

Regular meeting of Mt. Vernon City Council
Wednesday, October 27, 2021
<https://www.facebook.com/mountvernonny/videos/2872086616437067>

Public Comment by Mount Vernon Resident Marlene H. Wertheim
Minute 25:18

Willson's Woods, with two l's, is 23 acres of parkland owned since 1924 by Westchester County. It is now operated by its Dpt. of Parks, Recreation and Conservation. It's one of the County's oldest parks and is named after the former owner Charles Hill Willson of Willson and Adams Lumber Co.

There was a 1 million gallon swimming pool and a Tudor Revival-style bathhouse built of a striking mix of brick, stone, wood and stucco, such architecture we don't see much of these days. It's still standing and in use. In 2004, the pool underwent a major renovation transforming it into what the County's Dpt. of Parks called an "aquatic playground," with wave pool, water slides, water playground. There are also areas for picnicking, a children's playground and the DeMatteo Pavillon where people can rent space for special events. Our park is a gathering place for families, neighbors, visitors. Tens of thousands of people can come through in any one summer.

The park also contains Pelham Lake, the only lake in Mount Vernon. People fish there and the Boys & Girls Club have kept it stocked with trout. Years ago people would boat and skate on it. There's a grouping of river birch along its perimeter and that weeping willow that dazzles us each spring with its abundance of suspended delicate pink flowers. Lots of established grand oaks fill the grounds of the park. More than 50 species of birds have been spotted here. And... there's the waterfall.

During this lengthy time of COVID, we have really come to value the easy access to this place of respite that is tranquil and green. And, that's how I and many others would like it to remain.

We're on the threshold of a green renaissance in Mount Vernon. We have a revised Tree Ordinance, passed in December, 2020, to protect and expand our green spaces. From its perspective, progress is not measured by the number of tall buildings and the spread of concrete, but by how well we can maintain a healthy, green, sustainable city, along with regulated development. We have regained our Tree City designation from the Arbor Day Foundation. We have captured the attention of outside environmental groups that want to bring their resources to assist and support us. Mount Vernon residents have been brought together by the Westchester Parks Foundation to help clean up, plant and remove invasives from the park as part of the important goal of educating people to appreciate our green surroundings. What is needed are more tree plantings, beautiful parks, community gardens and, to have citizens and the administration working together on our landscape.

The proposed Stagg development does not fit into this picture. From the moment of their purchase of the property abutting Willson's Woods, they have defied the community and the development process. While sidelining the land use boards, they leveled a swath of trees and only under pressure from the County did they replace them with a thoughtless random selection. What they offer, contrary to their original simple plan of being solely an administrative headquarters, are palates for trucks and vans, a maintenance shed and movement of trucks along the park road, all part of a unique rezoning to suit their specific wants. We all know that any commitments made reflecting compliance with City rules will be upended the moment Stagg feels securely established here. They have no respect for Mount Vernon. They don't care.

And what disturbs me is that some of you sitting up there appear to not care either.

Marlene H. Wertheim