

# RECORD REVIEW

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## Board hears update on county initiatives

By VICTORIA SHERIDAN

District 2 county legislator, Kitley Covill, met with the Bedford Town Board on Tuesday with updates on a number of county projects that are underway, including restoration of the Merestead estate.

According to Ms. Covill, the Board of Legislators filed a lawsuit to lift several restrictions on the use of the estate written into the deed on the property.

Merestead is a 130-acre property, which the previous owners deeded to Westchester County in 1982. After the owner died in 2000, the county took full possession of the property.

Asked by the board for examples of activities restricted on the estate, Ms. Covill explained that a network like PBS could film on the property because it is a nonprofit, while the History Channel could not. She added that no one was permitted to reside in any buildings, other than a caretaker or security guard, which would bar farmers from staying on the property; that crumbling buildings on the property could not be removed; and that new buildings such as a security gate or office for taking tickets could not be erected.

Many of these restrictions stemmed from the previous owner's desire to preserve the property's use as a museum rather than as a public park, Ms. Covill explained. She quipped, "You couldn't even get rid of moldy clothes, at least theoretically."

"We couldn't really move anything forward in terms of use if we didn't get those restrictions lifted," she explained.

The county legislators passed a bond issue to finance a new roof and other improvements.

*'We couldn't really move anything forward in terms of use if we didn't get those restrictions lifted.'*

— COUNTY LEGISLATOR KITLEY COVILL  
ON PLANS FOR RESTORING THE MERESTEAD ESTATE

It also is seeking court permission to sell off a handful of objects on the property — 32 out of a collection of roughly 40,000, according to Ms. Covill. The legislators consulted with the only remaining descendant of Merestead's previous owners, who helped them identify which objects she was comfortable selling and which should remain in the collection.

With proceeds from those sales, the board of legislators hopes to hire a planner with a background in working with public parks and Westchester institutions to help the county envision possible uses for the property. Ms. Covill said she has fielded a range of proposed functions for the estate and grounds, including a rehabilitation center for injured wildlife, and establishing an artists-in-residence in partnerships with organizations such as Caramoor and John Jay Homestead.

"We thought that having a cultural planner can tease out some of those things in a way that would make sense for where it is, and in conjunction with park uses," she said.

Town board officials thanked Ms. Covill for her efforts with Merestead, noting that it is as valuable a resource to Bedford as it is to Mount Kisco, the two towns which the estate spans.

Merestead formerly belonged

to Margaret Sloane Patterson — daughter of W&J Sloane furniture company president William Sloane — and her husband, Robert Lee Patterson, a New York City orthopedic surgeon. The estate features a 28-room Georgian mansion built in 1907, which houses an art collection and library, as well as a dozen surrounding buildings — including a farmhouse, carriage house and barn.

According to the Board of Legislators, in the last decade the roofs on Merestead's buildings have started to deteriorate, threatening the artwork. In addition, the water and waste systems are not up to code, and an entrance bridge also requires repairs to make the buildings accessible.

Also in her update, Ms. Covill touched on a county measure under discussion that would require pawn shop owners to report new items electronically rather than via postage to law enforcement. The goal of the law is to expedite the process tracking stolen property. Among other initiatives, she said the county is working to ban flavored tobacco as an extension of efforts to prevent substance use with teens and adolescents. Also, the county is continuing to rollout early voting. In Ms. Covill's district, three polling sites will

be available for early voting in the November election. Sites in Lewisboro, Somers and Mount Kisco will offer early voting beginning 10 days prior to the Sunday before election day.

### ClearGov proposal

Following Ms. Covill's presentation, town board member Don Scott joined comptroller Abe Zambrano for a presentation asking the town to consider adoption of a transparency and budgeting software called ClearGov.

Using census data combined with data provided from the town's financial office, this software would create an online profile of Bedford's demographics, revenues, expenditures, and other financial details accessible and available to the public.

"We're leaders in a lot of things," Mr. Scott said. "It would be great to be a leader in transparency going forward."

The first year of ClearGov's services would cost the town about \$7,000, Mr. Scott said. The cost would then drop to about \$5,000 per year in subsequent years.

Mr. Zambrano added that by making the information from ClearGov publicly available, the software could reduce the number of Freedom of Information Law requests the town must process.

"I think something like this would help the public understand a lot of the things that we do, that we don't necessarily publish on any financial reports, because this is more detailed information that's being released," he explained.

The board did not act on the proposal and plans further discussion.