

# *Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.*



## **CCOS Fall 2010 Newsletter**

Concerned Citizens for Open Space has been particularly active this year. The following summary indicates the activities that we have pursued to conserve the relatively little remaining Open Space in White Plains.

In January, CCOS President Frances Jones was selected to moderate the first White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations Sustainability Forum. The keynote speaker was Bice Wilson, son of CCOS co-founder Donald Wilson. Panelists included Councilman Dennis Power, Councilwoman Milagros Lecuona, DPW Commissioner Bud Nicoletti, and several other local leaders speaking about various sustainability and environmental issues.

January also saw CCOS Vice President Al Gassman awarded third place in Westchester Land Trust's photo show for his photo of a local Eastern box turtle at Lift Works Gallery in Croton Falls. The next show will be February 2011 at the Arts Building on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains.

On February 3, eight members of the CCOS Board of Directors met with Mayor Bradley at City Hall to discuss various open space concerns including extension and enhancements to The Greenway walking trail, preservation of Ridgeway Country Club (CCOS advocates re-zoning), publicizing the Frederick Law Olmsted connection with NYPH for the advantage of White Plains, and maintaining green open space parcels around the city.

We reminded the mayor that once the South Tower was open, the Sales Office at 221 Main St. was supposed to be torn down and the area converted into open space, and we asked that this be done. To date that has not happened.

CCOS asked what happened to the Starbucks grant that was supposed to be used for acquiring open space, and the funding that was supposed to be available for the proposed Veterans Memorial Park on Tarrytown Road. We are waiting to learn the facts.

Later that month, CCOS President Jones and Vice President Gassman were appointed to the Mayor's ad hoc Sustainability and Environmental Enhancement Committee (SEEC) which held its initial meeting March 10 under the leadership of Councilman Power.

President Jones and Vice President Gassman serve on the SEEC Land Use Subcommittee and also on the Water Working Group (chaired by Bice Wilson) along with CCOS Board member Dan Seidel. Dan was instrumental in encouraging the Common Council to join the Long Island Sound Watershed Inter-municipal Council (LISWIC), which resolution was passed at the September 7 Council meeting. Mayor Bradley commented that this [Joining LISWIC] shows White Plains commitment to regional planning.

On April 24 several of us participated in the White Plains Parks Cleanup. President Jones worked with the Parks and Recreation Department helping to organize this event.

Jane and Walt Daniels, authors of the popular book "Walkable Westchester," made a well-attended slide presentation at our April meeting. Kim Eierman, owner of Kim's Native Landscape Consulting, spoke at our May meeting to an enthusiastic audience.

The CCOS website was redesigned and activated to include activities, history, calendar and previously published newsletters. ([www.wpccos.org](http://www.wpccos.org))

CCOS had a table/exhibit at the June 3<sup>rd</sup> first WPCNA Sustainability Expo at Post Road School. Board member Dan Seidel made a presentation about the use of pellets as an alternate form of energy for home heating.

At the June 8 White Plains High School Seniors Awards CCOS Treasurer Lynn Huber along with President Fran Jones and Ellen Benjamin (Barbara's daughter) presented scholarships to two deserving environmentally active seniors.

June 14, Fran Jones, Alan Gassman, and CCOS Secretary Nancy Hantman attended a Westchester Land Trust meeting at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Lyndhurst Estate. Conservation easements and other methods currently used around the county to protect open space were discussed. WLT encouraged us to work with them. Alan Gassman and Fran Jones spoke to the Common Council at Citizens-to-be-Heard and asked the mayor and council to meet with WLT to discuss how they could assist.

In July we held our annual open meeting and elections. Guests included Councilwoman Lecuona and a representative from Westchester Audubon Society.

CCOS was invited to exhibit at the July 17 second annual White Plains Clean & Green Event. Board members made posters, photo albums and various other exhibits, and enjoyed the opportunity to talk with the many attendees about open space concerns.

Later that month the CCOS Tree Committee (Jones, Harriet Baker, Midge Sanchez and Lee Huber) met with Councilwoman Lecuona regarding her plan to re-design to improve the Hartsdale Avenue entrance to The Greenway. We made sure that the nine CCOS plantings near that entrance are to be included in the plan, and encourage that the many other healthy mature native trees in that area also be preserved.

White Plains Common Council President Tom Roach attended our September 13 meeting and discussed several open space concerns with the Board.

### **C.C.O.S.'s Scholarship Awards Program: A Legacy of Advocacy**

On 8 June 2010, C.C.O.S. presented awards to two White Plains High School seniors in recognition of their strong records of environmental advocacy. The awards honor two former members of the C.C.O.S. Board of Directors. Nayib Valdivia received the \$500 Marc Pollitzer Scholarship Award and Emma Rose Livne received the \$1000 Barbara Benjamin Scholarship Award.

