

August 11, 2021. Mount Vernon City Council continuation of the Public Hearing regarding the re-zoning of One Bradford Road for commercial/industrial use that began on June 23, 2021.

The video of the hearing:

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=3879373828835108&ref=notif¬if_id=162872236706310¬if_t=live_video_explicit

Background

One Bradford Rd. sits within Willson's Woods Park ("the Park"), the oldest park in the Westchester County Parks System. The property is owned by the Stagg Group, a Bronx-based builder of "affordable homes and apartments, in the Bronx and Westchester County." <https://www.stagggroup.com/about/>

Stagg intends to use 1 Bradford as their corporate headquarters. However, before Stagg can enact their plan, the property needs to be re-zoned to suit their needs. MV residents, particularly those living adjacent to the Park, appear to oppose Stagg's plan overwhelmingly.

Resident concerns

1. **Traffic.** The only way vehicles can get to and from 1 Bradford Rd. is through the Park. Since Stagg is in the construction business, they own and operate construction vehicles. Construction vehicles are big, loud, and messy. The roads in and around the Park are narrow and residential. Stagg vehicles traversing the park and the surrounding community *necessarily* increases vehicular traffic in these areas.
2. **Safety.** The Park is used by families, swimmers, runners, bikers, etc. Increased automobile and construction vehicle traffic in and around the Park *necessarily* increases safety risk.
3. **Noise and air pollution.** The Park is a bucolic space for the community. Increased automobile and construction vehicle traffic *necessarily* increases noise and vehicle exhaust.
4. **Encroachment.** The community is justifiably leery of developers. The concern is that Stagg is offering an idealized version of their "intended" uses for the property, a version that may or may not ring true overtime.

Why isn't Willson's Woods Park just a park?

The land for Willson's Woods Park was acquired by Westchester County in 1924. The Park is named for the prior owner, Charles Hill Willson, an industrialist and owner of Willson & Adams Lumber Company. I do not know why 1 Bradford Rd exists as a separate private parcel of land accessible only via the Park.

A brief recent history of 1 Bradford Rd.

2001 to 2013. LTTR Home Care, LLC ("LTTR" owned by Alan Landauer) owned/operated a medical supply business at the property, but in 2013 the business was discontinued, and Mr. Landauer looked to sell the property.

2014-2015. a company named WP East Acquisitions, LLC ("WP") showed interest in purchasing the property. Their plan was to build a 120 unit luxury apartment complex on the land. However, since 1 Bradford Rd. was zoned for light industrial use, WP would need the zoning changed to residential multi-family use. In addition, Westchester County would need to grant an easement to WP since the Park road is the only access to the property. Finally, WP was seeking financial support (in the form of residential PILOTS) from the MV IDA. Seeking the changes it needed to build the apartment complex, WP appeared before the MV Planning Board (the current City Clerk, William Holmes was the Chair), the MV City Council, and the MV IDA.

The property was re-zoned and the MVIDA and WP did reach a PILOT agreement but, ultimately, the sale of the property from LTTR to WP did not go through. In the meantime, 1 Bradford Rd. sat vacant.

2016-2017. a company named NRP Group LLC ("NRP") expressed interest in purchasing 1 Bradford from LTTR. Like WP, NRP planned to build a luxury residential development on the land. The sale of the land from LTTR to NRP was contingent upon a PILOT agreement with MVIDA similar to the one WP had arranged. However, a new Mayor was elected in 2016 (Richard Thomas) and he had a different idea about what to do with 1 Bradford Rd. His plan was to build a "boutique hotel" and conference center on the land. By the fall of 2017, the potential sale of 1 Bradford Rd to NRP was dead. Subsequently, LTTR filed suit against the MVIDA, Mayor Richard Thomas, and Roberta James (an employee of the MVIDA), seeking over 5 million dollars. The judge dismissed 11 of the 12 charges.

It is noteworthy that the law firm representing Mr. Landauer & LTTR in their lawsuit against the MVIDA is **Zarin & Steinmetz**. Attorney Michael **Zarin** currently represents the MV City Council as they consider the re-zoning sought by Stagg.

2018. 1 Bradford sits vacant.

2019. Stagg Group purchase 1 Bradford for a little over 4 million dollars.

So why isn't Willson's Woods Park just a park?

Our Elected officials could lobby for Westchester County to purchase the land from Stagg and make Willson's Woods Park "whole". It's hard to imagine a better way to solve this problem or a better time to do it. It's unfortunate for Stagg, but maybe there is another parcel of land in MV that will suit their needs and the needs of the residents.

Once whole, the property at 1 Bradford could be developed into a space that complements the rest of the Park, rather than competing with it. Uses that would complement the Park include a botanical garden, a nature center, an arts center, or the like. Certainly, a community daycare center could fit within a vision like this. Actually, a daycare in the Park would be a wonderful thing.

What's sad is that it is my understanding that *Westchester County may have had the opportunity and the plans to purchase 1 Bradford from LTTR before the property was sold to Stagg*. Why didn't Westchester County take that opportunity? It is not clear, but there is a **notable entanglement** that should be clarified. In partnership with Westchester County, Stagg Group constructed the New Rochelle Family Court. Below is a photo from the ribbon cutting in June 2021.



Source: <https://www.westchestergov.com/home/all-press-releases/8967-new-rochelle-county-family-court-grand-opening>

If it is true that 1 Bradford could have been purchased by Westchester County but was not, MV residents (and all Westchester County residents) deserve answers to the following questions:

1. Why didn't Westchester County purchase 1 Bradford?
2. Did the relationship between Westchester County and Stagg influence the County's decision making?
3. Will Westchester County consider purchasing the property now? (Of course, Stagg may not be willing to sell it).
4. Will Elected officials who represent MV lobby on our behalf to try to make this happen?

Who can answer these questions?

- MV City Council Members.
- George Latimer, Westchester County Executive.
- Lyndon Williams, Former MV County Legislator and current MV City Judge. (Questions 1 & 2).
- Tyrae Woodson-Samuels, Current MV County Legislator (questions 3 & 4)

At the end of the Public Hearing on 8.11.2021, The MV City Council voted to close the public hearing.

Voting to keep the Public Hearing Open: Janice Duarte, and Delia Farquharson

Voting to close the Public Hearing: Lisa A. Copeland, Marcus A. Griffith, and Derrick Thompson