

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

OP would be better off with 'official' rail trail

Dear Editor:

No one is talking about building a six lane super highway. It'll be a foot path. I refer, of course, to the "controversial" rails-to-trails project. Ambitious people will be able to walk down to Colden for dinner, (or up to Orchard Park for dinner). Snowmobilers will be able to come up to Orchard Park for a meal or a tank of gas. Bicyclers will be able to gather in our town to start rides down to Springville. While they are here they'll buy bike parts, bottled water and, yes, meals.

Local kids will be able to hop on their bikes and come down into the village to patronize everything from the bowling alley to coffee shops and stores. We might actually be able to support a bookstore or a music store again. Maybe we could keep a coffee shop or an ice cream parlor open for more than a couple of years. Kids would have an opportunity to mingle and establish friendships outside the bounds of adult supervised competitive activities.

But the same old nonsense has again been raised against a walking trail. The objections are trite and, as usual, wrong. Objections have been raised, as usual, by a very vocal minority of residents whose back yards are closest to the proposed trail, or non-residents, who I don't think should be given a voice at our town meetings. There are only a handful of residents, but they show up at every Town Board meeting to be sure their voices are heard loud and clear. Statistics have been quoted, (or misquoted or incompletely-quoted) and fear has been mongered.

Some of us see Orchard Park as more than a real estate investment. It was raised here and I'll most likely die here. My home's value is an academic question to me since I won't be selling it and I never borrow against it. This town is my only home. Over the past 30 years it has gotten too noisy, too crowded and too paved for my taste. Here is a chance to instill some quiet and green in everyone's life. This is development we all ought to welcome. It will be for everyone, it'll be cheap as dirt, and it'll add some class to a town that is steadily becoming "Cheektowaga-South."

The notion that property values drop along such a development may be true for property in an urban area, but this will be a rural trail. My brother lives in a neighborhood near Ann Arbor which was deliberately wedged in next to a former rail line (now a trail), because the home values would be higher due to the easy access to recreational facilities. People walk, run, bike and, yes, ride snowmobiles, and none of the local residents seem put out at all.

The notion that criminals will use the trail to access neighborhoods for criminal purposes is nonsense. Every resident has a road in front of his or her home. Most criminals own, or are willing to steal automobiles to facilitate a crime. Most suburban burglaries are two-minute smash and grabs, in which a team is dropped off from a car or truck in front of a vacant house, and the vehicle orbits the block until the team comes out with their loot. All pile into the vehicle, (if possible chosen for its anonymity), and the team escapes on the road!

Statistics citing high criminal activity, (assault, robbery, etc.), on trails are for urban trails. This will be a rural trail. Sure, psychopaths may turn up anywhere. The presence or absence of a trail through the woods is immaterial to them. Juvenile delinquents, members of drug distribution related gangs, etc. are not going to get in a car and drive to Orchard Park.



leave their car in a town-designated parking lot and walk a couple of miles into the woods to terrorize anyone. It simply isn't human nature. Any kids you encounter on the trail will be recognizable to you from your own neighborhood, or one close by. I have always given our local kids credit for the brains not to mess in their own nest.

The notion that someone said the rail line was abandoned and would be forever wild is a demonstration of large-scale gullibility. The rail line has just become abandoned. At any point up till last summer the railroad could have started hauling six trains a day full of dynamite, nuclear waste and stinky garbage through our town, and we would have been powerless to stop it. Some residents may cite the recent incident where the railroad parked a string of empty bulk tank cars behind the Country Club, and the town asked them to move the cars, and the railroad graciously did so. The railroad did not have to. Those of us who have lived in Orchard Park for more than 50 years realize that when anyone tells you that a place is "off-limits" to development, what they mean is, "we haven't had the right offer yet."

Some people are concerned that they'll have strangers in their backyard. The rail line is not your yard. It is true that there are a few properties where a casual walker can see the entire backyard. A double row of blue spruce and a few "Keep Out" signs ought to suffice to keep hikers, bikers and snowmobilers from seeing your house, or wandering into your yard. Most people aren't ambitious enough to climb down or up a railroad embankment simply for a look at your garden.

As I have stated many times in the past, snowmobilers are far from the crazy devil-may-care types most people think. Snowmobiles cost a lot. The people who ride them are overwhelmingly employed men from their mid-20s to their mid-40s. When they see a sign that says "Keep on the Trail," they do.

Someone actually brought up the danger to hikers from flying golf balls. I've been walking or driving past two sides of the Orchard Park Country Club for nearly 45 years. If

I ever get hit by a golf ball, I'll pick myself up and go straight to the store to buy a lottery ticket.

Cost has been brought up yet again, and yet again it is nonsense. First, if the government asks if it can spend money in your neighborhood, the answer is always yes! Second, the project should cost pennies. The railroad is going to sell the rails; a salvage company will pick up the rails along with most of the iron or steel debris. (Railroad rails are very valuable). A company will then come in and remove the ties. After this is done, someone will only need to rent a bulldozer and run it from Orchard Park to Springville, and the trail will be ready for use. Anything over and above this comes under the heading of frills. If snowmobilers want to use the trail, have them re-deck the bridges and put up handrails at their expense. (They'll also be willing to keep the undergrowth trimmed back). Annual maintenance would consist of looking at it and saying, "Yep, it's still there."

Finally, the rail line is not going to disappear. It'll be there for generations. The same people who want to hike, bike and snowmobile on it now are going to do so whether you want them to or not. Building barriers across the right of way is illegal. (It's not your property). If someone is injured or killed by running into a barricade on the rail line you can be dead sure that they will sue either the railroad, New York State or the locality where the barricade was erected, and the builders of said barricade will find themselves party to a liability suit, if they are not arrested for erecting a "man trap" which resulted in injury or death. If you want to spend the rest of your life yelling at casual passers-by to get off the railroad right-of-way, go ahead. Knowing full well that it is not your property, they will ignore you. You will not be able to do a thing about it other than become a pest to the police, who aren't going to lose any sleep about hikers in the woods.

Isn't it better to have an "official" trail, where you may be able to get some grant money for landscaping? Someone will mark the trail, warn people to stay on it and police it. No, I don't think it's going to cost a bundle to police it. We're already paying a lot of police officers in this town; I'll bet the younger ones will fight over a chance to ride the trail on a bike in the summer. The Sheriff's Department maintains snowmobile patrols, so we're already paying for that anyway.

This is a slam dunk no-brainer for the vast majority of Orchard Park residents. For the few who are against it, I'm also sure they are going to find the trail a lot easier to live with than they've been told.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Orchard Park Press, 3770 Transit Road, Orchard Park, NY 14127

One Year Mail Subscriptions:

\$35 In Erie County
\$40 Out of County
\$30 Seniors in Erie County
\$35 Seniors Out of County
(Seniors - 65 years and older)

Periodical Postage
Pending at Buffalo, NY 14240

Founded August 1, 2008
Published every Friday.