



Letters to the Editor: Nov. 14, 2019



Thanks for story on lawsuits at MHS

On Nov. 1, Erin Roll wrote an article on an ongoing lawsuit against the Montclair Board of Education, that accuses multiple Montclair High School personnel of sexual harassment and a hostile work environment. As a 2016 graduate of Montclair High School, and moreover, as a young woman, I genuinely appreciate the coverage that this case is receiving. I strongly believe that it is important for all to be aware of the social and institutional disparities that women face even here in Montclair.

During my time at MHS, there were many occasions where myself or one of my female peers felt uncomfortable around certain personnel at the school. I never felt the need to take my sentiments to administration because I didn't want to jeopardize the relationships I had with other workers at the school. However, once my younger sister began her journey at MHS, my feelings toward protecting potential predators completely dissipated. Whether it was unsettling comments on her appearance, or the unwarranted graze of someone's hands, I encouraged my younger sister to always speak on things that brought her discomfort. In order for these issues to be exposed and rectified, one must speak up.

With that being said, I have written this letter to thank you and Erin Roll for shedding light on a very serious matter. This situation shows us that even in an affluent, community-thriven town like Montclair, women still face disparities that are oftentimes unbearable. And in order to amend these issues, we must first address them. I will continue to follow this story in hopes that the two female plaintiffs receive the justice that they, and so many other women in this world, desperately deserve.

NAOMI WIGGINS

Montclair

In need of a supermarket now

Ever since November of 2015 when Pathmark closed at the base of Downtown Montclair, Lackawanna Plaza continues to sit vacant. Only two businesses are still open — Popeye's and Robert's Pizza. It seems that the developers that are responsible for Lackawanna Plaza are not considering the needs of the customers.

Considering that we pay extremely high taxes to live in Montclair, we deserve better as a community with the construction of the revamped Lackawanna Plaza. It was supposed to have begun the end of this year but there has been numerous debates going on between the developers and the public. For example, the public feels that the developers are trying to limit the pedestrian access from the north side of the mall.

Being that Montclair is meant to be a pedestrian-friendly town, shoppers who approach the mall from the north would save a few minutes by being able to approach the plaza via Glen Ridge Avenue.

A good affordable supermarket in the lower part of Downtown Montclair is a must. When Pathmark was open, it was in a great location. Many people could walk to the grocery store. For those who need to take public transportation to get to the supermarket, they had so many bus options — New Jersey Transit's 11, 28, 29, and 34M all stop along Bloomfield near the intersection of Gates Ave and Lackawanna Plaza. During the period with the absence of a supermarket in Lackawanna Plaza, people have had to travel to other towns like West Orange and Bloomfield to do their grocery shopping.

The developers should seriously considering putting themselves "in the shoes" of customers who don't drive and need to use the mall. When Pathmark was open, many of its customers didn't drive and lived within walking distance of the mall. If we pay very high taxes, then we expect a lot more out of the Lackawanna Plaza project.

JOHN LEVAI

Montclair

Time for NJ to allow drivers' licenses for all

On Monday, Nov. 4, Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York signed a bill into law allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license. This is a life-altering change for many people, and a tool in the ongoing struggle for immigrants' rights. By ICE's own account, 50 percent of its detainees were located through traffic violations. A driver's license law would lower the number of violations and lessen the number of people jailed by ICE. It's time for New Jersey to pass such a law.

Though Gov. Murphy would surely sign a bill if it reached his desk, Assembly Speaker Coughlin and Senate President Sweeney are refusing to allow driver's license bills out of committee. We need to call our senators and assembly members to lean on Coughlin and Sweeney to get this done.

In the meantime, the right bill must be written. Like New York's new law, ours must guarantee privacy to ensure that DMV records cannot be used by federal agencies to track undocumented persons.

I encourage everyone who cares about immigration justice to speak out in favor of driver's licenses for all.

ANTHONY LIOI

Montclair

Lackawanna fight continues

Why should all be outraged about the short-sighted, and ill-conceived development in Montclair's Commercial district and most urgently, Lackawanna Station?

1ST: The decision to approve the Lackawanna developer's application by Montclair's Planning Board was in direct defiance of the unanimous recommendation of the Montclair Historical Preservation Commission (HPC), and every architectural, planning, preservation and supermarket consultant hired by the township and the Planning Board to advise them.

2ND: There is presently a lawsuit filed and funded by over 200 friends and neighbors to appeal the Montclair Planning Board's approval of the plan by Pinnacle Development and Hampshire Properties. The appeal is based on substantive and procedural defects in the decision.

