



The League of Women Voters of New Castle
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LEAGUE COMMENTS ON CHAPPAQUA CROSSING DEIS

PUBLIC HEARING – JUNE 23, 2009

My name is Sheila Crespi, and I'm here this evening to speak on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Castle. The League's Local Planning Committee has been studying the proposed redevelopment of the Reader's Digest property since 2005, and we've been reviewing the voluminous materials presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project. The League's Environment Committee is also reviewing relevant sections of the DEIS. As with the scoping comments the League submitted in January 2008, we continue to have questions regarding some of the key elements of the proposal. I'd like to touch briefly on a few of them:

AGE RESTRICTIONS AND ENFORCEABILITY

To render the age restrictions legal and enforceable, Chappaqua Crossing must achieve and maintain 80% occupancy by at least one person 55 years or older. We have questions about whether this level of occupancy can be achieved, considering the following factors among others:

- The weakened economy and housing market;
- The target senior population for the market-priced units has experienced significant losses in investments that underlie retirement income;
- The large influx of age-restricted housing that will be added to the Chappaqua market over a relatively short period of time; and
- The fact that Chappaqua attracts an unusually large number of buyers with school-aged children, looking to take advantage of the excellent Chappaqua Central School District.

There is also the question of whether the age restrictions will be upheld over time – whether they'll in fact be enforced to maintain the 80% threshold that is essential to keeping the age restriction in place and legal – and whether the Town of New Castle agrees to assume the role of enforcer as outlined in the DEIS.

DENSITY

Chappaqua Crossing would add approximately 370,000 square feet to the Reader's Digest campus, for a total of over one million square feet of gross residential and commercial space.

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- It combines commercial and residential use on a scale that does not have precedent in New Castle;
- It creates a condominium development larger than others previously constructed in town;
- And it would set a new benchmark for development in New Castle.

We believe more discussion is needed about whether this level of development is appropriate for the property, and whether it's consistent with the vision for New Castle that is outlined in the 1989 Town Development Plan.

TRAFFIC

There's a huge amount of material in the DEIS on this complex and technical issue. While we're working to take it in, the League expects the Town Board will conduct its own analysis to independently verify the conclusions of the traffic study. We expect the Town will conduct an analysis of traffic impacts for Chappaqua Crossing both with and without the age restrictions in place, as well as for the alternative scenarios that are considered in the DEIS. We further ask the Town Board to make this information available to the public in a readable, non-technical narrative that can be easily accessed online for widest possible dissemination to the community.

SEWER AND STORM WATER

The Town of New Castle must petition the Westchester County Board of Legislators to expand the Saw Mill River Sewer District to include all of Chappaqua Crossing. We'd like to come back to you with more comments about the expansion of the district and its ramifications for New Castle, and any back-up plans if expansion is not approved. Regarding storm water run-off, the DEIS states that peak on-site flow will be at or below current levels. The League's Environment Committee is reviewing this information, and may have additional questions or comments.

TAX REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

The DEIS makes assumptions about the tax revenues that will be generated from the commercial and residential portions of Chappaqua Crossing; and the costs to the town to provide additional services to the site. As with traffic, we expect the Town Board to conduct its own analysis and verification of revenues and expenditures; and we would expect to see a similar analysis from the CCSD Board of Education to assess the impacts of additional children in the school system, with and without the age restriction. And as with the traffic study, we would expect these reports to be made available for public dissemination and review.

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Given the complexity and sheer volume of information in the DEIS, the League needs more time to adequately review the material and prepare detailed commentary on its contents. We ask the Town Board to keep the public hearing open to allow the League and other groups and members of the community sufficient time to provide meaningful feedback on this important project. We also ask the Town Board to provide ample notice to the community of when the public hearing will be scheduled to close. We think this would best be accomplished with a town-wide mailing, so everyone in the community is aware of the window to comment on Chappaqua Crossing and how to access the DEIS and other relevant information.

Thank you.