

## **A Year of Extremes** by **Bruce G. Boncke, P.E., President**

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For those who are counting, you probably have noticed that you only received one newsletter from us in 2006. For BME, it was one of those years when we didn't have enough extra time to write about the projects and industry issues we faced. Normally, I reserve my lead article for some profound message or opinions about the planning and regulatory world we live in. Instead, I would like to start a new year by looking back at last year and thanking both our clients and many communities that we work in for an exciting year.

Last year was a year of extremes! I can't remember a year when it was more evident that when a community or agency wants to make a project happen, they can, and when they don't, they can stop it in its tracks! Even with the same codes, regulations, SEQR law, etc.! It was incredible to see how the same rules can be applied differently in "make it happen" mode or "delay it until it dies" mode, usually in proportion to public opposition.

After five years of planning, NIMBY intervention, political opposition, lawsuits, expense, and incredible patience from our clients, High Point Business Park finally went into construction. It is an exciting mixed-use project, and includes the restoration and reuse of a historical structure within the community. Normally, when a controversial project goes into construction, it provides more negative energy for the opposition. However, in this case, the construction and project start-up have received excellent positive comments, including praise from some of the opposition. Now, if only our client could have some of that time and expense back! But, anytime you can build 390,000 sq. ft. of office space, 18,000 sq. ft. of retail/commercial space, and 72 residential units, and keep the Town Historian happy, it's worth the effort. You will see more on this project in a future newsletter.

Barilla America chose a site in the Village of Avon to locate its northeast manufacturing and distribution facility. The final design and approval process services were authorized in March 2006 for the 330,000 sq. ft. facility, on 49 acres. The project went into construction three months later! It was an incredible effort from the design team and an equally incredible effort from the Village of Avon, who granted all the necessary subdivision, site plan, zoning variance, special use and grading permit approvals, including SEQR procedures, within that period of time. It can happen! Our project engineer, Linc Swedrock, has included his story of this effort, later in the newsletter.

Collegetown is a very exciting project for the Rochester Institute of Technology, which will be developed by Wilmorite, Inc. It is a mixed-use project with apartments and 80,000 sq. ft. of commercial/retail uses. It is the first mixed-use development in the Town of Henrietta and represents a very high level of visual architecture for both the campus and community. To "make it happen", the Town of Henrietta completed the use permit, variance, site plan, subdivision and SEQR procedures in approximately three months. All other approval agencies, recognizing the importance and value of this exciting project, have responded well, throughout the approval process, with one exception. The US Army Corps of Engineers was not a "make it happen" regulatory agency. After the extensive effort by everyone in 2006, the project was not able to go into construction due to lack of response on the USACE permit, in process for 1½ years. It was a year of extremes! This exciting project had no public opposition throughout all the required public notification procedures of the Town, NYSDEC and USACE. Hopefully, we will be writing about the project in "Under Construction" later this year.

There were also numerous residential subdivisions that we provided services on in 2006. We cannot give you any examples of residential subdivisions being approved in three months. I'm sure many clients reading this are saying "What about us?" Why does it take us years, not months, to get housing projects approved? The greatest challenges we had last year were related to getting housing projects approved. It seems communities have forgotten that homes are where jobs go at night. In a year of extremes, on average, this was another year of extremely lengthy approval procedures for subdivisions, driven largely by public opposition or political posturing.

Toward the end of last year, I was asked the question: "Why don't developers ever propose anything innovative in our community?" It was the ultimate irony in a year of extremes! The question was from the community that a very innovative project, High Point Business Park, is in. That project took five years to obtain approval. It will be interesting to see how they will handle their next innovative proposal.

We're hoping for a good 2007 for everyone, but, without extremes!