

commentary

Protectors care about people too

By KATHLEEN KIMBALL

(This position paper is addressed to Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly.)

As a way of introduction, I am a member of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, married and the mother of five children. I am writing to express my opinion of remarks and innuendoes which have appeared in print concerning the controversy surrounding the placement of group homes for the developmentally disabled in Corson's Brook Woods.

I would like you to know that for many years I canvassed door to door for the Association for the Help of Retarded Children. I was a driver in the Meals on Wheels program, delivering meals to the homebound, I have been involved in the work of St. Andrew's Church in many facets, its youth program and fund raising activities. I have worked for the past eight years in a physician's office during which time a large part of my job involved helping patients come into contact with the appropriate governmental agencies that could help meet their non-medical and medical needs, to help them forge their way through bureaucratic red tape, etc.

I am highly incensed that people have made these accusations, that members of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods care more about trees than people. This is only clouding the real issue of the state's deceitful handling of site selection for the proposed group homes. These people vs. trees remarks are not based on any knowledge of the people involved in conser-

vation issues. The members who I do know personally do not live in a vacuum of just one issue. They are involved in many aspects of life, with no compensation and at great expense of personal time, because of a high degree of commitment to quality of life issues. These do include the saving of our woodlands, which is a people oriented issue. Who do you think we want to save the woodlands for? I would be more than happy to provide as many biographies as required to set the record straight. There must be room in any issue for disagreement, without this dirty, unfair, and totally untrue attack on environmentalists' motivations.

The whole premise of "community placement" is a false issue. The Corson's Brook Woods site in no way and in no form represents true community placement. Jim Walsh (the director of the Willowbrook Developmental Center) has stated that there is no way that these multihandicapped, developmental disabled people can assimilate into a community across a main thoroughfare such as Forest Hill Road.

The concept of "public input" is laughable. One unannounced presentation by Mr. Walsh before Community Board 2, with no outside interested parties in attendance to listen, or comment, does not meet the ethical criteria for true community input. As a matter of record and fact, Community Board 2 had passed a resolution for the inclusion of Corson's Brook Woods into the Greenbelt. To my knowledge, they have not rescinded this and certainly others would have liked a chance to present an alternate site, whereby the Greenbelt would not have to be deforested, and the facilities for SIDC's clients could have been placed side by side, to the full board for its consideration.

The two-page "feasibility study," which states that alternate sites are not suitable, is obviously a quite uncomprehensive piece of material and certainly not worthy of being the

final word on the subject. Neither the City Planning Commission nor NYC Parks had even seen this "feasibility study," when the bulldozing began after election day, nor was it willingly presented on Nov. 19 by the state. I would like to make note of statements made

- by Comm. Webb, "the opponents to the plan (Corson's Brook Woods) would be able to comment when OMRDD makes a presentation to CB 2";
- by you that "the proposal is so preliminary ... that a protest is premature ... The development may not even affect the wooded area in dispute. Nothing is settled yet ... the site selection has not even been done";
- by a spokesman for OMRDD in Albany, "We intend to build the buildings on the grounds of the center ... we have no intention of building in the GB, in what is known today as the Greenbelt. When our drawings are completed next year, then we'll know if there's a potential conflict."

All of the above clearly promised that no decisions were made yet. The contradictory statements made by Comm. Webb essentially said that he made his decision a year ago and he wasn't going to change. You said, "Nobody, but nobody that I am aware of was ever invited to participate in any discussion on anything, but surplus property."

Obviously there was no real public participation as promised, and site selection was not preliminary as stated.

It is such a shameful thing to see all these false accusations of prejudice appear in print against the very people who are trying to save our precious woodlands for generations to come, and most importantly this entire controversy, and its resulting bad feelings, was avoidable and unnecessary if the site selection process had been handled in a truly open manner with the public, conservation groups, NYC Dept. of Parks, NYC Dept. of Planning providing input.