



Water filtration plant proposal moves on from WJWW Board to County Legislature

Rye Brook's Bradbury: "The Village wants the water filtration plant built asap."

By Dick Hubert

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The efforts by residents of Purchase Street in Harrison and their friends and supporters from the Purchase Environmental Protective Association (PEPA) to stop or delay the planned construction of a \$138 million water filtration plant which would provide clean filtered water to over 100,000 local residents – including all water users in Rye Brook and Port Chester - suffered another setback last Thursday, Sept. 28.

That's when the Board of the Westchester Joint Water Works (WJWW), led by Mamaroneck Village Mayor Thomas Murphy, voted to approve the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed court-mandated plant that has been delayed for some two decades.

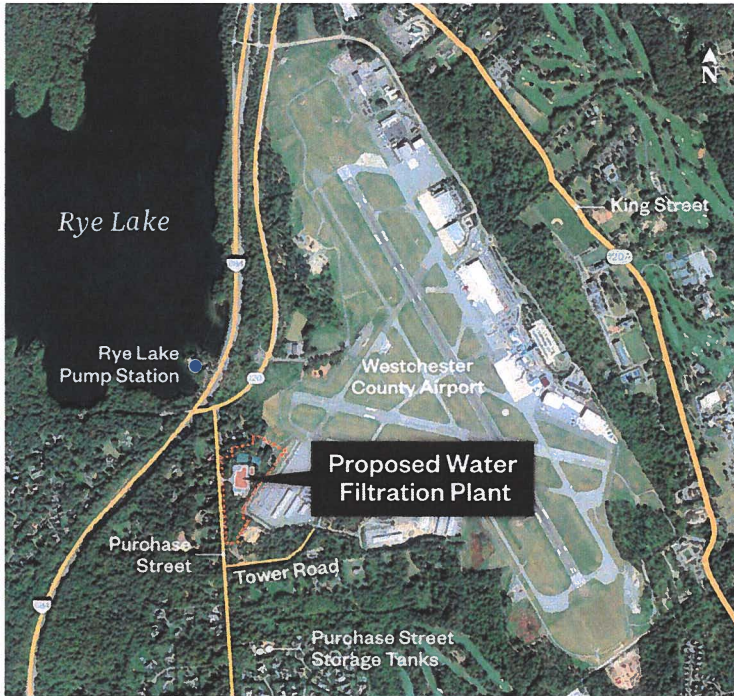
The vote was cheered by, among others, Rye Brook Village Administrator Chris Bradbury. "The Village wants the water filtration plant built asap so that the wholesale water purchased by Veolia (Rye Brook and Port Chester's water supplier) from WJWW is filtered like it is with the water they purchase from Aquarian in CT," he wrote in an email.

PEPA's Executive Director Anne Gold and other supporters watched the WJWW vote via a Zoom connection on the internet. No comments were allowed during this phase of the FEIS process.

In a post meeting interview with the Westmore News, Murphy said: "I understand the proposed site, which will now be the chosen site, has produced a lot of angst and anxiety in the community. But it really is the best site to locate this facility."

Murphy added that the construction of the plant "will avoid crippling fines that are held over our heads by the federal government in communities that can ill afford to pay that price. ... We are in negotiation with the federal government. The potential (in fines) is \$160 million. ... For 20 years we have had the responsibility for creating this plant, and the federal government is done waiting."

As the WJWW's media team said in a news release: "The proposed project calls for the construction and operation of a 30-million-gallon per day Dissolved Air Flotation/Filtration (DAFF) plant in the



An aerial view of where the plant will be sited adjacent to Westchester County Airport. Westchester Joint Water Works

"For 20 years we have had the responsibility for creating this plant, and the federal government is done waiting."

--Thomas Murphy, chairperson of the WJWW board and Mamaroneck mayor

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Town of Harrison on 13.4 acres of land with access to Purchase Street and directly adjacent to existing water transmission facilities located beneath the Purchase Street right of way. The land, currently owned by Westchester County, is planned to be apportioned from the Westchester County Airport property in exchange for a deed from WJWW for an equivalent 13.4-acre parcel it owns nearby. The exchange will result in no net loss or gain to Westchester County or WJWW."

That land swap, which must be approved by the County Legislature, has been manipulated by PEPA to delay or stop the plant's construction—and those efforts continue today.

In a letter dated Oct. 20, 2005, Sylvan Development, owners of land adjacent to the then planned location of the WJWW filtration plant, appealed to the Harrison Town Board, then in charge of the site review process, to force the WJWW to "aggressively pursue the relocation of the plant" from 12 Stone Ridge Rd. to County Airport land because "the facility as currently proposed would destroy all market value for the construction of high end residential homes located on the access road to such a facility."

That aided PEPA in bringing the plant construction planning process to a standstill.

In what can only be described as a 180-degree switch of position, on Aug. 31, 2022, on behalf of Sylvan Development, Michael Tokarz argued that the WJWW's current planned site on County Airport land should be moved back to the 12 Stone Ridge Rd. site adjacent to Sylvan Development's property.

Among other reasons, Tokarz stated that:

*"Having an enormous industrial building (44 foot high) within view of Purchase Street is detrimental to the residents of Purchase Street in the immediate area and will further diminish the residential character of Purchase Street.

*Construction of the water filtration plant at the airport location is contrary to the Town of Harrison comprehensive plan.

*Placing the water filtration plant so close to the historic Quaker meeting house will detrimentally impact the Quakers and may also have potential negative impacts on what may be important archeological sites."

Tokarz, advised by Eric Gordon of the law firm Keane & Beane (coincidentally, the attorneys for the Village of Rye Brook), sent the letter to the current WJWW Board, with copies to, among others, County Executive George Latimer and County Legislators Nancy Barr and Catherine Parker.

It was received by the WJWW Board as another outrageous effort by PEPA and its allies to delay the plant or kill it.

Asked for reaction to the latest Sylvan letter, WJWW Board Chairperson Murphy told the Westmore News: "My mother taught me when I was young: 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me...My constituents can't afford a mistake that would cost them dearly."

Again, as the media team for the WJWW wrote in its release: "Following completion of the Final EIS, there is a statutory 10-day waiting period to allow agencies and the public to review the document. WJWW is then expected to issue its Findings Statement, which is the final step in the SEQRA review. The WJWW Board has a scheduled meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 12."

After that meeting, the process moves to the County Legislature for approval of the land swap so the plant can be built on County Airport land.

Murphy's take?

"The County Legislature is comprised of very responsible people who will do what's best for the community at large. That's what we're all elected to do. This is about the greater good," he concluded.

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