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A BAD IDEA - PROPOSED LAND SWAP AT THE AIRPORT

By George Klein

Sierra Club, as part of the Coalition to Prevent Westchester Airport Expansion, opposes the land swap being pushed by Westchester Joint Water Works.

York City, in all about 9 million people. This new site is within the Kensico Reservoir watershed.

WJWW proposes to trade land it owns in Purchase, adjacent to the airport, for a similarly-sized parcel on airport property in order to build there a new drinking water treatment plant needed to service some WJWW customers. This is the "land swap", WJWW land in Purchase in exchange for acreage at the airport, within the Kensico watershed, owned by Westchester County.

Build a water treatment plant that might ruin Westchester and NYC water?

Prudence and reason would not gamble the drinking water of 9 million people for a location that would be advantageous in terms of engineering, or because of sunk costs.

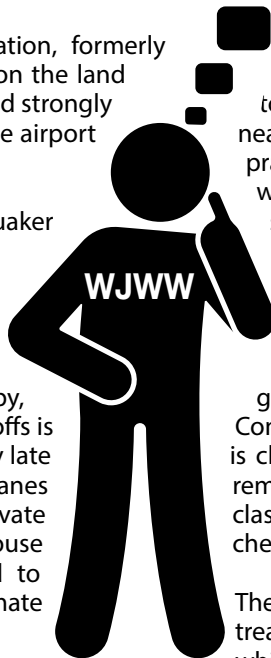
The Purchase Environmental Protective Association, formerly opposed to building the water treatment plant on the land in Purchase, no longer opposes building there, and strongly objects to the land swap. PEPA is a member of the airport coalition.

Impact of PFAS in a Nearby Community
Until 1983, a unit of the New York Air National Guard was stationed at our airport, and practiced fighting aircraft fires there. PFAS is an important component of the foam. A cleanup was done years later, but at that time PFAS was not yet understood to be toxic. In 1983 that unit relocated to Stewart Airport, near Newburgh, just across the Hudson, and proceeded to practice there, ruining Newburgh's drinking water supply with PFAS. As of 2018, Newburgh uses water from the NYC system.

Other Purchase neighborhood groups, and the Quaker Friends Meeting, also oppose the swap.

Why Should the Airport Not Expand?

Sierra Club and the coalition oppose expansion of the airport and its operations, as they are a threat to the water in the Kensico Reservoir nearby, they pollute our air, the noise of landings or takeoffs is extremely intrusive to residents nearby, especially late at night or in the early morning, and because planes with few passengers, such as corporate or private planes, emit a shocking amount of greenhouse gases per passenger-mile, especially compared to commercial airline operations, at a time of climate emergency.



The PFAS Cleanup

To its credit, the Westchester County government under County Executive George Latimer is pursuing a costly, complex cleanup of PFAS at the airport, under the guidance of the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation. PFAS is all over the airport, so the whole airport is classified as a PFAS brownfield, polluted acreage needing remediation. And the county is a plaintiff in a nationwide class action lawsuit against the Department of Defense and chemical companies who manufacture the foam.

There is also reason to believe that building the water treatment plant at the airport will help the airport expand, which is not a good thing. Tom Murphy, former mayor of Mamaroneck, says as much in a pro-swap video:

Many of us think of the airport as a commercial airline facility. It was, once. But nowadays 80-85% of the takeoffs and landings are corporate, private, charter and other, compared to 15-20% for commercial airlines.

<https://www.lohud.com/videos/news/2023/02/18/proposed-location-water-filtration-plant-purchase-questioned/11292131002/>

The Risk

The main reason Sierra Club and the airport coalition oppose building the plant on airport property is that in 2017, PFAS chemicals (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a large class of synthetic chemicals) were found at and adjacent to the airport. PFAS are highly carcinogenic substances, whose presence is legally tolerated in tiny amounts, measured in parts per trillion. Constructing the plant at the airport potentially could dislodge PFAS underneath the site and send appreciable amounts of PFAS into the groundwater channels leading into the Kensico Reservoir, a huge repository of drinking water consumed by most of Westchester's population, plus millions more people in New

continued on next page

Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and select Events

Visit RocklandSierraClub.org

All meetings via Zoom, link on websites

Opposing the Swap in the Board of Legislators

To enable any property transactions like the land swap by Westchester County, a supermajority of the Westchester County Board of Legislators must approve. We are lobbying the 17 members of the board to educate them about what's at stake and why they should vote against this plan.

