WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

Blurring The Lines

Suffolk County government is a sponsor of Suffolk County Community College. While SCCC is part of the State University of New York system, by law it is supposed to be governed by a board of trustees who serve in that capacity for nine-year terms.

The governor appoints four out of the nine trustees, the Suffolk County Legislature appoints five, and the student body selects one of its own.

The county funds approximately 32% of the operating budget for SCCC. The state contributes about 31%, and the students, through tuition, pay the remaining 37%.

The trustees are responsible for making policy decisions and leave the day to day running of the school to the college's president, his vice presidents and deans.

The Suffolk County Legislature has been increasingly attempting to usurp the trustees' responsibility by trying to micro-manage the school through various resolutions.

Recently, a controversy has erupted surrounding the TechCenter, which the school operates in the Hauppauge Industrial Complex. The TechCenter has suffered financially and the trustees have sought new leadership for the center in order to reverse that trend.

Tom Junor, who has an extensive background in economic development, was chosen by the trustees. Under Junor, an aggressive plan was developed for the TechCenter that should result in an enhanced program at the facility.

The lease on the TechCenter is up on August 31. The TechCenter is currently housed in a 15,000-square-foot building, of which only 80% is being utilized.

The H. Lee Dennison building, also located in Hauppauge, is being underutilized as well—an entire floor consisting of 5,000 square feet is vacant.

Some Suffolk County legislators are pushing to have the TechCenter relocate to the H. Lee Dennison building. The legislators had the Budget Review Office do a report on the feasibility of this move.

The BRO is generally noted for its excellent evaluations, but on this one, they missed by a country mile.

Nowhere in the BRO report is it noted that if the TechCenter were moved from its current location to the H. Lee Dennison building, it would essentially be squeezing an operation coming from 15,000 square feet into 5,000 square feet. Why was this left out of the report?

The report acknowledges that under the new leadership the programs and curriculum will be expanded. This would suggest the need for additional space, not less.

The report addresses the savings in rent without acknowledging the fact that 50% of the rent is currently reimbursed by the state. Nowhere in the report does it mention that if the TechCenter is operated out of the H. Lee Dennison building, the state will reimburse Suffolk County any of the costs associated with the rental space. Why was this left out of the report?

Also, the report does not address the cost of renovations or moving. The college estimates it will cost upwards of $750,000 to complete the project. Why was this left out of the report?

Considering how thorough and balanced the Budget Review Office's reports have been in the past, one is left to wonder what political pressures may have been brought to bear on this issue.

The college's trustees have their own agenda and should not be micro-managed by the legislature. The trustees were appointed to keep the college out of politics, not to be subservient to politics.

Under the right leadership, the TechCenter can be a tremendous asset to business and industry, functioning as a business laboratory, incubator and training ground that will make Suffolk County a more desirable place in which to do business.

Students can learn business applications firsthand, both from the technical and computer side as well as hands-on theory.

We support the full utilization of the H. Lee Dennison building, but seriously question whether SCCC's TechCenter can operate efficiently and effectively in this cramped space.

There are several county department offices operating out of leased space. Relocate one of them to the Dennison building?

And why not?

Bye, Bye, Bonnie

It was with a sigh of relief we learned that hurricane Bonnie had been downsized to a tropical storm and was heading out to sea. This will save Long Islanders much aggravation.

Bonnie began as a Category Three hurricane, packing winds of more than 115 mph. The geographical size of the storm was huge, estimated to be larger than the state of Texas.

When it finally made landfall in North Carolina, although less severe than expected, it still caused considerable damage and hung around over that state far longer than anticipated. It did, however, finally fizzle out, but according to the accounts, the rains and flooding in its wake caused more damage than the winds.

The folks in North Carolina may have to reach out to the rest of the nation for aid. As a country, we generally strive to pull together to help areas struck by national disasters. Under those circumstances, the American Red Cross puts out an appeal. If you would like to help, please contact the Red Cross at 924-6700.

The scare caused by Bonnie made many of us review our emergency plans. Did we have enough flashlights, batteries, candles? What windows would need to be covered and boarded up? We must not forget to fill the fuel tank, and so on.

Does your family have a plan for ascertaining where everyone is if a storm hits? Have you given any consideration to establishing the safest place in your home to gather in case a roof is in danger of being blown off. Have children been instructed to stay far away from fallen wires? Have you prearranged with other family members or friends to stay with them in case your home is rendered unlivable?

