

September 12, 2012

Mayor Thomas M. Roach
Members of the Common Council
City Hall
255 Main Street
White Plains, NY 10601

Dear Mayor Roach and Members of the Common Council,

We are writing to voice our strong support for the proposal by the French-American School of New York (FASNY) to create a new campus and the Greens to Green Conservancy in White Plains. Turning two-thirds of this defunct private golf course into an 84-acre public nature preserve—at no cost to the city in acquiring, developing or maintaining the facility—will deliver significant social, environmental, educational and economic benefits to White Plains and its citizens.

The FASNY proposal takes advantage of the rich opportunities for economic development, recreation, environmental health and scenic beauty offered by conserving and restoring natural assets and making them publicly accessible. The value of this approach is recognized by numerous organizations advocating for strong planning and community design. One example, Scenic Hudson's publication *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts: Illustrated Conservation & Development Strategies for Creating Healthy, Prosperous Communities* (which received an award in 2011 for Outstanding Planning Achievement from the Westchester Municipal Planning Federation) identifies methods and practices for enhancing riverfront and inland communities.

The FASNY proposal includes several best practices that communities containing outstanding and irreplaceable natural resources, like the former Ridgeway Country Club property, can put into practice and which have been included in the FASNY proposal:

Protect, Restore and Rehabilitate Wildlife Habitat: By returning the property to its natural state, the land will become much more inviting for native plants and animals that play an important role in sustaining human health.

Protect and Restore the Quality and Ecological Function of Water Resources: Free of the pesticides and chemical fertilizers needed to maintain the golf course, this land and its wetlands will help cleanse stormwater. Restoration of meadow and woodland habitats will also increase the amount of stormwater that will infiltrate into the ground on the site, a "green practice" encouraged in New York State's stormwater design manual. In addition, the Conservancy would conserve scarce water resources by eliminating the need to irrigate the property, which previously required millions of gallons of water annually. This is a stellar example of proactive conservation behavior.

Protect Scenic Resources: Properties of the size and natural beauty of the Ridgeway property are increasingly rare in southern Westchester. FASNY's planned 84-acre permanent conservation easement would become the largest privately owned conservation easement in southern Westchester and the first in White Plains, and would help protect the community character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Promote Good Urban Planning and Sustainable Design: Providing compelling public open space is a hallmark of good urban planning that also supports local economies. A recent study by the Friends of Westchester County Parks revealed that county parks alone pump \$183 million into surrounding communities. In addition, natural open space markedly increases the real estate value of residential and commercial properties next to and in the surrounding neighborhood of the natural open space. The Greens to Green concept for FASNY's 84 acres of natural open space complements the surrounding area.

FASNY's plan to restore and protect two-thirds of the Ridgeway property as a public amenity with 3.7 miles of trails would offer these additional economic and health benefits to White Plains. Studies show that creating parks and open space attracts new businesses and residents (a good quality of life—including an abundance of

parkland—is tops on the list for executives searching to relocate a business) and provides substantial, low-cost environmental services, which in this case, will be of no cost to the City of White Plains. Finally, data indicate that people living near parks and open space are much likelier to exercise, which can help reduce obesity and associated medical costs, both of which are becoming significant social and economic threats to Westchester and beyond.

On top of these benefits, the Greens to Green Conservancy at FASNY will become a living laboratory for study, providing an outstanding new place for both students and neighborhood families and children to engage in environmental education and seek inspiration from nature—so critical for fostering a lifelong love of the outdoors.

We acknowledge that the FASNY proposal is in the midst of a SEQRA review, and we are aware that some citizens in the nearby neighborhood have raised concerns about the project—most notably its potential traffic impacts. Those concerns should be given the hard look SEQRA requires, and mitigation measures should be identified as appropriate.

In conclusion, because of the thoroughness of analysis, research, planning, and the commitment shown by the FASNY leadership to create and share with the public two-thirds of their property as a bio-diverse, healthy and sustainable nature preserve, we strongly endorse the French-American School of New York’s proposal and encourage you and the Common Council to approve its application for a Special Permit. This is a unique chance for city leaders to leave a legacy of a healthy, livable White Plains for future generations to enjoy.

Sincerely,

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Benjamin Van Doren
Intel Science Talent Search - 5th Place in USA
White Plains High School ‘12