

Green Vs. Growth

by Dr. Richard Craft

A recent article in the Middletown Record featured the above heading. Emblazoned on the front page were the words, "26,000 NEW HOMES PLANNED." Ladies and gentlemen, the time for growth is here – NOW.

The article included a chart showing the planned housing units in Sullivan and Orange counties. True to their usual treatment of Wawarsing, a big fat zero stood next to our town. Apparently they neglected to once again get the right information. All they had to do is contact the building departments in the village and town where they would have been told that we, too, are experiencing a modest building boom.

Fortunately, we still seem to be on the fringe of bumper to bumper traffic and ballooning tax rates. I believe we are being overlooked to some degree for two simple reasons. Number one reason is that we are still somewhat isolated by being twelve miles from **Rte. 17**. This still seems to be an obstacle to those accustomed to four-lane highways and 70-MPH speed limits. The more obvious reason for bypassing our town is that our town building codes permit only one dwelling per acre. This is not attractive to cookie cutter home developers. The only exception to this rule is in the case of senior citizen housing. Multi-family housing without land restriction is still available in the village, but they are running out of room. Some may look upon these regulations as a disadvantage but I think it works in our favor. We at least are not being inundated and can control our growth to some degree.

However there is one area that I feel needs serious consideration and that is in the affordable housing market. There are many in our town who would be considered blue collar workers, laboring in our industrial and service sectors. Many of them are paying more than 30% of their income for rental housing which is often substandard. This lack of decent, clean, warm, and safe housing is good news for some of our landlords who exact top dollar and respond to their renters cries of being over charged by saying, "If you don't like it, you can move to..." Where? I would propose that certain acreage within the town be set aside for affordable housing and that those living in the town be given first preference.

The issues of housing, growth, and the maintaining of green in our valley is finally being addressed by a joint village and town agreement. For the next several months they will be formulating a new Master Plan. In order for this to

succeed, they must set aside the municipal rivalry and do what is best for the town as a whole. To begin with, consolidation of services should be a top item with the dissolution of the village as a long range goal. Duplication of services, reckless spending, political fairness and the yearly struggle to find competent people to run for public office is sapping our vitality. Political jockeying for power is ever in the minds of many and is a game that benefits few and stymies our vision.

As these two bodies begin their deliberations I would like to make some recommendations:

1. We must keep the *Ellenville Hospital* as a hospital at all costs. I say NO to just a first-aid station. We need critical access care to remain in Ellenville. Without it, our newly expanded ALS will be no better than our present system, since it still takes 30-40 minutes to get to a hospital from here. This is not acceptable to those seriously injured or those suffering acute life-threatening conditions.

2. There must be a give and take on our precious land resources that will accommodate affordable housing, industrial and business growth.

3. We must oppose outsiders coming in from outside our town and threatening us with lawsuits because a tree must be cut down. Comments, opinions, and petitions are welcomed from local residents, however high-priced lawyers representing well-financed special interest groups should be discouraged. Home rule should be jealously guarded. I like the comment made by former Interior Secretary Watts who said, "Don't expect me to stop an airplane from flying over where you want to hike."

4. We must plan for sensible, multi-use along the **Rte. 209** corridor.

5. We must plan for the extensive improvement of the **Berme Road** throughout the town that will accommodate truck traffic in the event of an emergency.

6. We must create destination sites within the town. The prospects of a completed **O&W Rail Trail** already exist. We can also boast of the *Shadowland Theatre*, the hang gliding sites, our airport, hunting, fishing and hiking opportunities, **Sam's Point**, but we need more. We must assist in the formation of historic districts like the one being proposed in Napanoch. A large museum would be nice.

7. We must encourage the development of a sizable shopping center so we don't have to travel 35 miles for a new dress, suit, or a pair of shoes.

8. We must strongly enforce our

codes. Through my experience I would say that both the town and village are being taken advantage of as we ignore violation after violation.

9. There must be a well-thought-out scenic design for all parts of our town. By doing so, we can prevent monstrosities from being built that detract from our vision of what we want our communities to present to the public. Attractive, historical, sensible structures should grace our communities. We should present to the surrounding area a community that is desirable to live in, work in and, yes, even to purchase in.

I am hoping we all will be asked to participate in this process. Most likely, my list is just a start and many more will be forthcoming and that is good. My suggestions come from four years of experience at the helm of the town. I have no problem with dispelling sacred cows since I've done it all my life as a health provider. I've had the opportunity to examine the patient and render a diagnosis. The remedy may vary and will take hard work.

Undoubtedly there will be some bruised egos but time is of the essence. We have one chance and this is it. We cannot wait any longer. We must get on with the job at hand. I firmly believe that our entire town can become the most unique and desirable place in the entire southeastern part of New York State. The resources are already here.

All we need is the desire. ☆

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