What You Can Do

Whether or not you get your drinking water from the Kensico, we ask you to contact your legislator and express your position on this plan. You can find your legislator here:

<https://giswww.westchestergov.com/ElectedOfficials/index.html>

Questions? Contact me George Klein, at lowerhudson@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Role of the Latimer Administration

To his credit, the County Executive Latimer's actions have been constructive. Early on, the administration re-started the use of sentinel wells, discontinued under the Astorino administration. These wells are used to monitor water quality at various locations around the airport. Also, the administration has enforced leases against expansionary moves by ground services companies operating at the airport, notably Million Air. Further, the administration has enforced the Terminal Use Regulations (part of county law) against corporations running airline-like services that do not use the main terminal, a violation of those regulations. And the PFAS cleanup mentioned above.

Join us to work on environmental issues in Rockland County!

Rockland Sierra Club was one of the groups leading the successful effort to defeat plans to desalinate Hudson River water for Rockland's drinking water. We are now helping the County craft a sustainable water management policy. We are also working to limit new fossil fuel infrastructure and have partnered with 350.org on efforts to address climate change through divestment and through promoting Climate Smart/Clean Energy Communities programs for towns and villages.

Rockland Sierra Club usually meets on the second Monday of each month. Check RocklandSierraClub.org for dates and locations. For more information: pkurtz9@gmail.com or call 845-709-0802.

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Rockland Sierra Club website: RocklandSierraClub.org

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HOW OUR ENDORSED CANDIDATES FARED IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

By Ed Berry & George Klein

Sierra Club makes political endorsements in selected races. Political involvement enhances our impact on policymaking, because we affect elections.

Audiences influenced by our endorsements are our membership and the general public.

Candidates seek our endorsement, and work with us through our rigorous process.

The table below summarizes what happened to our endorsed candidates in the elections of November, 2023. The bottom line is that we endorsed in 8 races, and our endorsees won in five.

Seat	Area	Endorsed Candidate	Result
Westchester County			
Board of Legislators	District 2 - Bedford, Lewisboro, Mount Kisco, North Salem, Pound Ridge, Somers	Erika Pierce	Won
Board of Legislators	District 9 - Cortlandt, Croton on Hudson, Ossining, Briarcliff Manor, Peekskill	Emiljana Ulaj	Won
Board of Legislators	District 10 - Eastchester, New Rochelle, Tuckahoe	Judah Holstein	Won
Board of Legislators	District 11 - City of New Rochelle, Town of Pelham, Village of Pelham, Village of Pelham Manor	Terry Clements	Won
Board of Legislators	District 15 - Bronxville, Yonkers	Ruth Walter	Lost
Supervisor	Town of Yorktown	Jann Mirchandani	Lost
Rockland County			
County Legislature	District 10 - Village of Nyack, Hamlet of Central Nyack, part of Hamlet of West Nyack, eastern Hamlet of New City	Beth Davidson	Won
County Legislature	District 11 - Town of Clarkstown east of Lake DeForest, including Valley Cottage, Congers & Rockland Lake	David Bruen	Lost

REPAIR CAFÉS ARE POPPING UP THROUGHOUT OUR REGION!

By Sarah Wilson

Repair Cafés are free community events where you bring your broken but beloved items and volunteer repair coaches help you FIX THEM for free!

What kinds of items get fixed?

LAMPS • CLOCKS • CHAIRS • ELECTRICAL ITEMS • SMALL APPLIANCES • DIGITAL DEVICES • CLOTHING & TEXTILES • DOLLS • STUFFED ANIMALS • TOYS • JEWELRY • AND MORE!

MOST ITEMS GET FIXED – but even when they don’t, we have a good time trying!

