

May 17, 2011

The latest challenge to the unique quality of life we enjoy is not coming as intensified urbanization from our west, but rather, an ambush from the east. Recent reports are that the Shinnecock Indian Nation is trying to take lands in our community, which is more than 75 miles from its reservation in Southampton. To surrender land at either the Hub or at Belmont Park is outrageous and our village's future with a sovereign nation next door is unpredictable. Like his predecessor Andrew Cuomo, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's efforts were rewarded by an Appellate Court's August 2010 decision which took decades of litigation to resolve. The decision declared that tribes, like the Shinnecock Nation in Southampton, must charge and collect state levied tax on cigarettes sold to patrons from off the reservation. Millions of dollars of state revenue has gone uncollected as a result of these sales. Attorney General Eric Schneiderman applauded the state's appellate ruling saying, "Today's decision closes an enormous tax-evasion loophole that was depriving New York of hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. The state estimates that as much as \$500,000 in unpaid taxes goes uncollected everyday as the result of Indian tobacco sales." (The Southampton Press.)

Why might we be opposed to development of Belmont's property, as a casino could be an economic engine providing jobs and revenue? The truth, I fear, would be just the opposite. Why should the Shinnecock Nation, which has flaunted the law by not collecting its fair share of state taxes, be rewarded with the right to reap an unfair windfall in Nassau County at the expense of the surrounding communities? The Shinnecock Nation is a sovereign nation and therefore any State lands inside Belmont Park transferred to Shinnecock control could become sovereign lands. Important issues like zoning, building heights, density, land uses, employee's rights, etc. could be beyond the laws and regulations of the Town, County or even New York State. What if, in addition to its Hempstead Turnpike casino location, the Shinnecoeks later decide to develop land adjacent to our Floral Park-Bellerose School as the perfect venue for another 25 story hotel and 7500 seat pavilion? There would be nothing we could do. The entire matter may ultimately rest within the jurisdiction of the federal government's Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs. But whether jurisdiction resides with the federal government or the State, how can either not declare that the more appropriate location for the Shinnecock Nation's casino should be at its ancestral home in a Township world renowned for its tourism.

During former Mayor Phil Guarnieri's tenure, Floral Park's Belmont Task Force addressed the issues of development at Belmont Park. Our position is well known and should come as no surprise to either our elected representatives or our neighbors. The Village of Floral Park has thoroughly and succinctly outlined our concerns and demands regarding the development of Belmont Park.

The **Task Force for Belmont's Preservation and Improvement: Statement of Principles** presented at the hearing on October 9, 2007 may be viewed by clicking [here](#).