

Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.



Summer Newsletter -- 2006

CCOS brings citizens together to discuss the need to preserve natural open spaces

Concerned Citizens for Open Space hosted an open meeting for the citizens of White Plains on June 12, 2006. More than 100 people attended, including speakers representing neighborhoods throughout the city. They came to express their determined opposition, and that of their neighbors, to development of the remaining natural open spaces throughout the city and, in particular, their increasing frustration with city officials who advocate the sale of natural, wooded city-owned property to developers. As a result, this year, city-owned property was offered to developers for a "one-time" cash infusion to fill the current gap in the *operating* budget. Approval for yet more high-rise buildings will likely generate another budget gap resulting in the possible sale of remaining natural open space, and of course, even higher taxes.

Alan Teck, president of CCOS, welcomed attendees, four members of the Common Council, Arnold Bernstein, Ben Boykin, Rita Malmud and Tom Roach, and representatives of neighborhood associations.

Although fifteen neighborhood representatives expressed a desire to speak eight were selected in the interest of time. Speakers (see below) strongly advocated the need to preserve beautiful open spaces in their neighborhoods. Much like the NYPH property, these environmentally sensitive wetlands and steep slopes likely have hidden pockets of polluted land. These spaces serve as buffers between highways and residential areas, are important passages for animal migration, contain fields of native wild flowers and are potential parklets and/or simply tree-filled spaces where citizens can relax amid the city's ever increasing cement and high-rise buildings.

1. Alan Gassman, North Broadway Association, aglandsurveyor@yahoo.com

Mr. Gassman described a parcel of steeply-sloped land near the George Washington School that is about to be developed for housing in spite of the strong objections of environmental and other city departments. Both the WP Conservation Board and the Audubon Society called for preservation of the property. This "rare and valuable" open space provides habitat for threatened species and serves as a green buffer between the residential area and heavy traffic in the neighborhood. UNBELIEVABLY, HOWEVER, WITHOUT WAITING FOR THE COMMON COUNCIL TO VOTE, environmental studies or holding public hearings, and ignoring the objections of local residents, the city has given the developer permission to put in sewage lines for twelve to fifteen houses.

2. Barbara Dille, Havilands Manor Association, bmdille@aol.com

Ms. Dille, a former member of the Conservation Board, now more than ever supports conservation and preservation of what is left of the rapidly dwindling natural properties throughout the city. She said there is good reason to expect that a city-owned parcel of land at the eastern end of Havilands Lane and Ridgeway, where deer and turkeys are often seen, will be offered for sale by the city. This heavily wooded parcel is a buffer against noise and fumes from Rt. 287. Havilands Manor residents want this heavily wooded parcel to be dedicated as

parkland. Ms. Dille urged Common Council members to find a way to reduce spending or find another way to raise income, rather than take away the natural, beautiful land tax-paying citizens want to preserve.

3. Cecelia Pfister, Prospect Park Association, cecipf@juno.com

Ms. Pfister reported that people in her neighborhood were concerned about property at Scott Circle (Vermont and Prospect), where an acre of steeply-sloped woodland provides a buffer next to Post Road. There is a plan to construct large houses on this privately-owned, very rocky property with very steep slopes, and her neighborhood association is continuing the years-long struggle to preserve that parcel as natural open space. The Planning Board is allowing smaller setbacks and taking other actions to make it easier to develop this property than would otherwise be the case.

4. John Migliaccio, Woodcrest Heights, drjohnmig@aol.com

Migliaccio reported that substantial housing has already been built in his neighborhood and now there is a new proposal to build thirteen additional houses on land that would require fill to bring it up to grade and sewage pumps to handle runoff. He attended Planning Board and other meetings and believes that approvals will be given without regard for the underlying serious environmental factors.

5. Anthony Solimine, Rocky Dell/Reynal Park, asolimine@earthlink.net

Mr. Solimine spoke in favor of a balance between quality of life and economics. While downtown development may help the city, there is a need for balancing it with preservation of as much natural space as possible. Creeping urbanism and increasing height of buildings are not creating healthy environments in residential areas. Land contiguous to busy areas, roadways, and highways is needed as a buffer for the neighborhoods. To sell all open spaces to developers is to lose wildlife, beauty, and control of water run off that can cause serious erosion. RD/RP association members have consulted an environmental lawyer to advise them on the effects of pollution in the city dump site next to the Railside properties that have just been sold. Development in this area will mean the destruction of trees along the Greenway trail and long-held paper streets are being abandoned without appropriate Council review. The group is working with Jack Harrington, long-term President of the White Plains Historical Society, to preserve trees, parcels of land and paper streets. Mr. Solimine urged the audience to pursue open space protection and "Smart Planning" that can become a source of pride for the entire city.

