

## HUD report cards ignore progress on fair housing

Written by Joan Maybury

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### THE ISSUE

• Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino, who has long been at odds with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Justice Department and the court-appointed monitor overseeing the county's fair-housing settlement with Washington, recently held a press conference with town supervisors to heap further criticism upon HUD and monitor James Johnson. All play key roles in the continuing saga over fair housing in Westchester. •

*In this June 12 file photo, Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino discusses the 2009 fair housing settlement. He is flanked by a host of town officials. The agreement requires the county to build 750 units of affordable housing in 31 mostly white communities. / Alyson Velati/The Journal News*

Astorino charges HUD and the monitor with unilaterally increasing the county's settlement obligations to build affordable housing, from 750 units, as specified in the 2009 pact, to more than 10,000 units. HUD officials and Johnson have repeatedly denied changing the agreement, implementation of which is overseen by a federal judge. • The 10,000 figure Astorino points to is derived from a 2004 housing-needs study commissioned by Westchester and oft-cited by county officials, local officials and housing advocates. Astorino disavows the findings. Johnson has stated that the number merely reflects goals and data long relied upon by Westchester — including the Astorino administration — in setting housing policy.

Re "Exec fights HUD with half-truths," June 14 editorial:

Under the New York State Constitution, zoning — the power to protect the health, safety and environment of our communities through land-use safeguards — belongs to local municipalities. The idea behind this exercise of home rule is that the power to regulate the development of cities, towns, villages and the neighborhoods within them is best left to the governments closest to the people.

So when an agent of the federal government sends a "report card" on your local zoning, you take it seriously. And, when the report card contains misstatements of fact, attempts to impose obligations that would effectively overturn home rule, and fails to acknowledge progress made on the affordable housing front, you look for an opportunity to set the record straight.

In March, James Johnson, the federal monitor hired by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to oversee the 2009 affordable housing settlement, sent report cards grading the zoning in the 31 communities where the housing is to be built.

Most of the 31 mayors and supervisors have responded individually. Those responses, along with the report cards, are available at [westchestergov.com/monitor](http://westchestergov.com/monitor) report cards. We urge the public to read them because they present a very troubling precedent.

## **Lack of credit**

A bipartisan group of municipal officials joined with County Executive Rob Astorino on June 12 to explain our reactions. It is safe to say all the report cards contained inaccuracies, generally the kinds that are easily correctable. More troubling was the lack of credit given to communities for their efforts to build affordable housing, especially considering the hurdles they face. Scarce and expensive land and lack of sewer and water systems are the two biggest impediments to affordable housing in Westchester. South of I-287 is almost completely built out. North of I-287, much of the land is watershed property that holds and protects the drinking water of 8 million New Yorkers and where environmental regulations make new sewage systems almost impossible to build.

**This article was written by Mount Pleasant Supervisor Joan Maybury. It was submitted on behalf of North Salem Supervisor Warren Lucas; North Castle Supervisor Howard Arden; Somers Supervisor Mary Beth Murphy; Rye Brook Mayor Paul Rosenberg and Deputy Mayor Jeffrey Rednick; and Tuckahoe Mayor Steven Ecklund.**