



November 27, 2023

Putnam County Executive Kevin Byrne, Putnam County Legislators: Greg E. Ellner, William Gouldman, Toni Addonizio, Erin L. Crowley
40 Glenedia Avenue
Carmel, NY 10512

Rohit T. Aggarwala
Commissioner

Dear Executive Byrne and distinguished members of the Putnam County Legislature,

Paul V. Rush, P.E.
Deputy Commissioner

I am writing this letter on behalf of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in response to your joint communication dated Oct. 4, 2023 regarding the Belden House property adjacent to the West Branch Reservoir's dam in the Town of Carmel.

P.O. Box 358
Grahamsville, NY 12740

Tel. (845) 340-7800
Fax (845) 334-7175
prush@dep.nyc.gov

The Belden House property and ancillary structures were originally acquired by DEP when the dam was built in 1896. It has since served various water supply business purposes for DEP including as the residence of the reservoir custodian, office space, and storage space, but has not been used since the late 1990s.

As you know, the structure has fallen into significant disrepair and suffered extensive water damage. We are also keenly aware that there remains strong interest among some in the local community to rehabilitate and preserve the property, in part due to architectural elements and the original owner's status in the Putnam County community.

By way of background, the main structure and surrounding acre of land was expected to be transferred to Putnam County in the early 2000s for potential rehabilitation and preservation as an historic interpretive center or similar use, though the County Legislature ultimately declined to take possession. Subsequently, as you mention, DEP then-Commissioner Emily Lloyd in 2006 announced plans to rehabilitate the structure for potential DEP use. Ultimately, however, construction estimates to fully rehabilitate and upgrade it to modern commercial use standards well exceeded initial cost projections, and the subsequent financial crisis and recession in 2008 ended that project's viability.

The very fact that the Belden House is no longer able to serve a water-supply purpose makes its full rehabilitation and ongoing maintenance by DEP a burden on water ratepayers that is difficult to justify, both for those ratepayers in Carmel as well as other water customers served by the New York City water supply system.

Regardless, DEP remains open and willing to consider other potential options, including transferring Belden House to a local governmental entity able to support its ongoing viability while ensuring protections to adjacent watershed lands and assets. We welcome revisiting Putnam County's interest from the early 2000s in taking over the site. It is indeed our sincere hope to work together with our neighboring communities and to come up with any creative solutions there may be for the property.

LEGISLATURE
PUTNAM COUNTY
CARMEL, NY

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While Belden House has been a concern for decades, DEP remains hopeful for a pragmatic solution and is more than willing to facilitate and engage in productive discussions towards that end.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul V. Rush", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul V. Rush, P.E.
Deputy Commissioner
Bureau of Water Supply