**VILLAGE OF COLD SPRING – PLANNING BOARD**

**85 Main Street Cold Spring, New York 10516**

**(845) 265-3411**

**MEMORANDUM TO PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS**

Date: 04/12/22

To: Members of the Village of Cold Spring Planning Board

From: Jack Goldstein

Re: Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail

1. This Chairman’s Report is a preliminary discussion of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail (the Project). It asks if the Village of Cold Spring Planning Board (PB) can play a constructive role in determining if the Project is consistent with sound Planning and Development principles as they apply to the unique qualities of Cold Spring, and to the self-determination of its residents. The Project’s long gestation period, wide net of association, investment to date and influential Partners should be factored into the PB’s consideration.
2. Various community groups first mooted the need to address the traffic congestion and pedestrian safety from increased hiking at the Breakneck Ridge Trail in 2006. In 2016, RBA Consulting Group submitted a Preliminary Master Plan to the City of Beacon, Town of Fishkill, Town of Philipstown and Village of Cold Spring. RBA was assisted by a 13-member Steering Committee including the municipalities and Scenic Hudson, NY State Office of Parks et.al (Parks), and Metro North. Since then, there has been little meaningful public involvement or public disclosure.
3. Recently, the Project has begun a roll-out of a revised, substantially re-imagined plan including a presentation to the Philipstown Trustees and a new website. The Project, in its current form, is helmed by Scenic Hudson working through a subsidiary not- for-profit management group called Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. The Steering Committee continues as an advisory body. A presentation to the Cold Spring Trustees is planned, but not scheduled.
4. The Project proposes a 7.5-mile-long contiguous development along the Hudson River from Cold Spring to Beacon. Approximately 1/3 of the Project falls within the boundaries of Philipstown which includes the Village of Cold Spring. It proposes to use property acquisition, easements, and capital improvements, with prominent elements of shoreline stabilization educational programming and visitor amenities such as increase parking, to create a major, intermodal, recreational attraction designed to attract significantly increased tourism to the area. The Project has identified the Village of Cold Spring as the “gateway” to this tourist attraction, envisioning Dockside Park as the primary point of entry.
5. Project construction will be staged, beginning with the Breakneck Ridge segment, located mid-way along the development corridor, in Fall of 2021 and open within a few years, and the Trail to Cold Spring completed by 2027.
6. In 2018, the Village of Cold Spring and Parks entered into 10-year management Agreement governing Dockside Park. In it, Parks reserves the right to begin construction of a Shoreline Stabilization Project at the site without further consultation with the Village and with only 48-hour notice. In it, Parks takes responsibility for design and construction of the new park and the Village agrees to pay for maintenance and liability costs until 2018. Construction began in December 2021 upon 48 hours’ notice and no consultation with the Village. In addition to Shoreline Stabilization, work includes a total redesign of the park and the construction of a new boat ramp. No environmental review is evident.
7. Because of its location and history Cold Spring has full views of the Hudson Highlands, access to stretches of the Hudson Riverbank, State and National Historic Districts of low-rise 19th century buildings and a mid-village Metro-North Hudson Line train station. With a population of approximately 2,000 people, the village rests on 383 acres set between ridges on the North and South, the Village of Nelsonville on the East, and the Hudson River on the West. Residential areas flank a central commercial Main Street largely comprising small, locally owned, or managed retail shops and restaurants. It supports a respected E-12 single campus school with 795 students. It contains one large development site. The Village cannot expand geographically, new construction must conform to its historic low-profile context, and streets and sidewalks constitute a closed loop. Parking is severely limited for residents, businesses, and visitors.
8. Tourism has been an element variously affecting Cold Spring’s economy and quality of life since the 1980s. It has been trending up since 2015. While hard data is all but non-existent experiential indicators such as rising commercial rents, demands on public services, and crowding of streets and sidewalks support the conclusion for working purposes. Legislation to maintain the integrity of residential areas through parking restrictions has proven necessary.
9. What, then, are some of the initial Planning issues for the people of Cold Spring raised by the Project?
   1. Did the Project make an error in designating Cold Spring, with its severely limited geography and plasticity, as the gateway to a major recreational development designed to attract significantly higher numbers of visitors?
   2. How much of the Project is necessary to address the traffic and safety issues for which it was initially conceived?
   3. Will the Project result in damaging and irreversible over-tourism in Cold Spring?
   4. Will the Project effectively take decision-making affecting quality of life, development patterns and property values away from the people of Cold Spring?
   5. Will the implementation of Breakneck Ridge first, i.e., construction of the destination before the road to get there, render the gateway inevitable and hence foreclose the options of the people of Cold Spring?
   6. Does the construction of Dockside Park, currently underway without reference to the desires of the local community, yet maintained at Village taxpayers’ expense, also effectively foreclose meaningful local objections to the gateway or the Project concept as a whole?
   7. What is the proper balance here between conservation and exploitation in the stewardship of natural and cultural resources?
   8. What are the different obligations for candor and meaningful interaction required of Government Agencies and Non-Governmental Organization?
   9. What is the proper role for the Cold Spring Planning Board?

Respectfully,

Jack Goldstein, Chair