

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **A Response to FASNY's Statement dated March 21, 2014. White Plains, NY, March 28, 2014**

A few days ago, the French American School of New York (FASNY) issued a press release criticizing the suit filed against the White Plains Common Council by the Gedney Association. It decried the suit's criticism of the Mayor and certain Council members and promised the suit would be dismissed and the project will move forward. FASNY smugly attempted to negate the thrust of the suit by suggesting their submission of 129 single-spaced pages of documents offered convincing proof that the requirements of the State's Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) were met. However, as any third grader knows it's not size of the submission but the quality.

Mayor Thomas Roach and Councilwoman Beth Smayda and former Council member Ben Boykin have been the key proponents of the FASNY proposal. Although opponents of the development were very disappointed no one denies their right to advance their views. What residents found objectionable was the Council not adhering to the very clear requirements mandated by the SEQRA process and the City's own land use procedures. A few glaring examples:

- The introduction of North Street as the school entrance and closure of a portion of Hathaway Lane were introduced after completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) thus nullifying any public comment on a key aspect of the proposed development. This change is no incidental modification. It directly impacts traffic circulation at White Plains High School, North Street, Ridgeway and adds approximately 3,000 feet of impervious paved area that encroaches on designated wetlands and steep slopes and lastly eviscerates the so-called "Conservancy" which was supposedly the carrot to the community. Surely, such a dramatic change requires comprehensive review by the public;

- The City sponsored TRC traffic report was not made public until the last day of permitted public comment. The report's findings are key. The final TRC report questioned how significant an impact relocating the entrance to North Street would have on Ridgeway. It indicated that since standard size buses are not permitted to use the Parkway most would continue to use Ridgeway in contradiction of the City's objective to have Ridgeway serve as a local connector and not as an arterial highway. The City's policy makes absolute sense in that Ridgeway is a narrow two lane road with mostly single-family homes fronting on it. Furthermore, the City's own traffic engineer has serious concerns with buses making a right turn onto Ridgeway from Mamaroneck Avenue where numerous children cross to reach Ridgeway Elementary School. The TRC traffic report also questioned the efficacy of the FASNY Busing Management Plan. Many observers felt that the TRC report was the "smoking gun" putting in doubt the feasibility of the whole project. Yet, this essential and key document was kept from the residents until after the period for public discussion and comment;
- The SEQRA process requires the mapping of all watercourses on a project site. However, FASNY relied only on Westchester County-produced base maps whereas the SEQRA process requires field investigation and resultant mapping. Despite numerous complaints the City never required FASNY to undertake this essential mapping. Making this omission more bizarre was that the proposed FASNY buildings are planned to be constructed in the immediate vicinity of one such watercourse.

During the last year the Mayor repeatedly told residents that the City could not say no to a school citing a decision rendered by the Court of Appeals regarding a Cornell University school expansion. In fact, the Court actually said quite the opposite stating that **"Educational and religious uses which would unarguably be contrary to the public's health, safety and welfare need not be permitted at all"**. The mayor's comments were at best misleading to the numerous residents that took the Mayor's words as authoritative.

Perhaps most troublesome was that neither Mayor Roach nor Council members Smayda or Boykin in their final assessment of FASNY's environmental impacts expressed concern for the safety of the residents, especially neighborhood children and those attending White Plains High School or Ridgeway Elementary School who walk, play and ride their bicycles on the local streets that were designed for a low-density

residential neighborhood. The Mayor and Council members focus on White Plains regional identity is fine provided it does not adversely affect the safety and viability of the numerous residential neighborhoods that are the enduring strength of the City.