

September 19, 2006

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to claims made by opponents of the creation of the Wyckoff open space trust fund that it is a campaign by a small group of homeowners living near the Deep Voll Ravine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider these facts:

1) I am a co-founder of the Friends of Wyckoff. For the record, there were four of us. I live about one mile from the ravine in Wyckoff, two of the other co-founders live about one-half mile away, and the fourth co-founder lives about three miles from the ravine. In short, none of us live on the ravine.

2) I conceived the idea for the www.SaveTheRavine.org lawnsigns, had them printed, and helped distribute them. As was noted in newspapers at the time of the last ravine subdivision application, the signs *were all over Wyckoff*. You could find them on Mountain Avenue, Godwin Avenue, Sicomac Avenue, Newtown Road, Russell Avenue, Franklin Avenue—miles from the ravine. This was *not* a “not in my backyard” campaign but rather the strong sense of residents who wanted the ravine to be preserved because of its beauty and historical significance. Do the more than 1,400 registered voters in Wyckoff who signed the petition calling for putting the open space public question on the ballot all have a view of Deep Voll Ravine?

3) Why is it that whenever someone is opposed to preservation, the argument is made that we are “99% developed” and that it’s too late? In fact there are more than 100 acres of developable land left in Wyckoff, Once this land is built, it will be lost forever. Towns even more developed than Wyckoff such as Allendale and Ridgewood are preserving open space. In the last six years, Allendale has received \$1,164,239 from the Bergen County Open Space fund; Ridgewood, \$ 1,777,991. Ridgewood has received millions more in state and private grants. It’s no coincidence that both these towns have local open space trust funds financed by small taxes. Wyckoff, with no such fund, has gotten \$305,125 from the county, none from the state, and what it has gotten has not been spent on open space acquisition. Local officials in our neighboring towns are using small amounts of local money to lure large grants. It’s time Wyckoff did the same. For me, it is well worth the \$39 a year it will cost the owner of the average house in Wyckoff (and it will expire in five years, and will need to be approved by a new vote to continue). For more information, please visit www.FriendsOfWyckoff.org.

4) Development in Wyckoff has only increased our taxes, especially school taxes. Development is rarely if ever tax positive once one considers its impact on schools and municipal services. Chasing ratables isn’t the answer, preserving some of our remaining open space is. That’s why I’m voting yes on November 7.

Sincerely,
Heidi Cassells