

Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #8, March/April 2002

***Our Water, Our Future** is the newsletter that keeps you, our valuable members, on the leading edge of watershed protection activities. Through the generosity of the Noyes Foundation, both this newsletter and our website, www.newyorkwater.org, have been made possible.*

ISN'T IT TIME THE INESCAPABLE NEED FOR CLEAN DRINKING WATER SUPERCEDE THE FAA'S UNSTATED AGENDA ?

*By Karen Shultz
Member, CWCWC Board of Directors*

The Westchester County Airport is located at some points a scant 250 yards from the Kensico Reservoir, the terminal reservoir for the waters of the Cat/Del system before they make their final journey into the water distribution system and supply four out of five Westchester residents and 90% of New York City residents with safe and affordable drinking water. Yet, this airport continues to be a target for expansion by the aviation industry and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which could force expansion because the FAA supersedes environmental law.

By today's environmental standards, the airport would not be allowed to be built on this site. **Therefore, we are asking that the FAA permanently freeze expansion for the sake of both public safety and economic wisdom.**

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NYC DEP'S SITE PROPOSAL GREETED WITH BRONX CHEER ... Similar Skeptical Reception in Westchester County

*By Marian Rose
President, CWCWC, and
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CWCWC staff member*

Could it be fuzzy facts and unanswered questions in the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) 's selling of its filtration plant for Croton water that keeps audience skepticism high and the siting of this unwanted filtration plant from being the slam dunk the DEP thought it would be? In any case, the meetings held the evening of March 5, 2002, at Bronx Community College and on the evening of March 13, at Valhalla Town Hall, in Westchester County, to review the DEP scoping proposal to site the Croton Watershed filtration plant was another important success for opponents of the long-debated filtration plant and a continued heads-up to an agency that has tried to skirt the law on more than one occasion "in the name of public health."

It was also "deja vu all over again," whether one was a witness at the Bronx meeting or came out

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THE FAA'S UNSTATED AGENDA, cont.

The two most prominent reasons are that 1) Public safety and public health demand that the Kensico be protected from accidental and intentional airplane crashes and chemical spills into the water. (2) Preserving this critical resource -- safe and affordable water -- will be far less expensive than remedying any problems after the fact, especially in these times of worsening fiscal status at all levels of government. No amount of human ingenuity can preclude accidents, spills, human error or equipment failure, so it is vital to use common sense and avoid potentially harmful scenarios.

Any increase in activity at the airport increases the likelihood of intolerable levels of pollutants entering the Kensico. A conference held a few years ago in Copenhagen of 159 countries considered the aviation industry the most polluting of any in the world. Airplanes in flight emit 83 pollutants including butane, sulfuric acid, ammonia and nitric acid, which fall unmeasured into drinking water supplies worldwide. Pollutants from flying airplanes are known to cause many serious diseases, such as cancer, asthma, liver damage and emphysema. Westchester County already falls way below the national standards for clean air. This airport is adding unmeasured emissions. The health problems that this pollution can bring to our communities far outweigh any economic benefits from this airport. Children and senior citizens are most at risk since all water and air standards are based on the average size male.

The National Academy of Sciences stated in a recent report that the Westchester County Airport poses a most serious water-quality threat to the Kensico Reservoir. The National Resources Defense Council asks that New York State adopt an official policy of no further expansion of the airport, freezing the airport at its present size and footprint, including the number of flights, hangars, and level of development.

Our goal is to convince our elected officials to pressure the FAA into exempting Westchester County Airport from any further expansion, an exemption that does exist and can be found within the FAA's own policies and rules. There is much that CWCWC members can do! Write or contact your Senators (Schumer and Clinton), your Congressional Representatives (Engel, Gilman, Lowey and Kelly), and Governor George Pataki and his policy advisor John Cahill, and ask that they commit themselves in writing to permanent non-

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A BRONX CHEER, cont.

on that rainy Wednesday evening to the Valhalla Town Hall to listen to what can only be described as a sketchy and inconclusive description of an at-minimum \$1,000,000,000 price tag for a project with a highly questionable outcome. The DEP is desperately going through the motions of selecting sites in order to comply with a Consent Decree that it signed onto in 1998 with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and N.Y. State Department of Health (NYSDOH). It is hard to fathom why these three agencies are going through these charades. Having, not long ago, extolled the virtues of two sites in Westchester County (town of Greenburgh and village of Mount Pleasant), DEP has now abandoned those sites without a word of explanation. Will it do the same with the Harlem River and Eastview sites, two sites proposed in December of last year? Only time will tell, and also the unyielding presence and persistence at these meetings of the many, many area citizens wanting the facts.

