



DUTCHESS LAND CONSERVANCY

Preserving Open Land in Dutchess County

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June 3, 2009

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Rebecca E.C. Thornton

Mr. Ryan Courtien, Supervisor
Members of the Town Board
Town of Dover
126 East Duncan Hill Road
Dover Plains, NY 12522

Re: Knolls of Dover project; Dover Knolls Development Company II, LLC; former Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center, Route 22, Dover, New York.

Dear Ryan and Members of the Dover Town Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Knolls of Dover project. The proposed project is innovative in many respects and attempts to promote a pattern of traditional neighborhood development that is both transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly.

At the same time there are a number of significant environmental impacts, including those noted in my letter to the Town dated May 5, 2008 (copy attached) that have not been satisfactorily addressed in the DEIS. As noted in my letter, these include impacts on wetlands, water courses, groundwater resources, farmland soils, scenic views, plant/wildlife habitat and steep slopes.

In addition, it is my observation that the DEIS includes very detailed habitat information for the property, including field work completed both by Dr. Klemens and by Hudsonia, Ltd. This habitat inventory clearly establishes that the entire western half of the property, taken as a whole, represents an extremely unique mosaic of habitat areas. The land west of Route 22 includes at least 18 sites with rare or threatened species, and large numbers of other unusual or important habitats, such as 'marble knolls.' These collectively, along with substantial portions of the Great Swamp and the Swamp River, provide a critically unique combination of wetland habitats, sensitive areas, and rare species occurrences that is a clear indication that the potential impacts of any proposed development should be considered as a whole, and not simply as a series of isolated impacts. Since ecosystems function as whole systems and not on isolated islands of green space, this is especially important because the proposed development is spread out in patches all over the property (rather than tightly clustered) where the ecosystem remains intact. One-hundred foot buffers are simply not an adequate protection alternative for areas this unique.

In addition to this thorough habitat inventory, the DEIS should include an assessment by Dr. Klemens and/or Hudsonia to determine the overall impact of the proposed development as a whole to insure that the properties extremely unique mosaic of habitats is preserved to the greatest degree possible.



Based on our assessment, it appears that it will be relatively difficult to truly mitigate the impacts to the environment based on the existing proposal. Our *Constraints for Development* summary map (attached as the final map hereto), clearly shows that almost all of the developable land is being consumed by development and/or the golf course, while the only land left open is already unbuildable (steeply sloping 25% and above and wetlands). I would suggest that the DEIS include an alternative development plan that gives true consideration to protecting the property's resources and follows a pattern that falls on the heels of the former Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center – tightly clustered and truly walkable, leaving the surrounding landscape fully intact and undeveloped. This revised plan should:

1. be consistent with the Dover Master Plan and the provisions within the MC Overlay District portion of the Zoning Law;
2. reduce the overall density of the proposal compatible with the existing zoning and a small town like Dover;
3. significantly reduce or eliminate altogether the number of sites to be located near the reservoir;
4. follow recommendations to be made by Hudsonia and/or Dr. Michael Klemen's on appropriately sized buffers or alternatives that will truly protect the Great Swamp, Swamp River, the 18 identified rare or threatened species sites, marble knolls, hydric soils, and other wetlands areas;
5. protect the underlying aquifer to ensure clean drinking water for the residents of the Harlem Valley;
6. protect the flood plains, ponds, and streams, whose impact will be seen well beyond the properties borders;
7. preserve the statewide and important agricultural soils, for you never know when we will need these to grow safe and local food;
8. protect the viewshed by eliminating changes including regrading, deforestation, forest fragmentation and construction and reduce stormwater issues on slopes 15% and above and on the ridgeline;
9. continue to ensure Greenway Principals to the greatest extent possible in siting, design and architecture compatible with the historic settlement pattern and building scale and design of the Village of Dover Plains; and
10. propose permanent protection (such as conservation easements) for the environmentally sensitive and other important resource areas of the property.

Providing a quality development plan that truly preserves what's important will give the residents of Dover the satisfaction that they truly can grow in a way that ensures that their community character will remain intact and at the same time the important resources will be protected. With added consideration noted above, this project has the potential to be a great model plan. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Rebecca E. C. Thornton
President