Preparation and forethought can pay big dividends in case of a natural disaster. The whole family should be in on these plans and know what their duties and responsibilities are if a storm hits. It is a wise move to review emergency plans with your family, perhaps even rehearse your plan of action.

As we say bye, bye to Bonnie, our attention must now shift to Danielle, the next major storm predicted for our area. We should be prepared for the worst and hope for the best.

And why not?

Give Flanders An Identity

Flanders, which is part of Southampton Town, is commonly regarded as part of Riverhead Town because it shares its zip code. Flanders has been struggling for its own identity for years.

Now, a newly formed civic association has been making significant strides in bringing a positive spin to Flanders. It has established blood drives, neighborhood watches and parades.

This association recently petitioned the postal service to give Flanders its own distinct and different zip code. We think it is a great idea.

It has been proposed that the new zip be carved out of the Riverhead's 11901 and be known as Flanders' 11902. A community has difficulty growing and developing in the shadow of an overpowering neighbor. Flanders deserves all the help it can get in revitalizing itself, and an identity is the first place to start.

And why not?

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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Reconsider Levy's Law

It is time for Suffolk County Executive Bob Gaffney to take his head out of the sand and seriously reconsider a bill being proposed by Legislator Steve Levy that would gain significant control over the cost of the county's fleet of more than 3,000 vehicles.

The county executive has been working to follow through on a measure passed earlier this year requiring Suffolk to downgrade its fleet by a mere 100 vehicles. This legislation was a compromise bill offered by Legislator David Bishop after the county executive vetoed a law proposed by Levy.

Levy's law would have required attaching decals to all county vehicles, specific documentation of any vehicle use, and prohibited usage by any county employee whose commuter mileage exceeded his or her business-related mileage.

That means a lot of county employees would have lost the use of county vehicles, a political perk paid for by the taxpayers.

The Levy law was cosponsored by Legislator Joe Rizzo and approved last March, with support from Republicans Rizzo, Allan Binder, Paul Tonna, Mike Caracciolo, and Steven Hackling; and Democrats Nora Bredes, Brian Foley, Levy, Bill Holst, David Bishop, and Maxine Postal.

Republicans Joe Caracappa, Martin Haley, Mike D'Andre, Cameron Alden, Angie Carpenter and Democrat George Guldi voted against the measure, while Republican Fred Towle abstained.

With only 11 votes in favor, the county executive vetoed the bill, knowing the legislature could not override him without the 12 necessary votes.

Initially, the county executive recommended cutting the car fleet by almost 200, but that just did not go over well with the police brass, as 173 of the vehicles cut would be from the police department. The public was handed a bunch of gibberish that such vehicular cuts would negatively impact the police because the "superior officers" and detectives would be stripped of their take-home vehicles.

By contractual agreement, these commanders, sergeants and detectives are "entitled" to take a county car home, and Police Commissioner John Gallagher argued that they need the take-home vehicles because they are on 24-hour duty.

Many of us are on 24-hour call, but are not required to respond to duty very often. Simply because the police department bigwigs are on 24-hour duty does not give them the right to waste taxpayers' money by having a county car parked in their driveways when they are at home.

It has been suggested that these commanders or detectives are not using the vehicles for much except transportation between home and work, and that is a waste of a county vehicle.

The same goes for the district attorney's office and the sheriff's department. Consequently, the county executive recommended cutting vehicles allotted to the district attorney's office from 126 to 102, and the sheriff's department fleet from 248 to 214.

These cuts would have saved the taxpayers a significant amount of money, but Gaffney ran into a brick wall because of a ridiculous clause in a police contract and the unwillingness of the bureaucracy to do what is right.

Perhaps now the county executive will seriously consider approving Levy's law when it is reintroduced later this month. Levy's law would offer no option, would include every department, and should include every elected official as well.

And why not?

Despicable Representation

It is downright despicable that Governor George Pataki, Attorney General Dennis Vacco and State Comptroller H. Carl McCall are sitting by idly while LIPA is proposing to improperly use bond money to send checks to ratepayers.

In the late eighties, LILCO was found guilty under the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) act for misrepresenting facts and collecting money it should not have. The courts then ordered LILCO to repay the ratepayers hundreds of millions of dollars, without interest, through electric rate reductions by the year 2000.

The remaining amount due is approximately $101 million. Last month, MarketSpan, the company created after the merger of LILCO and Brooklyn Union Gas, printed a legal notice in a Long Island daily newspaper stating that it is "obligated to supply LIPA with the necessary funds so that LIPA ... can provide the rate reductions remaining due under the 1989 settlement agreement."

