

Dear Editor,

Ignoring testimony that fewer homes would result in fewer variances, the Wyckoff Planning Board pushed Wyckoff one step closer to 100% build out on February 13, 2008 by approving a six-house subdivision for the Russell Farms tract. In a 4-2 vote, the Board once again granted steep slope and lot depth variances to allow six large new homes to be built on a cul-de-sac entering the property from Russell Avenue.

As was the case in the Deep Voll Ravine application, the Board also granted Barrister Home Construction, Inc., the developer of both properties, waivers on presenting details on the final size and appearance of the homes. Although some members of the board voiced concern that Barrister did not meet the criteria for granting variance relief and suggested that a plan with fewer homes should be presented, Barrister asked that the board take a vote to approve the application at its February 13<sup>th</sup> meeting. To some spectators it appeared the board would vote “no.” Planning Board Chairman Gordon Stanley then called a recess.

After ten minutes the Board returned from a door to a hallway behind the meeting room and in what appeared to be a change of opinion, quickly approved the six-home subdivision. The majority of the board said that after reflecting upon the testimony, it agreed with Barrister that one extra house would look better than having one lot larger than the other four in the development.

Another troubling aspect of the project is that soil at the site is contaminated with pesticides known to cause health problems. Barrister proposed the toxic soil be dug up and spread over the entire site. The Board appeared to be unwilling to delve into the contamination issue. During the hearing on February 13, there was no mention of contamination by the Board or the developer until immediately after the Board opened and closed the hearing to questions and comments from the public. Apparently armed with information still not yet available to the public, the developer did not discuss the contamination before the public was allowed to ask questions. According to the developer, final testing to determine the extent of the contamination has not yet been completed. Although months have passed since the contamination issue was first raised, the Board still did not ask about what specific contaminants were found or the possible risks to public health during or after construction at the hearing. More time was spent making sure the developer agreed to widen Russell Avenue and dredge Lemmerman’s Pond as a condition of approval.

One has to wonder: what is the point of having ordinances if they are not going to be enforced? Moreover, does it make sense to approve a development on contaminated land before we know the extent of contamination?

Sincerely yours,

Brian Scanlan

Wyckoff