Westchester & Putnam: In addition to the already established Repair Cafés in Rockland, Mamaroneck, Ossining, Pound Ridge, Rivertowns (Hastings, Dobbs Ferry and Irvington) and Yorktown, 2023 saw the debuts of Repair Cafés in Tarrytown / Sleepy Hollow, Cortlandt/Croton and Mahopac. In 2024 New Rochelle plans to hold their first Repair Café.

Rockland: Rockland Repair Cafés covers their entire county, because Rockland is the smallest County in New York State outside of New York City. There are five towns in Rockland that

are unique and diverse, and Repair Cafés are rotated throughout those five towns to ensure that all communities have access.

Putnam: Mahopac. Sustainable Putnam has set an ambitious schedule in 2024 of holding quarterly Repair Cafés.

To find upcoming Repair Cafés in our area, go to Repair Café Hudson Valley www.repairCaféhv.org and check the calendar.

DO YOU WISH THERE WERE A REPAIR Café CLOSER TO HOME? CONSIDER ORGANIZING ONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY! Contact Repair Café Hudson Valley www.repairCaféhv.org to learn what’s involved. Sarah Wilson, a member of Sierra Club’s LHG ExCom has organized 19 Repair Cafés in Yorktown, and she is happy to speak with any interested groups wishing to bring Repair Cafés to their community. Contact Sarah at saradwilson@optonline.net



THE MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE CONUNDRUM

By Laura Burkhardt

The Westchester Alliance for Sustainable Solutions (WASS) in Westchester County is currently engaged in a campaign to shut down the Wheelabrator Westchester (“Wheelabrator”) Waste-to-Energy (WTE) facility in Peekskill, which combusts the county’s municipal solid waste (MSW). A summary of some of the complaints (see <https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/for-the-local-good/wass-wishes-wheelabrator-was-out-of-business/59488/>) was published in March 2023.

Environmental groups oppose incineration of MSW because of its adverse environmental and health effects. But shutting down Wheelabrator will also have environmental consequences. Let’s take a closer look at the issues.

Arguments for closure

- 1) Wheelabrator emits large amounts of greenhouse gases and pollutants: 632,174 metric tons of CO₂e emissions in 2021. CO₂e emissions for Wheelabrator for years 2017 to 2021 are shown in Table 1 (source: [EPA Facility Level GHG Emissions Data](#))

Table 1. Emissions for Wheelabrator Westchester 2017 to 2021

Year	Tons of CO ₂ e Emissions Reported by EPA (Methane and N ₂ O Converted Using 20-Year GWP)					Total Emissions
	CO ₂	Methane	N ₂ O	CO ₂ + Methane + N ₂ O	Biogenic CO ₂ e	
2017	259,122	19,129	8,359	286,610	436,505	723,115
2018	263,602	19,277	8,423	291,301	425,554	716,855
2019	244,751	18,771	8,203	271,725	416,739	688,464
2020	229,527	18,207	7,955	255,690	395,034	650,724
2021	222,709	18,207	7,955	248,872	383,302	632,174

CO₂e = carbon dioxide equivalents, a unit of measurement used to compare the impact of different greenhouse gases (GHGs) on the environment. CO₂e provides a unified way to express the contribution of each GHG to climate change, i.e., it tells us the amount of CO₂ needed to produce the same amount of warming that other GHGs create.

GWP = Global Warming Potential, which allows comparisons of the global warming impacts of different gases.

Biogenic CO₂e emissions are defined as CO₂ emissions related to the natural carbon cycle, as well as those resulting from the harvest, combustion, digestion, fermentation, decomposition, or processing of biologically based materials.

- 2) The facility is 39 years old. The average retirement age of a WTE plant like Wheelabrator is estimated to be 23-27 years.
- 3) The coal ash resulting from the combustion process is taken to a landfill in Connecticut which is located near wetlands and the Quinebaug River.
- 4) A February 2017 report from NY State Department of Health compared Peekskill to surrounding communities and reported high rates of asthma in Peekskill, respiratory cancers, death due to cardiovascular disease and high incidents of low birth weight.

