents of South Country. The campaign might begin with extensive renovations of the eastern part of downtown Patchogue, under the auspices of a Greater Patchogue Business Improvement District, then find tenants who will fix up and bring back to life the old Caldor store and plaza, and continue with renovations and beautification eastward at least as far as the Bellport Station area.

Street cleaning and waste pickup. As in the matter of roadway construction and maintenance, the Village of Bellport has set a high standard of service and customer satisfaction.

Planning note: Perhaps the Town of Brookhaven Highway and Sanitation Depts. could undertake a thorough review of their street cleaning and waste pickup programs, in collaboration with a citizens advisory group, and with an eye on exemplary performance of the Village of Bellport. Included in the review should be the whole question of community education regarding the costs of litter, how to prevent it in the first place, posting of “NO LITTER” signs and enforcement of anti-litter laws.

Noise. There were complaints about boom boxes in cars, noise from excessive speed of vehicles, industrial racket across from the Sunshine Mall, burglar alarms, lawn & garden equipment at early morning hours, and rowdy crowds at bars.

Planning note: Noises come from a variety of unrelated sources. Each source has to be dealt with in a unique and appropriate way. Boom boxes are a health hazard to their owners (injury to hearing), as well as an annoyance to bystanders and a violation of one of the most prized attributes of neighborhoods—quiet. Noise from speeding vehicles has to be addressed by traffic enforcement. Noise from heavy traffic may be mitigated by roadside noise barriers and reduced speed.

Waste management. The Brookhaven Landfill drew many complaints from Brookhaven-South Haven and the area north of Sunrise Hwy. Here is one:

“The heavy trucks ruin the roads, spill dust (ash) falling off garbage trucks. When friends from out of town visit, they frequently comment on the amount of litter on roads. The smell from the dump (Brookhaven Landfill) & Great Gardens (a L.I. compost company), both on Horse Block Rd. Would like less trucks in the area, no American Re Incinerator. Should be a tax rebate for putting up with the dump.”

Planning note: It is easy to say “Close the land fill,” but then comes the question of what to do with the torrent of trash and garbage that pours out of homes and business daily. Surely Horse Block Rd. can be cleaned up more regularly. And a reasonable effort can be made to capture the escaping gas and use it for fuel. If leachate from the land fill has contaminated wells, public water lines should be provided at the expense of the town at large.

Vehicles parked and stored. There were numerous expressions of disapproval of the vehicle pollution that affects neighborhoods all across the land.

Planning note: We are not ready to suggest anything at this time.

Dogs & cats. There were 30 comments about stray animals, people not picking up after their dogs, barking dogs, enforcement of dog laws, and “Loose dogs that are a menace at the beach and on neighboring streets.

Planning note: The town should do its best to enforce its ordinances regarding domestic animals, but there are limits to what local government can accomplish here. There has to be backing and cooperation of civic groups as well.

Speeding and other traffic violations. Comments on this topic are very repetitious, restating over and over again the obvious facts that we have all observed. And they almost invariably point to one solution: better enforcement of traffic laws.

Drugs, prostitution & crime. After years of coordinated work by law enforcement, local organizations, local government and volunteers, as well as economic development programs to generate legitimate work, the comments from the survey give the impression that drug dealing and prostitution still flourish in the area. Why is this?

Planning note: First, this may be an appropriate time for a review and evaluation of law enforcement and job development since 1990. Second, the physical appearance of the North Bellport area makes it seem as if no one is in charge, no one cares about the neighborhood and it is all right to come in and do things that would never be tolerated in more orderly neighborhoods. Upgrading of the commercial strip along Montauk Hwy., rehabilitation of boarded up homes, and conversion of vacant lots to public parks and open space or to much needed affordable housing would go a long way toward correcting the impression that this is a no-man’s-land.

+

The planning notes are intended as conversation starters on each of the topics. Citizens are invited to discuss them in their civic associations and other organizations or take them up informally with friends and neighbors. A series of Community Circles now getting under way will provide additional opportunities to share views on these issues. It is hoped that in time a community consensus will emerge on at least some of the topics and that the community will then be in a position to make positive plans and recommendations.