

In the Future **by Bruce G. Boncke, P.E., President**

It's the year 2020 and I'm now living in South Carolina, along with most everyone else I knew in my professional life. I'm enjoying my classic cars and golf, year round, and am working part-time for a local Home Builders Association doing government relations work. We ended up down there for a couple reasons. First, neither of our children could find career-oriented jobs or affordable housing in New York. As they got older, they also began to understand the tax advantages of moving south. So, they had to move and we followed. Secondly, in 2001, I had read a story that ranked the entire country, down to the county level, on how friendly areas are to retirees. The four level rankings went from retiree haven to retiree exodus. Issues analyzed ranged from taxes and cost of living to availability of medical services. Nearly all of New York was shown as "retiree unfriendly". I figured I survived a business unfriendly 40-year career in New York State and I didn't need to spend my remaining years in a retirement unfriendly state.

Remember, the year is 2020. I have just come back to visit the Finger Lakes area. We don't have many friends to visit up here; most of them are also down south with their kids. We do enjoy coming back to vacation in New York to visit some of the vast open space that we started purchasing, with taxpayer dollars, back about 25 years ago. It's a bit of a shame that our kids couldn't afford the price and have moved out.

The views and landscape of the area seem spoiled, however. Not from any growth or development that has occurred since our departure; there doesn't seem to be much of that. There are signs everywhere, protesting growth. Signs against proposed development, signs calling for moratoriums, signs against landfills, signs against road improvements and plenty of real estate for sale signs. It just doesn't seem to be the friendly place that I grew up in.

I stopped in on my friends at BME Associates to see how they were doing and what they were working on. I was pleased to find them doing well and that they continue to grow. They had just finished a meeting with Taylor Morrell regarding their most recent project. It set me back a bit, since he represents the fourth generation of that business and I had the privilege of working for his great grandfather, Sam. However, I was particularly interested in their description of the design and approval process for the project. It was a 75-lot subdivision that was a neoclustered envirovista design with a 75% open space giveaway. It had 15 wetland avoidance easements, ranging in size from one 100th of an acre to one acre. However, what I was most intrigued with was their description of the approval process.

They were about to submit the plans and application materials to the Town's Director of Public Relations (DPR). Yes, I heard that right! I was surprised to hear that most communities no longer had Directors of Development that handled the development applications. That may be just as well, because many actually became the Director of Anti-Development around 15 years ago. I was also surprised to learn that, along with all the engineering and SEQR requirements, they had to submit a petition in favor of the project signed by over 100 people, or the application would not be accepted. I understand getting those signatures took twice as long as the engineering design did. I asked when the Planning Board would get the application and they said not until after the DPR conducts the public opinion poll. Apparently, this is all done on the Town's web site, so the public can just sit at their computer and render opinions or complaints, rather than come to the meetings. After the results of the public opinion poll are in, the Town Board will review them with the DPR and vote whether to refer the project to the Planning Board or send the application back for redesign. Yikes! I guess I saw this coming, many years ago, but hoped it would never come to this.

I wanted to ask how things were going with other regulatory agency reviews, but the guys said they didn't want to ruin my day. They wouldn't let me go without asking if I would be interested in moving back and buying a home in this new development. They said I didn't have to make a decision right now, because it would take 2 to 3 years to get through the approvals and into construction. Then they told me the estimated price of the home. Yikes, again!

I asked them whatever happened to the concept of affordable workforce housing? They said it never materialized. Apparently, most school systems now send out school buses to pick up their teachers who live in outlying towns, because they can't afford to live where they teach. Hospitals are also providing mass transit to outlying areas for their nursing and support staff, for the same reason. They also said that most fire districts now have full time paid firefighters because people paying these housing prices don't seem to have the time to volunteer!

I thanked them for the visit, wished them well, and headed for my tee time and to enjoy those vast open spaces. Can't wait to get back to my new home, though.