

Spider Barbour 7 Peaks letter to Shawangunk Journal– 1/1/13

To the Editor,

For over a decade I have provided environmental science consultation for the Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA) regarding projects in Mamakating, including the Yukiguni Mushroom Plant and the Seven Peaks project, as part of the Town's environmental review. Seven Peaks is back in the news because its developer, Shalom Lamm, has been touting its virtues in person and in print. Yet hardly any hard information has been made public about the project's reanimation. The Shawangunk Journal's recent coverage has consisted of articles about and interviews with Mr. Lamm, and letters to the editor in response.

BKAA provided me with a letter from Seven Peaks engineer Thomas Reilly to the Mamakating Town Planning Board, and a revised map of project changes that "eliminate future potential impacts." In his 1/24/13 Journal interview, Mr. Lamm claims these changes have "*dramatically shrunk the size*" of the project. What are these changes? First the hotel is dropped from the plan. But the hotel is no longer relevant to review. Its impacts were not assessed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Also, reserving the hotel and additional single-family housing amounts to segmentation, illegal for a project of this scale.

As Andy Willingham (David Clouser & Associates) pointed out in his Journal letter of 2/14/2013, the hotel was not buildable to begin with because of impacts to sewer and water, emergency services access, and attendant traffic problems. Willingham also reminds that contrary to DEC instruction, the new plan does not reduce the number of lots. 49 lots puts the project just under 50, at which stricter standards kick in. This is no accident.

What do the maps reveal? The Reilly memo claims that "relocation of Lot 29" adds green space and "eliminates impacts on Barrens Buckmoth habitat," and "relocation of Lots 25 and 30" increases green space around wetlands. True or false? Both, it seems. The maps of the old plan and new plan are so mismatched that even Mr. Reilly's memo gets them wrong. All the lots have been renumbered, so that no lot numbers match from one map to the other.

But it really doesn't matter. The relocated lots are as much a threat as before, but just to *different* sensitive natural areas, including wetlands and critical habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species. The genuinely new lots would have *greater*

impacts, and also some old lots, newly enlarged with longer driveways. Additionally, the realigned two-way access drive will probably not accommodate emergency services. It is still too steep, with a nearly 30-degree sharp turn just below its junction with the relocated main road. Its larger footprint will increase impacts on critical natural resources.

The new plan will not mitigate impacts identified by NYSDEC or by me in my previous comments to BKAA and DEC. Unique wetlands and high-quality rare upland habitats will suffer no less than under the first plan. Rare, Threatened and Endangered species found on the site are just as likely to decline or die out, common species too. The new plan is worse, not better.

In his 2/7/13 letter to the journal Mr. Lamm lauds the social benefits of capitalism. The benefits he selectively mentions are undeniable. But the benefits of Seven Peaks accrue only to its potential residents, a moneyed elite representing over 1% of the U.S. citizenry, but not much more. The rest of us, not 99% but pretty close, are given a tiny strip of trail hanging on a cliff edge, set off from the houses of the holy, the social benefit as vacuous as the environmental benefit. As for the "trail" there is no plan, no connection, no walkable path – beam us across, Scotty. The full, rich experience of the ridge, now available for 100% of us, should not become an increasingly degraded environment for the few that can only get worse over time.

Seven Peaks will, for once and forever, sever the spine of the Shawangunk Ridge, a globally precious ecosystem. The corridor, upon which all life relies in that lovely, lofty world, will be bashed and broken. We can't let that happen. Let's keep the Ridge a wonderful place to visit for everyone, not just a gated, degraded place to live for a very few.

Spider Barbour

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