

Commissioner rebutts editorial

Your recent editorial, "A secret assault on the public's land," can only be described as a biased attack on a reasonable, thoughtful and open plan to develop a small portion of the Corson's Brook Woods and to preserve otherwise the integrity of this environmentally significant section of Staten Island.

You call the state "arrogant and deceitful," yet you ignore, or omit, the careful and concerned manner in which the state proceeded in this development, failing even to note the significant actions taken by the state which were reported in your own newspaper. You begin your case in March and then jump to the present day, pretending that the state took no public action during the intervening time and implying that what did take place was sinister and not above-board.

While I do not begrudge your opinion about what you think ought to be done, or not be done, with the land in question, you have woefully distorted the truth about what has gone on in order to make your case.

The fact is that throughout the entire process to establish these much-needed residences for the developmentally disabled to meet the demands of the Willowbrook Consent Decree, officials at the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) and at the Staten Island Developmental Center have made several public presentations on the project and have endeavored to keep any intrusion in the wooded area to a minimum.

Plans for the project were first put forward early this year, and subsequently were discussed with legislators and in the news media during the state budget process in the spring. Contrary to what your editorial contends, there were subsequently a number of activities that took place to make sure that the project development involved all interested parties. Some of these activities were in fact reported in the Advance when they occurred.

Among significant meetings

that took place during the period were:

- April 17: Associate Commissioner Elin Howe and Staten Island Development Center (SIDC) Director James Walsh met with Marilyn Mammano, Staten Island director for the city Planning Commission, to discuss with her the agency's plans to build the residences.

- May 3: A well-attended, public meeting of the task force on the disposition of state property that will occur when Willowbrook is closed was held at SIDC. At this meeting, it was clearly explained (and reported in the Advance) that the Corson's Brook Woods area would remain state property, that the task force would not be involved in any development there, and that a presentation on the development would be made to Community Board 2. A detailed description of the project was also made at this meeting.

- May 18: Representatives of the New York City Planning Commission and the Parks Department toured the site with SIDC staff.

- May 25: Mr. Walsh wrote to Edmund J. Murphy, chairman of Community Board 2, advising him of the agency's decision to proceed with the planned construction of four intermediate care facilities for 72 clients.

- July 6: Mr. Walsh met with Mr. Murphy and other board members to discuss the project and arrange a meeting with a full board; Mr. Walsh was advised there would be no board meetings until September.

- September 5: Mr. Walsh met with the chairman of the Land Use Committee and with the Health and Hospitals Committee of the board. Mr. Walsh was placed on the agenda for the Sept. 18 meeting. He appeared at that session and discussed at length the community residence project.

In response to the concerns raised by the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, two additional sites were examined and found to be unsuitable because of greater costs and because they would not achieve the desired integration with the neighboring community. The nine-acre site in Corson's Brook Woods faces the surrounding community and

thus would become a part of the neighborhood.

In the final plan, care has been taken by the architect to preserve the natural landscape. Through careful building, roadway and parkway layout, it has been possible to minimize the need to remove trees from the site. The construction documents include strict instructions to insure that all trees that remain will be protected. With the preservation of 80 percent of the trees and vegetation on the site there will be minimal adverse effect on wildlife.

The state, in all stages of this project, has been open about its plans—not secretive as you suggest, and has been responsive to concerns about the development.

While you, as a newspaper, may not agree with the decision to develop on this particular site, it certainly isn't fair to manipulate circumstances to fit your own point of view.

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