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## Development must include Yonkers' key assets

*Ned Sullivan*

The 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage up the magnificent river that now bears his name, just a year away, is inspiring residents to help transform their waterfronts into great places to live, work and play. Increased activism about riverfront development reflects a growing commitment to "get it right" - to build on each community's unique qualities while safeguarding the Hudson Valley's stunning beauty.

Yonkers has tremendous assets positioning it for revival. Its proximity to New York City is enhanced by a beautifully renovated Metro-North Railroad station and New York Water Taxi service to lower Manhattan. X20 Xaviars on the Hudson offers fine riverfront dining, complementing the esplanade, townhouses and other restaurants that have turned industrial sites into public space.

But what guarantees the city a premiere place on the Hudson River Heritage Trail are spectacular Palisades views and the Saw Mill River, whose restoration as part of downtown revitalization could truly put Yonkers on the map.

Despite this potential, the Palisades may soon vanish behind a wall of skyscrapers. And public funds for daylighting the Saw Mill are at risk of disappearing.

Let's start with the Saw Mill. In September 2006 I stood alongside then-Gov. George Pataki and Mayor Philip Amicone to celebrate a \$10 million state grant, painstakingly secured with Scenic Hudson's help, supporting the daylighting initiative. Both expressed how vital this project was to the city's renewal. However, in the Pataki administration's last hours, the city quietly requested permission to divert the money to generic master-planning of downtown development projects. Pataki officials ratified the diversion.

The \$10 million supplemented \$24 million previously secured by former Sen. Nick Spano, R-Yonkers, for the project. As The Journal News has reported, the Amicone administration has applied to the state to use this money not for daylighting, but for acquiring property for general downtown redevelopment. This is perplexing since the developer, Struever Fidelco Cappelli, is required to purchase all the land.

Scenic Hudson has appealed to Mayor Amicone to utilize the \$34 million to uncover the Saw Mill. The mayor assures us he will, that the money ultimately will be recovered from developers, although he has not said how or when.

Regarding the Palisades, plans for the waterfront entail a narrow riverside walkway fronting a wall of as many as 19 towers up to 30 stories tall. These would obliterate views of Yonkers' "natural skyline" for many residents while placing added strains on already overburdened municipal services - including the fire department's ability to protect the high-rises.

The city's third great asset is its people. Scenic Hudson has held dozens of meetings with residents to develop an alternative waterfront plan. It features mid-rise structures offering a mix of affordable and market-rate housing, creates great new recreational facilities, restores the Saw Mill, and incorporates green design features.

One wonders whether Yonkers officials even care what their constituents think. On March 18 the City Council declared complete the 8,700-page Draft Environmental Impact Statement for River Park Center and Cacace Center (both in the central business district) and Palisades Point (on the waterfront), then ordered a mere 30-day public comment period. Scenic Hudson joined others at the April 29 hearing - one of only two scheduled - in calling for more time to digest plans that will impact the city for generations. While officials' concerns about the fragile real estate market are legitimate, neither they nor developers seem intent on engaging in meaningful dialogue with the public.

Yonkers was founded 35 years after Henry Hudson claimed this land for the Netherlands. Adriaen Van der Donck founded the settlement at the confluence of the Hudson and Nepperhan rivers in view of the Palisades. His saw mill marked the foundation of a burgeoning economy. Today, Yonkers' leaders can acknowledge this enterprising start of their city by building on its key assets, positioning it for success in the century ahead.

We join Yonkers residents in calling on city officials to make the waterfront and downtown the first and most exciting stop along the Hudson. The next public hearing is May 13. Let your voice be heard!

The writer is president of the environmental organization Scenic Hudson, based in Poughkeepsie, and a Yonkers native.

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