

Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.



CCOS FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 14TH CCOS CANDIDATES FORUM

CCOS hosted a candidate's night attended by about 100 citizens of White Plains at the Ridgeway Country Club. The candidates for Mayor, Common Council and both assembly districts were questioned regarding their positions on a White Plains Central Park, the Gedney landfill, Orchard Street and other open space issues facing the city officials after the November elections.

The city candidates were asked their position on the use of 'Eminent Domain' to acquire private land such as the Orchard Street property. Each of the candidates offered a different point of view of eminent domain. None endorsed its use except in extreme cases when there would be no question that the process would be used for the greater good of the city residents. There was general agreement that zoning was a better mechanism to prevent development of environmentally sensitive properties.

Replenishment of the reserve fund was also discussed. But details on how this could or would be accomplished were not mentioned. Some creative ideas on how to handle the clean up of the landfill were also put forth, some workable and some not viable.

The Gedney landfill issue served as an opportunity for positions on how to obtain additional open space for parks and recreation. Some proposed reclaiming the landfill through the use of new technology processes while others focused on the still alive concept of obtaining property from New York Presbyterian Hospital.

The range of answers varied based on knowledge of the city and its history of action or inaction on these critical issues. All the candidates supported open space issues but with the economy of the city running deficits it appears that many of our open space issues might be put on the backburner.

CCOS WORKS WITH WHITE PLAINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Rob Hoch, President of the White Plains Historical Society, attended the May 11, 2009 CCOS meeting and invited CCOS Board members to participate in a cleanup of the Jonathan Purdy Cemetery.

Mr. Hoch explained that although the cemetery sits on private property, it is set aside under a protective covenant dating back to the 1820's reserving its use as a cemetery for the descendants and family connections of Jonathan Purdy.

The White Plains Historical Society and its volunteers have been authorized to clean up and repair the site.

On a warm sunny June 6, 2009, CCOS President Frances Jones participated in the cleanup together with Mr. Hoch, George Jones, and a descendent of the Purdy family. The group proceeded cautiously as the stone markers are in delicate condition and many were covered with thick vegetation that had to be carefully removed to reveal at least part of the engraving.

Some are vertical but many, especially those for children, are placed flat on the earth. One of the headstones read "In memory of ISAAC Purdy who departed this life March 18, 1816 aged 84 years and 4 months." Another partially read "In memory of Sarah Wife of Isaac Purdy"

Many of the rather thin, vertical red and natural sandstone markers are delicately ornate on top. Subsequently the Historical Society has authorized restoration work on two of the red sandstone headstones which will be completed this fall. The Jonathan Purdy Family Cemetery Fund has been created to help with the restoration and upkeep of the site.

UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED ORCHARD STREET SUBDIVISION

The proposal to build three homes and roads between Orchard Street and Chadwick Road on property directly adjacent to City of White Plains watershed land that buffers our two reservoirs, as well as being uphill from five of our drinking wells remains before the Planning Board. To save this environmentally sensitive area this issue should be resolved now.

On June 15, 2009, a member of the CCOS Board of Directors photographed an Eastern Box Turtle laying her eggs on this same property. This species is listed on the Westchester County Endangered Species List under Threatened Reptiles. The Audubon Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians states that "a few specimens are known to have lived more than 100 years. If habitat conditions remain constant, a Box Turtle may spend its life in an area scarcely larger than a football field."

Directly south of the proposed Orchard subdivision, there is City of White Plains owned land wedged between Chadwick Road and a road that was never built at Francis Place, a "paper street". Francis Place runs through the massive rock ledges sitting behind the homes on the easterly side of Orchard Street. This spring a mother fox had a litter of kits on this property.

Mayor Delfino's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC), which last met in October 2008, identified the lands of the proposed Orchard Street subdivision as the top priority for acquisition for preservation. At that same October 2008 meeting of the OSAAC, the committee voted that the Francis Place property be changed from tax lots to dedicated parkland. Planning Commissioner Habel announced that she would go before the Common Council in January or February 2009 and request that the Council move to dedicate the Francis Place property as parkland. As we move on into the fall of 2009, nothing was ever done to dedicate the Francis Place parcel as parkland and there has not been a word from City Hall regarding acquiring the environmentally sensitive Orchard Street parcel that has the development proposal. The Mayor's OSAAC is mandated to meet quarterly and by this October will have not met for one year putting at risk the acquisition of this important environmentally sensitive area.

SCHOLARSHIP AWARD TO MAX CHAPNICK

On June 4, 2009, Senior Awards Night at White Plains High School, Max Chapnick became the sixth recipient of the C.C.O.S. Scholarship Award recently renamed to honor Marc Pollitzer, a former member of the Board of Directors of C.C.O.S. and an activist in the community. The scholarship recognizes a White Plains high school student for both academic excellence and a concern for the environment.

