

Many of you may have read the interview with the developers printed recently in The Five Towns Jewish Times. Although we were not invited to the interview process, we promptly prepared a letter in response to their article, and unfortunately the Five Towns Jewish Times chose not to print it. Therefore, we are sending it out as an email and we hope you will read it and forward it to your friends and neighbors.

Dear Editor:

First and foremost, thank you for revealing the developers motivations and plans for the Woodmere Club property and for keeping this important issue in the forefront of people's minds. Now it's our opportunity to set the record straight. **This is not a done deal.** Although the developers want everyone to believe their plan is inevitable, it is far from final. The Nassau County Planning Commission ("NCPC", the lead agency on this proposed project) mandates a full SEQRA review in which multitude of areas and concerns are to be studied. There have been and will continue to be time for public comment at various points throughout the process. Until that time, there has been no final determination as to what, if anything could be built on the property. The NCPC has not rendered any decision on any subdivision plan, and will not be doing so for quite some time. Further, no State or Federal court has determined that they could build as of right. This proposed project is one of the largest potential developments to take place in Nassau County in decades. It is not being taken lightly by anybody. It is so large in fact, that there is a dedicated link on the Nassau County website solely for this project called Willow View Estates. This is where you can go to find FACTUAL information about where we are in the process, how many more steps will take place and when there will be opportunities for public comment. To date, the only proposal submitted by the developers to the NCPC is the one for 284 single family homes. There is no mention of the new plan touted in your publication.

Attached you will find the official FEMA map which depicts the extent of the flooding that submerged a majority the golf course during Hurricane Sandy. For those who don't know, the Woodmere Club is located directly on the waterfront in a known coastal flood zone. During Hurricane Sandy, the Woodmere Club property acted as a sponge, absorbing most of the water that would have otherwise flooded hundreds of more homes in our area. If that sponge is developed and filled with concrete, future flood waters will have no place to go except into people's homes. Due to the increased frequency of major storms and rising sea levels, the risk of flooding is so great that the US Army Corps of Engineers is currently conducting a major study along the Back Bays of Long Island, including the area directly abutting the golf course to figure out the best ways prevent future flooding. How could anyone think it is a good idea to develop open land that currently acts as a natural barrier and major buffer against flooding? It defies logic! One of the best ways to mitigate flooding is to preserve in the area as much open space as possible, and not to build 284 homes on every inch of the property. In response to the proposed development, The South Shore Audubon Society said it best "We oppose this detrimental and foolish development of open space on a floodplain".

In addition, The Audubon Society also pointed out that "The development site sits directly on top of sole source aquifers for Long Island, and **the project threatens to pollute the drinking water for three million people.** Long Island already faces a water shortage from droughts and heavy usage, and the aquifers of southwestern Long Island show evidence of saltwater intrusion as the water table drops. Willow View Estates would increase demands on a shrinking water supply and could exacerbate saltwater intrusion and shift contaminants in the groundwater".

The list of potential adverse effects goes on and on. There are ecological concerns regarding flora and fauna, there are concerns for the hundreds of species of wildlife (birds, fish and amphibians) that inhabit the area or need it as part of their migratory grounds. There are hundreds of trees on the property that will likely need to be destroyed in order to pave the way for homes and roadways. Further, there are portions of the site that the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation has designated as “archaeologically sensitive”.

Turning to the issue of traffic, if you live in New Jersey, you probably don't really care about the traffic problems and gridlock that the residents of the Five Towns have to put up with on a daily basis. You probably don't have an appreciation for the nuances of hourly, daily and weekly traffic patterns. You probably don't have an understanding of the way our roadways connect, where the bottlenecks form or how the railroad tracks divide the neighborhood and can only be traversed at a handful of crossings. You probably don't know what it's like when one of our main arteries like Broadway, West Broadway or Peninsula gets clogged or is shut down entirely due to construction or an accident, and snarls up traffic for miles in every direction. You probably don't realize that a quick errand or carpool to school that should take five or ten minutes can literally take an hour. And if you are a developer, you are probably very relieved that the traffic study you are required to do by law only requires you to study turning movement counts on a handful of streets and corners on one weekday, one Saturday and one Sunday and provide just one week of data via an automated traffic recorder at Broadway and Meadow Drive only. That's right! You can prove that Saturday and Sunday are a breeze for drivers and that there is plenty of room for hundreds more cars on our roadways, yet ignore the fact that Thursdays and Fridays are the highest traffic volume days in our community. What impact will the increased congestion and traffic have on our emergency services? How will police, fire trucks and ambulances respond to emergencies when our roadways are clogged beyond capacity? The simple answer is that they won't be able to get to emergencies in a hurry, or God forbid in time to save lives. On the narrower stretches of Broadway, there isn't even room for cars to pull over to let an ambulance or firetruck through. The old Church on one of the narrowest stretches of Broadway in Woodmere is being converted into a Jewish funeral home. Can you imagine what traffic will look like when dozens if not hundreds of cars line up or try to park there? Rockaway Turnpike is a disaster. The Nassau Expressway is a disaster. What happens the next time the South Shore of Long Island has a mandatory evacuation? There isn't room for all the residents to use this route for basic travel now, why consider adding hundreds more cars to the equation? The fact is, we lack the infrastructure necessary to add a Sixth Town to our overcrowded roadways.

