

Guest Editorial

Belleayre Resort needed

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Fifteen years. That's how long it's been since the original announcement of plans for the Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park.

The Highmount resort plans were far more ambitious than any development proposed for this section of the Catskills — two golf courses, hundreds of lodging units and much more. Many people cheered what was anticipated to be a huge economic boost for the region. On the other side of the aisle, there was opposition from those concerned primarily about potential negative environmental impacts. Supporters and opponents backed their opinions with well-researched, factual information. The decade-long debate has often been heated, as each side has passionately argued its case.

In the time since the resort plans were first submitted for review, the blueprints have been altered dramatically. A golf course has been eliminated, the number of lodging units has been significantly reduced and the overall project footprint is much smaller than originally envisioned. Many other ecological matters have also been addressed.

Witnessing the concessions made by the developers, most of the environmental groups that had objected to the plan were eventually satisfied that their concerns had been adequately addressed and they have since pledged support for the plan.

My hope is that others, who may still have lingering resistance to the proposed resort, will be similarly satisfied with the most recent changes and are now willing to support this plan.

Substantial changes made

The Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park has met the stringent requirements of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, the state Health Department and other regulatory agencies. I hope the public will agree that the necessary due diligence has been completed and that the project should be allowed to proceed.

On a recent drive along Route 28, I counted approximately 20 restaurants that have closed in recent years. Many other businesses in the region have met a similar fate. The Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park is a unique venture that will deliver far-reaching benefits throughout our region. Far from being massive, the hundreds of units planned for the resort are a small fraction of the thousands of lodging units that once helped sustain the economic vitality of our region. The investment of nearly \$400 million to build the resort is a staggering figure. The positive impact on our tax base will be tremendous. That's just the start.

Hundreds of employees will be utilized to build the resort. These workers — from our region and out of the area — will bring much-needed revenue to local lodging, dining and retail establishments. Once the resort is operational, hundreds of new, well-paying jobs will be created. Our young citizens will be encouraged to stay with options both within the resort and also in our nearby communities where their energies are sorely needed.

On top of these immediate impacts will be the supplemental benefits from outside investors attracted to the region. This project will truly be a "game-changer" for our area.

Over the course of more than a decade, everyone has had ample time to express opinions on the project. The developers have listened and have scaled plans back considerably from their original proposal. It's time for all of us to unite in support of this plan. The Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park will present a much-needed economic boost that will serve as the catalyst for turning around our long-struggling region.

It's time to unite for the common good. Public comments on the resort are now being solicited. Please make your voice heard. Speak up and support the resort. We'll all benefit.