

I would like to thank the Town Board for considering the proposal to create a CEA classification for the area of town called, for the purposes of this proposal, Zena Woods. This is a regionally significant intact forest and wetland area flanking the Sawkill stream corridor and encompasses approximately 2,290 acres to the east of John Joy Road and Zena Road. It contains exceptional ecological resources, including unusually high-quality forest and connected wildlife habitat. Ecological services include flood mitigation, climate change resilience, and natural beauty. An underlying aquifer might in the future become a water resource for the town.

I am a local native of this town and grew up on the Peter Whitehead farm on upper Byrdcliffe. Our pastures were between Glasco Turnpike and Route 212 (Van Kleeck and Longyear farms) when most of that land was pasture. It was usually very wet pasture that was hard to walk over. Now I see it has all been changed.

I see assault on our environment everywhere I look. As a land surveyor I hike all over town, traversing the hills and mountains and valleys to survey lands for subdivision and development. Then in the office the engineers and surveyors divide up the land to the best financial advantage of the client. In most cases, environmental concerns are underplayed.

Then the Planning Board is presented with a fully prepared and engineered site plan that may develop the land to the financial advantage of the applicant but will damage the environment. The Planning Board then has to argue and haggle to improve the plan.

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.

If due diligence was practiced, developers would check first with the Planning Board before developing their plans. This would save time and money. Having a designated Critical Environmental Area would help developers and landowners to plan properly from the start.

Often the plans presented show watercourse buffers measured from the center line of the creek. That is not correct. By law, the buffer starts from the top of the stream bank. Water courses should have adequate buffers, determined by a certified Wetland and Water Course Inspector. I have seen what landowners often do to the land after getting approval. I have seen them take a meandering watercourse and ditch it straight with retaining walls and then put their patio right on the watercourse. I have seen that after getting the lot approved with the wetlands delineated, someone later fills the buffer and wetland for lawns and recreational courts. There needs to be better oversight by the WWWI.

We need to protect our town's environment and way of life. In addition, Woodstock's forest lands are part of the worldwide forest canopy, which we must protect if we are to do our part to help mitigate global climate change.

Some landowners may wonder why they are the only ones to get designated in a CEA. Not so. We already have designated CEAs based on regulated wetlands and the SO. The Wetlands and Watercourses law was a very good extension of the CEA designation, making protection of those areas enforceable. The next best step is to create additional CEAs and show them on the town map. Having the Zena Woods designated as a Critical Environmental Area will give developers a heads up before they make their plans. The CEA, although not in itself enforceable, could provide a basis for legal protection, like the Scenic Overlay and Wetlands and Watercourses laws already do. Folks in Zena Woods may ask what the PB would do differently if a subdivision is in a CEA. So, if a project comes before the PB in the Zena Woods CEA the Board may ask that a forester be involved in the planning process. And the Board can then look at the entire CEA in the review process allowing for habitat corridors and environmental protections. Also, the WEC should be included in the review of applications in the CEA.

I also propose that within the CEA wetlands should have additional protection by merging wetlands that are within one hundred feet and their associated buffers because they fill our aquifers. Again, this would require Town Board action, and is not mandated by creating a CEA.

Having a CEA designation would alert developers, engineers and the Planning Board to review new issues which need attention during development.

Health, safety and welfare for our citizens must include a healthy environment for all. Designating the Zena Woods CEA would be a good start.

Peter Cross
Chairman
Woodstock Planning Board