

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH OF WESTCHESTER

BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 1992

All of 1992 was spent negotiating terms and conditions with the Boy Scouts for the purchase of 5.5 acres on North Street in White Plains. In every respect this has been a painfully slow, tortuous process, full of frustrations.

The Scouts' organization has been plagued by internal strife aggravated by the lack of strong, focused leadership. All negotiations were hampered by a small but influential minority. They have been obstructionist to the point of risking forfeiture of the two additional acres which IBM has conditionally agreed to donate. The following is a typical example of the difficulties encountered. It took months to reach a satisfactory resolution of a relatively simple matter involving an IBM easement running with the land.

In order to ameliorate future opposition by neighbors to the combined church/Scouts project, a joint meeting was held with the president of the North Street Association at which time we and the Scouts disclosed the scope of our respective projects and pledged our willingness to be responsive to the concerns of our neighbors. This meeting was very amicable and augured well for the future. Similarly, in order that our joint application, when made, should not come as a complete surprise to the City of White Plains officials, the Scouts and church representatives had a cordial meeting with Mayor Alfred Del Vecchio and two of his commissioners, Ed Steinberg for Planning and Phil Amicone for Buildings. In addition, preparatory work in the form of interviews and discussions were held with individual attorneys representing several area legal firms to determine which one, following contract signing, would best represent the church during the application process.

The Building Committee is much indebted to a volunteer unit headed by Stephen and Karen Sirabian who took on the responsibility of conducting a survey of parishioners and friends of St. James in order to gain insight into and benefit from community attitudes on a number of important church related issues. There were 71 responses to the 345 questionnaires mailed. We are very grateful for the comprehensive nine page analysis submitted by Stephen to the Parish Council/Building Committee for use as a guide in the design of future facilities.

There followed lengthy discussions with the Scouts regarding an equitable apportionment of shared common expenses such as sewer, environmental impact statements and other approval costs. As a result, the Scouts became obsessed with and overwhelmed by doubts as to whether the money they were to receive from the sale would suffice for the construction of the new headquarters.

With adequate safeguards in the form of the church controlling design parameters, an offer was made whereby the church would build their new headquarters on a turn-key basis. This offer was accepted by the Scouts but upon further consideration, was withdrawn by the church.

Finally, after much further lengthy negotiation and based on an alternate allocation on the available land and for an adjusted price of \$1,175,000 a deal was struck.

Early in December, after instructing our respective attorneys to work out contract details, a new and totally unexpected problem arose, which caused the church to temporarily suspend all further work on the Scouts' property. The White Plains Common Council initiated consideration of a zoning change which would eliminate as an allowable special use, the "Headquarters of Philanthropic Organizations" designation. Such a zoning change would prevent the Scouts from building a new headquarters structure unless they apply for and obtain a zoning variance. The favorable outcome of such an application is open to question.

In September of 1992, when difficulties with the Scouts became increasingly apparent, the Parish Council/Building Committee meeting jointly, authorized an offer of \$1,400,000 be made for the purchase of 10.5 acres at 1131 North Street, White Plains. This parcel of land overlooks the highway and includes an historic 200 year old colonial. This offer was not accepted at the time but may become more attractive to the seller in light of the proposed zoning change.

During the year, we re-established contacts with both Skanska Corporation which owns 16 acres adjacent to the Scouts' property and Lowell Schulman, owner of the 24 acres at the intersection of Kenilworth Road and Westchester Avenue. Unfortunately, neither party was making any "fire sale" bargain offers.

Respectfully submitted,

GARO BASHIAN
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