

Mayor's Column

March 13, 2023

So many of you have reached out to me after learning about Governor Hochul's "Housing Compact." I want to assure you that it is a front burner issue with all of the Trustees and I am personally working with many of our Westchester colleagues, especially the small communities surrounding rail stations as the impact is of enormous significance. As a colleague from Suffolk County said, based on the numbers required in the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) piece - in our case a new zoning law requiring a minimum of 50 units per acre in the half-mile radius around the train station - enactment of the law could be an "extinction level event" for small towns and villages.

As a recap, the Housing Compact is a two pronged initiative; the first requiring us to build 75 new housing units every three years. Should we not meet this goal, a new fast track approval mechanism would be automatically triggered at the state level for mixed income, multifamily projects, notwithstanding any local zoning, planning, and land-use regulations to the contrary. Part Two is a compulsory rezoning of the area around the train station, requiring us to pass an amendment to Village law, adding a new section, so named, "Density of residential dwellings near transit stations," and in our case, allowing 50 units at a minimum per acre or 10,000 new potential housing units.

This compact is labeled an affordable housing initiative, which is a goal most everyone agrees is a worthy endeavor but the language in this flawed proposal actually does not require any of these units to be affordable and all could be built at market rate or above market rate levels so the overriding purpose is completely obliterated.

What is incredibly important is the provision, should we not hit the state dictated numbers, that allows builders and developers to build mixed income multifamily projects, notwithstanding any local land-use regulations including lot coverage, open space, height, setbacks, floor area ratios and permeable surface requirements. As you can imagine, developers are absolutely salivating as it would offer carte blanche to build the structures of their choice in our communities. The builder/developer lobby is so powerful in Albany that it is a bit of David and Goliath

as we try to counter their lobbying with our words as their advocacy funding is in high gear. What exacerbates this detrimental situation is that none of these projects would require State environmental laws be triggered, let alone any local ones on the subject as to floodplains and impermeable surfaces.

In true irony this week, Trustee Mary Behrens, Jim Palmer and I spoke with our Congressman, Jamaal Bowman's office and representatives from the State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Army Corps of Engineers about the persistent flooding in our community with the hope of near term solutions to alleviate the perennial problem. While we are doing this, developers are waiting to come into the Village to build with no environmental checks or balances.

The problem is further magnified in the 11 communities in the New York State Watershed Area subject to the Transit Oriented Development rules, where very stringent environmental laws assure the water quality for the 9 million plus of us in the southern Westchester suburbs and New York City who depend on it for our drinking water. It now appears the governing authorities, responsible for the watershed at the Department of Environmental Conservation were not in on the discussion formulating the housing proposal.

Also, not allowed in the building equation is a community's capacity for water and sewage service, police coverage, fire protection, road construction, parking and the education of students.

To cover these costs, the Governor has offered \$250 million as the stipend for the entire State of New York.

To put in real terms, a sewer pipe costs approximately \$1,000 per linear foot and this does not take into account the long-term cleaning, re-lining and water treatment. Just to repair their aging sewer/water infrastructure, our neighbors in Mt. Vernon received \$150 million in state aid and this does not even cover the entire project.

The Governor's statewide stipend would cover the infrastructure needs of realistically one medium sized community so the rest of us would be saddled with the largest unfunded mandate in state history.

This type of top down, no local input and punitive approach is the antithesis of what makes New York communities unique and appealing. What is best for Yonkers should not be best for North Salem, nor North Salem's rules for Bronxville. One-size fits all is not the answer.

As point of reference, Bronxville already has a density factor greater than White Plains and over 40% of our housing units are apartments, coops and condominiums.

The tax burden imposed on current residents would be unfathomable and further accelerate exodus to low taxed states. We already lost one Congressional seat due to southern migration and this could only further exacerbate departures.

It is important to note that Bronxville wants to be a bipartisan partner in a solution but this current plan is fatally flawed.

Our two elected representative, Senator Shelley Mayor and Assemblywoman Amy Paulin have lent strong voices in opposition to the "Housing Compact" as written but I urge you to lend your voice by contacting the Governor at 518-474-8390, by [email](#) or by mail: The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of New York State, NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224