

# Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.



## WINTER NEWSLETTER 2005-2006

### **Former ST Agnes Hospital Development Proposal**

North Street Community, LLC, the current owner/developer of the 23 acre property that was formerly St Agnes Hospital, has proposed the development of what they call an *"integrated community of residential units and services, including 390 independent senior housing units, adaptive reuse of the former St Agnes Hospital for 40 long-term care and 40 assisted senior housing units, and approximately 60,000 square feet of complementary medical and wellness care services oriented towards the needs of senior citizens"* and ***the necessary zoning changes required to permit this massive development on a residentially zoned parcel in a residential area of White Plains.***

**When translated into clear, simple and honest English this means:**

1. As currently zoned for single-family residential homes, the total property would support the development of not more than 69 private homes. The developer's proposal is for 390 condo or coop units for seniors (which may mean individuals and couples 55 years of age or older) to be housed in four new five to seven-story structures, plus a 40-bed nursing home and facilities for 40 seniors requiring various levels of assisted living.

***The proposal therefore requests a development density almost seven times that currently permitted. Are we prepared to permit this insidious destruction of our residential neighborhoods by accepting this proposal?***

2. The 60,000 square feet of "complementary" medical services ***cleverly cloaks what is actually nothing more than commercial rental space already located in existing buildings.*** These buildings are occupied by medical professionals and others who offer their services to anyone who wants them, just as any other commercial, non-residential professional service does.

***The "complementary" medical services referred to are not specifically geared to seniors only! What additional traffic will this exploitive commercial rezoning bring into our neighborhoods?***

3. The zoning changes proposed to allow this massive over development would require the creation of a new special permit use in the R1-12.5 zoning district to be called "Planned Senior Development" and create a new "Senior Residential Development Overlay Zoning District." The proposed changes at this site most certainly will have dramatic impact upon future development proposals at the 214 acre New York Presbyterian Hospital site and the 65-acre Burke Rehabilitation site, both of which are in the same R1-12.5 zoning district.

***The City would be hard-pressed to deny similar zoning change to either property if they permit such change at St Agnes?***

The White Plains Common Council has accepted its role as "lead agency" in the review process necessary to decide the fate of the St. Agnes property. At its December 5, 2005 meeting, the

Common Council adopted a "final Scoping Outline" which is a preliminary step in the environmental review of the proposal. This requires the developer to respond to the many questions and concerns raised by the City's professional staff, Westchester County staff and members of the community.

*We urge you to pay very serious attention to the review process that will continue through the early part of 2006. Please plan to attend the public meetings that will be scheduled to allow the community further input into how we want to shape our community, rather than allow the profit-driven desires of developers to impose these decisions on us.*

## **New York Presbyterian Hospital – An Impending Danger**

**NYPH's unending quest for large-scale commercial development:** In the past 20 years NYPH has submitted several elaborate proposals for large-scale commercial development on its property. Although all commercial proposals were eventually denied, each request took more than two years of consideration and millions of dollars for the hospital and for the taxpayers of White Plains.

**NYPH's alternative route to development:** In an effort to avoid the need to rezone their property for **strictly** commercial use, NYPH made two additional proposals with medical **pretense**. The latest proposal for a **proton** beam accelerator and a large medical research facility was proposed **and once again mistakenly approved by the Common Council**.

Each request took more than two years of consideration and millions of dollars for the hospital and for the taxpayers of White Plains.

**The current commercial development strategy:** NYPH property and the St. Agnes property are **contiguous properties** and share exactly the same **residential** zoning for three houses per acre with special permit **possibilities** for **legitimate** medical use. Since the zoning of both properties is identical, any change on one property will provide a precedent for similar rezoning of the other property. Therefore, NYPH is simply waiting for the proposal made by the new owners of the St. Agnes property to be approved.

**Did developers of the St. Agnes property receive assurance that necessary rezoning would be approved prior to their purchase of the land?** If not, why would any sane business man or corporation invest millions to purchase the property on speculation that rezoning might occur? Nor would they spend millions for architectural designs, legal counsel, public relations and environmental studies to assure compliance with state requirements.

**A precursor to high-rise commercial development on the entire NYPH property:** It is obvious that rezoning the St. Agnes property will set the precedent for the NYPH property. NYPH will demand rezoning equal to rezoning provided by the city for the St. Agnes property. NYPH no longer has to do anything to get permission to build commercial projects except to sit back and quietly wait for resolution of the proposed building of the St. Agnes property.

