

IMAGINE AMENIA

NEWSLETTER

www.imagineamenia.org

JUNE 2007

WHY CALL IT ImagineAmenia?

Imagination is the ability to see and think of things that are not immediately present to your senses.

Imagination is an active, rather than a passive ability.

Imagination makes it possible to plan.

Imagination allows you to think how things can be better than they are.

Imagination lets you predict what something done today will lead to tomorrow.

Without **Imagination** there can be no sense of horror.



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Did you attend the last town meeting to discuss the Master Plan? Or perhaps you watched it on your TV at home?

Don't just think you're horrified— Be Horrified!

Our bucolic, beautiful foothills are a natural setting for a train wreck. And we're not talking about Metro North. In 2003 all of you, all of us, stopped that gentle train called Amenia from derailing. We got together with candidates for office supported by ImagineAmenia at the helm, and we took Amenia out of the hands of people who, by their actions, showed they did not care about the future of our town.

Do you know that people were vandalized and threatened with scare tactics?

Oh yes, it's documented. In 2003-2004, secret photos were taken of a senior spokesperson's home and left in an unmarked envelope in her mailbox to make her nervous. Cars were "keyed". Threats were made. Anonymous messages were left on answering machines. Yes, right here in Amenia.

Please don't say, "Well, the election isn't until November."

The Election starts right now.

The wrong Supervisor and the wrong board could lead our beautiful small town into the dark ages forever. No, that's no exaggeration. So what can you do? A lot. **You can donate money to the upcoming campaign.** On page 3 of this newsletter there's a simple coupon that shows you how easy it is to send any amount of money you want to ImagineAmenia Political Fund. **Start talking to your neighbors and friends about November's election.** We're just as concerned about what happens in our picturesque hamlets as we are about what happens between Hillary and Obama and among Giuliani, McCain and Romney! Anyone who has seen the uncivil behavior at recent Town Board meetings has to feel outraged at the spectacle of one opponent of the proposed Comprehensive Plan (who happens to live in Millbrook), and another who lives in Northeast (we kid you not!), yammer on and on about "planning" decisions that could hurt Amenia. And at the same time, try to imagine

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Why an organization called ImagineAmenia?

ImagineAmenia was formed in 2003 to save Amenia from rushed, ill-considered, and inappropriate development projects.

As one speaker put it at the new organization's first general meeting, "We are here to stop a runaway train."

That runaway train was the new Town Board majority that took office in January, 2002, under supervisor Tom Lejeune, Jr. — whom many of us voted for in order to effect a change in Amenia town government. Our hopes were dashed however when in a 4-1 vote, the new board voted to change zoning and permit Jack and Linda Gregory to build a 12-bay automobile service facility in the middle of a residential district on the scenic hillside west of Route 22. Supervisor Lejeune, Jim Devine, Wayne Euvrard, and Bill Carroll all voted to allow the garage to be built over the objections of residential neighbors, many other town leaders (including members of the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals and a former supervisor), Dutchess County Planning, and in spite of the stated goals of the town's own Master Plan. Neighbors whose homes would be directly affected by the proposed auto service station quickly banded together to sue in State Supreme Court to have the rezoning overturned AT THEIR OWN COST.

About the same time, the Board began considering a development proposal from the Schuyler Corporation, which had purchased an option to buy a large tract of land right next to our existing shopping center. Before closing on the property, representatives of this company hoped to get all town approvals necessary to build a big-box supermarket and plaza, less than a mile away from the elementary school.

You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.

-Abraham Lincoln

Schuyler officials appeared at meeting after meeting of the Town Board, presenting revised site plans and environmental reviews prepared by their own consultants. Many in Amenia objected to this project; eventually some began to ask why the Board continued to consider a project that so many people opposed. One member of the 4-1 majority advised complainers to "let the process work." The train roared on. The presentations continued.

Amenia residents who felt they were not being listened to began gathering in small groups. One met on Railroad Avenue, another in South Amenia. These groups found out about each other in the summer of

Repetition does not transform a lie into a truth.

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

2003 and came together at the Presbyterian Church in weekly meetings. A volunteer steering committee organized the various complaints and proposals into a unified plan that settled on two main courses of action: 1) electing a new supervisor and two new Town Board members in the upcoming election, and 2) forming an ongoing organization that could monitor town business, recommend measures that were beneficial to the town as a whole, and support candidates for office when necessary.

ImagineAmenia came into being at a time when two catastrophes threatened: irresponsible development of a scenic residential hillside, and construction of a huge, unnecessary, traffic-snarling shopping plaza next to the existing plaza.

Sound familiar?

In 2003, ImagineAmenia supported three candidates who were elected to office. The citizens who sued to overturn the rezoning for Jack's Auto were successful. The train was stopped — for the time being.