However, during a meeting last Thursday, LIPA Chairman Richard Kessel said the company would be offering a refund to ratepayers, but tried to cover up the fact that LIPA is using borrowed bond money to pay off this settlement.

He at first adamantly denied LIPA is borrowing the money. However, after much prodding from ratepayers attending the meeting, Kessel finally admitted the money would be taken from the borrowed bond money used to purchase LILCO's transmission and distribution system.

Such blatant deception by Kessel is typical of the misinformation he and the LIPA board have been presenting to the public.

If LIPA is allowed to do this, it will cost the ratepayers $680,000 for the company to send out these checks.

If LIPA is allowed to use the bond money, it will return $101 to each ratepayer in Suffolk County at a cost of almost $700 per ratepayer because of interest that will be paid on the initial amount over the next 35 years.

If LIPA is allowed to use the bonds, it will be using bond money for something other than the purpose for which it was borrowed, and this is potentially illegal.

The RICO settlement is owed to the ratepayers no matter what happens. We should not be using borrowed money to pay ourselves what LILCO, now MarketSpan, owes us.

But so far there has not been a peep out of the governor, attorney general or state comptroller (all of whom are running for reelection this year) on this matter.

Being hoodwinked by Kessel and LIPA is outrageous enough and something we do not have sufficient control over, but to be so brazenly fleeced by our elected officials is another matter—one that will be easily remembered in the voting booth in November.

And why not?

Supporting 'English First'

Suffolk Legislator Mike D'Andre's proposal to make English the "only" official language in Suffolk County has a good premise, but it has done little more than complicate an already knotty and controversial issue.

Most people agree that those who come to this country should learn the language of the land, instead of insisting on speaking only in their native tongue. Learning the predominant language in the land in no way precludes an individual from speaking his or her native language at home or with friends, and can, in fact, be helpful in integrating foreigners into our society.

This point was highlighted during a recent public hearing before the Suffolk legislature, when speaker after speaker charged that D'Andre's "English Only" bill is not only unfair and shortsighted, it is a flagrant violation of the First and Fourteenth amendments of the Constitution of these United States.

They argued that the measure would do nothing but fuel the already rising rate of bias crimes in Suffolk County by encouraging separatism; that such separatism would do nothing but segregate our multicultural communities.

The most interesting point during this hearing was that these naysayers not only articulately chastised the measure and its author, they also offered a reasonable alternative which may turn out to be much stronger and more comprehensive legislation.

Under the title of "English Plus," the speakers, representing a vast multicultural background, suggested that D'Andre consider changing the bill to an "English First" measure, rather than "English Only."

In a world that is constantly shrinking in this age of massive telecommunications, we must begin to think more globally. This means accepting and assimilating other cultures and languages into our own.

But it does not mean we can accept those from another nationality coming to this country and refusing to speak English, which is our primary language.

Passing a law requiring that all schools and government agencies promote English first would maintain that practice without infringing on anyone's constitutional rights or undermining our country's multicultural foundation.

And why not?

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What Tanger Wants, Tanger Gets?

Former Riverhead Town Supervisor Joseph Janoski was the author of Riverhead Town's Manufacturers Outlet Center overlay zone, which allowed the development of the Tanger Factory Outlet Center.

It is Janoski's contention that the law specifically stated that stores in the outlet center had to sell 70% factory outlet merchandise. Each store would also be allowed to supplement up to 30% of its merchandise with discounted retail inventory.

Janoski noted that the overlay zone was designed to enhance the market, not to negatively impact local retailers, and the code specifically states, "each enterprise shall mainly purvey only those products originally manufactured or distributed by the affiliate enterprise."

But under the auspices of the Stark administration, the Riverhead Planning Department misinterpreted this law, claiming that 30% of the stores did not have to be factory outlet businesses.

Violating the intent of the overlay zone in 1996, the planning department issued a letter determining that 30% of the complex could be comprised of ordinary retail stores that have no manufacturing involvement. This determination also allowed Tanger to install a McDonald's and other food chain operations in Tanger II that were prohibited in Tanger I.

Now, Tanger intends to build an Office Max in one of the new units being constructed. This is a regular, commercial enterprise, not a factory outlet business.

