

http://www.newjerseyhills.com/bernardsville_news/opinion/editorial/editorial-in-a-vacuum/article_5310b1d5-126f-55aa-9018-41913a4d8261.html

EDITORIAL: 'In a vacuum'

8 hrs ago

“It’s almost like it was created in a vacuum.”

So said one Basking Ridge resident last Tuesday night while protesting a controversial proposal to redevelop the Millington Quarry off Stonehouse Road in Bernards Township.

The plan, which is now on life support, faces what officials are calling a “termination vote” by the Township Committee on Wednesday, Jan. 24. We expect the plug will be pulled at that time as the committee attempts to save face over this embarrassing episode.

Perhaps the thing that amazes us most is how it got this far in the first place. The over-ambitious project included 235 housing units, a hotel with up to 250 rooms, retail and office space, two restaurants plus a public park and lake.

What surprises us most is that some township officials appear to have been caught off guard by the swift and strong outpouring of public opposition.

Did the town’s elected representatives really believe residents were going to embrace such an intensive development at an environmentally tainted site?

From this perspective, the opposition was as easy to predict as a New England Patriots’ playoff victory. Considering all the circumstances, including the soil contamination and potential impact on traffic and the schools, the project seems completely inappropriate for the site.

Even one of its earliest advocates, a local businessman originally involved in the proposal, bailed from this sinking ship when he saw the writing on the wall.

We also found it surprising that the all-Republican Township Committee released details of the project just before the general election, which could have cost them the race. It didn’t, but residents were quickly up in arms.

Seemingly overnight, they created a website, obtained lawyers, organized petition drives and reached out to state environmental organizations for backing.

We wouldn't be surprised, however, to see officials take credit for listening to the public when killing the project next week.

Perhaps they should rehire the public relations firm used during the mosque debacle to help clean up this mess, too.

Of course, this isn't the first time we've seen local officials facing intense public heat over so-called "re-development project" proposals.

Bernardsville officials quickly backtracked after presenting a plan to put 100 condominiums at the borough's train station parking lot two years ago. That lead balloon was popped after just one public meeting when virtually no one in attendance supported the idea.

Similarly, Bedminster officials were also blasted several years ago when plans for a shopping center and hotel were presented for a parcel of land on Route 202-206 that is used by the state Department of Transportation (DOT) as a maintenance yard.

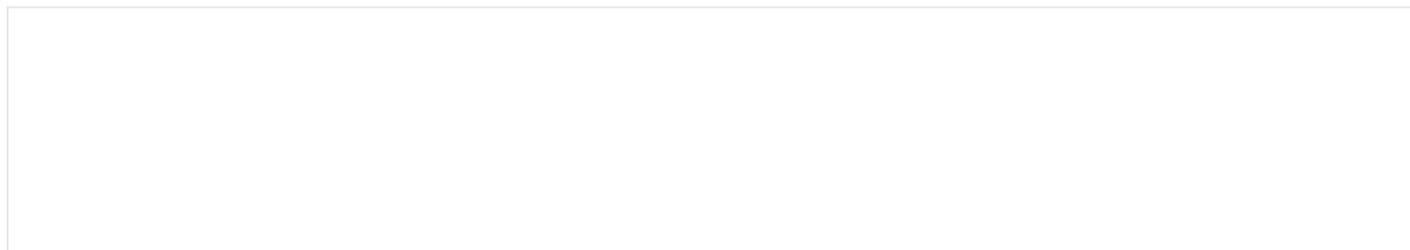
In both of these cases, the projects were scrapped soon after the public was brought in for input.

History now appears to be repeating itself in Bernards Township, where an oversized project was presented with little advance public notice or involvement.

The important question remains: What will become of the quarry site after this idea is "terminated?"

Officials will need to regroup and come up with another approach for this important 180-acre tract. Hopefully this time, residents will be involved in the process from the start.

MORE INFORMATION





(VIDEO) Quarry plan facing 'termination' vote in Bernards Township