In 2007, the pressing concern is not one or two projects. We are adopting the plan for our town's future as a whole. Read the names of the train crew from 2002: one is in office again, others attend meetings and speak regularly to ask for — what? You guessed it. Commercial development on the west side of Route 22! A new shopping mall on farmland opposite the existing plaza!

2007 IS 2003 ALL OVER AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME IT COULD BE FOR KEEPS. ImagineAmenia has the same mission it had in 2003: to make the future be the future, not the past. ♦

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

-George Santayana, philosopher

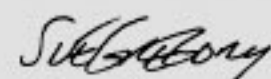
A Message from the President of ImagineAmenia

I grew up in a town called Marcy in upstate New York (pop. 9000) that has no town center, no senior housing, and no grocery store. There used to be a grocery and a large department store, set on a piece of property in the 1970's that had a farmhouse and several barns, and beautiful old Maple trees on a large piece of land. Now the stores are gone; only the Post Office and a Dollar Store inhabit the strip mall, along with several acres of pavement and many 18-wheeler trucks that park in the lot. The trucks constantly come and go from a distribution center near the old campus of the State Hospital, which is now a minimum security prison.

I moved to Amenia from Millbrook in 1999 when my partner and I purchased a house on Depot Hill. We looked at houses in several Dutchess County towns, and even at one in Columbia County. When we looked at the Depot Hill house, the realtor said "I think this is the one for you." It is a house that arrived by train in 1932, owned by one family until we moved in. We had become caretakers of a Sears house, in a great neighborhood, that was lived in by a school teacher whom everyone loved.

I joined ImagineAmenia shortly before the 2003 elections. I discovered a forward-thinking group of diverse members, accepting of everyone, no matter your political affiliation, wealth, education, or status in the community, whether you were a "newcomer" or had been born and raised here. This was a group that helped give a voice to suddenly ignored members of the community. I was asked to join the Board of ImagineAmenia in 2005, and was voted President in early 2007. I believe that honest, open government is necessary, one that is responsible to all the citizens of this town, not just a few. Everyone has a right to voice their opinion, but with that right comes the responsibility of persuading others with facts, not hearsay and innuendo.

ImagineAmenia continues to be a voice in the community. We attend meetings, participate in community functions, and volunteer to serve on Town committees, all with one goal: the best for this town called Amenia.



Susan Gregory
President

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yourself having to sit at the Town Board table, week after week, as people hurl insult after insult at citizens who devote hours of their time for little or no pay, trying to do what is right for the CITIZENS of Amenia. **In the coming months, make sure that EVERYONE votes.** Even in big election districts, a handful of votes one way or another can make a huge difference. Thinking about what is right isn't enough—you have to take action and vote for the people who will help preserve the way of life that we all enjoy here in Amenia.

We can't say enough about the members of CPIC. Do you hear us applauding?

Wow. Double Wow. Five years of giving the town open heart surgery. Every week a new challenge. So much good thinking, by a wide mix of people. Not a special interest person on the committee. We personally remember Harry Clark, when the process began. An actual quote from Harry: "You can't live in a town like Amenia and enjoy the views and the friendships you make without paying back. You must be involved." Then with Harry retiring to Princeton, to have Mark Doyle with a conscience and heart bigger than any acreage in our rolling hill town. And all of the others: Rudy Eschbach, George Fenn, Bill Flood, the late Dolores Holland, Darlene Riemer, Tony Robustelli. And the committee had the foresight to bring in not just a consultant, but a land-use attorney to write the language that would be defensible in court if challenged. What else can we say?

How about "it's an amazing accomplishment." It's a plan that

- preserves open space;
- protects the value of residential properties;
- provides plenty of zones for businesses of a scale and character appropriate to our small rural town; and
- accomplishes all this without compromising the natural beauty that is Amenia's greatest asset.

We just have to support and encourage our Town Board to JUST SAY YES!

Worried about being tagged as a "rich, overeducated outsider"?

You can be as anonymous as you like, but rich, poor, college degree or not, we need your support and your thoughts on how to make sure our town keeps moving in the right direction. These are serious times, friends. We need more than lip service: we need you. Here's how to make the first step:

1. **BECOME A MEMBER.** Our annual membership fee is \$15 for individuals; \$25 for families. Send your check made out to ImagineAmenia to PO Box 169, Amenia, NY 12501.
2. **BECOME INVOLVED:** Check one:
 - Sign me/us up. We'd like to be involved, attend meetings and help out!
 - We want to help out, but please keep our name(s) anonymous.
3. **SUPPORT POLITICAL ACTION** for the upcoming campaign, **which starts right now**, by sending a check or money order to support the **ImagineAmenia Political Fund.** Contrary to what some have said, it was scores of modest donations — many of which were from citizens who felt the need to remain anonymous — that enabled ImagineAmenia to present the facts and the issues to the voters in 2003. We hope to be able to do the same in 2007.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE (day) _____ TELEPHONE (evening) _____ E-MAIL _____

So just who are the members of ImagineAmenia?

