



Save the Pine Bush

December/January Newsletter

Dec/Jan No. 149 • 33 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12210 • email pinebush@mac.com • phone 518-366-7324 • web www.savethepinebush.org • Circ. 625

Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner

Wednesday, December 18, 2019, 6:00 p.m.

Holiday Party!

An evening of music, story-telling, and fun

Terry Phelan,

will play guitar and sing original songs

Deb Cavanaugh,

artist, educator, singer-songwriter will play folk instruments and sing

Tabitha Cavanaugh,

will play folk instruments and sing

At the Westminster Presbyterian Church, 85 Chestnut Street (people with cars can park in the lot near the door). All-you-can-eat lasagna dinner, with vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options, salad, garlic bread and delicious desserts. Only \$12 for adults, \$6 for students, and \$2 for children. People who make reservations are served first. For reservations, please email pinebush@mac.com.

Interested people are welcome to attend the program beginning at 7:00 for no charge.

Winter Solstice Ski or Hike Trip

Saturday, December 21st, 2019 at 9:30 AM

Meet at: The trail head at the end of Route 155 (past the water tower)

For GPS - 98 Madison Avenue Extension. Albany, NY 12203 (Lat/Long - 42.716563, -73.878508)

Leader: Claire Nolan • For More Information: (518) 281-9873 • andy@andyarthur.org

Claire Nolan will be leading our December Ski or Hike trip on these closing days of 2019. Please join us and enjoy the beauty of the Pine Bush on this first day of winter. This special day of the year has shortest period of daylight and longest night of the year and it is when the sun is at its lowest daily maximum elevation in the sky.

The hike is free and open to the public. If there is snow bring your skis or snowshoes. Bringing binoculars will help you observe the birds and wildlife. Invite all your friends!

The hike is free and open to the public. Bring your friends!

www.savethepinebush.org

Merton Simpson – Fighting Environmental Racial Injustice

by Tom Ellis

ALBANY, NY: Albany County Legislator Merton Simpson spoke about “Fighting Environmental Racial Injustice” at the October 16, 2019 SPB dinner. He began saying, “I see one of my environmental heroes--Ward Stone--here.” [Ward is the legendary and now retired wildlife pathologist (1969-2010) of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.]

Merton said, “We live in perilous times, even if we remove Trump and Mitch McConnell.” He said racism in the US goes back to the origins of the US and “our grandchildren, at the rate we’re going, probably won’t have a livable planet.” As we meet, he said 100,000 Kurds are being removed and Trump separates children from their parents at the border. “The number

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Air Pollution in Albany’s South End

by Tom Ellis

ALBANY, NY: On November 6, I attended a combined NYS DEC and NYS DOH community meeting about a study they did concerning the health of Albany South End residents. About fifty attended at the Albany Housing Authority office on South Pearl Street.

The just-completed study looked at hospitalization rates of South End residents compared to (1) the county as a whole and (2) Arbor Hill/West Hill. The information was not very useful to South End and Ezra Prentice Homes (EPH) residents, nor, in my view, and, many of them, was it designed to be useful to them.

When challenged by Dominick Calsolaro and, his first ward Albany Common Council successor, Dorcey Applys, to make it relevant and meaningful, DEC and DOH staff struggled. Albany County Health Commissioner Elizabeth Whalen said South End residents’ hospitalization rates for asthma and other ailments could be reduced if the residents took better care of their health by utilizing programs offered by the county health department. Her emphasis was that health outcomes, defined as hospitalization rates, are

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one goal is to remove Trump,” he said.

Merton, who was born in South Carolina and turned 65 in September, said Sheridan Hollow residents learned in 2017 about the now-canceled NYS government proposal to install natural gas-fired turbines and a micro-grid [at the site of the infamous state-owned ANSWERS trash incinerator that spewed poisons over Arbor Hill and Capital Hill from 1982-1994]. The state said in 2017 it had evaluated all alternatives but provided no proof to a FOIA request, “proof” to Merton “they were lying.”

He said “we must remain extremely vigilant, I am skeptical,” and even if we win here, the state may do what they had tried here at other locations. He said, “I question our governor.” Merton said his family members may have died from poisonous exposures from the now closed ANSWERS incinerator. “If the president is a psychopath, the governor is a sociopath.” he said. The governor “throws a brick and hides his hand.” He goes “one step forward and three steps backwards.” He said we must write and pressure Governor Cuomo. He is inspired by Greta Thunberg, and the “future is for our young people.”

