

Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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NEWS RELEASE

No. 1218
January 10, 1974

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REGIONAL PLAN OPPOSES WEEHAWKEN-HOBOKEN LOCATION FOR OIL TANK
DEPOT AS INCOMPATIBLE WITH FUTURE OF AREA

Stagnation of Hudson County Called Result of State
Failure and Inter-Municipal Rivalry

Attached is the statement of Sheldon Pollack, Regional Plan Association's Information Director, opposing the proposed oil tank farm in Weehawken and Hoboken, New Jersey. Mr. Pollack spoke for the Association Thursday evening, January 10, at Weehawken High School at the hearing held by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection on the Environmental Impact Statement presented by the firm proposing the development.

The following points were made:

... Oil storage facilities in Weehawken-Hoboken would be incompatible with the future development of north Hudson County. Other locations in Hudson County would be more suitable.

... The depot would represent a short-term tax advantage but would adversely affect the ability to attract further investment of the type most likely to want to go there--residences and local services, research industry, recreation.

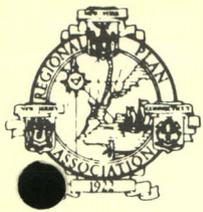
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. . . The continued failure of the State and Hudson County to develop a comprehensive plan and action program for the County, based on sound economic and demographic criteria, is responsible for the continued failure to attract suitable development.

. . . Inter-municipal rivalry has worked to the disadvantage of all.

. . . Because of this area's valuable location and natural features--the Hudson River and the Palisades--it should be accorded the same environmental protection as other especially valuable parts of the State --wetlands, Hackensack Meadows, coastal zones.

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Statement of
Sheldon Pollack, Information Director
Regional Plan Association

Hearing of
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
on the
Environmental Impact Statement for a
Proposed Bulk Oil Storage Facility in Hoboken-Weehawken
at the
Weehawken High School, January 10, 1974

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in tonight's hearing. I wish that I could say I welcome being here. Unfortunately, being in Hudson County all too often is to participate in one of the following: fancy Chamber of Commerce presentations on a new redevelopment project for the same deteriorated piece of the County; fruitless meetings with local elected and planning officials to encourage more realistic, environmentally and economically sound planning; or as tonight, to join our local friends at the barricade to oppose insensitive proposals, destructive of the long-range interests of Hudson County, its residents and the rest of us in the Region.

What you are considering tonight--the proposal for a large oil tank farm and depot--would be a limited, short-range tax advantage for a few, but the epitome of poor land-use from a local and county viewpoint as well as a wider view.

Therefore, once again--as we have for seven years--Regional Plan Association rises to plead for a comprehensive development of the New Jersey Lower Hudson waterfront, one of the most valuable pieces of property in the United States. And once again, we must plead with you to save this value by saying "no" to a piecemeal project that will destroy the potential and substantially decrease the benefits for Hudson County, New Jersey and the New

Jersey-New York Region.

In 1966, Regional Plan Association made the first inventory of the vast, significant changes taking place along the Lower Hudson, that stretch of both banks below the George Washington Bridge. It was published as The Lower Hudson.

Let me recapitulate what we found then--for it remains true today. Industry and shipping and railroad activities were moving away from both sides of the Hudson. In their place, billions of dollars were being invested or projected by local and state government and private interests --but in an unplanned manner--one project threatening the success of the other. There was no planning to take maximum advantage of the new potential for the riverfront--housing, office complexes, recreation, parks. Local governments were sorely pressed for tax revenues to make up for the loss of industrial and transportation rates and were seeking any likely tax "profit." But to maximize the tax profit as well as the human value, we said, would take cooperative action by all of those affected--the State, County and localities. That, apparently, was asking too much of neighboring local officials.

In 1969, our New Jersey Chairman, in opposing the sale of county parkland for private development stated: "These communities and Hudson County have failed in their stewardship. Responsibility for action, therefore, must lie with the State of New Jersey. Since the publication of The Lower Hudson, we have said on numerous occasions that the State cannot shirk this responsibility. It must take the initiative to work with communities and help them out of their tax bind and insist on a comprehensive plan for proper and sensitive use of this single most important asset--the River, harbor and skyline view."

Why has there been no cooperative effort? Why has nothing positive happened? Almost every Hudson County community has misread the signs of change. Each believes that it can rebuild on its own, to its advantage and to the disadvantage of its neighbor, an economic and tax base focused on industry. But the truth is that there is little industry that will come to Hudson County. For that matter, the entire industrial base of this 31 county Region is declining. But it is being replaced by office and service work which is just as good an economic base and much better aesthetically if properly built.

