

Sterling Messenger Logo

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Last Chance for Public Comment on Sterling Forge Estates

The Town of Tuxedo's environmental review process of the Sterling Forge Estates development plan has reached critical mass. In line with the New York State laws that govern the long and complex procedure, the Town of Tuxedo must hold one final session of public comment before the deal can be closed. The law requires the developer to respond to the public's concerns. (See the adjacent article for a clear and concise explanation of the legal process.)

The exact date of the hearing has not been determined. It will probably take place in the middle of January 2004.

The public hearing is the last chance for concerned citizens to contribute data, observations and views to which the developer must respond.

The public comment session will be a crucial event. The more informed our questions are, the more seriously they must be taken. We urge people to study the development plans prior to the hearings. Once the Town Board has accepted the latest version, it will be available at the Tuxedo Public Library and at Town Hall. The Sterling Forest Partnership also has the document available for study.

Citizens who wish to coordinate their presentations with ours are welcome to contact us. We welcome anyone to talk to us about how they can participate in the public review and any other action they may take.

We especially need to produce a realistic analysis of the costs of building this golf course, how it can be paid for and what the impact would be to the town if it is not self sustaining as a public course.

We will send out a notice as soon as we have more information on the date and location for the public hearing. Please call Mary Yrizarry at 845-783-4302, or Sue Scher 845-351-2883 to get more information about the upcoming hearings and issues.

Sterling Forge Estates Review Process: What's Up? Where Are We? What's Next?

By Mary A. Yrizarry

No one can fault the keen business sense of the holding company that sold land to New York for Sterling Forest State Park. It unloaded a rocky, road-resistant tax burden at Westchester County prices, and as part of the deal it held onto one of the few parcels capable of being developed.

Enriched by the sale, the company (Sterling Forest LLC) seeks to accelerate its profits to the maximum by developing its parcel, a vast region of hills and wetlands surrounded on all sides by graceful protected forest. The proposed development, called Sterling Forge Estates, would radically alter the landscape. An 18-hole golf course and over 90 homes will be gouged out of the State Park's core. Cliffs and slopes will be flattened into fairways and greens. The system of ponds, watercourses and cleansing wetlands will carry tons of fertilizers and pesticides over vast lawns, and empty into the reservoirs of Tuxedo Lake and the Ramapo aquifer. Contemplative silence will be replaced with traffic and noise.

Nothing stands in the company's way except a town council and a few state laws governing the environmental review process.

The Environmental Review of the Sterling Forge Estates development in Sterling Forest now seems to be playing a "hurry up and wait" game. A lot has happened however, and a lot more is coming up.

This past June, the Sterling Forest Corporation submitted a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to the Tuxedo Town Board. Upon reviewing the document, the Town's consultants wished to clarify several issues of continuing concern related to

water issues. The Timber Rattlesnake study required by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) drew particular attention.

As a result, in mid-August, the Town Board formally rejected the FEIS and requested a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) in its stead. This was an important step which will require the developer to publicize its plan and will expose the project to further public comment.

After following the Town's instructions, the Sterling Forest Corporation submitted its revised document on October 1 calling it a Draft SEIS (DSEIS). It contains a few changes to its original FEIS, mostly dealing with water issues and historic preservation, plus a complete set of new maps. At its meeting on November 17 the Town Board requested an extension for accepting the DSEIS in order to review it with their consultants. The Board will not accept the DSEIS until it is satisfied that all of its concerns of last August have been adequately addressed.

As of this writing the DSEIS is scheduled for approval on December 15. However the Town Board also needs to hear from the NYSDEC regarding the Timber Rattlesnake studies. Once the Town has accepted the document it will be released for public review and a date for a public hearing will be set. This should be around January 15, 2004 but the exact date is still to be determined.

After the public hearing, the Corporation will be required to review and address the public comments which it will then submit to the Town Board and its consultants. Once the Board is satisfied that the document is complete, it can reject the project as unacceptable, or accept it as a Final EIS (FEIS). This may take the process well into 2004.

If the Board accepts the FEIS it will issue permits which will define parameters under which the project can proceed. The Corporation will then take a more detailed plan to the Tuxedo Planning Board. The Planning Board will continue the review process and the Corporation will obtain various permits from the NYSDEC and other State and County agencies.

