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December 17, 2019

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Rye City Council  
1051 Boston Post Road  
Rye, NY 10580

Re: Timothy Knapp House and Rye Nursery Park

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

The historic 23-acre Jay Estate in Rye was saved from commercial development in 1992. This feat followed 13 years of active collaboration and dialogue spearheaded by a coalition of over 62 historic and environmental groups. Thanks to government officials like yourselves who participated, our story remains a powerful and replicable model of community engagement. The rescue of the property, reinforced by the language of Rye's own visionary Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP), Master Plan and City Code ultimately benefited the citizens of Rye. Passionate advocacy successfully preserved the adjacent wetlands of Marshlands Conservancy and protected the water quality of Long Island Sound. Rye's well considered framework of protections should similarly be applied to safeguarding the Timothy Knapp House and sensitively addressing wetlands restoration and drainage at Rye Nursery Park for the benefit of all Rye residents.

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It bears repeating that the Knapp House (1670) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; it is the oldest recorded home in Westchester County. It was once at the center of a substantial working farm with many residents. Before that, the land is documented to have been a Native American gathering place. Though small in acreage, the remaining natural grass space of Nursery Park with its mixed use and public access, along with the undeveloped wetlands, help give that ancient and colonial history much needed context and texture. A group of middle schoolers from Midland or Rye High history students can imagine the distant past while standing on that land or walking by it on the way home from school – the smells of the earth and sounds of nature are still there. However, the introduction of an artificial turf expanse, raised 6 feet high and surrounded by a locked fence would shut them out and forever dispel that illusion.

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The proposal for installation of artificial turf over natural grass may not only despoil the viewshed and interpretation of Rye's multicultural and environmental history; installation of this largely commercial structure has the potential to negatively impact irreplaceable archaeological and cultural resources. The threat of destruction is high without the appropriate advance probes, excavations and New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) review recommended by the City's own consultants, Woodward & Curran, in a 2011 report.

For that reason, we respectfully request the City of Rye to return to town hall workshops on this topic and reconsider the city's original vision for this parcel. We advocate a plan, pursued with the investment of public trust, to sensitively rehabilitate the grass field and restore the surrounding wetlands that lend critical context to one of Rye's historic and fragile treasures. This approach will benefit the many present and future stakeholders of this park.

Executive Director  
Kevin Peraino

Sincerely yours,  
*Suzanne Clary*  
Suzanne Clary  
President