Response to arguments for closure

- 1) Yes, Wheelabrator does produce a lot of CO₂e emissions. But the facility also makes positive contributions to the economy and our quality of life. And over the past 5 years its emissions have decreased by 12.5% (as shown in Table 1 above).

Furthermore, a carbon capture upgrade would eliminate this argument altogether. The facility is large enough for such an upgrade to make technical sense, and IRA incentives could make it financially feasible.



- 2) The useful life of a WTE plant is not necessarily determined by its age. The facility is continually being upgraded with new technologies for controlling air quality, and its emissions are well below the limits established by EPA, as shown in the following table for 2022.

Emission Limit Comparison				
Emission	Units at 7%O2	EPA Subpart Cb Existing MWCs	Wheelabrator Westchester LP TV Permit Limits	WWLP Average (2022)
NO _x	ppmv	205 ^e	184	162
PM (F)	mg / m ³	25	25	0.9
SO ₂	ppmv	29 or 75%RE	29 or 77% Control	7.3 (88% Control)
HCl	ppmv	29 or	29 or 95.4% Control	3.8 and 99% Control
CO	ppmv	100	100	15
Hg	µg / m ³	50 or 85%RE	28 or 85% Removal	0.8 and 99% Control
Cd	µg / m ³	35	10	0.2
Pb	µg / m ³	400	270	1.7
Dioxins	ng / m ³	30	25	2.6

Column 3 = EPA Limits for Existing (2009) Municipal Waste Combustors
 Column 4 = Title V Air Permit Limits for WWLP
 NO_x = Nitrous oxides PM=Particulate matter SO₂=Sulphur dioxide HCl=Hydrogen chloride
 CO=Carbon monoxide Hg=Mercury Cd=Cadmium Pb=Lead

- 3) Wheelabrator is currently investigating alternate ways to dispose of the coal ash produced by the combustion process. For example, coal ash is widely used as an ingredient in hydraulic-cement concrete because it improves many desirable properties of concrete.
- 4) The March 2023 article says, “A February 2017 report from NY State Department of Health ... reported high rates of asthma in Peekskill, respiratory cancers, death due to cardiovascular disease and high incidents of low birth weight.” This statement needs clarification and context. Although the report was issued in February 2017, it covered the years 2010 to 2013.

In contrast to the February 2017 report, a Community Air Screening project in 2017 took air samples from 4 different areas in Peekskill, i.e., **there is more than one source of pollution in Peekskill**, and concluded that there is no immediate public health concern. In addition, a report from NIH concluded that ascribing health problems in a community to emissions from a single site is not a straightforward matter, especially if the community has more than one source of pollution.

Contributions of Wheelabrator Westchester to the economy and our quality of life

- 1) **It reduces the amount of our MSW.** In 2020, Wheelabrator combusted 659,116 tons of waste, resulting in 152,613 tons of toxic ash, about 23% of the waste tonnage.
- 2) **It generates electricity.** By combusting MSW, it generates over 300 GWh of electricity annually. In 2020 it generated 369.9 GWh; in 2021 it generated 323.1 GWh. This is enough to power about 30,000 homes.
- 3) **Metals are recovered** from the coal ash (12,000 tons in 2016).
- 4) **The plant pipes steam directly to White Plains Linen** via a new steam line constructed in 2013. This enables the laundry to significantly reduce the amount of natural gas it uses to make steam and hot water. The reduction in natural gas usage will eliminate 4,775 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually, according to Wheelabrator.

What are the consequences of closure?

- ∞ **Another method will be required to dispose of our MSW.** Alternatives for disposing of MSW include technical alternatives (which are not yet completely commercialized and also have harmful emissions), landfills (where emissions result from the transporting of MSW, as well as from the landfill itself), and the recycling, reuse and reduction alternative.
- ∞ **An alternate source of 323.1 GWh of electricity will be needed.** To eliminate CO₂e emissions, this would need to be generated from renewable sources (solar, wind, hydro).
- ∞ **Metals would not be recovered.**
- ∞ **White Plains Linen will need another source of steam.**

What are the alternatives for generating electricity?