6. Carol Mayer, Gedney, carolmayer@optonline.com

Ms. Mayer noted that the Common Council provided a fourth-year renewal of New York-Presbyterian Hospital's plan to build a high-rise medical research facility, a 5-story parking garage and a Proton Beam Accelerator even though no ground has been broken and NYPH has no plans to start, much less complete, the facilities. Moreover, although all applications are supposed to be accompanied by a master plan for the entire property, the Common Council keeps granting approvals and renewals without having such a plan from the hospital. Whatever zoning change is permitted on NYPH property can also be permitted on St. Agnes property and at Burke (or visa-versa), all to the permanent detriment of the downtown area as well as residential neighborhoods. The city's Master Plan says there shall be no commercial development outside the core area, and all of these properties are outside the core area.

7. Marc Pollitzer, North Street, marcpollitzer@aol.com

Mr. Pollitzer said that residents wanted "intelligent growth" and proper use of a real citywide plan. White Plains was once called "a city in a park." Sadly, this is no longer the case. Mr.

Pollitzer said the Common Council should look to citizens for guidance rather than developers, who are never satisfied. He urged the attendees to call their representatives about preserving open space, city finances, and planning, and to be active in the community. New York-Presbyterian Hospital had been making demands on the city for 25 years; it has 12.5 zoning (three houses per acre) but is still asking for approval of commercial development and is watching the high-rise assisted living proposal at St. Agnes. White Plains is only 10 square miles. With all of the high-rise development, all outer neighborhoods are in need of protection. He urged the audience to look ahead and press for intelligent growth.

8. Patty Craft-Cantu, Battle Hill, pcantu@mindspring.com

Ms. Craft-Cantu noted that the Battle Hill neighborhood had only one open green space, the dedicated parkland along Tarrytown Road that has already been designated as a Veterans' Memorial Park. Since its designation as a park however, the city has done absolutely nothing to make it a meaningful memorial even though veterans' groups, under the leadership of James Dwyer, have designed a park, figured costs, have access to some funds and should be invited to use the city's grant writer to help raise any additional funds that might be needed. Several meetings on this subject have included at least ten veterans' groups, Jack Harrington, representing the WP Historical Society and Alan Teck, represented CCOS.

What Can You Do?

Teck asked residents to insist that the Common Council provide real vision and leadership to preserve what is left of the dwindling amount of open space in our city. Among the things the Council could do are:

- Update the Comprehensive Plan, with widespread community participation. Change and expand the plan to encompass all aspects of the current situation and all of the desirable visions and changes for the future; not merely cut-and-paste from the old plan as it apparently being done.
- Approve completion of the Veterans' Memorial Park in accord with the plans already provided by the Veterans' groups. Build on funding sources that have already been identified with the assistance from the city's Grant Writer.
- Work with both the Trust for Public Land, which can buy land from private developers and the Westchester Land Trust, which works through easements and other means to acquire and preserve land for use as parks.
- Send developers a message that city rules will not be bent or broken to accommodate further development on natural, open-space properties. The North Broadway property discussed above would be a good place to start.

Residents and neighborhood associations should:

- Express your views to the Mayor and Common Council as well as local Republican and Democratic District Leaders. Keep up the pressure to acquire and preserve open space. Fight especially hard for those open spaces in your immediate neighborhoods.
- Support other neighborhoods when their open space is threatened so they, in turn, will support your neighborhood.
- Alert C.C.O.S. to open-space issues so your messages can be transmitted throughout the city.

Members of the current Common Council you can contact on all open-space and other issues are:

Mayor Joseph Delfino, 1 Broad Parkway, 10601

Office phone: 422-1411, e-mail: jdelfino@ci.white-plains.ny.us, Fax: 422-1395

Council President Rita Malmhud, 7 Seymour Place, 10605

Phone: 946-0642, e-mail: ritamalmud@aol.com

Councilman Arnold Bernstein, 10 Stewart Place, Apt 5AW, 10601

Phone: 997-1665, e-mail: ASBernstein1@optonline.net

Councilman Ben Boykin, 78 Midchester Avenue, 10606

Phone: 328-7808, e-mail: benboy78@aol.com

Councilman Glen Hockley, 25 Linda Avenue, 255 Main Street, 10605

Phones: 761 -3320; 946-7235 sharisong@aol.com

Councilman Tom Roach, 18 Garretson Road, 10601

Phone: 946-8325, e-mail: tmroach@optonline.com

Please don't hesitate to reach out to any CCOS Board member for information about the local civic associate representing your neighborhood.

C.C.O.S. Awards Scholarship to High School Senior

On June 7, 2006, Lauren Minisci became the third recipient of the annual C.C.O.S. Scholarship Award. C.C.O.S. Treasurer Lynn E. Huber presented the \$500 award during Senior Awards Night at White Plains High School.

Each year the award recognizes a student whose academic work and extracurricular activities best exemplify commitment to the preservation and care of open space and the environment; it also encourages environmental responsibility in the student population.

Please use the tear-off coupon below to make sure we register your tax-deductible contribution. Your generous gift will help us continue to protect the quality of life in White Plains.

Concerned Citizens for Open Space

Tax-Deductible Contribution:

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Please mail your contribution to Lynn Edward Huber, CCOS Treasurer, PO Box 345, White Plains 10605. Thank you!

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