

Why Now?

After a dispute that has lasted many years, are Clinton Township officials rushing to settle litigation over the controversial Windy Acres development? Last week's letter from state Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley Campbell opposed the settlement on environmental and legal grounds. With such a powerful ally, why compromise now?

The short answer appears to be that Clinton Township officials fear the state Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) more than anything; it could foist on that municipality housing densities that until now have existed only in local officials' worst nightmares.

The proposed compromise has divided the township. Anandale residents prefer the plan because it likely would keep more "affordable housing" from being built in their village. People who live closer to Lebanon Borough and Round Valley Reservoir more likely oppose the plan — for its traffic, its housing density and its potential environmental impacts.

The Town of Clinton worries about any Windy Acres development's effect on its nearby wells. Lebanon Borough worries that dumping even this compromise's proposed 455 units on its border would be highly unneighborly.

We have written many times that New Jersey simply cannot let COAH regulations trump legitimate environmental necessities. Let's take a good, close look at the DEP commissioner's concerns.

Regarding this push to compromise, township officials have been accused of recklessness, of overlooking facts, of caving in to a powerful developer. One serious complaint is that the Planning Board ended hearings abruptly, denying people a chance to comment. Even so, current Mayor Tom Borkowski has yet to get the deal signed by township council. That means the public still has time to ask questions, at least until Oct. 26 — unless council members agree to vote sooner.

We suggest that they wait.