In 2021 Wheelabrator Westchester generated 323.1 GWh of electricity. It is assumed that any replacement amount of electricity would come from renewables (solar, wind, hydropower). If Wheelabrator were closed, it would require, for example, roughly 610 acres of solar farms (an area about 3/4 the size of New York City's Central Park) to generate 323.1 GWh of electricity annually.

What are the alternatives for supplying steam to White Plains Linen?

Since White Plains Linen has converted its laundry equipment and room heating systems to steam, ideally some other means would be employed to produce this steam. If no steam replacement was practical, the company would probably need to revert back to natural gas for its operations.

What are the alternatives for disposal of MSW?

The Technical Alternatives. Our research indicates that there are currently no feasible technical alternatives to replace Wheelabrator Westchester. Technologies such as hydrothermal carbonization of organics, plasma gasification, and pyrolysis are sometimes mentioned as possible replacements, but these technologies can also have harmful emissions, may not be practical at large scale, and may not yet be successfully commercialized. A brief survey of these technologies is available upon request from the author.

The Landfill Alternative. If Wheelabrator Westchester closes, the closest currently available option would be a landfill in Syracuse,

which would entail a 495 mile round trip by 60 trucks every day. Transportation to the landfill would produce emissions: an empty garbage truck emits 3.5 kg of CO₂ per mile. Sixty trucks driven over 495 miles a day for 365 days is 37,942 metric tons per year. Additionally, there is the noise, dust and traffic disturbance that occurs when large numbers of garbage trucks are driven through communities on a daily basis. Further, the 383,302 tons of biogenic CO₂e currently emitted by Wheelabrator (see Table 1 above) would now be emitted by the landfill.

Were the landfill in Syracuse to become unavailable, the next closest one would be in Pennsylvania.

The Recycling and Reduction Alternative. Increased recycling of paper, glass, and plastics and reduced use by consumers of single-use products are viable alternatives for disposing of MSW. We are told that the market for recyclables has dried up, and many private haulers in Westchester County who collect from businesses and non-residential operations do not separate recyclables, instead sending all MSW to Wheelabrator. We must work to create a larger market for recyclables. Food scrap recycling programs that are being implemented in many municipalities are an important step in this effort.

Reduction efforts, especially of single-use plastics, are extremely important. A recently passed single-use foodware law in Westchester County restricts delis and restaurants to providing individual plastic foodware packages only upon request. Delis and restaurants also need to make use of returnable reusable containers for takeout food; new regulations that enable customers to bring their own containers for takeout are essential. Individuals can help by reducing their daily use of single use plastics, such as cutlery, cups, lids, straws, bags, and beverage bottles (including single use water bottles).

Less plastic packaging would also go a long way in reducing the amount of waste we generate. Buying food in bulk or avoiding items with a lot of disposable packaging are strategies that we as individuals can follow. We must also work to get companies to reduce their use of plastic packaging.

Conclusions

The solution for disposing of municipal solid waste is not simple. At the present time we see reduction, reuse, and recycling, while not a complete replacement for the WTE facility, as the best actions to take. As individuals, each of us must focus on reducing and reusing while also using every possible means — messaging, lawsuits, protests, all types of media — to persuade institutions and governments to do the same.

Sources

1. [WASS Wishes Wheelabrator Was Out of Business – River Journal Online – News for Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow, Irvington, Ossining, Briarcliff Manor, Croton-on-Hudson, Cortlandt and Peekskill](#)
2. [EPA Facility Level GHG Emissions Data](#)
3. [City of Peekskill Health Equity Report 2017 \(ny.gov\)](#)
4. Email from Lindsay Audin, energy engineer and consultant, CEO of Energy-wiz.com, and previously energy manager for Columbia University.
5. Conversations with and emails from Commissioner Louis Vetrone of the Westchester County Department of Environmental Facilities (DEF), which is responsible for waste management in the county
6. [Wheelabrator Westchester Signs Steam Agreement With Commercial Laundry Operation - Waste Today \(wastetodaymagazine.com\)](#)
7. <https://www.energyjustice.net/WheelabratorWestchester.pdf>
8. <https://www.nyiso.com/documents/20142/2226333/2022-Gold-Book-Final-Public.pdf>
9. Health effects from hazardous waste incineration facilities: five case studies - PubMed (nih.gov)

WINTER GOT YOU DOWN? GET OUT ON A TRAIL!

