

SE Town Board Meeting Recap 12/18/08

Hi All,

Please forgive the late arrival of this recap but I did a lot of traveling over the past week and also thought that the following might not capture the true spirit of Christmas...

Gosh, I don't know what part of this last-of-the-year Town Board meeting I liked best. The complete lack of holiday good will? The smirking, condescending and belittling glances of Supervisor Rights? Perhaps the appointment of a new wetlands consultant who's never met a wetland worth saving? Nah, none of the above if only because the latest appointment defies description. If you read nothing else skip to item 10 and check it out in the comments that follow.

The winner of the coveted 'Height of Hypocrisy' trophy had to be Councilman Yee. Touting his ever vigilant quest to save us a buck (and woe to thee who spent the mysterious and outrageous sum of \$9.23 on a battery, a dastardly deed mentioned at every opportunity). Thus Yee droned on and on about the importance of saving \$100 here and \$100 there when I finally snapped and asked what the Temple Beth Dunford holiday decorations had set us back. Yee then went into Best Supporting actor mode pretending not to have an exact figure but Councilmen Honeck and Johnson were only too happy to throw Yee under the proverbial two-faced bus. It seems they had just signed a voucher for around \$1300. What!#\$%^&* Are you kidding me? I mean, at least we got the buttery yellow executive lounge for around the same amount- and at least we'll still have it long after the wreath, spray and garland are decomposing in some landfill down south.

Sure the decorations were pretty (albeit dry as a tinderbox and probably a major fire hazard by now) but 1300 bucks. Yikes. Of course Yee and Rights then went into spin overdrive claiming I was 'anti-holiday decorations' and then, upping the ante (and probably more on the mark) I believe that the word 'Grinch' was actually uttered.

Anyhow, the meeting lasted until after 11:00 and was painful on counts too numerous to mention. Unfortunately this means you'll be subjected to 'War and Peace' or, in this case, 'War and War'. It was a truly hideous evening.

As always the snarky, over the top observations are my own. They reflect no organization to which I belong.

Public Hearing:

Millennium Real Estate: Route 312 and 6 Represented by Michael Liguori.

This is a 4500 square foot building on 1.95 acres. It will be office/retail with storage located above. There will be pervious pavement (a poured concrete system) not yet used in this area.

The Town Board asked numerous questions. Additional questions were:

This project needed a variance from the DEP- do you have one? Ans. Don't need one any more.

Can a deli be located here? Ans. Yes, but the septic fields are limited.

I pointed that since this was supposed to be a Public Hearing perhaps the applicant could have the plans and renderings facing the public. Supervisor Rights said that this was 'duly noted'.

Public Hearing:

Dykes Lumber: Fields Lane Represented by Rick O'Rourke

This was in front of the Board for a special permit.

The project is a 72,000 square foot building located on 9.36 acres in the OP-1 district. There will be 12,000 square feet of retail space with 'incidental' office space- the remainder almost 60,000 square feet will be warehouse.

There are still access problems that need to be worked out with the Putnam County Land Trust.

There will be 4 flatbed trucks coming and going per day. There will be parking for retail. 60 Spaces are allowed but there will be less. The site can not be seen from 684 or Fields Lane. There will be a 10 day comment period.

Other questions were:

The applicant insisted that there would be no outdoor storage yet the 4 flatbed trucks would be parked in the rear of the building. Doesn't this count as outdoor storage? The Board didn't know.

How does the Land Trust use the preserve behind Dykes: Bird watching, hiking, natural amphitheater used by Boy Scouts, cross country skiing.

Traffic safety issues due to the proximity of the Brewster Ice Arena were also raised.

Public Hearing:

Drake Petroleum: Corner of Drewville Road and Route 6

This was for a Special Permit for a Gas Station/Convenience store
Architecture of the proposed building was addressed at length. There was no submitted plan of how the building would really look. The hours of operation would be from early morning until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. The present sign and canopy will remain. The underground tanks will be replaced.

Other questions and suggestions were:

Since this is in a residential neighborhood the sign should conform to the new standards. Do not allow the applicant to use 'fake stone' on the exterior. Yee wanted to ensure that teens would not be hanging out here. There are to be no outside merchandise displays. Again, it was pointed out that the applicant addressed the Town Board rather than the audience.

1. Correspondence

Accepted by a vote of 4-1 (Johnson dissented as e-mails were not listed)

2. Approval of Voucher List

Accepted 4-0 With Yee abstaining

3. Budget Transfers:

Passed 5-0

4. Setting of Meeting Dates and Public Hearings: All to be held at 1360 Route 22 at 7:30 PM.

January 8- Organizational Meeting with Work Session to follow

January 22- Work Session

January 29: Regular Meeting

Passed 5-0

5. Update of 2008 Issues:

Below are the accomplishments Supervisor Rights discussed.

