

TO: Chairperson Susan Meaney and Members of the TOW Planning Board

FR: Adelaide Camillo, Stanford Road, Millbrook NY

RE: Clear Subdivision second application (515 Woodstock Road)

DA: October 1, 2024

Dear Chairperson Meaney and Members of Town Planning Board:

The Comprehensive Plan of 1987, The Hudsonia Significant Habitats Study of 2004, and the Comp Plan of 2015 all recommended that the town identify environmentally sensitive areas -- wetlands, forest, steep slopes, open fields, and precious wildlife -- that require protection through zones that are *codified* into law.

That, sadly, has not been done by a single party Town Board that has ruled Washington for decades. These recommendations were based on multiple surveys of a community that overwhelmingly prioritized “preservation” of natural areas by over 95% majority.

Arch River Farm is one of those areas that should be part of a protective zone of contiguous forest and wetlands in the surrounding area. It should never be allowed to be subdivided, not only because of its long history as agricultural land in the ag district, but also because it is part of vital watersheds and is largely unbuildable swamp land. Consequently, it is excellent habitat for many birds and wildlife including species of concern. The US Fish and Wildlife Service already identified this area for species of special concern back in 2004 when we investigated this same land for another subdivision that abutted Arch River Farm and my property.

To reiterate points I made in my Sept 3 letter that bear repeating:

- 1) While the applicant submitted impressive volumes of material and due diligence that is commendable, it is the responsibility of the Town’s Planning Board to require independent biological analysis and not to rely on the developer’s interpretation of their own analysis. There is a lot to challenge and question in these documents. **Independent biologists** not affiliated with large corporate firms or developers are the preferred biologists without conflicts.
- 2) **This land must be restricted from further development. This is not a negotiable point.** It is a requirement and duty that is wholly within the right and purview of the town planning board.
- 3) As Planning Board members you are tasked with the awesome responsibility and solemn duty to **protect the “commons” for the whole community.** The “commons” are the natural resources that are shared by all members of society

whether they are resources that are on private or public lands. The air, water and habitable earth are not bound by property lines.

In closing, let me leave you with a bit of planning history so we can get perspective on how long truly protective planning has languished without driving leadership in the Town of Washington. In the mid 1980s and beyond, Fernando Nottebaum, PhD, of Rockefeller University was part of an inspired, diverse, and esteemed group of scientists and experts involved in the 1987 Comp Plan for the TOW (Dr. Gene Likens, Dr. Marc McDonnell and Dr. Joseph Warner of Cary Arboretum; Drs. Heather William and Stephen Clark of Rockefeller University; Joel Russell of DLC, members of Dutchess County Planning and others). **In a twelve-page letter dated Nov 30, 1987, Dr. Nottebaum wrote** (p.3) to the town Master Plan Committee Chair H. Curtis Place:

Embracing the concepts of natural beauty and rural character is an easy task. It is the next step, the translation of these concepts into public policy and ordinances which are both widely endorsed by the townspeople and enforceable, which is the challenge. Implicit in the adoption of such ordinances is the realization by the townspeople that natural ecosystems, such as forests, fields, streams and ponds, with their associated populations of plants and animals, have a value which is distinct from the return to be gained from the sale of land for intensive development.

He also wrote (p.2): It is possible to clear a forest, farm the land for 100 years and then let it go back to forest. Modern development is less reversible. Once an area is paved or built upon, it will continue to change but it will not go back to nature. For all practical purposes modern development is an irreversible process. This places a special responsibility on the generation that decides how much of nature should be destroyed, to be replaced by "improvements" that are virtually always for the worse.

This 1987 document goes on with many inspired and thoughtful recommendations: creating green corridors for wildlife, protection of streams and lakes with 200 and 300 foot vegetation buffers, protecting designated forests, adopting tree cutting ordinances, preservation of wetlands, and adoption of town ordinances that protect endangered species found in this town, and much more. History is on our side.

We are all **stewards** of this land and never in our history has that stewardship been challenged to rise up more urgently than now. The air we breathe, the water we drink and the land we share with a multitude of plants and wildlife in this town are not commodities to sell for profit, they are the most precious gifts all life depends on and we are required to protect them. It is a solemn responsibility. That is what good governance is really about.

Adelaide Camillo