The same individuals from DEP did their usual presentation for the two new sites. They are beginning to look tired and discouraged, having done this dog and pony show for the last five years, at least.

By contrast, the large audience that turned out for the city-based hearing was fresh and feisty, and ready to get to brass tacks; and the following week, the group of citizens in Westchester were just as equal to the task, presenting fact after fact and again asking for the answers to satisfy their scientific queries. On both nights, speaker after speaker spoke beautifully on why the plans for both sites and for the filtration plant were flawed from the start. The points were well made: 1) there is no need for this plant, anywhere, whether in the Bronx or in Westchester, because there has been no proof to date, or any indications, that the water is of unacceptable quality; 2) Croton water remains of high quality; 3) money should be spent on protecting the watershed with its invaluable features that purify the water rather than on an unneeded, cumbersome and quality-degrading \$1 billion filtration plant; 4) if the plant were built, ratepayers who are least able to afford it will suffer a regressive tax; 5) the plant would cost millions annually in maintenance 6) the Harlem site, specifically, is unworkable and would create dangerous traffic conditions and more air pollution in an area where air pollution is already extremely high; 7) filtration would throw the watershed open to development

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THE FAA'S UNSTATED AGENDA, cont.

expansion of the Westchester County Airport and that the updated master plan of the airport's foot print should maintain a natural buffer that already exists on the western side of the airport nearest the reservoir. An effort should be made at the federal level to permit the County to enforce a curfew for night flights, and stop any expansion of flights, gates, hangars, parking and heavier planes.

It is good public policy and makes good economic sense to protect this safe, affordable irreplaceable drinking water supply and the public's health. To do otherwise would be at our peril.

Please feel free to call 914-946-1271 for more information or to volunteer. Please get involved. [CWC](#)

C a l e n d a r

April 3: CWCWC Membership Meeting.

Place: Purchase (N.Y.) Friends Meeting. Time: 7:00PM Visit the website for details and directions, or 914-234-6470. See you there!

April 13: Federal and Estate Tax Benefits of Land Conservation—Private Land Protection and Income and Estate Tax Options and Strategies for Private Land Owners.

Speaker: Stephen J. Small, Esq.
Time: 8:30-12 noon. Place: Teatown Lake Reservation, 1600 Spring Valley Rd., Ossining, NY.
Phone: 914-762-2912, x10.

April 21: Protect our Water Walk-A-Thon, to stop the proposed golf course adjacent to Mt. Kisco's sole supply of drinking water. Route: Mt. Kisco (NY) Village Hall to Leonard Park.
Time: 1:00PM. Sponsor: Citizens for Byram Lake Reservoir in conjunction with the Mt. Kisco Recreation Commission. Phone: 914-242-0136.

April 28: Great Swamp Canoe Trip
Patterson, N.Y. Phone: 845-855-3063.

and water quality would deteriorate due to more toxic runoff into the reservoirs from roads, parking lots, lawns, etc.; 8) the DEP should take a serious look at alternatives, *as is required under both the State and City Environmental Impact Review regulations.*

These comments are a very brief summary of what was said both nights by concerned area residents. There was not a single speaker in favor of the plant, except in the Bronx where the consistent Mr. Shoenfeld made an appearance. An informal count noted that 23 speakers at the Bronx stated their opposition to the plant, although the meeting had to be closed before all present had had the opportunity to speak; in Westchester, nearly 1--half the audience--people spoke, and all opposed the filtration plant or its siting. One Bronx speaker made the point that these public hearings should be held in all the boroughs in order that more citizens can be kept abreast of this issue.

It was gratifying to hear that Bronx Borough President, Adolfo Carrión, is as strongly opposed to the filtration plant as his predecessor, Fernando Ferrer. His representative delivered a first-rate, thoughtful speech in opposition to filtration, and hit on all the points that needed to be addressed. In Valhalla, the DEP was called to task by audience members for its misuse of deadlines and last-minute tactics that intimidated town officials.

It is expected that the DEP will have an especially strong interest in the Eastview site, given the large lot. However, as pointed out by audience members, the site is bowl shaped and serves as a water-collection point, making its suitability as a foundation for an 11-acre building questionable.

CWCWC will continue to follow DEP's siting interests very closely. Please help us to help you by attending any of the public meetings and by being in touch with your elected officials either by phone, fax, e-mail, or U.S. mail to express your opposition to this costly and dangerous project. Log on to the CWCWC website [www.newyorkwater.org] to learn of any DEP or town/village meetings, or any related public hearings/meetings. We appreciate all that you can do! [CWC](#)

A BRONX CHEER, cont.