



Latimer promises 'detailed examination' as filtration plant battle enters new phase

By Dick Hubert

Thursday, June 15, 2023 1:18 AM

County Executive George Latimer has finally, in public, addressed dealing with the ultimate approval for the Westchester County Airport land swap that would enable the Westchester Joint Water Works (WJWW) to build its court-ordered water filtration plant on Purchase Street in Harrison.

In a June 2 letter to WJWW Manager Paul Kutzy, received June 7 by WJWW, Latimer told Kutzy to submit a letter to both him and County Board of Legislators Chair Vedat Gashi to outline the process for County review and action on the land swap.

Latimer wrote:

"The letter should be accompanied by relevant documents including, but not limited to:

- *Environmental Review materials
- *Relevant reports/correspondence by other government regulatory agencies
- *Design documents as may be available
- *Financial documents on the costs of plant construction and operation
- *Public comments and communications on the proposed action
- *Draft legal documents to effectuate the land transaction."

Latimer told Kutzy to make five copies of the material for the Executive Branch and 20 for the Board of Legislators.

He further emphasized that Kutzy must explain in detail why "Site 2 is superior to Site 1."

"We understand, Latimer wrote, opposition to Site 1 no longer exists. WJWW is asking the County to make a decision for which the County will bear the brunt of public controversy. This may well affect other sensitive issues the County is dealing with at the Airport. Therefore, I expect both the County's Executive Branch and Legislative Branch will conduct a detailed examination of the matter."

Latimer's 'public controversy' and political headache

The "public controversy" to which Latimer refers is the multi-decade opposition to the existence of the plant by Purchase Street landowner and multi-billionaire Michael Tokarz, his colleagues at the Purchase Environmental Protective Association (PEPA) and, more recently, the Purchase Friends Meeting House. The Quakers have been behind a major "Stop the Swap" campaign.

After stymying the plant for decades, Tokarz switched positions when WJWW found a second and, from the WJWW engineering point of view, far better site on airport land for the plant. At that point, Tokarz told the WJWW to go back to Site #1.

Tokarz' change of heart prompted WJWW Chair Thomas Murphy, mayor of the Village of Mamaroneck, to refuse to go along with the "Stop the Swap" effort championed by PEPA and the Quakers.

As Murphy told the Westmore News for an Oct. 5, 2022 story: "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."

Not heard from in the same fashion, but at the heart of the controversy are all the water users, including the entire circulation area of the Westmore News in Rye Brook and Port Chester, who have been waiting decades for their court-mandated filtered water.

Latimer concluded his letter: "Let me be clear: I personally expect the WJWW professional staff, leadership, and relevant consultants to defend this request. The municipal leaders who serve as the official leaders of the agency are focused primarily on the impact of Federal fines on their constituents and taxpayers. It is the professional staff and consultants who have recommended

this proposal, and I expect you to provide a cogent, persuasive analysis that can address the reasonable objections, or failing that will find the path to satisfy the Federal mandate without Site 2. That is the task ahead."

Latimer copied Village of Mamaroneck Mayor Thomas Murphy; Rich Dionisio, supervisor/mayor of the Town/Village of Harrison; and Jaine Elkind Eney, supervisor of the Town of Mamaroneck.

He did not copy Mayor Luis Marino of Port Chester or Rye Brook Mayor Jason Klein, who works for Latimer as his Director of Conservation.

Responding to Latimer's letter, WJWW's Kutzy wrote in an email:

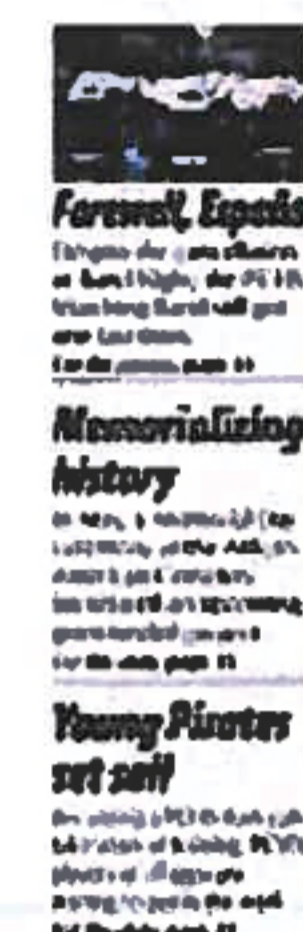
"I am pleased that the County Executive has outlined the process towards County consideration of the land swap. The WJWW team of environmental, engineering, planning and legal professionals are currently working diligently on preparation of a comprehensive response to the letter, which will be sent to the County Executive in the coming days."

Search

GO

NEWS Weekly Round-up

Sign up for news delivered right to your inbox

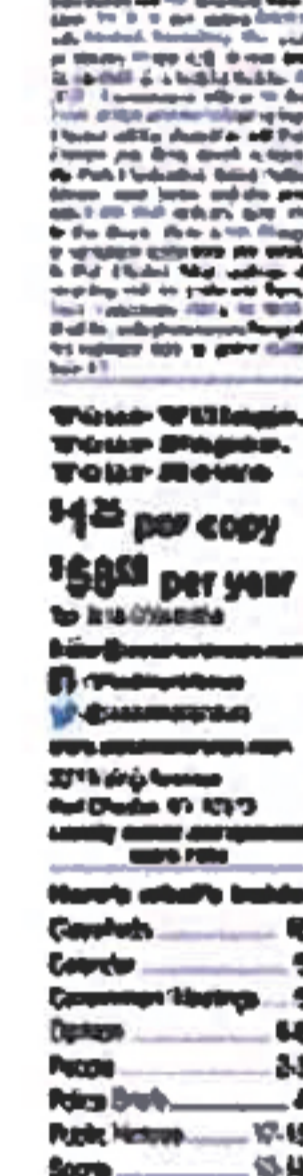


PORT CHESTER NEWS

Ken Force gave me the gift of music



New PCHS band members named after a local legend...



Refurbished ball field is ready for play at Recreation Park



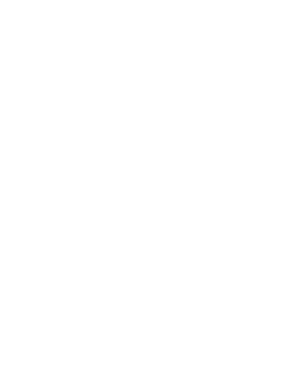
The \$100,000 ball field at Recreation Park is ready for play...



Amateur holiday schedule for the year...



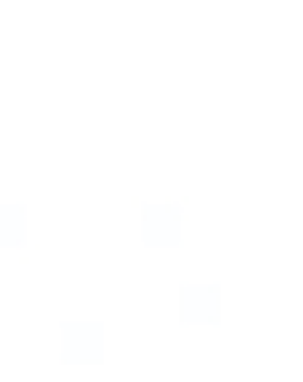
Young Pioneers set sail for their annual voyage...



Assault on a bridge in the city...



Memorializing history in the town...



Foreign, Espino, and other news...