Meantime, through the Freedom of Information Law, the Sterling Forest Partnership has obtained copies of both the original FEIS and the changes made to it in the DSEIS, and these documents are being reviewed by our consultants and other concerned individuals.

Our consultants will provide testimony at the hearing on issues that continue to be obfuscated or ignored and new ones that have become more apparent since the original hearings two years ago.

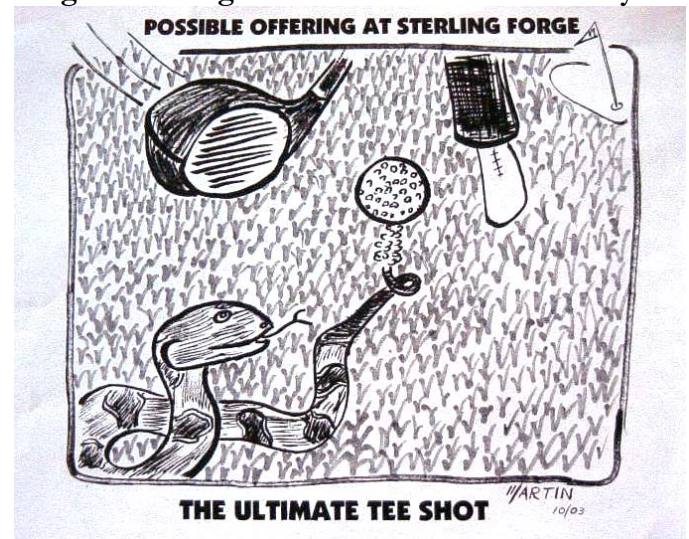
Anonymous Donor Pledges 50% Matching Grant for Fall Appeal

The Sterling Forest Partnership has received a promise of matching funds of 50 cents for every dollar raised up to \$10,000. The donor, who chooses to remain unnamed, will stake up to \$5000 to spur the Partnership's fundraising efforts.

This is a great boon for the Partnership. It means that every individual fifty-dollar gift will automatically take on the force of a \$75 gift; every \$100 becomes \$150, until the goal is reached.

Among the ongoing expenses faced by the Sterling Forest Partnership are the fees charged by the specialists we employ to examine the environmental and legal consequences of development within and around Sterling Forest State Park.

A few days after the publication of this bulletin, the Partnership will send its annual fundraising letter of appeal. When your letter comes in the mail, please take a moment to consider how your donation can help prevent the ruin of over 600 acres of forest currently on the line. Remember too that your gift will carry half again its effective weight in the fight to save the forest. Thank you!



The Eco-Pop World of Sterling Forest

While Googling “Sterling Forest” one day, we were surprised to find among the zillion references to the State Park and its battles, recurring links to a pop singer who goes by the unlikely name of Angela Sterling Forest.

How could we resist? We clicked (asterlingforest.com) and discovered a singer-songwriter in distant Seattle whose very name reflected our most local concerns! We listened to the samples of her music available on line, and our burdens seemed suddenly lighter. She describes herself as “An Eco-Commentarian,” and her music tends to emphasize environmental issues.

She wasn’t born with the surname Sterling Forest, but she didn’t simply adopt it as a stage name either. As a university student in the 1970s (she holds a degree in Environmental Studies), she read about Sterling Forest in the environmental press. The forest faced a development plan then that would have canceled it off the planet. In sympathy, Angela legally changed her name. Later, she climbed onto the stage and made music.

Angela sent us several copies of her latest collection, Marble Feather. These are available while they last during this fundraising season for any additional donation of \$10.

Conservation Day Festivities Drowned, but Thanks All the Same

September 21, Sterling Forest Conservation Day, was a typical late summer day, 2003: the clouds were gloomy and low, the air seemed colder than it should, and all the forecasters agreed on rain.

In the event, they were wrong. It was a fine soft day. It didn’t rain very hard or very long, but the forecast was enough to signal a change of plans for many who expected to spend the day outdoors. The hikes, the bike rides, the bird walks and lectures, were enjoyed by intimate groups about 1/10 the expected size.

The small attendance generated plenty of cheer. The prevailing good mood was helped along by very generous support from several local merchants and one distant artist. We extend our sincerest thanks to
XX Foods (better known as the Shoprite of Ramsey), who provided groceries;
Dunkin’ Donuts, who gave 10 dozen of their finest confections;
Ramsey Outdoors;

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