Switching to the vaping legislation then-pending at the Albany County Legislature, he said “If your only business is selling tobacco and death, then you need another business.” He said if Albany County passes this law, other counties will do likewise. Vaping devices, he said, are transition devices for youth getting into nicotine and we need to deglamorize vaping products including menthol like we did cigarettes. [The anti-flavors legislation failed to obtain the twenty needed votes for passage at the Nov. 12 meeting of the Albany County legislature.]

“We are losing several species every day,” he said. “I am so disappointed with the Democrats with their wordsmithing. [Attorney General William] Barr and [Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo are crapping on the Constitution every day. We could lock them up.” “All the projections are that things will get worse,” he said, and “the end of our lives may occur with an unsustainable planet.” “We have federal leaders who are among the worst ever.” The Electoral College is the tail wagging the dog. The Democrats could win 4 million more votes in 2020 and Trump could still win the Electoral College. “I can’t imagine Trump’s capacity for carnage,” he said.

A lively Q&A followed. He said 2017 saw multiple severe hurricanes, the Democrats in charge are “feckless and spineless,” we may not be able to make it but we must try everything we have, and changes are occurring at a rapid change, faster than scientists predict.

Speaking about NYS and Albany politics, he said we have to start at home first, and Mayor

Kathy Sheehan seems to be in the pocket of the governor regarding the micro-grid project. He said Skidmore College uses geothermal. Mayor Sheehan, he said, is not an independent actor due to Albany’s dependence on state money.

He said cigarettes and nicotine have no redeeming attributes, vaping may be a gateway to high nicotine products, and flavors are clearly directed at a youth market.

Ward Stone said the pollution levels in the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood need to be investigated, especially for lead, and “clean it up. Not just paint, but pipe, flashing, roof tiles; soils below have high lead levels that children play in.” Mr. Simpson responded, saying, “It is absurd that I--I am not a long term energy-environmental activist--must go to premier energy and environmental agencies in NYS and tell them what can be done.” He added some state agencies cannot respond to inquiries. Mr. Stone said, “We--state government--almost never do what we should do.”

To Carol Waterman’s question about why is menthol a racial justice issue, Merton said tobacco products are marketed to blacks to be cool, menthol eases tobacco use, people are being seduced into using dangerous products, menthol makes tobacco and vaping easier to use, to do damage to themselves, get addicted, and harder to quit.

Merton said there were many call-in days to Cuomo regarding Sheridan Hollow with many petitions delivered. The cumulative effort led to the announced changes, some of which will be implemented. He said he would attend a November conference in Newark that features Sheridan Hollow as what can be accomplished.

He said he works with Albany County Executive McCoy, Assemblymembers Fahy and McDonald, and state Senator Breslin, all of whom have been helpful.

Merton said “We have to beat up our Democratic representatives to get them to get a backbone. What we need is for Cuomo to be a leader, not just trying to look like a leader.”

Ward Stone said “We need to protect the Hudson River which we are not doing. We are missing a lot of birds. DEC does not have a set-up to know what the resources are. They are not there.”

Mr. Simpson said the state will not share details of what they claim they are going to do with Sheridan Hollow and “We need to do everything humanely possible to move to sustainable.”

Ward Stone said “clay areas, gardens, where kids play, should be checked” in the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood. Merton concluded the evening saying “I think there is a growing international consensus but we are swimming against the tide.”

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within the ability of local residents to improve, should they choose to avail themselves to information and programs offered by the county. I am sure this is true. However, residents would like to see an improvement in air quality and their overall health they believe is being severely impacted by the many overlapping pollution sources in their community. Several residents called for a soil survey to be conducted.

Government officials had little or nothing to offer short-term. Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, said 80% of South Pearl Street through traffic is local. She is having city-owned and operated Government officials had little or nothing to offer short-term. Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, said 80% of South Pearl Street through traffic is local. She is having city-owned and operated trucks avoid EPH streets to the maximum extent possible. State government officials said, that, as a result of information gathered in the study, they are recommending the diversion of truck traffic through Port of Albany roads to get them off South Pearl Street, and to gradually convert trucks statewide to use reduced quantities of diesel fuel, but acknowledged this will take years to do. To her credit, Mayor Sheehan told the listeners, “We are not here with the answers.” DEC Deputy Commissioner Jared Snyder said measured air pollution is below US EPA limits but still too high and unacceptable to DEC. A “long-run solution” will occur, he said, when we as a society move away from fossil fuels. He insisted, “We are taking steps to reduce pollution in the community.”

