

Editorial: Belleayre expansion plan encouraging and realistic

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Only two winters ago the future of the Belleayre Ski Center in Highmount appeared bleak. Not enough snow and not enough skiers had combined with the feeling that the area was not high on the priority list for its parent, the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Should the area close, which was a possibility, it would be a blow to the local economy.

Even the state transfer from the DEC to an operator with expertise in running ski areas, the Olympic Regional Development Authority, raised as many doubts as spirits. Talk of efficiency seemed to threaten local jobs and talk of better marketing had the scent of desperation. Marketing is fine but it can't lure skiers where there is not enough snow and not enough good skiing.

This winter, nature came through with more snow and more cold. Now, details of the long-awaited plan to expand Belleayre have been made public and there is every reason to believe in the predictions that some day it could double the number of skiers and create hundreds of new jobs.

By renovating existing lodges and lifts, then adding a new lodge as well as three parking areas, three lifts and 16 trails, the area would be in a position to fulfill some of those marketing promises and compete with other areas in the region.

All of that adds up to a plausible promise that the area could stop losing money and earn an annual profit of more than \$1 million. A profit is nice, but more important is the understanding that the ability to earn one means that the area will be able to stay open.