

Comment to the draft scope for the SDEIS of the Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park

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My connection to Todd Mountain begins from the cradle. The year before I was born in 1956, my parents bought 3 acres with a right of way from Lyman Todd. Another local farmer built our cabin during his winter break from farm work. My parents took me to our country house for the first time in the late fall when I was barely 2 weeks old but the bitter cold had arrived early that year and after one night with their newborn wrapped in blankets, they headed back to Long Island. In my early years, we spent the whole summer in the mountains. My brothers and I had great adventures and formed lifelong friendships with our neighbors. Many of the families that date back to that time are still there. We continue to gather each August for a community pot-luck, along with the newcomers whose roots on the mountain may not go back 50 years but whose attachment to the place is equally strong.

Over the years, some of the roads have been widened and paved but the number of houses on the mountain has remained remarkably stable at around 50 including upper Galli Curci, Fleischmanns Heights, Kelly, Belleayre Ridge, Whipple and Todd Mountain roads. About 15 years ago an Olive dentist bought the 900-acre Keise estate with hopes of building 90 houses. We were relieved when the plan fell through. Most of us were there for the piece and quiet and to suddenly double the number of houses on the mountain made no sense to us.

This brings us to the current proposal to build 60 detached houses, 60 2-bedroom apartments, and 120 hotel rooms for a total of 420 bedrooms on a few dozen acres on the high western slope and ridge top of Highmount. This is in addition to 528 bedrooms proposed for the Wild Acres site less than a mile away. Thus, with the stroke of a pen, the number of residences in the upper GalliCurci/Todd Mountain community would effectively be tripled, thereby overwhelming local community character. It's instructive to keep in mind that no one would actually live in either section of the proposed Belleayre Resort. If successful, thousands of transient guests would pass through the proposed resort each week, making no lasting connection or contribution to the community.

The car companies would do well selling SUVs to a population of time-share investors but what benefits would the Highmount Spa Resort bring to our community to justify the sacrifice we are asked to make? The community already has a sufficiently large, well-run and successful ski center with a brand new high-speed quad and many other recent enhancements. We have a summer concert series that attracts top-name performers and occasionally sells out. We have a popular state park for summer recreation. The community could survive without a few more boutiques and restaurants and the hamlets could do without the increased competition. There are already 2 spas within 15 miles and plenty of golf options even closer. What would be the costs to the community of the Highmount Spa Resort? The proposal allows an 8-year construction period during which the community would be subjected to construction noise and dust, blasting and traffic tie-ups followed by a drastic increase in traffic, pollution and noise forever after. Our community's greatest and most enduring asset- the beauty and serenity

of the mountains- would be lost. That trademark wave exchanged by passing motorists on our quiet roads would be a quaint anachronism. We would pay for having this huge spa resort in our midst with our quality of life and with our wallets, as taxes are sure to go up along with inflated land values.

With no tangible benefits and a litany of harm, The Highmount Spa Resort and, as a result, the entire Belleayre Resort fails the test of impact on community character.

Living in Catskill Park, we have a right to expect that the community character will not be sacrificed to mega-development. The only justification for blasting and bull dozing the Highmount Spa Resort into the mountain is to increase the prices the developer can charge for its timeshares. This “benefit” has to be balanced against the destructive impact it would have on community character and quality of life. The interests of the adjacent community cannot be ignored or steamrolled in these proceedings.