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Belmont Redevelopment Plan

In an effort to administer CPR to the 104-year-old Belmont Race Track, a newly released study known as the Belmont Redevelopment Plan was commissioned by Governor David Paterson to outline plans to develop some 36 acres of land into revenue producing entities that would create economic opportunities, new jobs and renew portions of the surrounding community.

The two parcels designated for development are located within the southernmost area of Belmont Park and are respectively labeled Parcel A and Parcel B. Neither site borders any boundary of the Village of Floral Park. Site A is an 8-acre parcel located on the north side of Hempstead Turnpike and is just west of the Cross Island Parkway. Site B is approximately 28 acres situated north of Hempstead Turnpike and west of the Cross Island Parkway and residential neighborhoods in Elmont.

The Floral Park Village Board attended every meeting with regard to this redevelopment to comment on the proposed capital improvements. There are several options; the preferred one on Site A being a stand-alone racino/casino, a stand-alone large hotel or a large hotel with a racino. Site B would include various retail uses, a small hotel, senior housing as well as recreational opportunities.

I believe this 54-page report is a good first step in a lengthy process. My view, however, regarding the injudiciousness of promoting gambling remains unchanged. Although I am bemused that government, at a time when households need to build up savings and banks are starving for deposits, blithely continue to encourage influences of personal profligacy over husbandry, I am nonetheless gratified by some real positives regarding this proposed development. Idealism has its place for sure, but let's not be straitjacketed by the attitude of sacrificing the good for the perfect, especially if the alternative is nothing at all.

The report's primary focus is the revitalization of Elmont, the gateway to Nassau, which is good for everyone. Belmont Park, historically inhospitable to creating cooperative enterprises, has been building bridges to integrate its infrastructure and resources to the fabric of its neighboring communities. This concept has been a magnet for success at Saratoga Racetrack and while the similarity between the areas of the two racetracks is not analogous, the idea has enough horsepower to instigate constructive and beneficial change.

We are also pleased that our elected representatives recognize the need to have dialogue with Belmont's neighboring communities and have been attentive to safety and security issues that were outlined in the Floral Park "Statement of Principles" as they create and enterprise zone consistent and congenial with the high-minded ideals of community living.

The political calisthenics needed to clear the hurdles for the development ahead we leave for other lights, but looking toward the future Floral Park will continue to advocate for direct representation on a Community Advisory Board on issues connected to the track, such as flooding and drainage. Moreover, Floral Park bearing its share of the burden as a village contiguous to the racetrack, expects to be among the beneficiaries of any and all revenue streams that are created by this development.

Centennial Volunteer Party

It was a gala fitting, a Centennial celebration, which is exactly what it was. Some 140 volunteers, working on a bevy of committees, gathered at village hall to reflect, reminisce and celebrate the extraordinary success that was our Centennial year. That so many contributed was a sign of the village's strength as volunteers are the life breath of the village. That this Olympian challenge unfolded so flawlessly proved that miracles can still happen if we are willing to work very hard.

After dinner, our Centennial Chairman Tom Hayden was invited to give an overview of the yearlong celebration. In a presentation flavored with witticisms and wisdom, Tom exhibited that easy, post-prandial charm that has made him a local legend. One more word about Tom Hayden: Is there anyone in living memory that has undertaken so many causes for so many years on behalf of the Village of Floral Park than our former mayor? It was said that the great advantage Chief Justice John Marshall had over everyone else, was that he was John Marshall. The same could be said for Tom Hayden, whose unfailing interest in our community and delightful bonhomie steered this committee from the opening fireworks to its closing ecumenical prayer service with geniality and grace.

I would also like to pay special tribute to all the volunteers who served on the various and sundry committees. I've said once before, and cannot say it often enough, that the life of this village cannot be successfully sustained by any one person, or any one group of persons, but only by the community as a whole. As we launch upon this first of the next 100 years, our journey must be infused with the same spirit of giving that blessed and enriched our Centennial year. The Centennial was not so much looking back as looking forward, not as much about the past as it is the future. Its success and safety rests, where it always has, and always should, with the fidelity and faithfulness of those who live here. It is a beautiful and irrefutable truth, seen more clearly at the twilight of elected office than it ever was at its dawn.