

August 23, 2007

Dear Editor,

Your publication should be commended for the breadth of coverage that you have been providing to the communities that you serve. The news reported for the week of August 21 was striking, particularly since we are in the middle of the idle days of summer. The contrast between the cover story on area parks and the civic action in Wyckoff, Franklin Lakes and Hawthorne was notable.

I was present at two of the events covered, the Save the Woods meeting in Hawthorne and the Township Committee meeting where Sicomac families voiced their concern with the physical structure at Sicomac School. The Save the Woods group drew nearly 100 residents from Hawthorne and Wyckoff on an August evening. The residents asked all of the right questions concerning stress on municipal services and impact on our taxes, flooding and traffic. The Save the Woods presentation was well organized and focused on facts. The impact of clear cutting trees was understood – environmental impact is indisputable and it will cost us plenty. The civic awareness, particularly among Hawthorne residents, from seniors and families, including some school children was evident in the meeting. Town officials from Hawthorne were in attendance also, which indicated that they want to be aware of community concerns. Open dialogue among the community, governing bodies and private organizations is a constructive way to assure that the best interests of all are understood, before the process begins. It seems that Hawthorne is working towards that balance in an open forum.

Sicomac residents, and anyone who drives through the area, are concerned about the Sicomac School structure. Property values and community image may be compromised. Unfortunately, it was difficult to grasp just how the building would look from the original plans, but this highlights the importance of community involvement before plans move forward. If the automatic answer is “aesthetics are a matter of individual taste” from our decision makers, we as a community must speak up before development is approved. This is similar to the Boulder Run construction project, which one resident has taken upon to appeal with the help of other neighbors throughout Wyckoff, after the impact of a regional draw shopping center, designed in Route 17 style was fully appreciated. Again, more active participation from more residents during the planning stages may have prevented this action. Numbers count at the Planning and Zoning Board meetings.

Yes, the area has parks, but we should be actively planning for more open space, particularly when the alternative is more traffic, more flooding, and losing the ratables chase? The front page article, I suppose, signals that we have enough open space. Wyckoff residents voted for more open space preservation in their town. We have decided, but are not being heard. This is a signal to our elected officials to secure our fair share of grants for open space preservation, not necessarily pavement and repair of recreational facilities (although grants are legitimately used for recreation). Alternatives can be sought to projects like the Deep Voll Ravine and Russell Farm subdivision proposals. Community action is strong, but it needs to be stronger if we are to succeed. Public and private partnerships are common routes for governing bodies to preserve open space.

Let's avoid the remorse we will experience when we see Boulder Run's enormous stucco Stop & Shop, nine homes carved into the ravine property, six homes and a new road jammed into Russell Farm, more traffic jams and dangerous intersections, a “swiss chalet-like” 258 unit structure at CHCC, commercial HVAC systems blazing near homes, metal guard rails adorning historic homes, more banks, and 200-year-old native trees destroyed. Think what could have been – a nature preserve with facilities to supplement education and provide a cool walking path amidst trees, a cape cod or Dutch colonial designed modern supermarket, a tree-lined parking lot, more shade to cool our yards – if more of us had only been involved before a few were left to decide based upon their best interests, and what they thought were ours.

As we head into the fall and back to school, please add civic duty to your long to-do list. Visit www.FriendsofWyckoff.org and join the 200 residents who are members and become an active member of the Wyckoff community. Friends of Wyckoff is holding its next general meeting on Thursday, September 27 at the Larkin House at 7:30pm. All are welcome.

Sincerely,

Diane Sobin

Co-chair, Friends of Wyckoff