

Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.



CCOS SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

IMPACT OF PROPOSED ORCHARD STREET SUBDIVISION ON OUR DRINKING WATER AND ENVIRONMENT and the OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mayor Delfino's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) has identified the lands of the proposed Orchard Street subdivision as the top priority for acquisition for preservation. At the last meeting of the OSAAC in October, Planning Commissioner Habel stated that the Open Space Acquisition Fund has about \$100,000. The Starbucks that sits in our park downtown is one source of this money. The Orchard Street land can only be preserved if the administration of the City of White Plains actively seeks additional funding for acquisition. At a land preservation conference in November sponsored by the Westchester Land Trust, CCOS Board members heard from other communities in Westchester that have successfully secured funding for preservation of environmentally sensitive property. The mayors of New Rochelle and Rye both attended and explained how they were able to accomplish this environmental goal.

Currently there is a proposal before the Planning Board to build three homes and two roads on property directly adjacent to the City of White Plains watershed, land that buffers our two reservoirs at the north end of Orchard Street as well as being uphill from three of our drinking wells.

The City of White Plains water quality report indicates to us that "reservoirs are normally susceptible to water quality problems caused by phosphorous addition from surface water runoff of fertilizers and soaps; but our reservoirs have a substantial buffer distance from residential development." That "substantial buffer distance from residential development" will disappear and the safety and quality of our drinking water will be compromised. This proposed Orchard Street subdivision would strip bare a hardwood forest on one of the steepest slopes in our city that is uphill from our drinking water wells and the lower of our two reservoirs.

Equally important, approval of this subdivision will forever shut the door on a vibrant wildlife corridor that enables animals to shuttle from the largest open space in White Plains, the forested lands of our reservoir watershed, and on into the largest wetland in our city, which lies westerly of Orchard and hosts our drinking wells. This is a habitat for birds and animals rarely seen in the rest of White Plains, including the Eastern Box Turtle, listed on the Westchester County Endangered Species List under Threatened Reptiles.

Directly south of the proposed Orchard subdivision, there is a City of White Plains owned parcel of land that is extremely steep, has huge rock outcrops and hardwood trees. At the October 2008 meeting of the OSAAC, the committee voted that the Francis Place property be changed from tax lots to dedicated parkland. Because this property is already City owned, expansion of our parkland would be without cost to taxpayers. 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 of the publication date of this CCOS newsletter, Commissioner Habel has not come before the Common Council to increase our parkland.

For the sake of the open space that protects the water we drink and the wildlife that has no voice, please urge our Mayor to complete the mission of his OSAAC. Ask Mayor Delfino to dedicate Francis Place as parkland and to aggressively seek the additional funding to purchase the privately held land of the proposed Orchard Street subdivision.

CCOS Veterans Park Update

Open space is at a premium in White Plains especially since the current financial crunch puts City owned land at risk for development. We must remain diligent in protecting our designated parkland and put it to good use. What better way to use the dedicated Parkland given to the Veterans than to create a memorial to White Plains residents who gave their lives. From the Revolutionary War and the present day they fought to protect the rights we hold dear including the protection of our environment. At a recent joint meeting between CCOS representatives and a group of dedicated veterans, a dialogue was begun and progress made on several aspects of the issues. First, a suggestion was made to rename a portion of Route 119. Among a number of suggestions for naming this portion of Route 119 were Veteran's Way or Washington's Way; because there was a major battle, the battle of Battle Hill, fought a few meters from the proposed Veterans park site.

At least two major issues exist with respect to implementing this project. The first is the cost of building and maintaining the park. Recently, and as a result of the floundering economy, there may be serious budget cuts and new taxes. At least a start of this project could be made since there is money, \$58,000, set aside for this purpose. At least this is what the Veterans understand. The cost of designing and planting the gardens was estimated at \$100,000 or more. Our Congresswoman, Nita Lowey, indicated the recent stimulus package has allocated specifically provisions for the following funds for White Plains: \$285,000 for streetscape improvements in downtown White Plains. There is no reason not to lobby the Common Council to allocate some of those funds to augment the \$58,000 asset on the books with another \$42,000 and use it to improve the entrance to downtown White Plains.

A Central Park for White Plains is Within Reach

Surveys across the country have shown that cities with large parks attract far more people than cities that do not have parks. It is truly tragic that in White Plains there actually is a very large parcel of land that could be a park, but it is not open to the public. There are over 100 acres designed by the world renowned Frederic Law Olmsted, America's most noted landscape architect. (He designed Central Park in New York City, among many others.).

A short history

About 150 years ago, the Bloomingdale family gave 215 acres in White Plains to the hospital. The purpose was to bring psychiatric patients into the open air where they could do simple gardening if they wanted and benefit from a well-staffed hospital. The question was whether that type of atmosphere would help patients get better. In many cases, it did.

How to acquire land for a Central Park

The NYPH has occupied the land tax-free for 150 years. To purchase the property or negotiate for its use requires a willing negotiator. However, in the recent past, the Administration has favored letting the hospital develop its property commercially in return for a paltry six-acre park, which by design would allocate more than half used for access roads, parking facilities, toilets, etc. This would have been a hollow victory. The Mayor even asked the Common Council if he could represent the hospital in making its application to the city! Fortunately, the Common Council voted that proposal down.