LeRoy Barnes Jr., director of Riverhead's building department, recently inventoried the stores and found that 30% of the stores were not factory outlets or discount retail stores. Barnes' survey did not include the McDonald's or other food stores—which are clearly not outlets—in his count. If they had been included, Tanger would have drastically exceeded the purported 70%/30% rule.

The building department's survey shows that Tanger I consisted almost completely of factory outlet stores. Clearly, it was the intention of Janoski and his town board members, when they established this outlet code, to limit the center to outlet stores.

From what shoppers tell us, many of the stores in Tanger II are disguised as manufacturers' outlets and are selling a whole host of merchandise not manufactured by the companies they are affiliated with.

Barnes and his predecessor have been approving these stores blindly, without checking into them, because the current town board has neglected to change the "just put it in there" policy predicated under the Stark administration.

Legally, Barnes said, he has to approve the placement of these stores until the town board tightens up the law.

The current town board is contemplating overriding Barnes' building permit approval for Office Max. This would force the issue before the Riverhead Zoning Board of Appeals to establish a legal interpretation of the law. The ZBA is not supposed to consider a policy preferred by a given town board or supervisor.

This is a demonstration of courage on the part of Riverhead Town Supervisor Vinny Villella's town board.

From the beginning, it appears that whatever Tanger wanted, Tanger got—a fact made abundantly clear when one looks at Tanger II.

It is time now, however, to say "No!" If Tanger wants to take on the ZBA, let him. If he loses, he will be legally forced to close every one of the stores in the center that is not a factory outlet and the center will have to conform to the guidelines it was intended to follow in the first place.

And why not?

Why Make The Poor Poorer?

In many of our economically disadvantaged communities, several things stick out like a sore thumb. Especially the paltry amount of money funneled into maintaining roads and other community improvements.

Most nights, leaving Riverhead, we pass through Riverside. The condition of Flanders Road is appalling. For years, this road has been plagued with potholes, cracks and patches.

The area is economically disadvantaged. The residents are a racial mix of lower and middle income families. The road is heavily traveled because it leads to or from downtown Riverhead as well as the Evans K. Griffing County Center.

Yes, many of the area's homeowners could do far more to their own properties, but what is the incentive when the main thoroughfare consistently remains the lowest priority on state and local government's list of concerns?

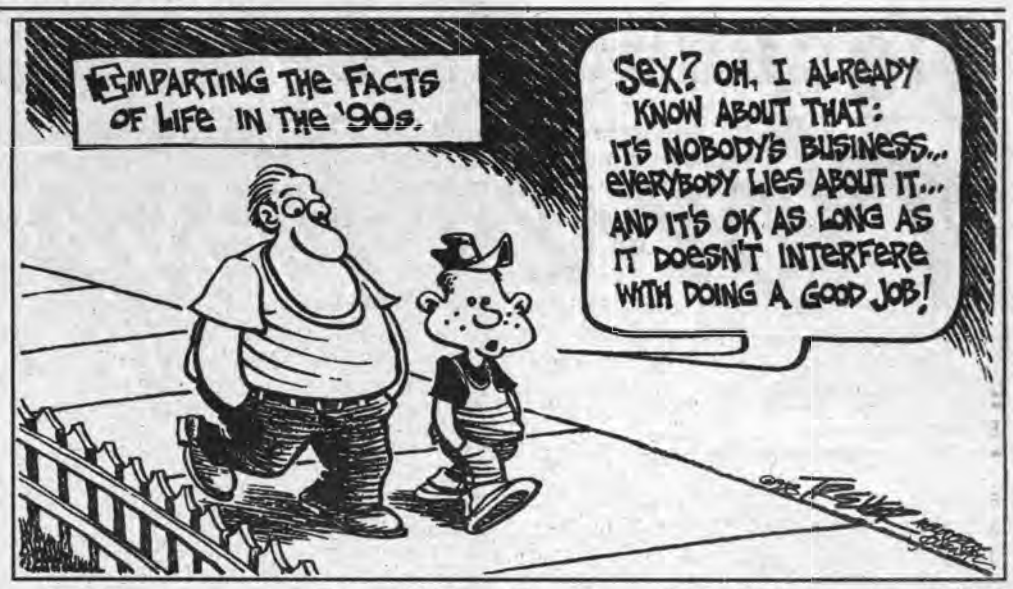
If this road passed by major shopping centers or some of the wealthy Southampton estates, you can bet your sweet bippy it would be the finest of roads.

We have also noticed other public roads in similar disrepair throughout numerous disadvantaged areas.