C.C.O.S. president Frances Jones and Treasurer Lynn Huber gave Mr. Valdivia his award. This senior is a founding member of the Green Reinvented Group, a student organizer of Earth Hour, and an active member of the Advocates for the Earth Club; all at the high school. A mentor and tutor for other students, he maintained a 3.9 grade point average. He noted that "being an activist for the environment is becoming more difficult because we are entering a stage of inattentive consumption [that] leads to destruction."

Ms. Livne received her check from Mr. Huber and Barbara Benjamin's daughter, Ellen Benjamin, who commented on the women's shared "legacy of advocacy." This accomplished senior, who has worked in rice paddies and helped build a dam in Thailand, was vice president and then president of Advocates for the Earth; she also was listed on the High Honor Roll throughout high school and commended for National Merit Recognition in grades 11 and 12. Ms. Livne is considering education in a medical field.

Each year since 2004, C.C.O.S. has presented an award to a graduating White Plains High School student. In 2009, the scholarship was renamed in memory of Marc Pollitzer, a former member of the Board of Directors of

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C.C.O.S. and an activist in the community. In 2010 an additional scholarship was instituted in memory of Barbara Benjamin, a co-founder of C.C.O.S.

Contributions designated either specifically for these scholarships or for the environmental advocacy represented by C.C.O.S. may be sent in care of the treasurer, Mr. Lynn Huber, P.O. Box 345, White Plains, NY 10605.

## **White Plains, City of Bars and Concrete but Little Green Open Space**

White Plains at one time known as "the City of Trees" is now characterized by the October 2010 edition of Westchester Magazine as the "city with the greatest number of bars..., lots of condominium apartments, and many tall buildings." Of the forty communities that were rated White Plains ranks 18<sup>th</sup> out of 40 and is characterized as "like most cities, there's way more concrete than grass."

CCOS is keeping a close eye on possible development of the remaining open space in White Plains. At this time the Ridgeway Country Club has been put up for sale. Development is inevitable unless our elected officials keep their campaign promises to maintain open space and protect our environment. News (reports) that the city is interested in purchasing the club is encouraging and represents a once in a lifetime opportunity.

As demonstrated by other Westchester municipalities such as Eastchester and Rye, if properly managed, city ownership of Golf Courses such as Ridgeway should be a productive, profit making experience. We fear what might happen if a private developer was to purchase the property. The lesson learned during the Railside debacle underscores the importance for immediate action by our city government to prevent another such loss of open space.

Greg Clary of The Journal News published a September 24 column in which he stressed that communities cannot afford NOT to preserve open space, citing a recent study by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli.

In his March 2010 publication "Economic Benefits of Open Space Preservation"

(<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/environmental/openspacepreserv10.pdf>)

Comptroller DiNapoli writes "In many instances, it is less expensive for a community to maintain open space that naturally maintains water quality, reduces runoff or controls flooding than to use tax dollars for costly engineered infrastructure projects such as water filtration plants and storm sewers...."

CCOS urges our elected officials to actively protect our little remaining green open space. It is time for White Plains to regain the title "the City of Trees."

## **Citizen Involvement, Comprehensive Planning and Preservation of Open Space**

A critical part of any process to preserve the open space within municipalities is the necessity of citizen involvement at every step of the way. For the successful preservation of open space, a most recent New York Court of Appeals case, BONNIE BRIAR SYNDICATE, INC., appellant, v. TOWN OF MAMARONECK, ET AL., 94 NY2d 96 (1999), is illustrative of what a municipality must do. To legally set the stage for limitation of use requires rezoning from single-family residential development ability on open space parcels to "recreational use only", thereby keeping the spaces open.

The Town of Mamaroneck, our neighbor to the south, rezoned the Bonnie Briar Golf Course, to recreational use only based on their Comprehensive Plan, the inherent "police power" of the municipality, and a well thought out, reasoned and documented process showing the ecological, recreational, architectural and scenic values, as well the golf course space providing a large swath of contiguous open space and natural water retention/flood control. The court reasoned because the rezoning of the golf course property for solely recreational use bore a rational and reasonable relation to the legitimate objectives stated within the Comprehensive Plan and new

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Local Law 6 - to further open space, recreational opportunities and flood control, the Town could proceed and the action of rezoning would not be considered a "taking", limiting use of private property, which needed compensation to be paid from the Town to the private landowner.

What the Town of Mamaroneck did is instructive for White Plains. Even though there is talk of White Plains purchasing the Ridgeway golf course, there is no guarantee that White Plains will not, in the future, or if the purchase is not completed, allowing single-family/cluster development on this land. Ridgeway and Westchester Hills Golf Courses sit in the drainage basin of the Mamaroneck River Valley and provide crucial uptake and drainage for storm water and underground rivers and streams in the area. To develop this headwater drainage basin would cause catastrophic flooding in White Plains locally as well as downstream into the Town of Mamaroneck. The former Mayor of Mamaroneck has already written a letter to the city of White Plains about this concern.