Further, once all these cars are out on the road, they will need a place to park and the parking situation in the Five Towns seems to get worse daily. How will our streets, municipal lots and LIRR parking lots accommodate 284 more households? We simply don't have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate this new volume of vehicular traffic.

Infrastructure does not only refer to roadways. It also includes utilities such as gas, electricity, water supply and sewer lines just to name a few. It is no secret that our sewer lines are in a grave state of disrepair, our water lines are rusty and crumbling (which one of the reasons our residents are plagued with brown and black water). Until just a few weeks ago, there was a moratorium on natural gas for the entire state of New York. How can anyone consider adding hundreds more households to an area whose infrastructure and utilities are so overburdened and on the brink of collapse?

This applies to our municipal services as well. Any new homes built will need to have streets and sidewalks built. They will need fire hydrants, sewers, lighting, sanitation services, postal services, snow removal services and of course adequate emergency service providers (police, fire and ambulance services). How will all of this new infrastructure affect the taxes for the hundreds of new residents and the current residents. Who will foot the bill for these municipal services? You guessed it-we all will.

Something else we must take into consideration is that we will not wake up one day to find 284 brand new houses on the property, or a shiny new luxury condominium building along Broadway. Construction comes with its own set of unique and somewhat terrifying consequences. Construction will likely take many years, and will most likely happen in phases rather than all at once. This means that we will have to live through YEARS of air pollution, noise pollution, and construction related traffic. Our poorly maintained, pot-hole laden roadways will become impassable. Anyone living near the construction zone will not be able to open their windows or enjoy their own back yard with all the drilling and banging that will be taking place 5 days a week.

Furthermore, the Woodmere Club has been in existence for over 100 years. As is the case with all older golf courses in this country, the grounds have likely at some point been treated with now-banned pesticides that are now known to be dangerous to humans. What happens when that soil is disturbed and dredged up? All those toxins that have remained dormant until now will be released into the air. Aside from all the homes in the surrounding area, there are several schools within just a three block radius of the construction zone. Gesher Pre-School, Gan Chamesh Pre-school, Kulanu Center for Special Services and HAFTR High School. Who would want their child playing outdoors and breathing in all the toxins and filth that will be released into the air? What will the short and long-term effects be to the health of our residents?

Another important area of concern is home values. Baruch Hashem, here in the Five Towns, demand for housing is high and that keeps our property values high. But what happens when hundreds of homes and properties suddenly hit the market? The laws of supply and demand will come into play. Home values across the area will likely decline significantly with an influx of inventory on the market. Additionally, because the homes proposed will be built in three different municipalities, the taxes on the homes will vary significantly as well, making some more desirable than others, and making current homes with higher taxes even less desirable to new buyers.

There are four more golf courses in our immediate area that have not yet fallen victim to the declining interest in the sport. But what happens if and when they do close? The Seawane Golf Club in Hewlett Harbor was just sold. For now, the owners plan to keep it running as a club. It is zoned for residential use, which means that property can be developed if the owners decide to do so. What happens when The Rockaway Hunt Club decides to shutter its doors? Or Inwood Country Club? Or Lawrence Country Club? By allowing development at the Woodmere Club site, will it set a precedent that allows for wholesale development on all of these properties?

Has anyone considered all the other construction projects currently underway in our area? NYC has recently approved a 1700 unit apartment complex just over the border in Far Rockaway. Bruce Blakeman and the TOH Board recently unveiled sweeping zoning changes in North Lawrence and Inwood that will pave the way for another approximately 1900 residences. A local developer is involved in a deal that would allow him to purchase property from the Woodmere Academy on West Broadway in Woodmere and he has plans to build a 33 unit luxury condominium on the site. Thankfully, his initial

proposal was recently rejected by the NCPC, but it is only a matter of time before something is built on that site as well. How much more can we take?

In your article, the developer claims that their proposal is not a Sixth Town. Make no mistake, it most certainly is. The village of Woodsburgh consists of 257 homes. Their Sixth Town proposes 284. The “as of right” zoning they refer to is zoning that was put in place 100 years ago. It should have been changed by the local municipalities well before the property was up for sale. Unfortunately, nobody in our local government had the foresight to do that. Does this mean that they should allow construction based on zoning that was put in place over a century ago? Before anybody even had one car let alone multiple cars? Absolutely not.