How can a government expect its people to take pride in their surroundings if the governing body itself is sending the message that if you live in poverty, your roads should reflect it?

We, the people, are the government, so it is up to us. Let your elected officials know—and in no uncertain terms—if you are unhappy with the upkeep of your roadways.

And why not?



Blatantly Unfair & Illegal?

LIPA intends to issue rebate checks just prior to Governor George Pataki's reelection bid. Pataki had promised that if LIPA took over LILCO, Long Island residents who had been LILCO customers would receive a rebate.

Pataki and Kessel had intended to use the leftover RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations act) money that LILCO had been fined for lying about the Shoreham debacle. Judge Weinstein ruled that this money could not be used for rebates and must be used for rate reductions. Pataki and Kessel found themselves in a pickle.

But now, just so they don't appear to be reneging on their promise, they intend to use millions of dollars of borrowed money, which the ratepayers will ultimately have to pay back. For every dollar of rebate you get back, you will have to pay $6 when the interest is compounded. Obviously, this does not make much economical sense.

In addition, the rebates are not being issued in proportion to the overpaid charges. They will not be issued to the people who paid them. Instead, they will be issued only to the people who became LIPA customers back in May. The entire thing is beginning to make less and less sense.

Some people only use $20 or $30 worth of electricity per month, while other users, like the Suffolk County Water Authority, have bills that run into hundreds of thousands of dollars each month.

Is this right? Is it fair to penalize the people who were abused the most? Of course it isn't! Someone should sue and obtain an injunction against LIPA to stop it from sending out those checks.

Governor Pataki can order Kessel to call off this charade. Yes, he would have to go back on a promise, but it would be for the right reasons. Does he have the political courage?

And why not?

McGwire, Sosa Made Us Proud!

When Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa smacked their record-setting 62nd home runs last week, they provided refreshing moments for the sports world and for this nation.

In a time when the President of the United States is in serious danger of impeachment for his reckless behavior and sexual antics with a White House intern, both players' classy, thoroughly professional pursuit of the single-season home run record provided a needed respite for us all.

McGwire's joyful reaction to his record-setting home run—hugging opposing players, his son Matthew and especially members of Roger Maris' family (the previous record-holder)—was both graceful and delightful. For his part, Sosa's also comported himself with class and dignity. We were overwhelmed with their feats and behavior.

While many of us feel betrayed by the most important political leader in the world, McGwire and Sosa have proven we can have faith that there is decency among us.

After a brief period of surly behavior to the media months ago, McGwire really got it right. The slugging first-baseman, who hit 58 home runs last season after shaking off a variety of injuries in previous years, began to revel and delight in the experience, and it showed.

Both players have often spent time signing autographs for fans, even giving away bats and balls to show their appreciation. And anyone who doubted their sincerity only needed to watch a press conference the pair held together days before breaking the record.

Although McGwire and Sosa were pursuing the same record, the two friends laughed and smiled their way through the same old tired questions they've been asked thousands of times before. As a shining example of sportsmanship before competition, they have openly rooted for each other.

And don't forget Cardinals groundskeeper Tim Forneris who retrieved the ball, estimated in value at $1 million, and gave it back to McGwire, who promptly turned it over to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

It has truly been a case where professional sports has brought out the best in us as a nation.

And why not?

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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Preserving Private Open Space

Some environmental groups and others have gone off the deep end. They are suggesting that housing development is better than the preservation of open space created by a golf course.

Riverhead farmer and real estate broker Bill Talmage has proposed the construction of two 18-hole, national golf courses—with a clubhouse and 500-room hotel—along Sound Avenue in Riverhead.

Talmage has asked the Riverhead Town Board to rezone a portion of 350 acres to allow this project instead of simply building the 300 single-family homes allowed under the current zoning.

The fact that this property lies within the town's "receiving zone," where development rights could be placed from other parcels under Riverhead's transfer of development rights (TDR) program, suggests that the parcel would easily be developed with single-family homes.

Environmentalists are objecting to Talmage's proposal because a portion of the property consists of a migrating dune system, known as the Grandifolia Sandhills, and a section of 120-year-old beech trees that is apparently a large nesting area for ruby-throated hummingbirds. Talmage claims he is willing to agree to covenants that will protect those dunes, trees and wildlife.

Talmage further argues that building a national golf course would maintain open space in perpetuity, but the naysayers claim the land is already open space, since Talmage's family farms it.

That is just impertinent.

