

LETTER: Get behind Belleayre Resort project

Published: Thursday, May 16, 2013

Dear Editor:

We, the elected municipal officials of the towns and villages in Ulster, Greene and Delaware counties, are writing to our regional media outlets, the Department of Environmental Conservation and state officials in support of the Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park.

We represent our municipalities and understand the powerful positive impact -- the needed impact -- this resort and the build-out of Belleayre Mountain Ski Center, can and will have on our area. We have also seen the long, slow and painful decline of our mountain main streets and communities.

Hunting and fishing licenses in New York, along with visits to our area, have dropped over 20 percent in the last 10 years. Our population is shrinking, and lodging units are down 90 percent since the 1950s and '60s, let alone a century ago. Additionally, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection is aggressively purchasing local properties that will forever be undevelopable, further limiting our choices and potential to expand and preserve for the next generations of native dwellers.

We take the view -- one that is based on facts, beginning with an acknowledged premise that we need this resort -- that we cannot afford more delays.

The average per capita income in Middletown and Shandaken is \$19,378.00; 14.4 percent of our neighbors in the towns live below the poverty line and more than half of our local school children are in the free lunch program. We need jobs that help young families not just survive, but thrive, buying homes and getting mortgages they can afford while providing future opportunities for their children. The resort will also offer seasonal employment that our local teenagers can fill only a few miles from home. To us, knowing our communities as we do, a good job is a job, period.

This area has many assets, too numerous to list here. But we know we lack enough quality lodging units for the many who would visit if they had somewhere -- a destination -- to stay, somewhere to schedule and hold conferences or family vacations, somewhere to bring friends for a spa break, a ski break -- all of which can be summed up in two words: Belleayre Resort. This kind of development project is completely in keeping with our history as a getaway for the many who live in the New York-New Jersey Metro area.

Once upon a time, between Pine Hill, Highmount, Fleischmanns and surrounding areas, there were 10,000 hotel rooms. We need this opportunity to be a destination once more.

At 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on May 29 at Belleayre Mountain there will be public hearings on the Resort at Catskill Park. We're urging the many -- the majority -- who agree with us to come out in force as a public "yes" to the Resort. Please join the conversation and show your support for what will be the economic engine this area has long needed and desired. It's our resort, too!

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The first five signers are, respectively, supervisors of Olive, Middletown, Halcott, Andes and Robury. The last two are, respectively, mayors of Fleischmanns and Margaretville.

