

Concerned Citizens for Open Space, Inc.



CCOS SPRING 2006 NEWSLETTER

Five Common Council Members Vote to Sell City-Owned Open Space

During the past sixty years, several parcels of land have been acquired by the city as a result of foreclosures. One of these is 1.6 acres and located on Railside Avenue just off Ridgeway. This property is unique and special because it is located next to the all-to-narrow Greenway linear park. Fortunately, thus far, this land has been protected from sale by all previous administrations to provide a much-needed buffer between nearby residents and people who walk or jog on the Greenway.

Throughout Westchester County, community after community prides itself on efforts to protect as much disappearing open space as possible. These are communities that understand the true meaning of "smart" planning and, in particular, the dangers to the environment when there is no appropriate balance between development and the open space required to maintain a decent quality of life amid towers and suffocating traffic.

In spite of the fact that there has been an outpouring of protest by the citizens of White Plains, five members of the current Common Council voted to sell the Railside properties to developers to raise money for a one-time infusion into this year's operating budget. In fact, the anticipated money from the sale of these properties was included in the budget well before the intended sale was announced, let alone voted on by the Council. Even worse, the citizens of White Plains were never given a chance to express their disapproval in regard to the inclusion of money in the budget that the city does not have. In their rush to vote, many possibilities for raising money to preserve the land went unexplored. For instance, no one contacted local corporations or environmental foundations to find out if the property could be purchased and designated as a park into perpetuity.

Even in the face of an enormous outpouring of residents protesting sale of the property, five members of the Common Council voted in favor of development. Those voting for the sale to developers are Arnold Bernstein, Ben Boykin, Robert Greer, Glen Hockley and Mayor Delfino. It was an "in your face" vote by elected officials who did not seem to be interested in the opinion of their constituents. On the other hand, Rita Malmud, who said she would "not vote away our heritage", and Thomas Roach, who stressed the need to preserve open space for the benefit of future generations, voted against the sale. We thank them for their vote and applaud their courage in standing up for what they believe.

It is sad to realize the extent to which open space is, and always has been, a meaningless part of the rhetoric of political campaigns by the five members of the Council who do not seem to care about what the citizens of White Plains want or the scientific issues involved in protection of our environment. It's time to find out exactly how much increase there has been in the number of children living in White Plains who

suffer from asthma or will never have the pleasure of exploring the natural habitat that was here before our increasingly paved city.

Open space is being reduced very quickly in White Plains

More than a century ago, Frederick Law Olmsted, the great park designer and city planner referred to as the father of landscape architecture, found open space and parkland to be central to his work. He pointed out that *“a park exercises a very different and much greater influence upon the progress of a city in its general structure than any other ordinary public work.”* Parks give a city a survival advantage, they improve the quality of life by cleaning the air, providing cooling shade, space for recreation and play, offering attractive vistas and furnishing outdoor environmental classrooms.

White Plains 1997 Comprehensive Plan set a goal of attaining for the City's future carefully preserved and maintained open spaces, natural environments and historic sites open to the residents and visitors of White Plains for their quiet enjoyment and for their environmental and historical education; along with an open-space network and trail system linking major parks, nature areas and historic sites (excerpted from *White Plains Vision*).

Today open space and parks in White Plains are a rapidly depleting resource. The City's woodlands, meadows and wetlands are being paved at a much faster rate than most people realize. The facts are striking: Between 1982, when White Plains published its first *Open Space Inventory*, until 1992 when the *Inventory* was updated, well over half of the City's significant open-space parcels in private ownership had been developed. Since 1992 the trend has continued.

White Plains is behind many other cities

Although White Plains is a city of about 53,000, it occupies only ten square miles or 6400 acres. Its population density (number of residents per acre) is 8.3. This is between Cincinnati, OH (pop. 346,000 and 49,408 acres) with a population density of 7.0 and St. Louis, MO (pop. 352,000 and 39,616 acres) with 8.9.

If we compare acres of park per thousand residents, Cincinnati with 4,686 acres of park has 13.5. St. Louis with 3,290 acres of park has 9.3. White Plains with 55.6 acres of park (per Recreation Master Plan-Sept. 1999) has only 1.05 acres of park per thousand residents.

As a point of reference, New York City with its dense population has an index of 3.8 acres of park per thousand residents. This is more than three times greater than ours! Should we seek to make White Plains a “mini-Manhattan”? Even if this is our goal, we have a lot of catching up to do. Or should we strive to increase the index number even more to indicate the goal of an even healthier city for our fulltime residents and daytime population, which exceeds 250,000?

Demographic Changes Since 1997

White Plains has been described by the 1999 Recreation Master Plan as a *“medium size community in both population and size with a distinctive urban and suburban character. It is anticipated that the population of the city will stabilize at around 50,000 by the year 2000.”*

- By 2004 the city had grown to more than 53,000.
- An additional 2,000 plus housing units have been either built, are under construction or already approved. This will add 2500 to 4000 more residents, largely to the densely populated core area,
- Open space has declined in all neighborhoods.
- There is still no central park for White Plains.

Join the Growing Tide of Citizens Determined to Preserve Open Space

As mentioned previously, five members of the Common Council recently voted to sell city-owned open space along Railside Avenue for a one-time infusion of cash into the city's over-extended operating budget. Not only would this land have made a good pocket park, but since it is contiguous to the Greenway Linear Park, it would have widened the Greenway and provided a tree-filled buffer for the neighborhood.

The same thing could happen in any part of our city.

For 22 years Concerned Citizens for Open Space has been working to preserve, enhance and enlarge open space and parkland throughout White Plains. The experience at Railside Avenue has reminded us that every city-owned piece of property that has not been dedicated as open space is in danger of being turned into concrete. The only way this can be prevented is by bringing together citizens from each neighborhood to create a large citywide organization with shared leadership so we can all help each other in the fight to retain as much open space as possible in each neighborhood and throughout the city. To achieve this, CCOS is looking for at least two additional active members from each of the 22 neighborhoods in the city. That way, a new and expanded group will have broader citywide clout to support local neighborhoods when open space is threatened.

If you are determined to help stop destruction of open space in your neighborhood and all over White Plains or know others who are, please contact the CCOS by email at ccos@fx4casts.com. You will be invited to attend our next by-invitation-only meeting that will be held in 3 or 4 weeks. You will be able to learn about developments all over our city, be part of a forum where you can express your opinions and be in a position to help other neighborhoods as we will expect them to help us in our neighborhood.

CCOS Election Proxy

The CCOS nominating committee has nominated the following candidates as members of the **Board of Directors of Concerned Citizens for Open Space** for a term of one year:

<i>Nominee</i>	<i>Please indicate with a "X"</i>
Alan Teck	_____
Lynn Edward Huber	_____
Carry Kyzivat	_____
Marc Politzer	_____
Doris Simon	_____
Harriet Baker	_____
Midge Sanchez	_____
Doris Lee Huber	_____
Nancy Hantman	_____

OR indicate below your write-in vote for the Board of Directors.

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:

___ \$25	___ \$50	___ \$75	
___ \$100	___ \$150	___ \$250	___ \$Other

Name: _____ **Tel:** _____

Address: _____ **E-mail:** _____

_____ **Zip:** _____

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

CCOS is a project of the Open Space Institute. OSI is a tax-exempt public charity under Sec. 501 (c) (3) of the IRS code