Now is the opportunity

This year there will be an election which will give the opportunity for a new direction. A new environmentally-sensitive Mayor with an equally environmentally-sensitive Common Council could seek financial help to make a central park in White Plains a reality. We invite everyone to join us. Let's make White Plains a better city!

Our Latest CCOS Honoree: Alan Teck

On Sunday March 22, CCOS honored Alan Tech our longtime President and active member of our White Plains community. At the event Harriet Baker spoke about Alan's achievements in White Plains as a

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writer and speaker for the environment, a leader and mediator in C.C.O.S., and a challenger of the administration. He reached out to other groups, such as the veterans to support and encourage the betterment of our community. Tom Roach offered a toast to Alan's service and dedication to open space.

Adam Bradley spoke in appreciation of and agreement with Teck's belief that people were "stewards of the environment for the city." Alan Teck was "an incredible leader," one "committed to the principle" and worthy of being named with the Benjamin's as protectors of open space. Jack Harrington called Teck an important successor to people such as Stephen Holden and Renoda Hoffman, who respected the history and landscape of White Plains. The current and next generations had to act as well.

Dennis Power thanked Alan for the "key role" he had played in White Plains, acknowledged his influence, and sang an Irish blessing for him. William Ryan spoke of Alan's impending move as "a tremendous loss for us as individuals and as a community." He had learned from and admired Alan, and was pleased to present him with a proclamation from the county's legislators making March 22 Alan Teck Day. Council Person Milagros Lecuona said that, as an immigrant, she had been attracted to White Plains. She thanked Alan for his role in making the city possible and appealing.

Frances Jones, interim President of CCOS, said that Alan had been her mentor and an example for her. On behalf of the C.C.O.S. Board of Directors, she thanked Alan for his leadership and presented him with a certificate of appreciation.

Alan thanked the Board and other supporters. He emphasized the importance of working together, planting trees, raising awareness of open space, and recognizing that "smart growth" was not only about straight lines and buildings but was also about valuing the natural landscape. Open space needed more advocates, and he encouraged the attendees to "keep the momentum going," focus on the issues, and have the facts. Although C.C.O.S. is an apolitical organization, it can recognize worthwhile action on the part of elected officials locally and at other levels of government. Since "mundane things are critical," it was vital for the attendees to continue their efforts.

Marc Pollitzer – As We Remember Him

Marc Pollitzer was many things to many people and an advocate for a variety of causes. He energized a room when he entered and had a kind word for all. When it came to the ideals that Marc supported he was eloquent and tenacious. His ideals were very much his own, however, he was willing to compromise and encouraged all of us to advocate for those ideals that we supported. As a spokesperson for CCOS, he was a strong supporter of open space. He frequently addressed the common council with conviction about the values of open space. As a member of the first Open Space Committee he fought long and hard for the purchase of properties such as the D'Elia land as well as trying to convince New York Presbyterian Hospital to preserve the Fredrick Olmsted designed property. Because of the many causes that Marc supported he was well known as a community activist. He voluntarily devoted his time and energy to civic organizations such as CCOS, Council of Neighborhood Associations (CNA), Citizen's Budget Advisory Committee, White Plains School District ABC Committee, with tireless enthusiasm. He was a dedicated campaigner and advocate for the preservation of open space, excellence in city schools, neighborhoods, controlled development, and fiscal restraint.

Even though Marc always spoke passionately with knowledge and held strong views, (often in opposition to those of others) he was able to do so articulately with humor and grace. His goal was always focused on bringing people together to make a better city in which to live and raise our families. We miss immeasurably his presence and voice at CCOS meetings, civic events, Common Council meetings, School Board meetings and at a variety of other groups in which he selflessly offered his time and acumen.

CCOS has changed the name of our annual scholarship to the CCOS Marc Pollitzer Scholarship. This monetary award is given to a White Plains High School graduating senior who is involved in efforts to preserve open space in White Plains. Should you choose to honor Marc's life and commitment to open space, consider a membership contribution to CCOS. Donations may be sent to Mr. Lynn E. Huber, Treasurer, CCOS, 1 Eastdale Road, White Plains, N.Y. 10605.

WPHS Senior to Receive Sixth Annual C.C.O.S. Scholarship

During Senior Awards night at the White Plains High School a fortunate student will receive the sixth annual and first Marc Pollitzer C.C.O.S. Scholarship Award. A member of the C.C.O.S. Board of Directors will present a check for \$500.00 to an academically successful student who, in the opinion of the faculty, has demonstrated serious and continuing commitment to the preservation and care of the environment.

This event is open to the public. You can be at the high school at 7:30 p.m. on June 4 to applaud the winner.

What Counts Now for Our City

The land, the water, and the air still matter and will continue to do so after the current crisis fades. The preservation of open space, whether for farms, parks, gardens, or recreation is vital for everyone. Open space must be kept as a shared resource, not sold or built upon for short term assets.

As spring brightens toward summer, enjoy the open spaces around you—parks, trails, gardens, lakes. Help them to flourish, too. Consider pitching in for parks and volunteering to care for a space near you. Your actions speak louder than words. Act on open space.

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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
 \$100 \$150 \$250 \$Other

Name: _____ Tel: _____

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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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