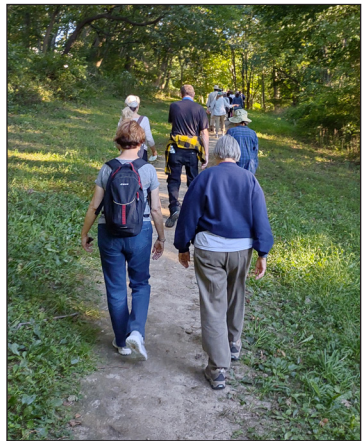
Once the brilliant fall colors have subsided and leaves have turned brown, it's tempting to think that nature has gone into hibernation for the winter. While many plants and animals slow down during the cold weather in New York, the landscape is not dead! There are many signs of life to those who look, from buds on trees to animal tracks in the snow.

Besides giving us the opportunity to exercise, getting out on a winter hike gives us a chance to experience peace, since even popular trails are not as busy. With adequate layers of clothing and proper planning about distance, time, and possible need for equipment such as crampons, getting out on a trail in winter is refreshing and inspiring. Empirical data across numerous studies document significant benefits from exposure to natural environments, including improved psychological health, mood, attention, coping abilities and overall well-being.



Lower Hudson Group has been excited to increase our outings in 2023. Several of our members have taken Sierra Club's Outings Leader Training to become authorized to lead hikes. They have arranged outings for a variety of ability levels, from easy, fairly level walks with visits to local farmers markets afterwards to more challenging hikes up Breakneck Ridge in Putnam and Hook Mountain in Rockland.

In addition, Lower Hudson Group has partnered with Another Summit, a program based in Cold Spring which



arranges outdoor adventures throughout New York and the Northeast. They offer outings at all difficulty levels, from beginner to advanced, which are led by certified outdoor leaders. While Another Summit was organized to serve guardians (including veterans and first responders) who benefit from the healing power of getting out into nature, their outings are free and open to all community members. Outings are routinely provided in public transit accessible locations, including Putnam, Westchester and Rockland, and many are wheelchair accessible.

In 2023, Another Summit led adventures to many places, including:

- Dennings Point in Beacon
- West Point Foundry Preserve in Cold Spring
- Popolopen Torne in Harriman State Park
- West Pond in the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Rainbow Falls in Minnewaska State Park
- The Hubbard Lodge loop trail in Fahnestock State Park

Those of us from Lower Hudson Group who have participated in these outings have found friendly companionship and warm conversations as we experienced the woods together.

We are planning another year of outdoor adventure in 2024. **If you are interested in being notified about future outings, attending an outing or even being trained as an Outings Leader, please send your email address to Gail Dutan at gail@move2lifeny.com.** She will add you to our Outings email list that will only send you notices of upcoming outings and Outings Leader Trainings.

We post Lower Hudson Group outings and many Another Summit hikes on our website at SierraLowerHudson.org, on the "Get Outside" tab. Another Summit's webpage is at <https://www.guardianrevival.org/programs/another-summit>. While there, read about their good work and consider helping to support their free programs.



HIKES AND OTHER OUTINGS

Don't forget to check the Get Outside page on our group website for all kinds of outings. They're fun and invigorating, and a great way to meet like-minded people of all ages and walks of life.

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and click Get Outside.





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LOWER HUDSON GROUP

SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM, ROCKLAND & SOUTHERN ORANGE COUNTIES

"...the frequency of unusually warm extremes is increasing. It is the extremes that have the most impact on people and other life on the planet." - James Hansen



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Inside

.....

A Bad Idea – Proposed Land Swap At The Airport 1-2

Vital Numbers 2

How Our Endorsed Candidates Fared In The November Elections 3

Repair Cafés Are Popping Up Throughout Our Region! 4

The Municipal Solid Waste Conundrum 4-6

Winter Got You Down? Get Out On A Trail! 7