The members of ImagineAmenia have been tagged by opponents as *rich, overeducated*, and above all, *outsiders*, looking to Amenia as *their rural theme park*. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth! Almost all of our members live here permanently, and most have lived here for decades, if not generations. Very few of our members are rich, and we certainly don't regard education as a negative. **We welcome all people to the group.**

ImagineAmenia members represent all segments of the community. Politically speaking we are red, blue, green, and all shades in between. In terms of national politics we represent the full spectrum. Our members are Democrats, Republicans, Independents, liberals, conservatives and moderates. Some of our members have college degrees, some do not. A few of our members are rich and a few work for minimum wage. Most of us are solidly middle class both in terms of economics and social values. We are a diverse group and by no means do we agree on everything.

What we DO agree on is the vision of the future for our town, a vision which rests on a safe, pedestrian-friendly small town atmosphere, a town where basic needs can be met, a town of smaller businesses which people can walk to, a town where economic and social diversity is treasured. We want a town in which seniors can live comfortably, a town in which young people feel they have a future. We want Amenia to be a destination, not a pass through. We may have differing views on the details, but we all agree on the vision we don't want. *We don't want our community to turn into Route 9 in Poughkeepsie, or Route 7 in New Milford. We don't want our town to become a reflection of Southern Dutchess.*

We are grateful for the democracy in which we live. We believe in dissent and debate, but not division. We all pull together to seek a balanced future for our town, a **PROGRESS WE CAN LIVE WITH.** We accept that the majority determines the outcome, but we do not want to be the pawns of developers or of a few people who are in power.

We love Amenia and appreciate the generosity of its residents. It is a place where hard times are overcome by the help of neighbors, even if they disagree with you. We appreciate Amenia's incredible resources, all of which must be preserved and treasured. Its ecosystem is incredibly fragile, located in a valley where a huge portion of available village land functions as wetland. Future development must be carefully planned so that this fragile ecosystem is protected — not just for the "bog turtle" but for the very water that we drink and the air that we breathe. Right now, in several Dutchess county communities, water has become a commodity that is delivered **and paid for** like fuel oil...by truck! This concern for the future of our town is what brought us together and what is keeping us together.

We respect and support the many volunteers who work to make this town better. ImagineAmenia works with them and local government to get done what needs to be done. In the end, we ALL want a "better Amenia." We all want more business, more opportunities for our children, more services for our seniors, more affordable housing and jobs so our children, if they wish, can live in the same town in which they grew up.

Won't you join us?

We have a few scary thoughts for you:

Imagine Amenia...without the brilliant new MasterPlan.

Imagine Amenia...without dedicated, hardworking town committee members.

Imagine Amenia...in the hands of people who only care about themselves or a friend.

Let's clear up one thing right now. We do not dislike the DDSO. We understand they have a payroll and folks need their jobs. But WE, THE TOWN OF AMENIA, have absolutely nothing to do with the future of the DDSO. Only our legislators in Albany will decide on the future of the DDSO. So why is the DDSO eating up our valuable time to discuss the future of Amenia? No one knows, but we know one thing—we're sick of hearing about it. If DDSO employees are worried about their future, they need to start lobbying in Albany.

How many times do we have to hear people saying they haven't had time to consider all the ramifications of the Master Plan? Gosh, a lot of us have been listening and commenting during the last five years. And just imagine how much staying power and dedication it took for the great, caring citizens of CPIC to donate one night a week for almost five years to helping plan our future.

What an opportunity we've been given. An opportunity to support a greener, healthier future for our children and grandchildren. An opportunity to lay the foundation for future businesses, more jobs, an even more diverse town.

Yes, affordable housing for young families and senior citizens alike is important. But without a friendly environment to attract the movers and shakers who will create businesses and housing that will pay many local salaries, the town will become gray, tired, and without new ideas, fade away.

It's time for the citizenry of Amenia and Wassaic to count our blessings. One positive way to do that is to applaud the CPIC, who have a lot more patience than most of us, and to give total support to our Supervisor, Janet Reagon, and her like-minded colleagues on the Town Board, Vicki Doyle and Roger Russell.

**How much easier
it is to be critical
than to be correct.**

-Benjamin Disraeli, British politician 1804-1881

I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crises. The great point is to bring them the real facts.

-Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the US

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POSTAL PATRON