- 1.45% tax Reduction- Rights and Yee said that they had kept their election promise of cutting the budget by 10% but the rest of the Board had not gone along with this.
- Only legal employees can work for the Town of Southeast
- Beautification of the Town
- Route 22 Improvements will be started
- Town Board Meetings are available on-line
- Yee and Rights are 'fighting waste' in government

Below are the accomplishments Councilman Gross mentioned:

- Springhouse Estates ongoing water quality improvements
- Water Spray Park underway
- Volunteer Park/Volleyball
- Landfill capping underway
- Intermunicipal agreement with the village
- Highway Department back on track
- Peach Lake Sewer District underway
- Lakeview Manor Senior Plan
- Putnam Humane Society Plan
- Website Overhaul
- Green Initiatives for commercial building on the table

7. Resolution Establishing Office of Deputy Highway Superintendent:

Yee and Rights felt that this position should not be established as there is no Deputy Supervisor position. The position was created at a salary of 65,000 by a vote of 3-2 (Rights and Yee dissenting)

8. CSEA Contract

Deferred to Executive Session

9. Website Announcement

Paul Johnson explained the update and thanked Eric Cyprus and Denis Castelli for their help

10. Wetlands Inspector

Roger Gross made a motion to appoint Stephen Coleman as the town's new wetlands inspector.

Questions and comments included: Does the new inspector live in Southeast? Ans: no. What does Coleman charge? Ans. Comparable to former inspector Don Cuomo. Did the town bid this out? ans. No, as a service it doesn't have to. A plea was made to reappoint Don Cuomo who had served the town well by protecting our wetlands.

This discussion then evolved into hiring a new town planner (Morris Associates) who Rights and Yee insisted would save the town money over AKRF. Morris is presently the town planner in Fishkill. Rights insisted that AKRF had charged the town \$167,000 in '07 when in fact most of this is paid by the applicant. Rights did not have any breakdown of what was actually billed to the town and what was paid for by the applicant. The same for 2008 which Rights claimed was \$196,000 to date. Again there was no breakdown available. Rights insisted that he is concerned with upgrading the community.

It was decided to defer voting on a new town planner. Roger Gross apologized to Rights for 'reneging' on a deal. The vote was then taken on hiring Stephen Coleman. This passed 3-2 with Yee and Rights dissenting.

11. Springhouse Water District:

Rights wants to bond for 40 years (capital expenses) thus reducing Springhouse bills to their '08 levels. Passed 4-1 with Johnson dissenting

12. Brewster Heights Special District

Deferred 5-0

13. Terravest Wastewater Treatment Rates Approval

Needs to be on a Work Session

14. Town-wide Drainage District Hearing Date

Premature. Needs a map and will be on a Work Session.

15. Building Permit Fees

These will be raised by 25%. Deferred to Work Session by a vote of 5-0

16. Union Apprenticeship

Deferred at request of union

17. Set Public Hearing on proposed Amendment to Chapter 3-

Architectural Review Board

Set for January 29, 2009 5-0

18. NYSDOT Permit Application Re. Route 6 and 312

Beautification Project.

There is no fiscal impact to the town as Walt Thompson must raise the \$10,000.

Passed 5-0

19. Procedure for Town Board Re. Minutes

Deferred to Work Session.

20. CHOP Resolution

This authorizes the County to explore a Cooperative Heating Oil Program.

Passed 3-2 with Honeck and Johnson dissenting.

Comment/Opinion:

Millennium Real Estate:

First of all a Public Hearing is supposed to be, as the name might imply, for the public. But, recently this has become yet another golden opportunity for the Good Old Boys and the Bad New Boys to snipe at one another.

To understand the rules, when one attends a Planning Board Public Hearing, Chairman Tom LaPerch always tells the applicant to address the public because this is 'their show'. And besides, in theory, the Planning Board has already seen the plan countless times. Just as the Town Board should have seen the aforementioned project and asked questions at a work session.

Apparently not so for this Town Board. Thus ensues the predictable bickerfest. Everything from the outrage of a \$9.23 battery to Joe Vera's decade long 'over-charging extravaganza' is fair game. And mentioned...repeatedly.

In fact, the Board takes up so much time on the irrelevant crap that by the time they get to questions from the public they're irritable and not the least bit interested in what the public has to say. Oh right... when did they ever even bother feigning interest? Anyhow, I think the most important point with Millennium is that they have a letter in hand from the DEP stating that no variance is needed. But I'm sure that all got lost in translation.

Dykes Lumber:

Well, aside from the ongoing and well justified Land Trust dispute this one was fascinating for the Board's totally ridiculous claim that they didn't know whether or not vehicles 'counted' as outdoor storage. Guys, I have two words for you... Westchester Tractor. Of course vehicles count as outdoor storage, you all should know this. And shame on my new favorite and never ruffled attorney, no not you, Mr. O'Rourke, but you, Mr. Stephens. He knows this stuff inside/out and I can only assume that he was on Level 30 of BrickBreaker with only one life left... in this case all is forgiven as absolutely *anything* would have been more interesting than this travesty of a meeting. Oh, and you too, Mr. O'Rourke- So, yes boys, the four flatbed trucks stashed in back of the building count as outdoor storage. I have no doubt these *easily* fall into the zoning regs 5% requirement but from now on please let's have the applicant present the unvarnished truth from the get-go.

