

May 20, 2006

Dear Neighbors,

I would like to thank the group of "Friends" who came to the Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting in May.

Without a doubt, we set the tone for the meeting, and our presence was undeniable by the board members. During the past year, I have attended several meetings of the various Boards and have never seen such a positive reception and recognition of objectors' issues from as large an amount of Board members as I did last night on simple these otherwise variance applications. These were not on the scale of the Ridgewood Water Tower, Owl Creek or the Ravine, but rather builder/developers proposing single-family houses which have a history of sliding right through without objection. Usually comments by people outside the 200' property radius are met with lip-service and a smile, and in my past experiences, a waste of time. What is clear is that Wyckoff's "Silent Majority," residents from all corners of town, are outraged, and are beginning to speak out on applications that are no longer just "in my back yard". This has become a "Not In My Town Anymore!" issue.

Of over a dozen items on the May meeting agenda, four applications before the Board touched on either one or more of the following: steep slopes, open space, and tree preservation. In the one application heard, a developer/ homeowner had already cut down right-of-way trees (along the road) and buffer trees. Stating that every one of the 15 LARGE, MATURE trees he removed from his property was either dead or dying, unbelievably, the applicant was offended by neighbors' objections.

Although the tree-cutting issue was outside the jurisdiction of that Board, Rudy Boonstra (the Board Chair) criticized the applicant in question for pre-emptive tree cutting that was done last week in anticipation of making it easier for them to gain variance approval. Nearly every board member stated or displayed their frustration over this applicants' disregard for the neighborhood, but were unable to do anything about it because there was no tree protection ordinance to prevent them from doing so

I believe this sentiment was clearly recognition by Board members that the tree protection ordinance is a much-needed and much-supported issue. It is interesting to note that several people NOT CONNECTED with the Friends of Wyckoff (nor were they aware of the Friends' efforts on the tree protection and open space preservation) spoke about the widespread destruction that is taking place in town during several of the applications, to the applause of the audience.

By my count, out of three applications which concerned trees, 15 mature trees were already lost, four more are now to be removed: each is to be replaced with two to three inch diameter trees after construction and 11 will be subject to next months hearing--one of which is a tree over 200 years old. That's 30 trees with an average of 10 trees per application. Neither the Planning Board, nor the Zoning Board has the authority to adopt

a tree ordinance, but they do have to deal with the problems the lack of such an ordinance creates, and the sentiment is that their jobs would be much easier had there been an ordinance in effect. Only the Township Committee has the power to act upon our requests for tree and open space preservation. With that said, we need to continue to treat this as we would with any bleeding wound: we MUST continue to apply gentle but firm pressure to the Planning Board, the Zoning Board and the Township Committee until an effective tree ordinance is adopted.

Sincerely,

Michael Brienza