But Hudson County must recognize this drastic economic change and plan with it, not against it. No major reputable developer is going to come to Hudson County--despite its great advantages--without some assurance of the future. Who will build a large residential or office complex, uncertain whether its neighbor will be a coal depot, an oil tank farm or some other noxious industry.

Now it is true, if the citizens of this area will allow it, that prime areas can become the dumping ground for all of those facilities that amenity-conscious communities will not have. And like the farmers daughter, your officials and planning boards will be the target of every travelling salesman turned away from those communities.

Speaking of amenity, I am reminded of when the Department of Interior had review power over Hudson River projects. The Association objected to a proposed high rise in Union City because its steel structural base would dig into the Palisades and present a destructive, unsightly appearance. A halt to the project was secured. The developer, with Hudson County muscle, was able to overcome that objection with a rendering showing the steel understructure painted green and covered with vines--a sort of Hudson County hanging garden of Babylon. Interestingly, Cosmopolitan Terminals has offered to paint its tanks green.

Regional Plan Association is not saying that we can do without oil tank farms and other industry. But they must be carefully located in suitable areas where they will not have an adverse effect on other more beneficial uses--commercial, housing, recreation.

In The Lower Hudson, we proposed the following broad development guidelines:

"From the George Washington Bridge to the northern boundary of Hoboken. The most appropriate major new uses for this section are residential and associated commercial and community activities, regional parks and regional recreation facilities such as marinas and amusements.

"The Palisades should be preserved as permanent public open space, and continuous waterfront parkland should be provided by filling in the River at certain places.

"Northern boundary of Hoboken to Morris Canal Basin, Jersey City. This section would best retain its character of mixed uses, but the rail yards which are likely to be released, should be reclaimed for residential, recrea-

tional and related activities. Large-scale housing developments should be built around the under-used PATH stations at Exchange Place and Pavonia. Adequate separation of existing industrial uses from new residential-recreational uses is possible.

"Hoboken's waterfront from Stevens Institute to the Erie-Lackawanna Ferry Terminal should be redeveloped for activities that would benefit from proximity to Stevens and to Manhattan. The historic flavor of Hoboken and its waterfront might also be an attractive setting for hotels and conference centers as well as for residences. The area near Stevens Institute might accommodate industrial research activities related to the University. The face of the Palisades ridge, which turns away from the water and continues behind this section, should be cleaned up and reclaimed as public open space.

"Morris Canal Basin to Constable Hook, Bayonne. Except for the inland area behind Liberty State Park and the Tidewater Basin vicinity--both most appropriate for housing--this section probably is best used as a reserve for future harbor and other water-related goods-handling and goods-producing activities. Constable Hook, Point Breeze, Greenville and Caven Point Military Reservation all seem capable of significant industrial, harbor and rail freight development."

As you can see, the New Jersey shore of the Hudson is not short of locations for such important needs as tank farms.

Our position on proper development of the riverfront has been no different for New York. Recognizing that projects along one bank of the River will affect the opposite side visually as well as functionally and economically, we protested the design of the proposed North River sewage plant that would have provided an unpleasant--10 block long--view for New Jersey residents if built in the traditional manner. As a result, that project has been redesigned to be covered by a park at an additional cost to New York City of \$400 million. We remain committed to a similar position with regard to the reconstruction of New York City's West Side Highway.

New York City has undertaken a \$200 million Convention Center on the riverfront which may now overlook oil storage tanks. We cannot ask less consideration from the State of New Jersey.

To return to my basic point. To achieve a development program that will magnify, not destroy, Hudson County's great opportunities will require coordinated planning and probably revenue sharing among all of the Hudson

County jurisdictions as well as State planning and financial assistance. It is the same message of eight years ago.

It means that each municipality will have to be considerate of its neighbors. For you are in the same dilemma and you will sink or swim together --and all, including the State, will lose out if you don't make it.

It is interesting that in a State with one of the most courageous, forward looking and imaginative Department's of Environmental Protection, which has already placed so much of the State under its protection, Hudson County and the Palisades, have been left out. I venture to say that it is not because Hudson County is without influence--either in the legislature or with the past three State Administrations.

As a result, Hudson County is being left out of the real economic growth taking place in the State and Region. If the County continues the present pattern, it will continue to be left out. We all will be the poorer for it. I urge the State to reject the proposal and move forward to initiate an imaginative, comprehensive program for Hudson County in cooperation with its citizens and officials.