I spoke near the end of the meeting. I said, let’s assume all the traffic and vehicle proposals being offered here by state and local governments, are successfully implemented. Will the asthma rates of South End residents be reduced? Will the asthma rates of South End first-graders ten years from now be one-half of what they are now? Patricia Fritz of NYS DOH replied with we don’t know what causes asthma, lowering pollution will help, we have no standard for ultra-fine particles, and individual efforts would help. Dr. Whalen also replied. She said the data presented in the study was for asthma hospitalization rates, asthma can be managed to some extent, and it is not easy to discuss how to reduce asthma incidence as it is asthma hospitalization rates.

Earlier, Gary Ginsberg, who heads the NYS DOH Environmental Health Center, said it is not easy to determine if there is an immediate health impact from these exposures. He added the exposures do create an increased risk.

Dominick Calsolaro asked: What is the cumulative impact of all these pollutants? and When will the state declare a state of emergency? These questions were not answered. A Warren

Dunn Landfill – Stinks Up the School; Parents and Residents Protest

by Tom Ellis

RENSSELAER, NY: Rensselaer residents took a big step toward closing the Dunn (Waste Connections) construction and demolition (C&D) debris landfill in November when they elected Mike Stammel as mayor of their city. Mr. Stammel, also chairman of the Rensselaer County Legislature, has taken an anti-dump stance and works with locals eager to immediately close the dump.

As of mid-November, more than 900 comments have been posted on ItStinks.org about dump odors, many from residents who say the dump is literally making them ill. Many people have posted many times. Comments continue to be received from East Greenbush and Rensselaer residents. Dump odors complaints are also coming from the Doane Stuart school on Washington Avenue near where it crosses over I-90.

In recent weeks, truck traffic into and from the dump has diminished as have the tractor trailer truck parades that greatly irritated downtown Rensselaer residents.

Retired NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Wildlife Pathologist Ward Stone was the keynote speaker at a November 14 community forum in downtown Rensselaer. About seventy attended. Mr. Stone told stories of his many dump-fighting experiences and said C&D wastes contain an unknown cocktail of materials and poisons including large quantities of debris from buildings quickly demolished after fires. He said DEC and the state health department are gambling with the health of Rensselaer children.

During a multi-day and all too common dump odor assault inside the school buildings, Rensselaer City School District Superintendent Joseph Kardash issued an October 25 email to school staff that read in part: “Thanks to everyone that helped us keep a record of the unacceptable odor issues last week...It is critical for us to form an accurate picture of how this issue affected our students and staff. We cannot expect to provide a productive learning/working environment when subjected to these odors in our building. Since odors are extremely difficult to

measure in scope, intensity, and duration - our only tool to do so is to keep a record of observations...On Friday, 10/25 we received 23 reports of odors. some were multiple instances. All were before 10:45. 11 reports were related to the elementary hallway between 7:15 and 8:40. 3 were related to the 2nd floor hall around 9:30. 1 referenced the 3rd floor hall around 9:30. I was in the main hall around 10am. 8 were specific classrooms at specific times. This reported information allowed us to paint a very difficult picture of what our students and staff were experiencing to the DEC. They quickly sent 3 people to our school to further assess the situation.”

At a November 21 meeting of the Rensselaer Environmental Coalition (REC) attended by twenty-five, Mr. Kardash urged Rensselaer residents and others to not say they would not send their children to the school because it scares people. He said the school district has and is collecting lots of data, the school has been tested for lead, and “I want accessible data - then we can shut the dam thing.”

A fascinating discussion began. One Rensselaer resident said “I don’t like sending my kid to the school.” He said he formerly lived next to the BASF manufacturing facility [now an inactive hazardous waste site a few hundred feet from the Hudson River and a few blocks south of downtown Rensselaer, where BioHiTech hopes to construct a 150,000 tons per year solid waste reprocessing business] and frequently saw dirt particles come from BASF and land on the ground. A Rensselaer mother of four said, “There is a lot that testing does not capture. I am a scientist. A false feeling exists that dump testing assures safety.” A man noted there was a giant spike in measured hydrogen sulfide at the dump on September 21 and asked why this would occur on a Saturday when the dump is closed for the weekend. Another man said that when he spoke at a community forum in July, David Carpenter, MD, who specializes in environmental health, said children are up to twenty times more at risk than adults to toxic

exposures, and if people frequently experience odors, they sort of get used to them, like people who live near hospitals tune out ambulance noise, but the danger remains. Mr Kardash promised to participate in a follow-up meeting.

