

Impact on the Environment Comment for DEIS Rapp Road Residential/Western Avenue Mixed Use Redevelopment Projects

1 message

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To: Kovalchikk@togny.org

Attention: Kenneth Kovalchik, Town Planner, Kovalchikk@togny.org

I share the concerns of Save the Pinebush, including their analysis of the DEIS as laid out below. I understand that many people want to see a COSTCO in Albany, but it is a false choice to say that Albany can only have a COSTCO by destroying land in a relatively natural state next to a wildlife sanctuary. Previous agricultural use has impacted the parcels at issue, but they still play an essential role as a buffer zone for the Pinebush itself, a role that will inevitably be diminished by building a large apartment complex, a large office space, and an even more vast commercial retail space, with associated parking and a 16 pump gas station. There are currently underused or unused commercial spaces on Wolf Road, or for that matter at Crossgates itself, that could be converted into a COSTCO without adversely impacting the Pinebush or the Rapp Road Historic District. The applicant has written off the possibility of using space at Crossgates as unfeasible, but with only a cursory explanation. This possibility should be re-examined. Malls everywhere are going to need to be redesigned to adjust to the new circumstances created by COVID19, and COSTCO could be incorporated into such a redesign of Crossgates without paving over any more natural areas. It is also questionable whether living in a five story apartment building is likely to be the lifestyle of choice for very many people in the foreseeable future. I live in an apartment building myself, and I can testify that it is very difficult, at time even impossible, to completely follow recommendations for physical distancing in an elevator or hallway.

I am especially concerned about the proposed construction project because from what I have read, Pyramid is on the verge of bankruptcy, which could mean that habitat will be destroyed and then the site will be left abandoned, or that Pyramid will cut corners on mitigation measures, or that some future owner will take advantage of the natural area having been destroyed to build something worse. As one speaker at the hearing pointed out, it would be most appropriate to put the project on hold for now, given both the economic uncertainties involved and the changes in design that are going to be evolving for buildings like those being proposed.

As Save the Pinebush has said, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed development by Pyramid (Crossgates) on Rapp Road, the Mall Road and Western Avenue to build up to 360 Apartments with up to 3 five-story apartment buildings, up to 50,000 sq ft of office space and up to 278,900 sq ft commercial expansive retail including including a Costco with a 700 car parking lot and a 16 pump gas station should be rejected because the following are not adequately addressed:

1. The Pine Bush borders the Crossgates expansion. The Albany Pine Bush is considered the best example of an inland pine barrens ecosystem in the world. The Pine Bush contains 78 wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including the federal and state-endangered Karner blue butterfly) and state-threatened frosted elfin butterfly, and the largest inland sand dune system in eastern North America. The site has been designated a National Natural Landmark, a National Heritage Area Site, a NYS Bird Conservation Area and a National Audubon Society Important Bird Area. Appendices F and G in the DEIS are inadequate to evaluate the impact of the proposed development on the plant and animal species in the Pine Bush.
2. The Pine Bush habitat is threatened by the expansion of this commercial venture, whether it is adjacent to the construction or a few hundred feet away. These species are important not only to the Pine Bush, but to the local ecosystem as well. The cumulative impact of this development plus other proposals on the Pine Bush is not adequately addressed.
3. The world is experiencing the sixth major extinction. The mitigation measures offered in the DEIS are inadequate to address the destruction of 46 acres of land. The proposed development decreases the size of the Pine Bush and the mitigation measures offer no possibility for expanding the habitat.
4. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is woefully incomplete because it does not adequately address the effect this massive development would have on the ecosystem of the Pine Bush, or the effect on plant and animal species.

Thank you,

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