
Subject: FW: Written Comment re: Annexation of 164 Acres from Town of Monroe to Village of Kiryas Joel - By Russ Kassoff 9-28-14

From: Russ Kassoff [<mailto:russk@frontiernet.net>]
Sent: Monday, September 29, 2014 11:31 AM
To: tmiller@timmlerassociates.com
Subject: Written Comment re: Annexation of 164 Acres from Town of Monroe to Village of Kiryas Joel - By Russ Kassoff 9-28-14

Dear Tim Miller and Associates,

First of all please relay L'Shana Tovah to the good folks of KJ and I thank the Village for hosting this historic scoping session and the opportunity to speak and write comments regarding this all too important issue. As a proud American Jew who has every branch of Judaism in my family including Hassidic in Williamsburg, I am grateful that we have met to begin a positive discourse and hopefully allay the fears and trepidations that certainly exist on both sides due to a lack of community coming to the table and having public and meaningful discussions. There certainly is ignorance everywhere. My wish to have meetings such as these WITH NO AGENDA restrictions on a regular basis. Peace would be made stronger and our diverse and very different communities would be made to feel better living side by side.

PLEASE REPLY WITH AN E-MAIL CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT OF THIS MISSIVE. If not received by 9-30-14, I'll be happy to send this as a certified letter. Thank you.

Comment #: _____

PUBLIC SCOPING SESSION
for the

ANNEXATION OF 164 ACRES FROM THE TOWN OF MONROE TO THE VILLAGE OF KIRYAS JOEL

Written Comment Form

Name: RUSS KASSOFF
Taxpayer of the Unincorporated Town of Monroe

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I'll get right to my points. They will be addressed as my thoughts about what may be a worst case scenario in terms of any and all reviews. In the case where people have already spoken I will try to skip those points:

1.Re: A, 1. - All public references to the population of KJ refers to a 2009 study. Practical experience living in the town has shown an explosion of growth in KJ since then creating the highest percentage (93%) population on the Medicaid rolls of any jurisdiction in Orange County. Any projections need to be disclosed to the entire county which bears the largest burden of Medicaid payments. Using a 2009 figure would not be accurate or

even close to the population growth in KJ as the village has far surpassed any other community both percentage and actual numbers-wise in Orange County. County legislators such as Mike Agnostakis, James Skoufis and others have spoken at our town meetings earlier this year (before ONLY agenda items were permitted to be spoken to which are solely and unilaterally decided by Supervisor Doles) indicating the difficulty of getting the County to publish ACTUAL numbers of medicaid rolls. The lack of transparency from the county executive has been obvious and ridiculous. Even the 2010 census isn't cited for numbers purposes. At any rate - the population of KJ is currently much higher than printed anywhere, a current census study needs to be done and should certainly be included in a worst case expansion scenario.

2. Schools District Issues. Superintendent Peitlin of the KJ Union Free School district spoke of a "willingness" to create an agreement with the Monroe-Woodbury School district to move its borders thus making it so that should the annexation be approved, the residents would no longer be in the M-W School district and thus - the worst case scenario - a block vote takeover by the new eligible citizens still in the M-W School district electing themselves to the board and dismantling the incredibly highly rated school district which many of us moved here to enjoy and reap the benefits of. I needn't spell out the entire story. I'm sure you are aware of the blueprint. East Ramapo. THIS issue, if addressed in conjunction with the DGEIS and SEQRA would take years to accomplish and BOTH school boards would have to agree to change the boundaries. How can this NOT be a requirement for annexation and be part of this DGEIS study?

In addition - this year we in the unincorporated Town of Monroe received a 3.5% School Tax increase (in the M-W school district). This is the highest percentage I have received in the 18 years I have lived here. It was a several hundred dollar bump up that I not only did not expect, I certainly cannot afford. I called the Town's assessor (referred to me by all the folks at the School Board Tax collection office) who productively, respectfully and most cordially explained to me that due to their diligence in assisting the School district in working this year's budget, and coming in at a 1.9% increase under the 2% state cap, we will this year only (and the property tax in January) receive a refund from the state for the amount we paid in advance over what we paid last year. Taxes are already too high and have been here for several years. In a tip of the hat to our previous recent town boards, they have been fiscally responsible enough to keep the tax hikes at a so-called manageable and stable level as compared to other towns nearby in Orange and Rockland. That being said, my most important question to the assistant tax assessor was: "How many parcels have become wholly or partially tax exempt in the past year (in the Town of Monroe), and would that be the reason why the unincorporated town of Monroe received the highest percentage school tax increase as compared to the other 4 towns and villages that are encompassed within the M-W School District?" His answer was vague, he had no numbers, I don't know how to get them, and he did make the point that several properties went back ON the tax rolls as well, again no numbers. Shouldn't this be a part of the study? Wouldn't it be important to know what properties were going to receive whole or partial tax exemptions for any reason, religious or otherwise in the Village of KJ and/or the unincorporated Town of Monroe. I believe you must study and will report on all the tax ramifications that would ensue within the School district and all of these complicated issues that do nothing more than co-exist with the town boundaries and annexation issues.

The town supervisor has stated publicly in Town Board Meetings that the town taxes would not rise "very much" should the annexation be approved. This is true in that the town ONLY REPRESENTS 7% of the total tax bill. The School tax is roughly 75% of the annual tax bill, the remaining 18% is county, medicaid, and services such as fire, sanitation, highway, police, etc... In reality the town supervisor oversees the smallest amount of what all of us in the town have to be concerned about. To do a study that limits the purview to TOWN taxes would be insufficient and incomplete. The tax ramifications on all county residents, and school district residents for all services adding up to 100% of the tax bills must be included.