I bet you thought I was gonna have a coronary over the warehouse/office ratio (remember: it's supposed to be 80% office/20% warehouse) as well as a full blown Fields Lane rant? Nah, I'll spare you all but seriously this is really outrageous. 12,000 square feet retail (Special Permit?), 60,000 warehouse with 'incidental' office space. Scheesh, with a total square footage of 72,000 square feet (in the spirit of full disclosure I suck at math) I'd say the office space sounds even smaller than 'incidental'. Perhaps there's a definition of 'incidental' that I missed in the code book... Long story short. This will end up a retail operation in our 'premier' Fields lane Office Park district.

Drake Petroleum:

In one of the least prepared applications I've had the honor to sit through this one was almost amusing. Every never-ending request from the Town Board was met with a 'sure, we can do that' so that the artist's rendering ended up as totally irrelevant. To the Board's credit they said that they needed to see a more concrete version of the plans as would the ARB.

The one really fun part was when Councilman Yee insisted that a gas station/convenience store was really needed in this area. Note to Dwight. I've lived 2 miles from this gas station for over 30 years- and it hasn't missed for the last two it lay fallow. And could you possibly be serious about another convenience store???

From this location there's a deli you could spit to and the 'Superette' a stone's throw from there. Dwight- I know this ain't your side of town but please... know thy geography. Finally, this property is in the Gateway and borders quite a lovely residential neighborhood- couldn't we do any better than a purveyor of Little Debbie, Miller Lite and Newports?

5. Update of Accomplishments:

Sidesplitting! This was supposed to be The Roger Gross Show- but, of course, Supervisor Rights turned it into a self-serving, political infomercial. The highlights, for me anyway, involved town beautification- this from the guy who single-handedly issued a Special Permit to Westchester Tractor for outside storage of tractors, bulldozers et al (a vote was never taken) and the same fella' who wants the old Dills Best building (backing up to the Residential Meadow Lane/Allview Ave.) to become a service center for Honda. Good call Dave!

Rights also tried to take credit for slated Route 22 improvements. A totally bogus claim that has only to do with Rights being in the right place at the right time. And, what with the economic state of NY who knows what's really gonna get 'improved'.

Of course in light of the \$1300 chair purchase and the \$1300 holiday decorations Rights' claim of 'fighting waste' was a real knee-slapper. If memory serves Rights once tried to pawn off Ball event refreshments and Secretary Day gifts on us

poor unsuspecting taxpayers. Councilman Gross then had the floor to tout the other guys' accomplishments which were a little disingenuous but stellar compared to Rights & Yee.

Wetlands Inspector:

This was a complete horror show that magically transformed into 'Let's Make a Deal'. Follow this one...if you can.

Don Cuomo has served the town well since his appointment in '07. So well it seems certain developers aren't all that ecstatic with Don's zeal to protect our wetlands- that is: Mr. Cuomo tries to get applicants to comply with our wetland regulations. Regulations that were enacted by at least one member of our current Town Board.

It seems that our Town Board doesn't like listening to complaints from various pillars of our community. You know, the same pillars who want to pave over everything- including our wetlands. What to do... what to do... I've got it, get rid of that pesky stickler- the one who's actually intent on following town code. Sayonara Mr. Cuomo!

Thus in a 3-2 vote the Board appoints Stephen Coleman. The really, really weird part here is that I'm hearing Mr. Coleman already holds a full time position down in New Castle- but I digress.

The most twisted part of this tale is that some kind of deal appeared to have been cut between Councilman Gross and Supervisor Rights. The deal seemed to be that Rights (and probably Yee) would vote for Coleman if Gross would vote our Town Planner (AKRF) off the island and award Morris Associates the job. Now here's where it gets even snakier... it seems that Morris has contributed to the Ball campaign (imagine that). Then, in an eleventh hour switcheroo, Gross apologized to Rights for renegeing on the deal by voting for Coleman but deferring a vote on our Town Planner. Rights and Yee were so p*ssed that they then voted against appointing Coleman- ironically doing the right thing out of sheer vengeance. Johnson and Honeck (I assume to protect AKRF) then voted for Coleman. In any case I could be wrong about this but I think that the video is pretty telling.

I can only hope that the Board reconsiders and rehires Mr. Cuomo.

Town-wide Drainage District:

Fortunately there are a lot more i's to dot and t's to cross before this financial burden is shifted to the general public so I'll try not to drag out the hindquarters. But know this. In a neat little bait-and-switch move all SE taxpayers are gonna have to foot the bill for all those glitzy new subdivisions. The same subdivisions (we were promised at numerous public hearings) that would be self-sustaining. And they wonder why I'm jaded...

My fingers are cramping and I've droned on far too long. So to all my friends and my more numerous enemies please have a safe and happy New Year's Eve!

As always please feel free to e-mail me with any questions or comments that you might have.

Happy New Year!

Lynne Eckardt