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Islip again passes law to protect Oakdale's iconic Idle Hour mansion after 2018 preservation flap



Oakdale's Idle Hour mansion, seen Tuesday, is protected from possible alterations under new legislation. Credit: Newsday/J. Conrad Williams Jr.

By **Brianne Ledda**

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Islip Town has again passed a law to protect Oakdale's iconic Idle Hour mansion after discovering the original passed in 2018 had expired when the property owners failed to file a legal agreement with the county.

The legislation, approved in a 5-0 vote, adds another layer of zoning — a planned landmark preservation overlay district, or PLP — that will further protect the century-old Vanderbilt estate, the centerpiece of the shuttered Dowling College campus. The PLP is commonly used to preserve historic areas such as downtowns or neighborhoods with large numbers of old houses.

For Idle Hour, the added overlay district means the property owners, Delaware-based Mercury International, would be required to obtain additional town approvals before the mansion and other historic sites could be altered.

Unlike in 2018, Mercury's involvement is not required for Tuesday's resolution to be enacted, town officials said.



Islip Town supervisor Angie Carpenter at Tuesday's town council meeting, where the board passed the resolution to protect Oakdale's iconic Idle Hour mansion. Credit: Newsday/J. Conrad Williams Jr.

"Let it be known in no uncertain terms that myself and council members voted unanimously for the PLP in 2018 and have supported that without question," Islip supervisor Angie Carpenter said at a town council meeting on Tuesday before the board passed the resolution.

"Today, we're pleased to say that the town board will be voting on a resolution that will create the necessary PLP overlay district and include the same historic landmarks that were identified in 2018. And again, we thank the community for your advocacy."

No residents spoke at a public hearing before the resolution was passed.

Besides the mansion, the [2018 law](#) ordered the preservation of Dowling's former performing arts center, a historic water well and a mature weeping beech tree on campus known to local residents as Love Tree.

[Residents raised concerns in recent weeks](#) about whether the 2018 law had been properly enacted after learning that the legal protections they thought were on the books — including covenants and restrictions dictating approved and unapproved uses of the site — do not appear in town maps and zoning records.

Carpenter and legal experts contacted by Newsday said the law expired when Mercury failed to file covenants and restrictions that accompanied the original resolution with the county clerk.

Oakdale residents in 2018 had asked Islip officials to enact legal protection for the mansion when they became concerned that the property owners, in an initial presentation to the town board about the company's plans, did not mention preserving the mansion.

Town and Mercury officials say the mansion has never been in danger of being demolished.

Don Cook of Huntington, a Mercury property manager who cares for the estate, declined to comment Tuesday and said the town's passage of the resolution was "business as usual."

Mike Burke, 50, an information technology consultant who contacted Carpenter last month about the preservation flap, said he's "very happy" that the town "took the steps to solidify what we had already expected to be in place."

"I just hope it has the same weight it's supposed to have," he added. "I'm concerned that it almost slipped through without anybody knowing, or anybody bringing it up."

Maryann Almes, president of the Oakdale Historical Society, said she is "deliriously happy" that the PLP protections are in place and thanked the town for taking action on the lapsed legislation.

Oakdale Civic Association president David Chan also thanked the town and praised the Oakdale community for bringing attention to the issue.



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Brianne Ledda covers the Town of Islip for Newsday. She previously covered Southold and Greenport for The Suffolk Times and is a graduate of Stony Brook University.

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