The Talmages farm their land because that is what they choose to do and they should be encouraged to continue farming. However, if the family wants to sell the property's development rights or build whatever is allowed under the law, they should not be impeded.

A national golf course is much better for Riverhead than single-family houses because it allows the town to levy taxes on a commercial operation without negatively impacting the school district or town services.

Conversely, if Talmage constructed 300 single-family homes on the site, each home would have a septic system, and unregulated fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides would be used.

In addition, Riverhead School District spends approximately $12,000 per student. According to the town's planning department, 1.5 children can be expected to occupy each single-family home. That is a total increase of almost $5.5 million in the school's $45 million annual budget.

Environmentalists also argue that the development rights could be purchased on this property. Although they mean well, these environmentalists have no concept of cost when they claim the development rights of the East End's farmland and open space can be purchased through local, county and state funding.

Two years ago, the public approved a $4 billion preservation bond, each of the five East End towns has already approved multimillion-dollar bonds for preservation, and in November the county wants the public to approve a $62 million preservation bond as well.

The continuous blather about purchasing the remaining open space and farmland is ridiculous. Having supported the numerous local, county and state preservation plans over the past 21 years, Suffolk residents are among the highest taxed landowners in the country.

Working with developers to privately maintain open space is the most economic way to preserve our rural quality of life, and a golf course would do exactly that.

The claim that a golf course is a major contributor to groundwater pollution was once legitimate because of the toxic chemicals used to maintain the grounds, but today, with all the restrictions on chemical use, that is not the case.

Initially, Talmage included another 100 acres that had its development rights sold to Suffolk County about 21 years ago. Including this acreage in the project would have required action by the Suffolk legislature to take the property out of the county's farmland preservation program. That does not seem likely.

Talmage has since talked about withdrawing that portion of the proposal, and we think that is a good idea.

Talmage has asked the town to rezone about 268 acres from Agricultural/Residential to Recreation Overlay, which would allow the hotel.

If Talmage is willing to build a golf course without any housing development rights attached to the future of this property, the Suffolk County Planning Department and the Riverhead Town Board should accept this proposal without delay.

As a matter of fact, they should accept it with open arms and work with the developer to ensure that the very latest technology is used to help limit or restrict any pollution.

And why not?

His Right To Build

Some 30 years ago, for a period of about 10 years, we had a goose pit in Sagaponack. An old friend, Paul Rosell, owned the property. When Rosell passed away, the farm had to be sold because of the inheritance tax laws. We have occasionally visited this scenic area since then.

In recent years, we have become more and more perturbed by the number of sprawling second homes that have popped up on fertile farmlands.

Another good friend, the late Doc Goode, a Riverhead veterinarian and avid outdoorsman, often lamented about homes being built on farmland. He would ask, "Why do we allow development on these prime fields that have six feet of topsoil? Why not limit building to the sandy soil Long Island is noted for?"

The property where our goose pit was located is the site Ira Rennert has chosen for his estate. This is 63 acres of incredibly beautiful oceanfront property. Rennert is building a 72,000-square-foot home with 29 bedrooms. When all the outbuildings are included, the estate will span more than 100,000 square feet.

While this is huge and constructed over prime top soil, the total structure covers less 4% of the land. The balance will be kept as open space, thus preserved.

Is this project massive? You bet. Conspicuous consumption? Without a doubt. A proper use of land? We think so. What is more desirable? Is it better to have a 63-acre estate or 20 overbuilt homes on three acres of property each?

We have often questioned the wisdom of people building homes of more than 5,000 square feet, particularly when they are being built by people without children who will only use these homes for a few months out of the year. The Hamptons are filled with them and more are going up every day.

The year-rounders never complain, and they should not, because these residents contribute enormously to the tax base and place little demand on services.

Although we think many of these ultra-large houses are an utter waste of resources, they are not our resources, and we do not have a right to complain about how foolish some others are with their wealth. They have earned it and they can spend it on anything they want.

Rennert's estate is no exception. He worked hard, accumulated a lot of money, and has every right to spend it as he sees fit. He bought the property, filed the necessary permits, and the permits met current town code requirements.

Although all the structures will total 110,000 square feet, the entire parcel encompasses almost 2,700,000 square feet. However, he is still building on only a small fraction of the land that is available.

We would much prefer to have large estates on eastern Long Island rather than have the land peppered with single-family homes. Instead of trying to discourage estates, Southampton Town officials should be encouraging them.

