

## Community View: French-American School makes a good neighbor, good steward

Sep 14

lohud.com



### Zoom

A host of environmental and open-space advocates on Thursday backed plans for a \$60 million campus and conservancy on the former Ridgeway Country Club property in White Plains, but the proposal by the French-American School of New York still faces stiff resistance. It is shown here in a 2009 file photo.

### The Issue

White Plains is considering restrictive open-space zoning that would make it virtually impossible to build — at the same time the French-American School of New York is looking to create a \$60 million campus and conservancy on the former Ridgeway Country Club property. Common Council hosts a hearing on the FASNY

*A host of environmental and open-space advocates on Thursday backed plans for a \$60 million campus and conservancy on the former Ridgeway Country Club property in White Plains, but the proposal by the French-American School of New York still faces stiff resistance. It is shown here in a 2009 file photo.*

proposal 7 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall.

On Wednesday, the White Plains Common Council will hold a public hearing on the French-American School of New York's plan to build a private pre-K-12 school and a public nature conservancy on the old Ridgeway Country Club property.

Though the purpose of the hearing is to obtain comments on FASNY's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which is comprehensive and technical, the focus will be the Special Permit that FASNY needs to proceed with its plans. The council gets to say yea or nay, but your comments and concerns will help drive the decision.

Before FASNY purchased Ridgeway, there was widespread concern that it would be developed for housing. The watchwords were open space and the environment. Some wanted Ridgeway to remain a golf course. Others talked about a Central Park or other recreational area. Anything but housing.

But wishing didn't make it so. With golf in decline as a sport and an excess of golf courses locally, no one stepped up to buy and operate Ridgeway for golf. And hastily made plans for the city to buy and develop the property for recreation were rejected by the council as financially untenable.

FASNY's purchase of Ridgeway early in 2011 took the city by surprise, freezing attitudes and turning advocates for open space and the environment into activists against FASNY.

Fortunately, the hearing is not about the character, quality or value of FASNY. There is widespread agreement that the school will make a good neighbor, as it has in Scarsdale, Larchmont and Mamaroneck, where it now operates in leased facilities. Internationally recognized for its innovative bilingual and bicultural curriculum, FASNY undoubtedly will add prestige and a welcome diversity to the city.

But will it get the chance? I think it will if you take a few minutes to learn about FASNY and their plans and then write the mayor and the council — or better yet attend the hearing. I think you'll agree that 2/3 of park and a great school might just be better than a whole park — that good educators make good neighbors and good stewards of the land.

The writer is president of Bryant Gardens, a 409-family, 22-acre co-op adjacent to the FASNY property, a member

<http://www.lohud.com/article/20120915/OPINION/309150027/1076/OPINION01/Community View+>:

of the Mayor's Sustainability Committee and a past president of the White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations.