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Town Planning Board
Guilderland Town Hall
P.O. Box 339
Guilderland, NY 12084

29 March 2020

Dear Board Members:

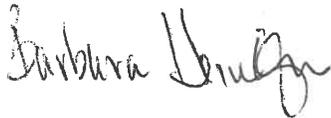
As a private landowner, I have been working with roughly 15 acres along the Hudson River to create better habitat for native species of all kinds. I am acutely aware of the damage being done to our local environmental wealth by prioritizing economic growth over environmental health and in my small way I am trying redress the balance. As a colleague in East Africa once told me, "If the land is sickly, the people are sickly." When I moved here in 2011, the land was in poor shape, but we are slowly improving on what we found. It is a small contribution in the face of the large-scale declines in plant, insect, bird, and animal populations which together create strong ecosystems that support strong societies.

I don't know the Albany Pine Bush, but I do know that it is a very rare habitat, as rare as the one I am managing here on the Hudson River opposite Schodack Island. The Pine Bush, like Schodack Island and this stretch of the Hudson, needs as much protection as can be provided.

For that reason, I am quoting from a letter written by Grace Nichols who knows the Pine Bush issues much better than I do (See page 2). I support what she saying and hope that the Town of Guilderlands will respect both the law and the long term need for local residents to benefit from healthy local environments. Restoration, not destruction, should be the priority now.

Many thanks for your attention,

Sincerely,



Attached on page 2: quotation from Grace Nichols Letter to the Editor of the Altamont Enterprise

Cc: Grace Nichols
Guilderlands Town Supervisor, Peter Barber

Quote from Grace Nichols' Letter to the Editor of the Altamont Enterprise about the recent clear cutting in the Albany Pine Bush, sent 29 March 2020.

I am writing in opposition to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement filed by Rapp Rd Development Corporation, a pseudonym for Pyramid LLC, the owner of Crossgates Mall which was filed to develop 47 acres of pine bush into a variety of projects such as a gas station built in sand over an aquifer.

The level of development proposed is dense, inappropriate to the area and also bent on increasing traffic in a congested area; designed to create noise pollution in a residential community and determined to disrespect rare and federally endangered species of the inland pine barrens in this area.

It is not legal to develop land before a state environmental quality review is completed. However, Carver Companies with the Guilderland Police and Crossgates security as escort, entered part of the proposed development land, and proceeded to clear-cut the majority of the trees on 27 acres of land on March 26, 2020. While the Guilderland Coalition for Responsible Growth and Save the Pine Bush protested, asserting that the clear cut was in fact illegal, there was nothing we could do to prevent it until the Zoning inspector issued a Cease and Desist order the following day. Interestingly, before the order was issued, the website for the Town described the plans to clear-cut, announcing it would be done to avoid obeying an environmental law designed for bat protection. It is unusual for a town to flout law-breaking in this manner.

Meanwhile, I've been writing about the importance of peripheral lands as buffer in the Wildlife-Urban Interface. There are many reasons to maintain a wide buffer for the pine bush; one is that pine bush species are adapted to flee to peripheral areas when there is a disturbance or controlled burn in the pine bush; they need somewhere to go. Another reason is that this land allows a little space between the animals and the shoppers at the mall, which is an important factor in preventing zoonoses transmission. Another reason is that a buffer prevents the microclimate changes brought about by concrete and other impermeable surfaces from impacting the actual habitat, such as the critical Kame Blue Butterfly breeding ground of Butterfly Hill. It creates a tree line that prevents light pollution and shade effects over Butterfly Hill; it separates impacts such as feral cats who hunt birds, tall buildings that result in bird strikes, pesticides and hikers from the rare species breeding ground. Buffer is essential to the protection of the pine bush.