



PEPA

Purchase Environmental
Protective Association

In the news

Long-opposed Harrison office park rears again

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HARRISON - Town residents and community groups are opposing a long-disputed proposal for an office park that they say would worsen traffic problems and lead to the demolition of historic sites. Leading the charge against a proposed 76,384-square-foot building at Manhattanville Road is the Purchase Environmental Protective Association, which has battled the plan for decades.

PEPA maintains that a 1984 settlement with Purchase Corporate Park Associates prohibits the proposed four-story building. "The fact is that the matter was resolved by the courts 20 years ago, and people are legitimately wondering why this whole thing is rearing its head once again," said Anne Gold, PEPA's director and a New Rochelle resident.

Even residents on the other side of town oppose the plan, said Gold, who works for Manhattanville College, which is near the proposed development. "I can't even imagine what those people will have to go through," said Mary Malara, a member of the West Harrison Neighborhood Association. "It would turn a sleepy hamlet into a major corporate center. And the traffic congestion down there is already a major problem."

Planning Board members heard from PEPA at an April 11 hearing, as the group's lawyers tried to poke holes in an environmental impact study. "We're really just in a listening mode," said board member Raymond Kraus, declining to offer his opinion on the application, which was submitted in 2000 after legal battles bottled up a separate proposal from the 1980s. Back then, Purchase Corporate Park Associates built the Centre at Purchase, which includes a 265,682-square-foot office building at the 100 Manhattanville Road site.

Purchase Corporate Park Associates, which leases the land from a German company, would need to demolish what opponents view as historic sites: the Ophir Dairy and remnants of the Olmsted Barn. Ophir Dairy, completed in 1902, was designed by Edward Burnett, a former member of the House of Representatives and pre-eminent farming architect of the day, according to Manhattanville College research.

Frederick Olmsted, the celebrated landscape architect for Central Park in Manhattan, designed the eponymous Olmsted Barn. Both were a part of the Ophir estate, a gentleman's farm created by Whitelaw Reid. Reid was a longtime editor of the New York Tribune and leader of the Liberal Republican movement in 1872.

A lawyer for Purchase Corporate Park Associates, Paul Sirignano, said the buildings are not registered with the state, and therefore not protected. "I don't see this as a big controversy," the White Plains-based attorney said. But residents like Ellen Kaidanow do.

Purchase Elementary School, Purchase College, SUNY, Manhattanville College, corporate offices for MasterCard, world headquarters for PepsiCo. and a Morgan Stanley building all stand within a one-mile radius of the site, causing congestion in the area, Kaidanow complained. "We already have more traffic than we can deal with," said Kaidanow, who lives near the site.

Looming in the background is a revised comprehensive plan that the town unveiled in January, which tweaks its 1988 study. Gold said her group was assured by town officials two years ago that Manhattanville Road would be closed at Purchase Street and connected to Corporate Park Drive with an egress to Westchester Avenue before any additional development would be considered there. But that was not part of the draft comprehensive plan update released this year. The town planner, Pat Cleary, did not return messages requesting comment.

The Planning Board's public hearing on the office park application is expected to resume May 22 at Town Hall.