Meanwhile Governor Cuomo continues to ignore the public health crises Dunn dump operations impose on Rensselaer and East Greenbush children and adults. He regularly attends parades and fundraisers, opened Exit 3 of the Northway driving a classic car, and issued a news release and video celebrating the second birthday of his dog. The state Health Department is quiet as always. State Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblyman John McDonald continue to disappoint many Rensselaer and East Greenbush residents with their refusal to call for the closure of the dump. In a Nov. 27 statement, Mr McDonald wrote “this issue is not going away any time soon.”

US Representative Paul Tonko signed a petition on November 16 that reads as follows: “Dear Governor Andrew Cuomo and DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos: We the undersigned call on you both to immediately shut down the Waste Connections Dunn Construction & Demolition (C&D) waste dump in Rensselaer, NY. it is located 200 feet from a pre-existing PreK-12th grade school, athletic fields, and close to many neighborhoods. Up to 100 massive tractor trailer trucks also roar through the city each weekday. Therefore, the dump is a health and environmental hazard to thousands of children and families and negatively affects quality of life. We urge you to shut down the Dunn dump and require the company to fully clean up the school, homes, and the dump, and to reject any proposed expansion.”

Albany County legislators William Reinhardt and Doug Bullock signed the petition the same day. (Mr. Tonko made it clear he signed not in his official capacity as an elected federal legislator, but as a private citizen.) Hopefully their courageous act will motivate other elected officials and physicians to call for the closure of the dump.

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County man said ill health in the South End is caused by generations of exposures.

Near the end of the meeting, Peter Iwanowicz of Environmental Advocates, asked the health officials if they would live in the South End. DEC’s Jared Snyder eventually said “that from an air quality perspective, there is no reason why people should not live there.”

After the meeting ended, Patricia Fritz told me asthma incidence is really complex and sometimes confounds health professionals.

Other observations: I think state and local environmental and health officials know for sure that bad air quality and other pollutants contribute heavily to both disease incidence and hospitalization rates among South End residents, that this has been obvious for decades, and, government, at all levels, has allowed and facilitated the poisoning of residents. Finally, had South End residents not complained loudly in recent years, state and local governments would have said and done nothing, and allowed the pollution onslaught to continue and possibly worsen in the coming years.

Even with all the truck and traffic changes state and local governments have promised to implement, air quality in the South End may remain poor over the long run for many reasons. These include the continued heavy truck traffic to and from the Dunn landfill in Rensselaer, continued busy operations and a looming expansion at the Port of Albany, and heavy I-787 traffic. New threats include the proposed BioHiTech municipal waste processing facility just across the river in Rensselaer on the old BASF site, and the

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Proposals in the Pine Bush

by Lynne Jackson

GUILDERLAND, NY: Last August, Save the Pine Bush wrote comments on the Draft Scope for the Pyramid Crossgates proposal to build 222 apartments on land in the Pine Bush ecosystem that was designated as partial protection. At the time, the Draft Scope included two other parcels along Western Avenue, but, no announcements had been made about what would be built there. Now we know — Pyramid is proposing to build a CostCo with gas pumps and more apartments. Save the Pine Bush just found out a week ago that in addition to all of that development, Pyramid's tenant is proposing to increase the height of the movie theaters in order to install a 50 foot screen in one of the theaters. which, if built, will adversely affect the butterflies due to shading.

Save the Pine Bush has been meeting with people from the Rapp Road Historic District and from the nearby neighborhoods. We have been in touch with scientists regarding the adverse affects these developments will have on the Pine Bush ecosystem. Now, Save the Pine Bush is raising funds to oppose this development which will impact the Pine Bush. Our first fundraiser is Sunday, December 15, 7:00 PM at the Low Beat, 335 Central Avenue. Watch for our social media campaign and share our online fundraiser.

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proposed giant Amazon warehouse in Schodack, both of which would likely bring additional truck traffic through the South End. Finally, the South End is located in the bottom of a river valley subject to temperature inversions that trap dirty air near the ground.

South End residents would like to experience real improvements soon in their quality of life. Can and will government make it happen? I remain doubtful.



DEFEND THE PINE BUSH

A BENEFIT TO KEEP DEVELOPMENT OUT OF THE PINE BUSH ECOSYSTEM

FEATURING:

CHIEF ETHERNAL THINNER FRIENDS +1 TBA

CRIMES

ART RAFFLE & OTHER GOODS TO BE SOLD. ALL PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT THE SAVE THE PINE BUSH ORGANIZATION.

DECEMBER 15TH
DOORS: 7PM
BANDS: 8PM
AT THE LOW BEAT
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ALBANY NY 12206

PROTECT NEARLY 20 ACRES OF HABITAT FROM INTENSE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT.



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