3. Traffic has become unbearable. Especially on SATURDAYS!!!! That includes obviously no members of the good folks of the KJ community. Yesterday it took me 30 minutes to get from Harriman to the Organic farm on Route 208. Usually a 12 minute ride. An all time record. What with all the development going on within the

town outside of KJ, roads are closed, there are NO alternatives except long detours. Recently, without notice - THREE TIMES I got diverted at the bottom of Rye Hill Road because of sewer and water main construction. NO SIGNS, NO WARNINGS - A 7 MILE DETOUR!!! The town is already more than crowded enough and along with all the other non-available water and sewer resources unsustainable. To create the annexation and the easement of more high density zoning and an incredibly fast population growth in just one section of the town would just make living here totally unbearable especially if one needed to drive in those areas (ACE FARMS, etc..). For those of us who came here to enjoy a rural residential lifestyle it already has been very taxing and for the most part the residents of the roughly 100 square miles of land within the town of Monroe - excluding the village of KJ - will do everything we can to preserve that - while fully embracing the right to purchase property within it - fully understanding that the zoning ordinances were created over generations of residents for exactly such purpose. What plans would you have to ease congestion particularly off exit 130, The Thruway Exit 16, Nininger Road, Forest Ave and Bakertown Road - ALL roads that take us from one place to another in our diverse and daily lives. I travel on at least 2 of these each and every day.

4. Post Office services - It is well known that the Federal Government or to be more precise - the USPS has offered to create a post office in KJ and the leaders refused citing cultural requirements. The post office is open to ALL and so would one be if in KJ. There are over 100 cities, towns, villages and hamlets in Orange County. ALL OF THEM HAVE A POST OFFICE (Even Southfields and Sugarloaf).. The post office in Monroe - 10950 is ALWAYS crowded - including and especially the parking lot. If the population were to expand according to predictions and estimates - what of the pollution, traffic, parking, wasted gas and the health ramifications of such pollution as folks travel the several miles from KJ to this post office. The population of KJ right now is estimated as high as 24,000 and they don't have a post office? Seriously this topic needs to be included in any studies. ONE local post office to service over 50,000 people???

5. The town of Monroe multi family high density zoning area... in which the current 164 acre proposal lies. Several speakers spoke to the fact that with the unusual Town of Monroe zoning requirements, yet ANOTHER multi-family high density zoning area would have to be created IF this current annexation area were to be annexed into the Village of KJ and out of the sovereign boundaries of the town of Monroe. What is supposed to happen then? Another multi-family zoned area and in due time - much faster this time, another annexation and so on and so on??? Perhaps whatever these requirements are could be removed from the town charter in litigation?

6. Possible local Casino - A local casino would definitely contribute tax revenue and other positive revenue to the overall community. It's likely that most folks on all sides do not want one!!! It's too crowded, our resources are tapped, too much traffic, and our area does NOT have the roads to sustain an influx of tourists for gambling and recreation.

Yet - for the first few years until the novelty wears off, as is with any casino project, it would be positive revenue into the town's, and surrounding town's coffers. ALL environmental and tax concerns should be addressed in this study. I expect your study to include the positive financial contributions that the annexation would create FROM the newer larger Village of KJ towards the Town, and the County coffers.

7. Possible litigation by United Monroe law firm Zarin & Steinmetz - costs to the TOWN in the event the annexation is voted FOR and adopted by both boards.

You and I/we the residents of the Town of Monroe including the 3 villages (KJ, Harriman and Monroe) as well as the surrounding affected towns who are within the jurisdiction of the Monroe/Woodbury School district are either members, supporters, or aware of the United Monroe group/party line which is fully dedicated to the preservation of the rural residential lifestyles of the Town of Monroe and its area, the continued high level of education and diversity in our school system including graduation rates, music, art, sports, etc., fairness, transparency, open government and of course equal justice and treatment for all. The organization has gotten so large that much fundraising has produced enough to retain the Municipal firm of Zarin & Steinmetz to represent the majority of the folks who live in the unincorporated town of Monroe and it's connected villages, etc., etc.

Since the block vote of 2013 elected a majority of the town board and consistently does not allow our viewpoints outside of KJ to have our own elected representatives by outvoting us, and our voice locally regarding this issue is not heard by the block voted elected officials - AND our privilege to have public comment at our bi-monthly town board meetings has been cut in half after many years of open discussion and comment - AND the agenda is all we can speak to at these meetings which is solely at the whim and decision of supervisor Doles who is completely beholden to the wishes of the leaders that awarded him that block vote, then it is likely that litigation will occur to contest any passing of this segmented annexation or any annexation in its current form without solving all the other issues that accompany it. (School district boundaries, property tax and school tax ramifications, financial and environmental concerns, etc.) I ask, since this issue is in the category of “may or likely to” occur and perhaps worst case scenario, then the cost to the town of Monroe residents as it pertains to the Town’s defending itself in litigation, to appeal such a decision should also be part of the study.

I thank you for taking the time to read this and for the opportunity to present it to you as representatives of the Lead Agency - the Village of Kiryas Joel.

Best wishes,

Russ Kassoff
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Written comments on the Draft Scope are welcomed through September 30, 2014 until 5 p.m.
Please direct documentation to:

Tim Miller Associates, Inc., 10 North Street, Cold Spring, NY 10516

OR E-MAILED TO:

tmiller@timmillerassociates.com