

League of Women Voters Holds Debate on FASNY

By Andrew Vitelli

A two-hour debate earlier this month on the subject of the French American School of New York's (FASNY) proposal to build a campus on the site of the former Ridgeway Country Club drew a large crowd and brought about some passionate discussion but saw no real breakthroughs in the two sides finding common ground. The debate showed just how entrenched each side, particularly those against the school, was in its position.

Traffic and water issues remained the main concern of the project's opponents, many of whom live in the Gedney Farms neighborhood. Robert Stackpole, a survey technician and Gedney Farms resident, represented the project's opposition while Michael Zarin, an attorney representing the school, spoke for FASNY. Close to 300 people packed Ridgeway Country Club on Nov. 10, including some of the council members who will ultimately decide the project's fate.



ANDREW VITELLI PHOTO

Robert Stackpole and Michael Zarin debated the merits and concerns of the French American School of New York's proposal to build a campus on the site of the Ridgeway Country Club earlier this month.

"We understand that we're the outsider coming in. We're a change in something that's been here over 50 years plus," Zarin, of the White Plains-based Zarin &

Steinmetz, said. "I'm sure that there were many of the same issues when it went from a farm to a private golf club, or different issues I should say."

Ridgeway Country Club, which had been a golf course since the early part of last century, began struggling financially during the economic downturn and this past January sold the 128-acre property to FASNY. The school plans to turn most of the land - approximately 85 percent - into a preserve.

Stackpole said the neighborhood's preference would be for another golf course to purchase the land but that their second choice to be for a residential developer to come in. He questioned what effect the school's construction would have on the site's drainage and expressed doubts about whether the neighborhood could handle the increase in traffic.

"It will be a total chaos in terms of the end product of what this is going to do for this neighborhood," Stackpole said,

referring to the traffic situation.

Zarin acknowledged the increased traffic may have impacts but said the school would do whatever was necessary to mitigate them.

"If we have to bus more children, we will do that," he said. "If we have to change our peak hours to avoid those times on the road, we will do that."

Zarin and Stackpole discussed the preserve that would be created on the site, in particular a dam that has recently been a center of attention. Zarin called the dam a "red herring," adding, "to the best of my knowledge, there's never been any problem."

Stackpole, who has expressed concern about the dam, countered, "Earth and dam is not a perfect water retention system."

The debate was held by the White Plains League of Women Voters, which is not taking a side on the issue.

Zoning on the property allows a special permit for the school, and FASNY has applied for such a special permit. The Common Council is in the process of reviewing the application but currently has a moratorium on land use decisions on several sites, including the Ridgeway site. The moratorium is set to expire in May 2012.

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