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Kerzner, Paul

From: PII
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2001 2:24 PM
To: PII
Cc: PII

Subject: Needs our immediate attention!

From: Staci-lee Sherwood
Date: 16 Jun 2001
Time: 13:42:18
Remote Name: 208.219.109.201

Comments

This is an open request to all people who read this. In Ulster County there is a development proposal called Belleayre Golf Resort. This is a massive development comprising of hundreds of houses, condos, stores, hotels, tennis courts, roads and two golf courses all built on top of a mountain that is NYC watershed. All the chemicals from the construction needed to build this, plus the pesticides on the golf courses will flow down the mountain into the two reservoirs that supply 90% of your unfiltered drinking water. This is extremely dangerous and reckless for this development to even be considered. The developer and his allies feel that the city owns too much of their land and doesn't care if your water is contaminated. He also had the zoning secretly changed to allow this project and has secretly bought the towns water supply. Clearly he has no ethics and cannot be trusted. Especially with your watershed. His allies feel that the city uses extreme tactics already and don't understand the need to protect the water. Most people DO want to protect your water because it would really benefit both upstate and downstate. It would help open up communication for everyone which would lead to a more positive partnership but we need your help ASAP. Please write a letter opposing the Belleayre Golf Resort from being approved. Contamination of the watershed and reservoirs is a given with this type of development. It has happened before. Those of us who care are trying to stop it but we need your help, we need you and everyone you know to speak out now so that your water is kept safe. Plus your taxes will have to increase in order to pay for a filtration facility (that will cost more than \$6,000,000,000) if your water is contaminated. We don't feel that you should have to drink contaminated water or pay higher taxes. We feel this can be avoided. It is probably easier for everyone to send the letters to me than to mail copies to a dozen other parties. My address is below and if anyone has anyone has any questions please feel free to contact me. We must all work together to protect this precious resource now and for future generations. Staci-lee Sherwood PO Box 62 Bloomington, NY 12411 lobbyistfortheplanet@yahoo.com

6/21/01

Kerzner, Paul

From: kerznerp@coned.com
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2001 4:06 PM
To: kerznerp@coned.com
Subject: NYTimes.com Article: A Catskills Resort Plan Draws Opposition

This article from NYTimes.com
has been sent to you by kerznerp@coned.com.

Jim: here's the Txs article on the Catskill watershed development. pak

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A Catskills Resort Plan Draws Opposition

By ROBERT WORTH

HANDAKEN, N.Y. — There were snickers and snide comments five years ago when Dean L. Gitter built Catskill Corners, a gaudy gift-shop mall featuring the world's largest kaleidoscope and a silo painted with psychedelic designs. Even Mr. Gitter, an actor-turned-developer who wears a cowboy hat and ponytail, seemed happy to poke fun at his hucksterish image, promoting himself as "the P.T. Barnum of the Catskills."

But few people here, Mr. Gitter included, are laughing about his latest proposal, for a \$300 million resort atop a mountain in the heart of the Catskill Park.

It is the largest development ever proposed in the state park: a 500-acre complex with two 18-hole golf courses, two hotels, several lodges and hundreds of time-share residences. To slake its thirst, Mr. Gitter has bought the local water company. And in the process, he has split this normally peaceful town into two angry camps and drawn fire from environmental groups in Albany and even from New York City mayoral candidates.

To some, the resort is a godsend that could jump-start the depressed economy of this quiet hideaway in Ulster County, about 125 miles northwest of Manhattan. Others warn that it will mar the landscape and contaminate the nearby reservoirs that supply most of New York City's drinking water.

At the very least, the project is expected to pose the biggest test yet for the fragile agreement the city and state reached with

upstate communities four years ago to keep the reservoirs clean. Under that agreement, the city gives towns in the watershed money to promote economic development, and the towns in return have dropped their long resistance to water-protection efforts.

The state environmental officials who will soon review the resort proposal face a tricky decision. If they order it scaled back, Mr. Gitter and his allies, who supported the watershed accord, are likely to say they have been betrayed because they believed the pact would encourage projects like theirs. But if the state approves the project, environmentalists warn, water quality will suffer and the federal government could follow through on its threat to force the city to spend billions of dollars on a filtration plant.

"This project is shaping up as an unavoidable test of the state's commitment to watershed protection," said Eric Goldstein, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council, who has included the resort project on a list of issues to raise with New York City mayoral candidates. Already, two of those candidates, City Council Speaker Peter F. Vallone and Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi, have spoken out against the plan.

Reviving tourism has long been a preoccupation in the Catskills, where flashy resorts drew tens of thousands of visitors each year until the 1960's. A number of major developments have been proposed in recent years, including plans for a \$500 million hotel and conference center at the former Concord Hotel, south of the Catskill Park in Kiamesha Lake.

But in the park, "nothing proposed or discussed is anywhere near the scale and scope of this proposed development," said James M. Tierney, an assistant state attorney general who serves as the inspector general for the city's watershed.

Before publicizing their proposal in late 1999, Mr. Gitter and his partners acquired 2,000 acres for the complex, to be called the Belleayre Resort, after the mountain where it would surround the small, state-run Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. They will soon submit a detailed plan to the State Department of Environmental Conservation, which will then seek public comment and make a decision.

Although about three-quarters of the land would remain undeveloped except for nature trails, opponents say the plan could endanger two of New York City's most important reservoirs with pesticides and soil erosion from the golf course, along with runoff from new roads and traffic and development fostered by the resort.

Any project this large is bound to stir opposition. But Mr. Gitter's flamboyant style has provoked a special rancor among many of the year-round residents and summer people who chose Shandaken (pronounced shan-DAKE-in) for its remoteness and tranquillity.

"This is the most controversial thing a sleepy town like this has ever seen," said the town supervisor, Wayne Guttman. "And Mr. Gitter's personality does get involved."

The developer, who began his business career by recording the folk-music legend Odetta's first major album in the late 1950's and went on to earn an M.B.A. at Harvard, clearly has big dreams. A decade ago, he tried to build a \$500 million cultural theme park and trade center near Baltimore with the help of the former Democratic presidential candidate Paul Tsongas and a \$23 million investment from the Chinese government, but the project foundered, in part because of local opposition.

Mr. Gitter, 65, moved here from Boston in 1971 to be with his guru, Rudrananda, known locally as Rudy, who ran an ashram here. Mr. Gitter still follows Rudy's teachings and maintains a small outdoor shrine to the guru's memory. From the silo at Catskill Corners, a painted pair of Buddha eyes stare out at the mountains.

But Mr. Gitter's spiritual talk conceals a ruthless businessman, said Peter DiModica, an opponent of the project who runs an antiques shop. Opponents have accused the developer of getting town and county officials to help him gain control of one hamlet's water supply to use for his resort.

Mr. Gitter dismisses those accusations as a ploy to kill his project, which he calls "a civic-minded effort to do good. I have been painted into a posture of villainy," he said during an interview at the Emerson Inn, a \$7 million venture that is his largest successful project so far.

He conceded that the \$300 million Belleayre resort would be a quantum leap for him, and said he might sell the project to a larger company with more experience in resort management.

The project's goal, he said, is simply to restore the area's tourist economy - "to get people sitting around the kitchen table in Long Island or New Jersey to say, 'Let's go to the Catskills.' "

Mr. Gitter said his critics exaggerate the resort's environmental impact and ignore the glaring need for jobs in a town where he says "every single child who graduates from the regional high school gets a diploma and a bus ticket."

The state owns most of the land in Shandaken as part of the Catskill Park, and New York City has been buying land for several years in an effort to protect the city's watershed, shrinking the amount of taxable land and forcing residents to shoulder an ever-higher portion of the tax burden.

"The fact is that more people favor this project than oppose it, and it's going to be good for the area," said Robert Linge, the owner of the Cold Spring Lodge here. He added that 170 business owners in Shandaken and neighboring towns signed a petition supporting the resort proposal last year.

The resort would create 350 full-time jobs, Mr. Gitter said. It would contribute about \$80 million a year to the local economy and add about \$100 million to the tax base, said Eric Griesser, the town assessor and a supporter.

Opponents counter that most of the new jobs would be low-paying and seasonal, and that the increase in the tax base would not compensate for the added services and roads the town would have to supply. Above all, they say, the project is totally out of character with the region's unspoiled mountain scenery.

"He's offering a theme-park vision that threatens our most precious resource - virgin wilderness," said Adam Nagy, co-chairman of the Catskills Heritage Alliance, formed in 1999 to oppose the resort.

But for many here, a bigger concern is Mr. Gitter's purchase and management of the water system that serves the hamlet of Pine Hill, within the Town of Shandaken. He bought the system in March 2000, just as the town appeared close to a deal to buy it from a private owner and shortly after state officials informed his lawyers that the availability of drinkable water would be a crucial element in the resort's environmental review.

A number of local residents and officials, including the area's representative in Congress, Maurice D. Hinchey, have raised questions about how Mr. Gitter acquired the company and have pressured him to sell it to the town. But he has insisted on keeping part of it for his resort - a stance that infuriates many residents, who say they will be left without an adequate water supply.

"This is unheard of, it's very unethical," said Margaret Loyd, a former mayor of Pine Hill.

Mr. Gitter said private polls he commissioned showed that people in Shandaken and neighboring Middletown supported his proposal. But Mr. Guttman, the town supervisor, said a survey the town conducted last year showed that most residents did not want any resort in Shandaken.

He recalled a conversation several years ago, when Mr. Gitter was planning another development that did not succeed.

"Listen - what do you hear?" he recalls asking the developer as they stood outdoors.

"I don't hear anything," Mr. Gitter said.

"That's just it," Mr. Guttman told him. "It's quiet, and that's the way people here like it."

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