

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

Restoring Wetland Will Help Restore Lake George's Water Quality

To the Editor,

John Shafer's quixotic campaign to stop the environmental restoration of the Gaslight Village site in favor of commercial development is all sound and fury, but lacks real substance and understanding (Letter to the Editor, "Restored Wetlands Won't Attract Tourists," July 18, 2008). Shafer prefers that this site should house museums and aquariums and more, rather than be used to create an environmental restoration area that will help save Lake George. His logic is flawed on many levels.

First, he flat out fails to realize that the Gaslight Village was built atop filled wetlands. As such all existing buildings are built on slabs and are relatively insubstantial. This site cannot support large, new buildings that would meet the current codes. The water table in this area is high, within two feet or less of the surface. Last fall one interested party searching for an aquarium location studied the Charlie's Saloon building and site and concluded the parcel could not support the weight of an aquarium. Other commercial interests over the years looked at the site and concluded the site was unsuitable to modern commercial building demands.

Second, he says the site is one of the most desirable for development in the area. If that were the case, then why did this site sit vacant with no willing buyer for more than two decades? And why then did developers around the south basin utilize all manner of other sites rather than this one for all types of development?

Shafer states that the environmental restoration is a guise by environmental groups to prevent development on the site. No guise here. We don't want the site developed. We actively intervened to prevent development. We want the site restored to help the lake. The highest and best use of this area is to restore the natural wetlands that once existed there. The site was once wetland, and we aim to make most of it wetland again.

Mr. Shafer also fails to realize that the environmental groups have purchased an easement over the property for \$2.1 million. We proudly walked the walk all the way to the bank and back and put our money where our mouths are. While Mr. Shafer denies that Lake George needs a major investment to protect its high water quality, long-term data shows declining water quality from nutrient loading and sedimentation.

Mr. Shafer argues that there are plenty of wetlands in the Adirondacks for people to visit. True, but irrelevant. Shafer says no more wetlands are needed. False,

but revealing of a fundamental misunderstanding about the ecology of Lake George. Today, there are hundreds if not thousands fewer acres of wetlands that once flourished on the shores of Lake George. All around the lake, wetlands have been filled. Wetlands are vital to the ecology of a healthy lake by pulling out nutrients and soaking up sediment. Wetlands buried and filled do not provide these services. Restored wetlands will provide an ecological benefit for Lake George. Yes, we can visit a wetland in Lake Luzerne or Warrensburg or Indian Lake, but these wetlands do nothing for the water quality of Lake George.

Mr. Shafer's biggest error is that he fails to recognize that the wetland restoration is an investment to protect Lake George, the key economic asset of this community. Plain and simple: the long-term economic interest of the greater Lake George community is served by the environmental restoration of the Gaslight Village. This project is an investment in the water quality of Lake George, which makes it both an investment in the economy and environment of the region. The real "missed opportunity" will be a failure to seize this moment to protect Lake George, which is the undisputed economic engine of this area.

Peter Bauer, Executive Director
FUND for Lake George