We feel we must also respond to the negative statements made by the developers about the Five Towns Civic Association (5TCA). The 5TCA, a volunteer grassroots organization was created by residents from all over the Five Towns, not just the ones who live near the golf course. We met with the developers on two occasions in the past few months. In September, Supervisor Laura Gillen (who is by the way no longer the Supervisor for the Town of Hempstead) invited us to a meeting where Efrem Gerzberg and his attorney unveiled their apartment complex plan. At their insistence, we were advised not to disclose this new plan to the community until they were ready. We have had several months to digest this information, and to get some informal feedback. We also had a chance to speak with Robert Weiss in a more informal setting after the IMA was signed at Lawrence Village Hall. Both meetings were open, honest and by all accounts cordial. When Mr. Weiss reached out several days later for another meeting, the response on behalf of the 5TCA was as follows “we appreciate you keeping the lines of communication open. However, until there is further and/or new information for us to discuss, we do not feel that a meeting at this point would be productive. We have each expressed our current positions and ideas. I look forward to speaking to you in the future as the process evolves and further information comes to light”.

In addition, during our meetings, we told them how utterly disappointed we were that there was no plan to create, build or gift anything whatsoever to the community. Take another look at their proposals-Is there anything there that will benefit the residents of the community? No. We suggested that they consider gifting some property to PPL. We proposed that they reach out to the JCC and perhaps gift them or sell them some property for a community center. Along with several local politicians, it was our idea to consider expanding the clubhouse to accommodate the huge demand for a large and local simcha hall/catering facility. It was our recommendation that they try to ingratiate themselves to the community rather than being so adversarial. Unfortunately, as your recent interview so clearly demonstrates, they have chosen to be litigious, to pit the three local municipalities against each other, to threaten us with statements like “if there are no conversations, we will simply move forward on our 284 home project”, to threaten us with lawsuits and increased taxes if we don’t accept their proposal. According to public record, they paid a little over 9 million dollars and assumed 15 million in debt for the entire 114 acre piece of property. They are poised to make an excellent return on their investment. As one resident so eloquently stated at the last public meeting **“I look at this map and all I see is greed”**.

Contrary to their statement that this fight is about 1000 feet, and that the 5TCA doesn’t “care about the community, they only care about themselves”, that is patently false. The 5TCA has an email list that reaches over 3,000 residents. (to be added to our email list, please email us at

stopwoodmeregolf@gmail.com). Over 400 people came out last June to the first NCPC meeting on this subject. Every single person who got up to speak (including representatives from every local government) spoke up in opposition to the proposal. Following that meeting, over 1,000 petition letters were signed and emailed to the planning board. To clarify some other issues we are focused on, we too were completely unaware of the zoning changes to North Lawrence and Inwood that were approved by TOH under cover of night, and then not unveiled until four months after the vote, at which point the decision could not be legally reversed. Nonetheless, our attorney has requested all the records associated with this new zoning change and we will soon be advised on what we can do to mitigate the potential effects on our community.

The developers portray themselves as the victims here, claiming they are being treated unfairly by everyone, yet they are the ones initiating multiple lawsuits and suing anyone and everyone that stands in their way. They insult our local leaders and mischaracterize a Civic Association that exists solely to be the voice of and to inform the community. The fact is if we don't let our voices be heard the only victims here will be all the residents of the Five Towns Community who will suffer through years of construction which will decimate an integral ecosystem, make us much more vulnerable to flooding, compromise our water supply, stress our infrastructure to the brink of destruction, snarl traffic beyond all recognition, hamper the efforts of our first responders and cause a decrease in our home values, while likely causing a tax increase to all residents.

We maintain our position that 284 homes in any configuration (apartments or houses) is still way too much. We thank your paper for printing our most recent email to our subscribers which reiterated our current position; that this new proposal was indeed a step in the right direction, an improvement over the original plan, but that it still didn't go far enough. Open space is far more valuable than hundreds of homes. Once green space is gone, it's gone forever. In short, if either of their current proposals are approved, the character of our neighborhood and the quality of life we enjoy will never be the same. Every single resident here has a voice. Your opinion counts. Your concerns matter. Every single person who is opposed should be reaching out their local representatives in Lawrence, Cedarhurst, Woodsburgh as well as your local Nassau County Legislators, and TOH Council Members and tell them how you feel. Attend the public meetings and express your opposition.

The Five Towns Civic Association is seeking donations to support our efforts. Donations will be used to for attorney fees and to commission our own environmental and traffic studies. You can donate via PayPal by visiting our website 5TCA.org. Checks can be mailed to 5TCA, PO Box 462, Woodmere, NY 11598

Thank You.

The Five Towns Civic Association