Mr. Chapnick received a scholarship check for \$500.00 from Lynn E. Huber, treasurer of C.C.O.S. Adam Pollitzer, one of Marc's sons, was a co-presenter; Adam's mother and brother were in the audience.

Max Chapnick has been active at the high school in the Advocates for the Earth Club (as vice president in the 11th grade and secretary in the 12th grade) and has been a volunteer for in-

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school recycling. A writer for the school paper, he has a grade-point average of 5.1, and has been captain of the varsity cross-country team. He wrote that he is "Committed to ensuring that my kids will also be able to hike up Bear Mountain and eat wild blueberries in May, And I care because I fear that if I don't the wonder of nature as I know it will disappear. If I don't use less gas, who will? If I don't recycle, who will? If I can't convince everyone I know to appreciate the environment, who will teach them? . . . My commitment is a promise I have with the Earth."

SALUTE TO BARBARA BENJAMIN

There is an old saying that "the world doesn't know its greatest people." Everywhere we look in White Plains we see signs that this applies to Barbara. Here is an example out of many.

The county owns the large park surrounding Silver Lake. About 20 years ago, it bought a contiguous six acres from the Dellwood Dairy, all of which were in White Plains. Shortly after that, Barbara and Alan Teck, former president of CCOS, went to look at the property. It bordered Silver Lake but was overgrown with unsightly bushes. Barbara thought it would make a great waterfront park if it were fixed up. She thought there could be picnic tables, rowboats, family fun and much more.

Barbara and Alan invited White Plain's three representatives in the county legislature to come and see the property. They were amazed. All three were seeing it for the first time. They agreed it would make a great park and took that message back to County Executive Spano. Then, because the property was in White Plains, they met with the Mayor and told him about the idea.

At that time, Mr. Spano wanted some property in White Plains where the county could build low-income housing. The Mayor refused. Barbara was persistent; there were meetings and conversations and ultimately the county and city came to an agreement in which the county would lease the property on the lake to the city for 30 years, and the Mayor would allow low-income housing to be built nearby. Barbara's intermediary role in the process was so well known that when the Journal News printed an article about the new White Plains park there was a front-page picture of Barbara standing in front of the lake.

For almost a decade, when CCOS was getting started, CCOS met every month in the Benjamin's home on Dupont Avenue. Barbara's husband Ted chaired the meetings and kept the minutes. Barbara, although in the background, was an influencing force for the organization.

When Ted passed away, Barbara became President of CCOS and led the group for several years. When the group grew larger, Alan Teck became president to handle the daily affairs and Barbara became Chairperson to provide broader ideas and a sense of direction.

Barbara often presented the group's thoughts at Common Council meetings. She spoke without notes and very forcefully expressed her strongly-held opinions. Sometimes she carried the day; sometimes not.

More importantly, Barbara didn't just talk about ideas; she contributed her time and energy to the causes that were important to her, reaching out in many directions.

BARBARA BENJAMIN MEMORIAL

20 SEPTEMBER 2009

The program was held at the Ethical Culture Society in White Plains. Photographs of Barbara, from childhood to the planting of the Benjamin tree on the Greenway, and copies of books written by her were available for viewing. Attendees included:

Family: Ellen Benjamin, her husband Fred Bates, her granddaughter (and flower-girl) Amelia Bates; Phyllis Benjamin; Meredith Skeath (cousin); Edward Benjamin (cousin).

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C.C.O.S.: Harriet Baker, Nancy T. Hantman, Lee and Lynn Huber, Frances and George Jones, Midge and Richard Sanchez, Riena Kaplow.

Politicians: Ben Boykin, Adam Bradley, Lois Bronz, Milagros Lecuona, Dennis Power, Patricia Keegan, Rita Malmud, Thomas Roach, Andrea Stewart-Cousins

SPECIAL THANK YOU

This newsletter will serve as an additional, formal thank you in writing for the wonderful job the White Plains Department of Parks and Recreation, specifically Cheech (AKA Frank Piacente), and his crew did on the Greenway for the Memorial Plaque on behalf of Concerned Citizens for Open Space.

Not only did they personally do a masterful job of setting the plaque in such professional manner; but arranged for the adjacent area to be especially complementary. It was really perfect and very much appreciated.

CCOS Board of Directors:

- Frances Jones, President
- Lynn Edward Huber, Treasurer
- Nancy T. Hantman, Secretary
- Alan Gassman, Vice President
- Donald Hughes
- Midge Sanchez
- Harriet Baker
- Lee Huber
- Thomas Masotto
- Dan Seidel

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Please use this tear-off coupon 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:

___ \$35 ___ \$50 ___ \$75
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Please MAKE CHECKS OUT TO OSI/CCOS and mail your contribution to Lynn Edward Huber, CCOS Treasurer, P.O. Box 345, White Plains 10605. Thank you!

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