In one sense, an estate is basically open space, preserved land. The estates enhance the appearance of the Hamptons and often become tourist attractions.

We wish Rennert well and welcome him to the Hamptons.

And why not?

Campaign Reform Needed, But?

Last summer, Senator Al D'Amato sat on our deck and outlined an onerous schedule of public appearances he had to make in order to raise funds for his upcoming reelection bid. He condemned the system and talked about what a waste of time it was and how it took time away from his duties as a senator.

"We have got to reform the process and change our elected officials into legislators instead of fund raisers," he said. D'Amato is the king of fund raising, and for him to utter these words of condemnation should make us all look seriously at campaign reform measures.

The United States Senate is currently considering the McCain-Feingold bill, which deals with campaign reform.

Under campaign finance laws, individuals and corporations are limited by how much they can directly contribute to the candidates. There is no limit on how much they can donate to national political committees. This so-called "soft" money would be banned under the McCain-Feingold bill.

The bill would also strengthen disclosure by requiring electronic filing and a 24-hour Internet posting of required reports to the Federal Election Commission. The bill also clarifies the Supreme Court decision that forbids unions from spending members' money on politics without their permission.

Candidates and their families would be limited to contributing $50,000, which would stop the rich from being able to buy an election. If they exceed the $50,000 limit, they would not benefit from the coordinated expenditures by the political parties on their behalf.

This all sounds good, but—and this is a big "but"—the bill also bans what it calls "phony issue ads." Take the "phony" out of it, and the bill bans issue ads, probably one of the most important tools of a campaign.

Who decides what is phony and what is real? In the world of political advertising, the two often overlap. Organizations representing specific interests often use issue ads to drive home the organizations' point and a candidate's support or rejection of that belief.

This is called free speech and it is guaranteed under the First Amendment of the Constitution. Liberal causes, Conservative causes and special interest segments have used issue ads to educate and inform the voting public. They should not be stopped.

We may not agree with a particular position, but we must all agree that everyone is entitled to an opportunity to express his or her viewpoint. This is what makes America different and makes America free.

Take this part of the bill out, and we say, pass it. Such a measure is long overdue. It may allow our elected officials to go back to governing, rather than common-begging.

And why not?

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

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The Great Divide

When the Suffolk County Charter was adopted, it specifically delineated the duties and responsibilities of the county executive.

Unfortunately, it did not clearly define the duties of the Suffolk County Legislature. Consequently, as the legislature has matured, it has tried to infringe on the county executive's prerogatives.

The legislature was originally intended to be a board of directors. It s primary function was to set policy, approve budgets and develop laws. It was not intended as a management arm of the county executive's office.

The county executive position was to be that of a chief executive who would conduct and oversee the operations of the county. Now, however, legislators seem to be exhibiting a desire to micro-manage everything and encroach on what is traditionally the county executive's domain.

Recently, another example of legislators' intent to micro-manage is being brought forward. Legislator David Bishop proposed that instead of the Suffolk County Police Commissioner being appointed by the county executive, the legislature should take on this responsibility.

Instead of the commissioner being accountable to the county executive, he would have to answer to each of the 18 legislators. This scenario, with each legislator having his or her own agenda, would most assuredly lead to havoc.

John Gallagher is currently the appointed police commissioner. Gallagher has been part of several different administrations, going back to the Peter Cohalan days. He is respected for his ability to be congenial and to compromise in order to find a solution where others have failed.

Is Gallagher the best police commissioner Suffolk could possibly have? We are not in a position to judge.

Several months ago, we met with representatives of the Police Benevolent Association (PBA) and their attorney. The attorney had racked up an impressive record of acquiring huge salaries and favorable working conditions for the police. And he made a somewhat disturbing statement. He bragged that he had been able to accomplish so much for the police because there was no opposition from management.

Is this the fault of the county executive, his labor negotiator or the police commissioner? The county executive is not known to be hard on the police. From a political standpoint, he fears the organization and the clout they appear to wield.

Maybe we need a better county executive. One who does not fear the police or the unions. We doubt very much that because a police commissioner is appointed by the 18 members of the Suffolk County Legislature, he will be any more effective in getting productivity out of the police department.

The legislature is noted for giving in every time an organized special interest group appears before it. The legislators know full well that if they are targeted by such a group during an election, they can be defeated. It is more difficult to target a county executive who runs for office at-large throughout the county.

