

LETTER TO PHIL GARBER, EDITOR, OBSERVER-TRIBUNE at pgarber@newjerseyhills.com

EDITOR:

The most important thing that every citizen of Mendham Township and Mendham Borough can do to save the irreplaceable 1720 Pitney Farm from destruction is to go to the next Mendham Township Committee meeting, to any and all Township Committee meetings and – when Mayor Chris Baumann calls for public comment – simply step up to the microphone and speak your mind. It doesn't have to be eloquent. A few sentences spoken from the heart or from jotted down notes will do it. You just have to show up in person and tell the members of the Township Committee that they need to preserve this irreplaceable pre-Revolutionary treasure sitting in the center of the Mendhams, at One Cold Hill Road on the border between the township and the borough.

The members of the Mendham Township Committee need to hear from the mouths of the citizens and voters that Pitney Farm is worth saving. A petition is all well and good – and more than 493 people, most from the Mendhams, have pushed the button on the <https://www.change.org/p/pitney-farm-future> petition website. But the five members of the Mendham Township Committee will only truly understand the widespread public support for saving Pitney Farm when they see 25, 50, 100 people standing up at every Committee meeting, telling them that Pitney Farm is irreplaceable, that it can become – as the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead has become in Bernards Twp – a centerpiece for the arts and community education and activity. Just check the www.mendhamtownship.org website to find out when the next meeting will be and come out to speak your piece.

If the Township Committee feels that the township cannot afford to own Pitney Farm for public use, as it had intended when it purchased the property in 2009, then it should turn the property over to the Friends of Pitney Farm, a growing corporation of citizens working to preserve and restore the historic homestead and re-purpose it to benefit the community. Here are some of the reasons why this would be a good decision:

1. Transferring ownership to Friends of Pitney Farm allows Mendham Township Pitney debt and debt-servicing costs to be reduced or retired.
2. It would bring significant funds into Mendham Township from non-municipal sources, including public and private historic preservation grants that many other communities have used to finance the restoration of historic structures. It would also eliminate the current Mendham Township expenditures to maintain and try to stabilize the Pitney Farm buildings.
3. It would result in better management of the property, because Friends of Pitney Farm will dedicate its attention and resources solely on preserving, restoring, and making maximum community use of the property, something which Mendham Township, its current owner, does not have the luxury of doing.
4. It would result in more services to the community and a stronger community. By transferring management of Pitney Farm to an organization dedicated to the historic preservation and use of the property for cultural and educational purposes, it will improve the facilities for the community's benefit. As with the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead in

Basking Ridge (see <http://www.farmsteadarts.org/>), the 1720s Pitney Farm homestead could stand at the core of community activity, offering programming and events in the arts, gardening, history and more for school children and adults, serving as the permanent homes for the historical and gardening societies of both Mendham Township and Borough. It could offer needed public meeting space, outdoor concerts on the beautiful lawns, gallery space for local artists – the uses and the community benefits are endless. Our citizens want and need these services. And by co-locating all of these community organizations and programs at one site, there would be more collaboration, innovation and growth, bringing Mendham Township and Mendham Borough together as a stronger and healthier community. This will raise property values. If you allow Pitney Farm to be demolished, you are destroying something that could, if restored and re-purposed, bring value and pride to the Mendhams.

So if you have any opinions about Pitney Farm, if you think it should be saved instead of demolished, stand up at any Township Committee meeting and speak your piece. But do it soon, because if we, the citizens of the Mendhams, do not tell our elected representatives on the Mendham Township Committee – in person – that we want Pitney Farm preserved for the benefit of current and future generations, well – Pitney Farm just might not be there. Before there was a Mendham, NJ (1748), there was Pitney Farm (1720). Pitney Farm is worth the time it will take to tell the members of the Mendham Township Committee – in person – that this historic treasure must be saved for the community's benefit.

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