

# Our Water, Our Future

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Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #13, January/February 2003

**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](http://www.newyorkwater.org), have been made possible.

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## PUTNAM COUNTY'S POTENTIAL LEGACY

*A Look at Today as a Bellwether for Tomorrow*

by Ann Fanizzi

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This is a story of how residents of Putnam County, in a remarkable show of strength, are working day and night to reclaim and preserve the character of their communities against an onslaught of development. In an unprecedented show of strength, unity, and outrage, newly formed organizations, such as Putnam Valley Residents Coalition, Concerned Residents of Lake Gilead Road and Turk Hill Road have joined



the Concerned Residents of Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space (PCCPOS) to challenge the equally unprecedented and misguided efforts to “pave the county” with McMansions, “affordable” senior housing, manufacturing/warehouses, self-storage complexes, and questionable logging operations. Also, all of these proposals are located in and around the Middle Branch and East Branch Reservoirs, threatening their vitality and ability to provide suitable drinking water.

In the Town of Southeast alone, four projects have either sought approval from the Planning Board or waivers from the town's year-long development moratorium. One such project is the "Meadows at Dean's Corners," a 104-unit, single-family cluster development spanning Route 124. The Meadows will include two internal roads, which are actually 40 feet wide and more than 4,800-foot long "boulevards" traversing and destroying wetlands and impacting Holly Stream,



a tributary of the Diverting Reservoir. **The projected amount of impervious surfaces alone should have doomed this proposal. But it didn't.** Now, residents, along with Riverkeeper, CWCWC, and PCCPOS have challenged the development in two separate suits, which are currently being litigated in court.

Zoning along the Middle Branch reservoir had long been an issue for many residents of Southeast. Yet, even though the town has had a self-imposed building moratorium in place since March, 2002, the town's administration was still managing to miss addressing this central zoning problem. The reservoir had been vulnerable to permitted "Ed 1" uses, which allow light industry as well as the warehouse/self storage units seen proliferating along Route 6. **Fierce resident opposition to one of the larger self-storage unit proposals, however, did achieve a concrete victory.** Centering on water quality and quality of life issues, and coupled with support from Riverkeeper and CWCWC, Putnam residents were able to table it. And along with this **victorious defeat, we were able to then force a re-evaluation of the Ed 1 permit; extend the building moratorium from six months to one year; and institute a re-assessment of the entire Route 6 corridor zoning,** a re-assessment that in countless letters PCCPOS had advocated to town officials.

PCCPOS also included **in the recommendation for re-assessment of Route 312,** an area home to bountiful streams, wetlands, habitat and corridors for wildlife, and the Middle Branch, but **now under siege from a proposed 1 million square feet of commercial and some residential development.** Approximately 40% of that amount is now **already completed and occupied by the 361,000-square-foot, 61-acre "Big Box" retail center known as**

**Brewster Highlands, which bull-dozed ridges and slopes, and has added considerable heat to citizen outrage. This additional proposal would simply complete the developers' wishes. As well, to the west is an additional threat, the 327-acre development proposal, named Campus at Fields Corners,** which is adjacent to the recently purchased Tilly Foster Farm, and which calls for a 143-unit single-family cluster development along with three office buildings containing under- and above-ground garages. It's worth noting that more than 100 acres of this parcel currently remains unaccounted for in the developer's plans.

But, we're not done yet. **It is the fourth proposal that is, by far, the most potentially damaging environmentally. It is the proposed Terravest International Corporate Park.** It will also be aesthetically and socially destructive of the area and will prove to be a traffic nightmare. **Situated less than a quarter mile to the east of the Brewster Highlands development along Route 312, this project is also twice its size -- 139 acres, 500,000 square feet.** A 46-acre parcel will house light manufacturing facilities/ warehouses/offices, with the largest occupant being an Elmsford food distribution and processing company, Ace Endico; the other three lots will also be occupied by similar companies relying on trucks and trailers, requiring parking spaces and loading docks. **The applicant has blithely stated an increase of approximately 552 vehicles per peak hour on a road already at capacity due to Unilock trailers and school buses bearing children.** Compounding the potential for a traffic bottleneck is the addition of 72 "affordable" (\$300,000+) senior housing units, yielding another 172-174 vehicles to the mix. **The senior housing will be sited adjacent to a wastewater treatment plant,** look out onto the blank concrete walls of the commercial sites, will be stripped of the majestic trees that are a keystone to a tranquil home setting, provide no walking-distance amenities, subject occupants to nearly ceaseless commercial traffic with its incessant noise and diesel-fuel exhaust health threats—in short, it will have none of the human-scale features of quality housing.

