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“Parcel B” debate reignites

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Decades-old proposal resurfaces

A proposed development in Purchase that's been kicked around since Ronald Reagan's presidency will soon be back on the table for public reactions, after the Harrison Planning Board accepted an update to the plan's original environmental impact statement.

At the Jan. 25 meeting, the Planning Board accepted the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) from Purchase Corporate Park Associates (PCPA) for its proposed development on the contentious “Parcel B” property, ushering in a public hearing on the proposal to take place at this month's Planning Board meeting on Feb. 22.

Back in 2007, resident emotions ran high as the board considered a draft version of the document approved last week.

However, the saga of Parcel B does not date back to just three years ago or even to March 2000, when PCPA first submitted an application to the Planning Board to build an office building on the lot in question.

Many of the issues at play in the current development proposal, which would install a 76,000 sq. ft. office building on Manhattanville Road at the corner of Purchase Street, dates back to two 1984 court settlements.

The settlements, agreed to by PCPA (also known by the larger corporate name Related) and the Purchase Environmental Protection Association (PEPA), stipulated that PCPA could build on one lot. But, it said further development would be restricted unless a series of conditions were met.

Now, over 25 years later, PCPA is actively seeking to build. And PEPA, long an opponent of the proposal, believes that the developer's actions are violating several of the settlement provisions.

“They're trying to circumvent so much here because, even stipulations aside, what they were [granted] to build in 1984 was one building in two phases,” said PEPA Executive Director Anne Gold.

According to Gold, had the conditions in the stipulations been met that were necessary to allow Parcel B to be developed, the 1984 stipulations were designed to allow only for an eventual project that would connect the Parcel B property with the building that was previously completed (originally the home of Nestle, before it was sold to BFG). It should not, she said, allow a completely separate office building on that lot.

However, Gold says, the separate building proposal is only one of many complaints about what PEPA feels is a settlement document that has been flaunted.

Although the spirit of the original settlement was largely to assuage PEPA's fears of escalating traffic volume, Gold says, the developer has not taken steps agreed upon in the stipulation to reduce traffic. She said that PCPA had tagged \$1 million, with which it was supposed to explore the possibility of extending a road between Manhattanville Road and Westchester Avenue, while simultaneously looking at closing Manhattanville Road to traffic at the Purchase Street intersection.

"None of these important steps, which were aimed at reducing traffic in the Purchase area, have been taken," said Gold. "Nor has the company made any attempt to work with the community to accomplish other promised traffic mitigations."

Another concern of PEPA is the historic Ophir Farm, designed by architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Part of that property is located on the Parcel B site and is not owned by PCPA but leased to the company for a dollar per year from BGF, the owner and occupant of the already developed building.

PEPA is concerned that the developer will tear down a small dairy building and two other structures on the Parcel B land in order to make way for the development. "Both the state and the county wrote letters commenting that this needed to be treated with [caution], that perhaps the buildings need to be preserved," said Gold.

A late call to Paul Sirignano, attorney for the developer, was not returned by press time.

The next Planning Board meeting will allow the board members to feel the community's pulse on the most recent iteration of the Parcel B project.

As for PEPA's next move, it all depends on what lies in store in the newest environmental study, which, as of press time on Wednesday, the organization had not yet received.

"Once [the FSEIS] is posted, we will review it to determine if Purchase Corporate Park Associates has sufficiently answered the numerous issues PEPA raised as part of its review in the DEIS," said Gold, referring to the original draft document. "PEPA will continue to address the environmental, legal and safety issues that it has brought forward previously. Depending on the adequacy and completeness of the FSEIS and, ultimately, the Findings Statement, will dictate the future course of action that PEPA will pursue."

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