In May of 2021, after the completion of the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) Maps, members of the Woodstock Environmental Commission (WEC), the Woodstock Land Conservancy (WLC), and the Planning Board began to work with Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia to choose and then designate an area of Woodstock for a Critical Environmental Area (CEA). The eastern forests of our town were selected not only because of their multitude of wildlife corridors and wetlands and streams, but because these large lowland forests are unique in the fact they are contiguous with larger forests in Saugerties and Ulster and beyond. Fragmentation would threaten all.

The CEA improves the connections between these protected areas by alerting landowners, developers, and regulatory agencies to the importance of these rare local environmental features. It gives the Planning Board notice to take a deeper look at any potential disturbance to this area.

This work took time and effort, including choosing the exact area to protect habitats and prevent fragmentation of the forests, and reaching out to the community and specifically the residents of the area so they could understand and embrace the importance of such a designation. Many maps were created and the Town Board approved a resolution adopting the Zena CEA, which Bill McKenna voted against. Peter Cross wrote a powerful letter supported the CEA stating “Because the Planning Board is obligated to take environmental protection into account, the applicant has to start all over and ask what they can do with their property. They may argue it is their right to do as they wish on *their* land, but the Planning Board is required to recognize and prevent decisions that damage the environment.”

Asking for a variance to add 7,000 feet to a 2,000-foot-long dirt and gravel right of way constitutes damage.

Allowing 900 feet of that extension to sit up against wetlands with NO buffer constitutes damage.

Approving this road and subdivision variance, which allows for development of the large, forested Woodstock lot constitutes damage.

Cutting trees for 7,000 feet (1.32 miles) and reducing the superior carbon storage and climate resilience of this area constitutes damage.

We at the WEC request that the Planning Board deny the variances. We also request that the developers speak with the Trust for Public Land or the Nature Conservancy, organizations with larger pockets, to acquire an easement on the Woodstock portion of their lands, and then further register it with the State so that NO ONE touches that precious ground except for forest maintenance and for the creation of trails that would allow the community to treasure that land in perpetuity.