

4/30/2015

# Don't buy misstatements about Pitney Farm

EDITOR:

All residents of Mendham Township need to be aware of the following:

Despite broad, strong support to save our Pitney Farm, despite many relevant examples in our area of similar sites that have become successful and vibrant, and despite the non-binding but authoritative Certificate of Eligibility (from the N.J. Historic Preservation Office) stating the farm's deep historic value and listing its many features, our 300-year old Pitney Farm is on the path to being bulldozed for private development instead of for community use.

Most people are shocked to discover this, since it is "obviously" wrong and unthinkable, but that is the situation. Pitney Farm consists of about 12-acres total, of which there are seven acres of protected public open space, mostly lawn and gardens, surrounding an additional five acres of unprotected municipal land with all of the historic farm structures. (Please visit: <http://www.pitney-farm.org>)

There are currently two proposals for the unprotected, historic five acres:

1. The town governing body is clearly forging ahead only on their own goal of selling the unprotected municipal land, demolishing all the farm structures for private development. The governing body has made statements that are factually incorrect or misleading, supporting their plan and for not saving the farm, all to pay down a piece of the total town debt and to reduce the need for town resources to support the site (public works, etc.).

After all the effort and money expended to acquire Pitney Farm, the Township Committee's plan is for all the stated reasons, investment already made, and promises for the original acquisition would just be summarily brushed aside as if the Pitney family had just sold to a developer in the first place, which they chose to not do.

2. The Friends of Pit-

ney Farm, while active for only the last few months in response to the development plan, has worked in good faith with the Township Committee and considered all stakeholders towards creating a "win-win" proposal to meet the needs and concerns of residents, community groups, and the Township Committee. The net result would be improving the town's financial situation, getting the Township Committee "out of the landlord business" but also saving the irreplaceable 1700s farm history, preserving the beautiful and historic farm setting, not negatively affecting the surrounding open space land nor the adjacent neighbors and importantly, having a location and suitable facilities to house community groups, and run educational programs with our schools (who are very interested).

Some important points follow; your conclusions will be self-evident:

The town has, for over five years, actively blocked any pursuit of available, non-taxpayer funding, beginning shortly after the initial acquisition when the town-appointed Transition Study Team emphatically recommended having an expert preservation plan and to get an available grant to fund it, and most recently earlier this year, with the town, as owner, blocking Friends of Pitney Farm from applying for available Morris County grants to study the site, acquire it from the town, and preserve it.

At the April 13 Township Committee meeting, the governing body summarily dismissed the Friends of Pitney Farm proposal for acquiring the most historically significant portion of the farm's unprotected municipal land. In fact, the governing body has also ignored 100 percent of the recommendations from their own two appointed site study groups and all the associated professional work done by those groups to fund and save the historic features of the site and to use the location for a broad list of community benefits.

The town has also rejected similar, strong recommendation from our town Historic Preservation Committee, and impassioned urgings from regional historic experts and groups, as well as a petition with hundreds of resident signatures to save it, and dozens of people speaking at town meetings. All completely ignored.

The town has exaggerated the condition of the farm buildings as being poor and being in need of too much attention. In reality, professionals who have inspected the site structures for Friends of Pitney Farm have stated that, while some work is needed, the structures are actually in good condition. And, compared to other, similar historic sites with old houses and barns, all of which today are successful and vibrant community treasures, Pitney Farm's structures have been judged to be in much better shape.

Friends of Pitney Farm proposes to use available grants from Morris County and private foundations, private donations, fund raising programs, etc., to fund the acquisition, stabilization, preservation, and re-purposing of the historic site for many community needs and benefits.

Our own Ralston Cider Mill and some other historic sites in town have done exactly this with great success. The nearby Kennedy Martin Stelle Farmstead Arts center in Basking Ridge, a site very similar to our Pitney Farm, has successfully obtained millions of dollars of grant funding over years and today is a successful and valued community center.

The governing body, as part of rejecting the Friends of Pitney Farm proposal at the April 13 meeting, remarked that no one would want to see a huge building erected in their back yard, probably referring to one idea for what might be possible for a new library, but the Friends of Pitney have never proposed anything like that, only preserving part of the existing site and the

key structures, and letting the town use the remaining land to help their financial and town resource goals.

Prior to the April 13 meeting, some Township Committee members had informally previewed the Friends' presentation and they helped shape it, and they praised the Friends' direction. At the April 13 presentation, only Mayor Baumann and Councilwoman Diana Orban Brown were open to the Friends' presentation and showed support for a "win-win" solution to the future of Pitney Farm that would save the key historic structures and reduce the township's financial and other commitments to the property, but the governing body's plan remains selling the historic site for development and bulldozing the existing structures.

There is so much misleading information being presented for not saving Pitney Farm that it is troubling. This should concern residents who understand and value Pitney Farm and certainly those who value sound financial management, our town's coveted character, our Master Plan, having community resources, acting consistently with past promises, historic preservation, fact-based planning, and acting in the best long-term interests of our town.

The Friends of Pitney Farm disagree with the Township Committee and will actively oppose their plan in favor of one that clearly serves Mendham better. Please learn the true facts and express your views in a public forum. Write a note to the newspaper and say which plan you favor, come to a Township Committee meeting and speak up, and please support the Friends of Pitney Farm (<http://www.pitney-farm.org>) so we can make the right things happen on behalf of our town.

**BRIAN G. BODEN**  
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Mendham

• LETTERS TO THE EDITOR •

OT 4/23/15

# Preserve Pitney Farm for benefit of community

EDITOR:

I sent the following message to each member of the Mendham Township Committee.

I urge you to reconsider your decision to put the Pitney Farm property up for auction to developers. This historic property cannot be replaced. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.

A few houses will not be an asset to the entire Mendham Township community as the preserved farm property would be. We need that sort

of community center – a place where people can meet their neighbors for many different kinds of activities. We have always made sure there are sports facilities for our residents, let us consider the needs of many others who would benefit from such a cultural and historic resource.

I recognize that you are seeing the bottom line in terms of cost, but enhancing the quality of life for Mendham Township residents is part of your mission as well. Remember those public officials who allowed

the old Penn Station to be destroyed. No one sees that as a good move today.

Compromise, as suggested by the Friends of Pitney Farm, and heed the call of the numerous professionals who have made statements in support of preservation of the main structures. What do you want your legacy to be?

**NANCY J.H. BAILIN**  
*Washington Valley Road  
Mendham Township*

# No more residential development in Mendham

EDITOR:

Pitney Farms, or more McMansions?

The beauty of our historic, bucolic community is its history and its open spaces. It is the reason we live here, raise our children here and are willing to drive 20 minutes to the nearest

highway.

The roads in and out of Mendham are already clogged. Our outdoor spaces are shrinking. We have tons of houses on the market, some for a very long time.

We do not need residential development. We need historical preserva-

tion. Do what is right here – for our town and for our times. Keep Mendham the beautiful, peaceful, historical treasure that we all cherish.

**JULIE RUBINFELD**  
*Valley View Drive  
Mendham*

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