

County Legislature approves land swap to pave way for water filtration plant

Latimer says he will sign the bills but emphasizes there will be no airport expansion

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This aerial view from Westchester Joint Water Works shows their ideal land swap location for their water filtration plant on Purchase Street which was approved by the Westchester County Board of Legislators Monday evening, Apr. 8. The alternate site owned by WJWW was swapped with this one and the County Board agreed never to develop it. (Courtesy photo of Westchester Joint Water Works)

By **DICK HUBERT** | Comments: 0 | [Leave a comment](#)
Columnist

The Westchester County Legislature voted 15-1 Monday evening, Apr. 8, to approve the County Airport land swap with Westchester Joint Water Works (WJWW) which would allow that utility to build its court-mandated water filtration plant on a 13.7-acre parcel of land adjoining Purchase Street and the Quaker Friends Meeting House.

At the same time, the Legislature approved a law keeping the swapped 13.7-acre parcel of airport land forever undeveloped.

That lack of development had been a demand of the new owner of 26 acres adjacent to that parcel, Virgil Price of 6 Wolfe Ln. in Purchase, who supported the land swap after purchasing the property from a longtime opponent of the swap, Purchase-based billionaire entrepreneur Michael Tokarz.

County Executive George Latimer, in an online interview with the Westmore News after the Legislature's vote, said: "15-1 vote. I will sign it. Want to make it clear the land we get in return will not be party of any airport expansion. Period."

Latimer's position was telegraphed in a letter he wrote to the Westmore News published in the Mar. 22 edition answering a letter attacking the land swap by spokespersons for the Quaker Friends Meeting.

He wrote then:

"The Letter to the Editor from members of the Purchase Friends Meeting outlined their reasons for opposing the WJWW land swap under consideration by the County Board of Legislators. Notwithstanding their other arguments, speculation or assertion that the swapped parcel would allow for Westchester County Airport expansion is completely and wholly untrue. The County has followed a no expansion policy during my six-year tenure as County Executive, and there are no plans whatsoever to use this land or any other parcel for expansion purposes. We expect any legislative language will make clear that point, over and above my expression of Executive Branch intent.

Whatever concerns people may have over the WJWW proposal, they ought not impute County intent to do anything that expands airport operations; it is a willful misrepresentation to raise that as a question, leading people to think it is a possibility. It is not.

My position on this has been clear and continues to be clear. Such speculation is off base."

Looking at the County Legislature's vote

The 15-1 vote came after a joint meeting of three legislative committees in the early afternoon of Apr. 8 unanimously voted 9-0 to refer land swap approval to the full Legislature for their vote.

The three committees were the Legislation Committee, the Public Works and Transportation Committee, and the Parks and Environment Committee.

Among those voting unanimously for the three land swap legislative items was Nancy Barr, the legislator for District 6 which includes Rye Brook and Port Chester.

Barr also represents parts of Harrison which include longtime opponents of the land swap including the Quaker Friends Meeting and Purchase Street residents, many represented by the Purchase Environmental Protective Association (PEPA).

The one negative vote during the full legislative meeting came from Terry Clements, the Majority Whip for the Democrats who represents District 11, which includes New Rochelle, Pelham, and Pelham Manor. E-mails to Clement's office asking for an explanation of her vote were not answered by press time.

David T. Imamura, the District 12 Democrat who represents Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Greenburgh, Hastings-on-Hudson and Irvington, recused himself from attending committee hearings and voting because he works for a law firm that represented opponents of the land swap.

It's not a done deal yet for WJWW

Now that the County has signed off on the land swap, the whole process is not over yet. Not only must various regulatory agencies (like the New York State Department of Conservation) still give their final approvals, but the Harrison Planning Board must approve the project. How long that process will take is still up in the air.

Throughout the two-decade effort by opponents to defeat the plant's construction, first on the previous land and now on the County approved parcel, the Harrison Planning Board has been the last stronghold of land swap opponents.

Comments:

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