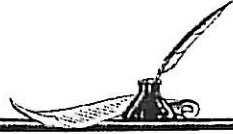


EDITORIAL



The Darkling Plains of Dover; We Sound the Alarm

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

When the first settlers in these parts named Dover Plains a few of them must have come from the English port town of Dover, a town that had no plains, but, rather, the chalk cliffs immortalized in a poem by Matthew Arnold. As a point of departure, Dover may have been the last glimpse of England that a sea traveler may have had. It was also these cliffs that figured in Gloucester's dialogue on his destiny in *King Lear*; it was there that Arnold stood, considering "ignorant armies" clashing through history, a history destined to be repeated.

We raise the question of origins in exploring the destiny of that economically stressed town at the edge of Dutchess and our own neighbor. That part of Dover called Wingdale, known as the site of an empty and abandoned state institution for the insane, the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center, faces a future heavily burdened by the mistakes of the past. An overly ambitious program of building edifices has left the town with the asbestos laden brick remains of buildings no longer useful. The cost of demolition is so great the developer who now has title does not even allude to them in its DEIS, now before the Dover town board. The finances of this slightly improbable development should be fully explored to see if the developer has a viable scheme, especially since he does not intend to fully deal with the inventory of 83 old structures until the first phase is well under way. By then the developer may have exited, leaving the town, or another developer, to deal with the demolition problem.

The majority of the Dover Plains town board seems intent on pushing the developer's approval process, discounting the objections raised in the environmental review process as useless rhetoric. A hurried SEQRA process usually results in litigation. The towns that have failed to adequately consider the impacts usually lose.

The process in Dover is a reminder to us that politics, economics and environmental issues don't mix well at all. They inevitably clash. Environmental considerations do count, but few politicians are convinced. They too often put expediency first, as it appears Dover is determined to do. SEQRA only works if the participants respect the law. When towns refuse to hire their own consultants, refuse to make their own independent findings, when they turn the whole process over to the developer and say, "here, you do it and we'll approve it", then the process has been undermined, the results skewed, the damage everlasting. Loss of forests, habitats, pollution of land and water and air, these are losses from which there may be no recovery. Loss of biodiversity, landslides, floods, erosion and pollution may take not centuries but eons to reverse, or, perhaps never. The issues Dover Plains face in this and other developments in the wings are intense. They require the talents of professionals far beyond the capacity of those presently employed by this town. Their future is our future, for we share this planet and this land just as we share the air and the water.

Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind. - *King Lear*

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