

Friends of Clifton Park Open Space
P.O. Box 821
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Letters to the Editor
Community News
Clifton Corporate Park
Clifton Park, New York 12065

In December, 2003, FCPOS sent a letter to the Clifton Park Planning Board suggesting that any proposal to develop an Exxon-Mobil combined gas station, convenience store/carwash at Ushers Road and Van Patten Drive near Exit 10 be accompanied by a public hearing. As this project comes under additional review, we renew our call for this public forum.

Concerns about this project have been expressed, in writing, by numerous groups, including members of the Town Board, the Building Department and the NYS Association of Service Stations and Repair Shops. Comments have ranged from outright opposition to serious concerns from citizens about traffic safety and disruption of the country-like character of the area.

As noted in some of the correspondence already received on this project, there are already two vacated gas stations at Exit 9 which have considerably more traffic to support such ventures. Also, a prior application from the Stewart's Shops at Ushers Road for a gasoline facility was rejected by the Planning Board. In essence, **approval of this Exxon/Mobil facility could trigger one or more applications for similar stations that would be almost impossible to deny.**

Furthermore, it is a reality that, in most cases, the **failure or closure of gas stations results in a significant responsibility to the public, because few other commercial enterprises want to purchase and reuse the land when there is a high probability of environmental damage and expensive restitution.** We are not aware of any requirement that a company operating a gas station posts a permanent bond for purposes of eventual or inevitable environmental clean-up, but it is something that should be considered.

As we understand the situation, the parcel under consideration is zoned for light industrial use. The current project does not meet that definition. Therefore, a special use permit is required to proceed. It is our understanding that Town Law requires a public hearing for such exceptions. In light of growing concerns from a wide variety of groups, not the least of which is local residents, we renew the call for a public hearing. Furthermore, we believe it is important that it be scheduled at a time and place which will allow for meaningful citizen participation. July and August are notoriously difficult times for people to turn out. If the public meetings on the GEIS in western Clifton Park can be used as examples, it is equally important to: pick a location which allows people to be seated together, be able to hear each others comments, and have their questions and concerns addressed without standing in hallways or outside the common

room. As a general commentary and not a criticism of the current Planning Board, we are a community of over 35,000 people and we need to manage these participatory processes more intelligently.

Secondly, we urge the Planning Board to deliberate on the proposed project from a broader perspective rather than as an insolated parcel of land. There are several residential neighborhoods in this area as well as a number of trails. The Town's interest in extending trail networks and securing smaller pocket parks could apply here. This coupled with the current view shed, which is quite remarkable, could effectively conform to and enhance the attractiveness of the area. By looking at the "bigger picture" The Planning Board is less likely to succumb to the often-used tactic of impact mitigation. Reducing the size of a sign, or changing traffic patterns and traffic signals, building artificial berms and planting shrubs will not make the Mobil-Exxon project a more beautiful place than it is now.

The Town's comprehensive Plan and Open Space Plan formally embody the Town's movement to drive both open space and continued development into a more singular, overarching design. These goals and ideals—derived after extensive input from all segments of the residential and business communities—have as much value as any artificial price tag for commercial development, wholly contingent on the town granting a particular exception to validate the asking price for a single parcel or project.

In light of this second concern for a more comprehensive planned approach, we again call upon the Planning Board to hold a public hearing at an appropriate time and place on the request before it for a special use permit for this Exxon-Mobil proposal at Ushers Road.

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