**Of additional and of particular concern to members of CWCWC is that this project lies within the watershed of the Middle Branch. The cumulative effective of this deveopment,** along other proposed Putnam County developments – **Meadows at Dean's Corners;**

**Campus at Fields Corners** in Southeast; and **Weston-Chase** on Turk Hill, as well as **The Fairways** -- 93 acres/100 homes in Carmel, which

is described below -- **increases the phosphorous loading of the Middle Branch and further impacts the East Branch reservoir.**

Calculations by Riverkeeper and CWCWC indicate that **fully 15%+ of total area of the Terravest development are impervious surfaces.** According to Riverkeeper, “recent research indicates that watersheds are demonstrably and irreversibly degraded when as little as 10% of their surface area is covered by impervious surfaces.”

Of further concern are the applicant’s plans, as noted by CWCWC, to build 5 detention basins, 12 water quality basins and a stormwater maze in wetland buffer areas; disturb town-regulated and Army Corps of Engineers wetlands; construct a



waste-water treatment plant at the perimeter of the senior housing complex; clear-cut 37+ acres of forests for the construction of senior housing on a gradient, inviting erosion and sediment into the streams and ultimately into the reservoir.

**The DEP, charged with the protection of our waters, has been peculiarly absent from much of these proceedings.**

Southeast is not the only town that is struggling with such pressures. **Carmel has the “The Fairways” project, a.k.a. “The Links,”** which is a proposed 150-unit senior housing cluster development of 93 acres, amidst ecologically sensitive areas, situated at the edge of the 327-acre Centennial Golf Course. **Efforts by the applicant to re-define and re-interpret “open space” to meet requirements for cluster development were opposed** by the Coalition both before the Carmel Zoning Board and Town Board and in letters to town and zoning board officials and by members and supporters of Concerned Residents of Carmel/Mahopac.

Carmel also has the **Corporate Park**, located on Route 6, which would abut residential areas and property that is environmentally sensitive. That includes DEP wetlands, and it appears unsustainable in terms of infrastructure limitations and current traffic. Although reduced from 18 lots

to 8, the project will continued to be opposed by CWCWC, PCCPOS, and residents.

Then there is Putnam Valley, which has challenged the proposed **“Living Springs”** project, a 90-acre proposed development, 60 acres of which are pristine forested land. More than 200 units of senior housing and a retail center, situated in the Hudson and Croton Watersheds, are part of the development. **It is adjacent to the ecologically sensitive Bryant Pond, with further impact on Peekskill Hollow Brook, a DEC Class A water body, any disturbance of which would negatively impact the Town of Peekskill water supply.**

#### **ON THE HORIZON -**

The most cost-effective and efficacious method to protect the watershed is land acquisition. Although recognized by the DEP as the keystone to its **protection program in the Catskill/Delaware watersheds, to the tune of \$250 million, the Croton has been permitted to make do on a paltry \$17 million.**

**Both Westchester County and 12 Westchester towns, the latest New Castle, have taken steps to protect the Croton through funds exclusively dedicated for open-space acquisition.** Through a variety of financial mechanisms, the majority employing bonding, town residents have overwhelmingly approved open-space referenda.

**Yet, there are town municipalities that have not, and they are the governments of the towns of Putnam County** - the fastest growing county in New York State and the area of intense residential and commercial development – with clear impact on the Croton. In fact, such thinking has not even begun. Presently, the county is relying on Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) funds, which will soon be depleted. In addition to challenging misguided development, the Coalition is seeking to influence public opinion and to tell town and county officials that the time is now to address the issue of preservation.

We are literally and figuratively at the watershed. We have much before us, but we also have much to be proud of. Stay tuned at [www.putopenspaces.com](http://www.putopenspaces.com), or better yet, join us as we turn the tide and make Putnam County a secure, preserved, and progressive place to be. **CWC**