The charter gives the county executive the right to choose the police commissioner. The commissioner is the county executive's employee, and is responsible for overseeing the police departments. Bishop would be wise not to let this proposed bill out of committee. It does not deserve consideration.

And why not?

Is Lying No Longer Wrong?

The media has been obsessed with covering the events that led President Bill Clinton to be accused of lying under oath during a grand jury hearing.

The dictionary defines a lie as a falsehood presented as truth; anything meant to deceive or give a wrong impression; or to convey some false image.

Most people have learned to expect an element of erroneous information to come out of the mouths of Washington politicians, but is it all right for a president—under any circumstances—to outright lie to the American public and then so cavalierly expect "forgiveness" as if nothing had happened?

This is a question of local as well as national significance.

In Suffolk, a situation arose where county police officers were charged with giving false answers, "lying," on a police department entrance exam administered by the state.

Presidents and police officers are an important part of our society, expected at all times to uphold the law, justifying our faith and trust in them. Trust is something that can be broadly defined, but has specific boundaries which are difficult to reestablish once eroded.

Suffolk officials charged 55 police officers with cheating on the entrance exam held in 1988 and 1992. They were charged with falsifying answers on their tests simply to get higher scores.

The answers were supposedly provided by high ranking officers, the police brass, allegedly to give a "selected" group of recruits a better shot at scoring higher than everyone else.

After several months of investigation by a politically appointed police review panel and a promise by the police commissioner to dismiss anyone found guilty of lying on the exam, one sergeant has been indicted and a lieutenant suspended with pay; three police officers were given six-month suspensions; and 19 were given lesser suspensions.

There is a concern that many of these officers, who have been on the job for 6 to 10 years, have families, mortgages and other expenses to pay. So does the president. Many have demanded that the president resign or be impeached, while others are willing to publicly admonish him and move on.

The police commissioner justifies suspending rather than dismissing the officers in question by claiming there was "far less gross deceit" by them than initially thought. He went on to promise that "the public will benefit."

We are not second-guessing the police review panel or the police commissioner or even the pristine minds of Washington politicians. We are asking whether honesty and truth still have any value in our society.

And why not?

Management Must Manage

We have often heard the argument that school principals and administrators do not manage the schools properly.

State Senator Carl Marcellino recently drove this point home in an interview with our editorial board.

Prior to embarking on his career as a senator, Marcellino was a school teacher. He was also a member of his local school board. He confirmed what we had heard from several others close to the educational establishment. Principals and administrators rarely observe teachers in the classroom, even during their three-year pre-tenure process. This protocol of observing and evaluating teachers in the classrooms is not adhered to even in schools that have department heads whose job it is to do so.

Teachers who have achieved tenure are rarely ever visited by someone in management to review their performance within the classroom. Because of this, management does not know which educators are providing a quality education and which of those are just showing up for work.

In most other professions, the average workers are closely supervised and monitored. They are reviewed on a regular basis and their work critiqued. Those whose work is found to be deficient are given further instruction and motivation. How many of us are ever left to our own devices and without any accountability in our workplace?

It would be wise for parents with school-aged children to approach their local school board and find out what the district's position is regarding classroom monitoring by administrators. Is the policy being followed? If your district does not have a strict policy of observation, review and accountability, you may need a new school board, because the current one is not doing its job.

And why not?

Follow Huntington's Lead

Regardless of how one feels about the political aspects of LIPA's buyout of LILCO, Suffolk County's nine other town boards should seriously consider following Huntington's lead.

Last week, the Huntington Town Board agreed to hire outside counsel to sue LIPA, LILCO, MarketSpan (Keyspan), and the state Public Service Commission.

Two significant issues are at the heart of the suit:

First, while LILCO's ratepayers funded all of its investments, they received absolutely nothing from the company when it profited from the $7.8 billion buyout by LIPA, nor did they receive any benefit when the IRS waived a $2 billion capital gains tax, which cleared the way for Governor George Pataki's LILCO-LIPA deal.

Second, the ratepayers did not receive any refund from LILCO when it was determined the company was not required to turn in the $2.3 billion in federal taxes it collected from ratepayers between 1981 and 1997.

Huntington has estimated that LILCO owes Suffolk taxpayers approximately $477 million. If divided equally among all 10 towns, that is approximately $47.7 million each. Think of the tax savings that could be delivered directly to the public with this money.

This is a perfect opportunity for Suffolk's town boards to ensure that their constituents benefit, at least partially, from the governor's LIPA deal.

And why not?