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June 16, 2015

Tim Miller Associates

10 North Street

Cold Spring, New York 10516

Dear Mr. Miller and associates:

This letter is in reference to the Kiryas Joel annexation environmental impact statement hearing of June 10. I would like to expand, and in one instance correct, my verbal statement.

I prefer to speak and write about Schunнемunk Mountain environment generally, but am unable to understand the maps, so confine my remarks to Gonzaga Park, on Schunнемunk Mountain.

First, Gonzaga Park is small. According to the County property website, it is 115.7 acres in size (correction: *not* the much smaller size I had gleaned from Town tax maps). In one or two directions, paths are marked closed. Because of this relatively small size, losing 7 acres would have a significant impact. More specifically, it is unclear but seems that this decrease would take place at the entrance. Compromising accessibility is crucial, of course, and, in fact, might compromise the entire parcel; given the narrow steep terrain after the entrance gate, access might be impossible. In addition, parking for hikers outside the gate (during winter hours when the park has been closed during the last years) would probably be impossible. Maps do not reveal whether or not the small pond, the glory of the Park, the home of dragonflies, now home to a picnic table --- where several people have fished, as one elder had done with his family as a child, or its stream, would be part of the lost 7 acres.

Second, Gonzaga has already had a complicated history. It was the home of the Novitiate of St. Andrew on Hudson since the twenties and of Jesuits since the seventies, then of RECAP. The State took it over in 1995, eventually demolishing a magnificent stone building. Reportedly, the extraordinary woodwork inside had been vandalized --- even burned --- many times. The man who supervised the demolition told me that, in the end, he had to sleep on the site. On the last night, seven groups tried to enter. The State also thankfully cleaned up enormous amounts of heavy trash thrown down a steep slope, as well as a couch, tires, and everything-else-you-could-imagine in the pond. In 2004, the State turned Gonzaga over to the County for a public park. It opened in 2012.

The deed for this transaction specifies that:

This grant is made and accepted upon the condition that said Premises shall be improved and maintained for park, recreation and playground purposes. In the event that said Premises are not improved and maintained for said purposes, the title hereby conveyed shall revert to The People of the State of New York and the Attorney General may institute an action in the Supreme Court for a judgment declaring a reversion of such title in the State.

Regarding the parking and the trailhead, it further specifies:

Grantor reserves the right but not the obligation to construct a parking area and trailhead near the intersection of the aforementioned trail easement and the northerly line of Seven Springs Road, said parking area to be limited to a maximum of twenty (20) cars, the exact location of said trailhead and parking area to be determined by agreement between the Grantor (or the Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on behalf of the Grantor) and Grantee.

Grantee covenants and agrees that the portion of the herein described Premises lying above contour elevation 1060 feet U. S. G. S. Quadrangle (Monroe) shall not be improved or developed except for open space purposes or as required by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for the management and maintenance of the aforementioned trail easement.

Finally, during the several years it has been operating as an Orange County Park, it has developed into a small but lovely well-maintained community park. On or near borders between Kiryas Joel, Woodbury, South Blooming Grove, and Monroe, it welcomes all. Young *Hasidic* men and others have, for many years, hiked Schunnemunk Mountain ridge from the park, greeting each other peacefully as we hikers do. The ballfield is used by *Hasidim* and others alike. Passive recreation park activities such as nature education, picnicking, fishing, walking, birding, even meditation and praying, go on among all groups. It is a place, an environment, where so-called different peoples can appreciate nature: flowers planted by previous owners, foxes, views, alone or together, as we wish, but where in time we are also learning to communicate. It is one of the few places where that is happening, where there is hope that it can continue to happen and to develop. Personally, it is my hope that our children and grandchildren will play together. Perhaps it is time for that playground that is mentioned in the deed.

In conclusion, I speak and write against the annexation of any part of Gonzaga Park. Any annexation would have negative detrimental impact on the Park --- and thereby on Schunnemunk Mountain --- in these specific ways: size, access, parking, functionality, viewshed, access to trails, protection of ridge and pond/stream, wildlife, human relations, and fundamentally its legality.

Thank you for your attention to this new and growing public park that we share.

Sincerely



Kate S. Ahmadi, Ph. D.

citizen, Blooming Grove