### **WHAT can be done?**

It has become even more urgent to protect NYPH's beautiful, natural property and provide a park near the core of the city for all the new residents of high-rise towers. A park not only acts as a buffer between large-scale commercial development in the core area of the city and residential sections of White Plains but also a tremendous natural resource for the entire community. Our only real hope of preserving the woods and meadows portion of the NYPH property is to make certain every person in the city who understands the importance and economic advantage of

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parkland in a city make their voices heard at City Hall. Our Common Council has the power to save the park. They need to hear from you.

## **The Development of a Veterans' Memorial Park**

On March 2, 1998, the Common Council designated parcels on Tarrytown Road between School Street and Robertson Avenue to be a Veterans' Memorial Park.

Many residents of the White Plains community have considered how our city can honor its veterans in all wars. These men and women have sacrificed their time and sometimes their lives to preserve the way of life we enjoy so much today. It seems especially fitting at this time that we show our appreciation in a tangible and visible way.

In addition to honoring veterans, the benefits of completing the park's purpose include:

- A completed Veterans' Memorial Park would enhance and complement an expanding city park system.
- Visitors to the Park would gain a renewed awareness and greater appreciation of earlier White Plains citizens who throughout our nation's history served their country and made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our democratic system of government and the individual and family values we cherish.
- Visitors to the Park – especially our school children – would be immersed in a very meaningful educational experience by participating in a “walk through history” that would encompass all our nation's wars on one site.
- The Park's location on Tarrytown Road would visually enhance one of the most prominent corridors into our city.
- Development of a Veterans' Memorial Park at this time would be an especially meaningful public gesture by giving very timely recognition of all men and women currently serving in the nation's armed forces around the world.

## **A billion dead birds, just in the United States alone**

Every year, beak to beak, that's enough to wrap around the equator four times! Now White Plains, *by choice*, is adding to these statistics. Window glass is invisible to birds. They crash right into it, day and night.

Our Common Council seems hypnotized by developers. Requests to ask developers to explore and report on proven alternatives for their towers of shimmering reflective glass were ignored, as were yearlong presentations, pictures and statistics demonstrating window birdkill here in White Plains. Although it might be too late to change the glass facades on buildings already finished, several more major towers have been approved but not yet built.

Based on 20 years of research, the country's foremost birdkill vs. glass researcher, Dr. David Klein, offered to bring his expertise to White Plains at no cost. The Common Council did not respond to him. If they learned the facts, they ran the risk of being moved to action. White Plains can still join major cities and colleges now working to eliminate this escalating problem. Council members were invited personally to see the pre-dawn carnage in our mid-town. Nobody accepted. So the daily carnage will be increased as more high-rise buildings go up. It's not too late to take meaningful action.

**A non-profit, tax-exempt organization advocating preservation, enhancement and expansion of open space and parkland in White Plains and Westchester County**

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Many songbirds fly thousands of miles over open oceans to get here. They bring us incredible beauty, music, cheer and they consume millions of disease-carrying insects. Do you think they deserve premature death against man made glass walls that could be correctly altered? Merely four council votes requiring developers to investigate and report on proven alternatives can save countless generations of future birds. The first step is merely a no-cost invitation to Dr. Klein to learn the facts.

Birds are an important part of our environment. Who will speak for them? Why do developer dollars wield so much, non-compassionate power? Is there not even one Common Council member who will bring this issue up at a work session or CC meeting?

A no-cost invitation of Dr. Klein would not commit the CC to anything, but it might raise sensitivity and be a good start. (Reprinted from *The Journal News* Letters to the Editor)

**Barbara Benjamin Retires**

Since she first became an active member of CCOS, Barbara Benjamin led the CCOS efforts with her ideas and determination. Barbara was elected President of CCOS in 1997. Having lived in White Plains since 1952 and having been politically active Barbara fit right in as a mover and shaker. As a forceful speaker, eloquent writer and tireless advocate, Barbara kept CCOS focused on important open-space issues. Under her leadership CCOS contributed to efforts that resulted in the designation of two parks and the preservation of several neighborhood open-spaces throughout our city. Under her leadership CCOS became a large effective city-wide organization. As the organization grew Barbara was elected to Chairperson. In this capacity she continued to immerse herself in the issues of open-space. Although Barbara has moved to Kendall, in Sleepy Hollow, her close proximity to White Plains allows her to continue her active role as Chairperson Emeritus. We are thankful not only for Barbara's past contributions, but also for the important contributions she will provide in the future.

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**If any of these items peak your interest please contact CCOS at 914-949-6364.**

**We will continue to keep you informed.**

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Please use the tear-off coupon below to make sure we register your contribution.

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**Concerned Citizens for Open Space**

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**Please mail your contribution to Lynn Edward Huber, CCOS Treasurer, PO Box 130, White Plains 10605. Thank you!**

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