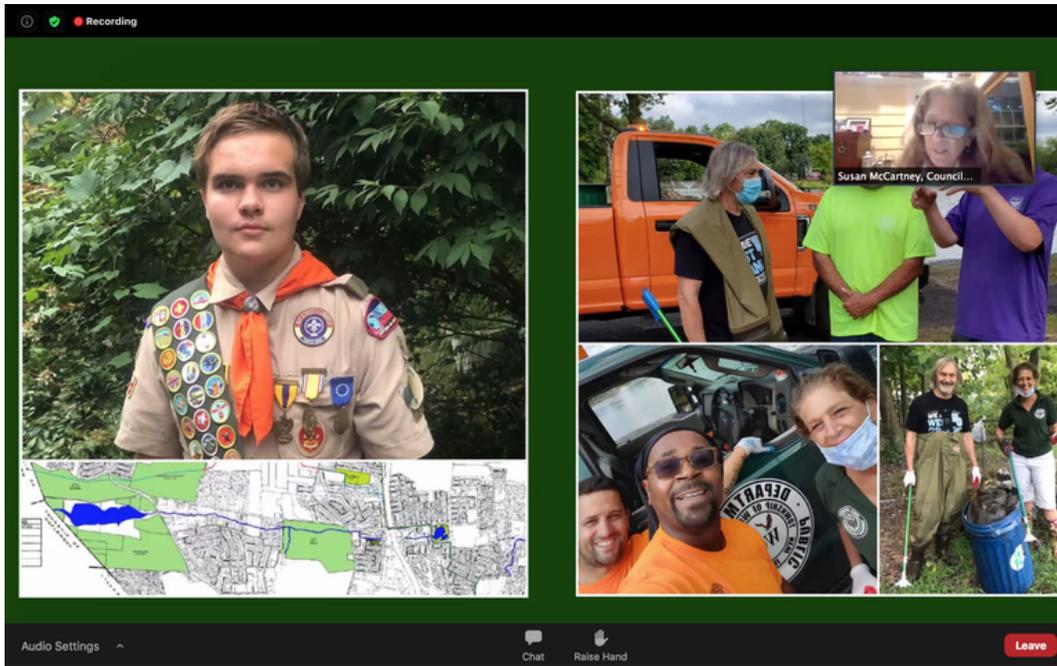




Government

West Orange Residents Voice Opposition to Crestmont Country Club Property Development Proposal

By ELISE PHILLIPS MARGULIS
October 8, 2020 at 10:58 AM



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WEST ORANGE, NJ — The West Orange Township Council meeting on Oct. 6 featured discussions about several topics, but the pervasive concern was Crestmont Country Club’s proposal to develop 90 acres into housing units.

More than a dozen residents voiced their objections relating to potential flooding caused by removing many trees, an increase in traffic, nearby roads becoming cut-through streets and traffic endangering children playing in their neighborhoods.

Families living within 200 feet received letters from the country club, notifying them about their desire to redevelop the land. The other residents found out about the plans from the Mayor’s Facebook post or by word of mouth.

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Sharon Yedwab reported that the ridge that the country club wants to build 150 units on is volcanic rock. She warned, “It will disturb our houses’ foundations.”

Brent Scott asked if the land is zoned for housing. He also questioned, “How does it fit in with the existing master plan for the area?” Another topic Scott brought up was if the new development would be environmentally sound. “Will it be energy efficient? Will they use green building materials? Are they performing an environmental impact study?”

Joyce Rudin mentioned that all residents must be included in development discussions. She reminded the council of the problems caused when the townhouses at the Reserve were built. "They didn't build containment basins, and neighboring properties flooded when trees were removed."

Steven Ferry commented that he lives on Edgemont and is concerned that his street "will become a thoroughfare. It will be dangerous for the children." He added, "Remember, this is a public government process. Citizens can object."

Monica Perkowski also expressed opposition to the development. "It's a supreme concern and threatens trees, the environment and will result in more traffic."

Shilpa Mankikar said, "Developers shouldn't take over the town open spaces."

Mark Paull of Sunnyside Road spoke of installing French drains and sump pumps in the 1980s. He fears that his basement will start flooding again if trees are cut down.

Sharon Sherman of Lakewood Drive wanted to know, "What changed in the country club proposal that it's being reconsidered? They wanted to develop that land years ago and their proposal was rejected." She mentioned that rain water already flows down the hill through retaining walls on her street.

Sherman anticipates, "People will probably cut through Pleasant Valley Way and Eagle Rock to Crestmont, and we were told we can't have speed bumps. Also, the schools are already bursting at the seams. The development would add to that."

Councilman Jerry Guarino is working on obtaining an update on the redevelopment status.

In other business, Michelle Casalino commended Eagle Scout Sean Coxe who noticed trash in the Rahway River while on a walk with his father. He organized a cleanup session, and 63 bags of grass and debris were removed from the river. The river was flooding and can now flow naturally.

Guarino reported that the Farmer's Market will close after Oct. 31. He thanked Stacy and Rob Reese for "another great season."

He also mentioned that 26 Hometown Hero banners with veterans' names are hung up in town. Another 26 will be ordered for those who want to honor a veteran.

Councilwoman Susan McCartney announced a call for [artists](#) for Hispanic Heritage Month. McCartney also mentioned that many residents have been attending OSPAC's socially distanced performances.

Edwin Johnson, Assistant Director of Recreation, talked about the October 30th costume contest at the Degnan Park, a virtual Pumpkin Carving contest and the Barktober Halloween Dog Parade. Casalino thanked Johnson and the Recreation Department for "keeping everyone safe and entertained."

Public Information Officer Joseph Fagan told the council that some West Orange-bound mail was found in North Arlington. It's been recovered and delivered.

Sally Malanga called in to say she's concerned about 46 trees that are going to be removed in town. "They are big, old and irreplaceable. West Orange loses shade, beauty and traffic calming. We need a stronger tree ordinance. The trees are removed because it's convenient to cut them down when building."

Len Lepore, West Orange Municipal Engineer, assured the council that trees are not removed unless "hazardous or diseased. We consult the home owners and recently saved a tree on Old Indian Road."

Resident Althea Tweiten brought the council's attention to a situation on Watchung Avenue where large numbers of people are congregating, especially on weekends. William Rutherford III later said, "It's a safety hazard and affects quality of life."

The many parked cars are dangerous because there's no space for emergency vehicles to drive on the street. The police have been called multiple times, but the people return when the police leave. Casalino said she'll contact the police chief.

Tweiten also mentioned trash near a Route 280 ramp. The state needs to be contacted to have it removed.

Rudin asked if red sonar could be installed at Eagle Rock Reservation so deer will stay there, rather than coming into

town and being hit by cars. She had just seen a deer killed by a car near her house. The deer's two fawns were with her.

She also wants West Orange to find a way to "preserve the canopy of trees."

Resident Hannah Monk requested that the ordinance allowing residents to have chickens in their yard be revisited because it requires two acres of property. Guarino said he'll check into it.

Mankikar talked about tax increases being "too much of a burden" now with the economic repercussions of COVID-19.

Councilwoman Cindy Matute-Brown and Councilman Joe Krakoviak both shared that they support preserving protecting deer and preventing flooding. Matute-Brown wants to form a tree commission.

McCartney told the council that Degnan Park Playground is being renovated.