The developer's tactics was a strategy of divide and conquer. The Fourth Ward and others were guided by an expectation that a full-service supermarket was to be integral to the project. A ShopRite supermarket was bandied about for months and months, setting clear expectations, especially among the traditional Pathmark shoppers who felt the loss of Pathmark created hardship. Once the expectations were set, the applicant clearly and unequivocally created a false dichotomy, telling residents and the Planning Board that preserving

the historic train station (a National, State and Local designated landmark in Montclair's Town Center Historic District) would preclude a lease to a supermarket. The applicant cultivated conflict between those who sought the preservation of the historic train station and residents of the Fourth Ward. This classic divide-and-conquer seemed nuanced with racial undertones and socioeconomic conflict. The needs and ambitions of both groups were never in conflict. This was a cleverly manufactured tactic.

The developer's tactics was a strategy of bait and switch. What was actually, incredulously, voted on was not the project that had been applied for and presented over the previous 24 months. After two years and hundreds of hours of discussion, the applicant produced a tenant only on the actual night of the vote. Instead of a 49,000-square-foot supermarket promised to the Fourth Ward, Brian Stolar suddenly revealed LIDL, a 29,000-square-foot specialty market that is approximately half the size of what was promised and represented in sworn testimony. Ironically, LIDL promotes itself on its website as open and actively willing to embrace historic buildings.

Montclair is at a critical intersection. Literally, Lackawanna can and should be an important anchor to Montclair's main commercial district. The Lackawanna site is a critical gateway to Montclair and a bridge connecting the Fourth Ward commercial and residential district to the rest of Bloomfield Avenue and the township. Most critically, its central location in town, with little creative effort, could link and create visual and pedestrian continuity to promote vibrancy and activation of the full length of Bloomfield from the Montclair Art Museum to Bay Street Station. A good plan would activate and bring continuity to the full-length Glen Ridge Avenue. Lackawanna is perhaps one of the top 10 most trafficked intersections in Essex County. As presently approved the site will become a Route 46/10 big-box site with an astoundingly inappropriate 375-foot-deep parking lot, entirely defiant of the prescriptions of Montclair's Master Plan and entirely disruptive and deadening to four important streetscapes.

The developer of Lackawanna developed The Siena, Valley & Bloom, The MC Hotel, The MC Residences (under construction), and The Seymour Street/Wellmont project (under construction). Consider these buildings. No matter what you think of these projects you might want to ask: "How is a single lead developer developing every major commercial project in Montclair? Simultaneously?"

Pinnacle incredibly was granted a variance due to "hardship." This "hardship" is entirely self-created by their desire to build residential multifamily units on top of existing parking lots, east of Grove. Go seek a variance for a self-created hardship in any other community and see how far you get. For this privilege, Pinnacle will demolish the most architecturally rich and most important historic site in Montclair. You think parking downtown is hard now?

Where is consideration for sound planning principles? Where is the kind of thoughtfulness our beautiful township deserves? Our planning board and our township planner are failing us. We should all should be outraged.

DAVID GREENBAUM

Montclair

The writer is a member of the township's Historic Preservation Commission.

Don't take voters for granted

On Election Day, we entered the voting booth and did something we have rarely if ever done in the fifty plus years since we cast our first votes — we chose not to vote for any candidate running for Assembly in the 34th District. While we are registered Democrats and candidates Giblin and Timberlake generally vote in synch with our values and concerns, not one of the candidates on the ballot made any effort to contact us prior to the election to let us know who they were and why we should vote for them. (We did get a robocall on Election Day from Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill asking us to support the Democratic candidates, but without citing any reason other than they were Democrats.)

In short, the Democrats took our votes for granted, and the Republicans obviously did not think outreach would sway us — probably correct, but you never know, do you? This also applied to the candidates running for other county positions as well.

Over the past two years that Giblin and Timberlake have served, we have not received any mailing or email telling us what they have done in office, how their work has promoted issues we care about, or any other news about their service. They have not held any town meetings in Montclair that we might attend, or otherwise made attempts to reach out to us, their constituents.

Obviously both Giblin and Timberlake won their district with overwhelming support from the party faithful. We realize that our lone dissents were not sufficient to change the outcome of the election, but hopefully this letter will lead them to take heed and at least pretend that they work for their constituents instead of the other way around.

BILL BEREN & JOANN KATZBAN

Montclair