

# Mailbag



## Guest Editorial

### Resort key to turnaround

By Dennis Metnick

We fell in love with these beautiful mountains more than 20 years ago. Like so many love affairs, it's complicated but worth the effort. It wasn't an easy transition, because of few restaurants, a decrepit movie theater, limited entertainment, and empty streets. But we grew to love, admire, and support this talented, hardworking community. We're older and the desire for a night out does not come around as often, which is a good thing. Because things have gotten worst, not better. Dozens of restaurants along Route 28 are gone. Weekend venues have closed or no longer offer the entertainment that enriched our local social lives. School rosters have shrunk as families depart. New businesses falter. Arts venues starve for audiences. For our communities to have a vibrant, stable economy, businesses cannot confine themselves to weekends only.

I am astounded when opponents say they are, "against a resort on Belleayre Mountain because it will ruin the character of the villages." I'm sorry: poverty is not a character that should be glorified. Derelict buildings and empty streets don't create rustic character: they create isolation, joblessness, illicit activity, and an exodus of families.

#### Creating real jobs

Opponents say that the plan favors developers and that public money to expand ski facilities will be slanted towards them. Carol O'Beirne, executive director of the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce rightly observes that "to spite the Project [opponents] would denounce the potential for any sizable increase in real jobs" and would deny opportunities to improve upgrades to Belleayre that would save energy and money, improve productivity, infrastructure, and safety, and give paying customers that which they would enjoy. She adds, "The arrogance astounds me." It astounds me, too.

Our streets were once filled with people patronizing dozens of restaurants. Substantial full-service hotels in turn supported smaller hostelries and businesses. When prosperous visitors came, the middle class followed. This has always been the case in areas that become tourist and second-home destinations. It can be again in our mountains. And, we have a protective advantage over other coastal and mountain regions. We can't be overdeveloped because so much land is owned by the State and the City. Unfortunately, fear of mega-development has gotten so extreme that we are currently unable to enjoy any economic balance.

Objectors to the original project plan raised valid environmental concerns that have been addressed, yet objections still fester. What is the real reason for their antipathy? Is it the selfish Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) mindset endemic in our society? Opponents fear that greater demands on infrastructure will impose traffic congestion and pollution. Yet when thousands of hotel rooms existed in the area, serviced by narrower roads and fueled by leaded gas, this wasn't a concern. The Resort plan includes LEED-certified structures, low light pollution measures, vegetated rooftops, sound pollution mitigation, use of local materials to reduce truck traffic, storm water pollution prevention measures to minimize erosion and sedimentation, and an organically maintained golf course. Our infrastructure can easily absorb far more activity than currently exists.

#### Change is coming

I caution opponents to understand that change will happen. The only question is "What kind of change?" If an area stagnates it eventually dies. Perhaps that is what they really want? Opponents of the Resort say there is a better way. Really? What have they proposed for which they have developed funds and a plan? To date, no entity – neither entrepreneurial nor community heritage-based group – has proposed a positive, concrete alternative plan to boost economic and social vitality.

The opponents' delaying tactic says, "We need to go with the third alternative," hoping the developers will give up. Two approaches endured the regulatory process. The one they now trumpet has not. That would mean wasting more years and creating greater poverty. They demand there be no ridgeline construction. There isn't. They fear additional massive flooding of Fleischmanns, hazards that have been scrutinized by the DEC, DEP, FEMA, and the Village. The new plan calls for minimal impermeable surfaces, underground parking, and so on.

#### Significant tax benefits

In addition, the plan will create significant tax monies from currently vacant land. I prefer that the eventual and inevitable shortfall in taxes are made up, in part, by a large employer that creates jobs and boosts local economy, rather than increasing tax burdens to homeowners and existing businesses.

I hope that those who support the Resort now recognize that they must become as active in supporting the project as those who are against it. They must write letters to the DEC and the Governor and – most important – attend and speak at the Public Hearing at Belleayre this evening. The Time is Now. Our economic future depends on it.

*Editor's note: Dennis Metnick, a local lawyer and owner of the Catskill Mediation Center, is the former Town Attorney of the Town of Middletown, past president of the MARK Board and past Vice Chair of Margaretville Hospital.*