What is now needed in White Plains is a Comprehensive Plan Review and an Update recommending the rezoning of the golf course areas in White Plains to recreational use only. With a storm water detention and retention purpose, federal, state, and private grant monies, as well as low-interest loans, would be available for the storm water focused issues. White Plains should immediately undertake a review of all outside funding sources for this infusion of money to allow the preservation of the golf courses - for open space concerns as well as storm water and flooding concerns. Proper and immediate citizen involvement is crucial to this effort if White Plains is not to become a city of cement and steel. All are invited to call your elected officials to see what can be done to preserve these last mega open spaces in the southern part of Westchester County.

## **Orchard Street and Our Drinking Water**

An important focus of the efforts of CCOS is to preserve the natural corridor between the Orchard Street Reservoir and other city owned land in the area of Orchard Street. The owner of a portion of this natural and pristine parcel of land would like to build on his property thus disturbing the corridor and the unique wildlife supported by this parcel. Adjacent to the property is a paper street (Francis Place) which drains several of the deep water wells that provide part of the drinking water for the City of White Plains.

In the latest Water Quality Report for the City (2009), there was a curious statement indicating that 3 of the wells had been shut down and would not be opened until additional changes to the water treatment protocols had been implemented. Little mention is made of the environmental impact that would be brought about if several houses and a street were constructed in the proposed subdivision. Also not clear in the Water Quality Report was the impact that further development of this area would have on the adjacent reservoir or the wetland and wells that exist below this important land parcel.

While the land owner has the right to develop the land, the city and land use committees should also have the right to disparege the development in order to protect the hardwood forest, the birds, turtles and other wild-life found on this beautiful piece of land. Mr. Alan Gassman, a member of the board of CCOS, won a medal for a nesting box turtle picture on this site. We suggest that a visit to this site to take pictures of the numerous birds and other wildlife will document the uniqueness of the land in question.

We also suggest that Mr. Nicolleti, the Commissioner of Public Works, be reminded of the importance of this barrier property to the community both as a wildlife refuge and as a buffer between the runoff from adjacent areas and the reservoir and the wells.

## **CCOS Fundraising**

Since its founding more than 20 years ago, CCOS has used periodic newsletters as its primary fundraising tool. This medium has been quite effective in reaching out to our base of supporters. However, the donor base does not appear to be expanding while our mailing database has grown. CCOS has also sponsored targeted events

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such as, honoring retiring officers, memorials, and generating funds from social events supporting The Greenway. Donors like to know that the money that they contribute to charities is making a difference.

Presented below is a short description of the several strategies that we would like you to evaluate. If you so choose please send an email to [l.huber@wpccos.org](mailto:l.huber@wpccos.org) and let us know which of the following programs you feel best reflect our image and cause.

### **CCOS Newsletters**

Our primary method for raising funds for the last 5 years has been the newsletter. This mode of fundraising has been a success because it provides information about current activities of CCOS, updates members about current community open space issues as well as soliciting support for the continued publication of the newsletter and supports open space causes. Keeping our donors up to date with our progress and how their money is being spent helps promote on the energy and excitement of our mission.

### **Email Campaigns**

We use email to reach out to our members with information. Unfortunately we do not have email addresses for all the names on our mailing list. An effective email campaign for fundraising would require that we acquire email addresses and an opt-in for distribution of the emails.

If we use email as a method of fundraising we will tie this in with a contest. For each new donor that signs on and makes a donation we will enter them into a drawing. Clean and Green items or prizes would be the attraction to join and donate.

### **Sales of Branded Merchandise**

We have considered many types of branded fundraising ideas. Car washes and dog walking services or a bake sale, for example, are more suited to a different organization. Our target would be T-shirts, bookmarks, open space post cards and pictures. These items can be offered through the newsletter, at trade shows and on our website. By promoting and selling these items we can expand our visibility and generate a new fundraising revenue stream while providing a tangible memorabilia item for the donor.

CCOS has participated in local trade shows which offer a great way to network with donors, sell memorabilia and use our presence to actively solicit new members.

### **Keep in Touch with Our Donors**

Donors like to know that the money that they contribute to charities is making a difference. From recent polls conducted the charities that show donors the work that is being done with their money receive more donations. We do keep in touch with our donors throughout the year by sending periodic newsletters that explain our latest work or projects.

### **Gold Resources in White Plains**

Garbage... It's everywhere - even in the middle of the oceans - and it's pure gold for companies like Waste Management and Republic Services who dominate this \$52 billion a year industry. Money is made at every point - from curbside collection by \$250,000 trucks to tonnage fees at transfer stations, from where trash is transported by rail, truck or barge to landfills.

At \$1 million an acre, modern landfills are technological marvels - a far cry from the town dump that still resonates in people's perceptions. Not only do they make money for their owners, they add millions to the economic wellbeing of the towns that house them. Technologies, such as Landfill Natural Gas and Waste To Energy, are even making it possible for landfills and trash to generate power - which is helping solve mounting problems in Hawaii, where disposal space is an issue, and China, where land and energy are needed and trash is plentiful.

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