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IN HEMPSTEAD / A Watchdog Has Many Bones to Pick

By Jennifer L.M. Gunn. STAFF WRITER

July 29, 2000 8:00 PM

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VICKY ROSENBERG IS AT IT again. The longtime community activist in the Town of [Hempstead](#) is known for getting things done and, as always, has a plate full of issues and an arsenal of supporters.

Her latest mission, the Greenspace Initiative, is a plan that would help

communities work together with local governments to find a middle ground in debates of open space development. Rosenberg hopes to narrow the gap between residents and politicians, and over the years she's had a lot of practice.

Victoria Rosenberg, 63, a retired speech and language teacher in the

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Farmingdale school district, began her life in activism by fighting for the rights of special education students.

"When I first entered special education, the kids were somewhere where nobody could see them, and they were considered something to be shunned," she said.

Disgusted, she successfully fought to bring children with special needs

into the mainstream to ensure they received an equal chance at education.

As president of the Wantagh-Seaford Homeowners Association, Rosenberg has worked with town and county governments as an environmental and civic watchdog.

In 1991, she took on Nassau County after it proposed the creation of a plant at Cedar Creek in Wantagh to dehydrate sludge, making fertilizer pellets.

The association and those who opposed the plant celebrated victory in 1993, after a federal judge upheld the county's decision to ship the waste to a West Virginia recycling site.

"It was a very environmentally practical battle," she said. "We were stopping something heinous from being built." Residents were concerned that the plant might pollute the air and pose a fire risk.

Rosenberg then focused attention on sewage plants after residents began complaining of odors and noise. She's confronted corporations, bulldozers and most recently cell-phone companies seeking to build cell towers in her community.

Hempstead Supervisor Richard Guardino Jr. has worked with Rosenberg over the years, and has appointed her to the Town's Cell Phone Technology Task Force.

"Vicky Rosenberg has long been an extremely effective and eloquent voice for area residents," he said. "She brings a great deal of energy to this and other vital endeavors."

But now, Rosenberg says, she is tired of watching people stand idly by as decisions affecting their communities are made virtually without notice.

"People in Wantagh do not get out and vote," she said. "They're so willing to scream about taxes and then not go and have their say about it."

Her current campaign, the Greenspace Initiative, seeks to designate the area's remaining open space for mixed use.

"Preserve, protect and possibly acquire," is the motto of the Greenspace Initiative, Rosenberg said.

Her ideas come from her extensive research of the Portland Plan, a metropolitan land-use study in [Oregon](#). There, planners are building houses in clusters, around a parcel of open land.

"You cluster houses perhaps in townhouse style and then you have gardens," she said. "But you have land around the perimeters, cushioning it from civilization."

This idea includes many options for urban planning that keeps the environment in mind, and Rosenberg's Greenspace Initiative hopes to promote the adoption of such ideas.

Among the areas where Rosenberg is focusing her efforts is St. Francis Park in [Roosevelt](#), a possible site for low-income housing.

"It isn't necessary that it be all or nothing," she said. "If affordable housing is needed, why not have affordable housing and some attractive little space, too?"

In Levittown, at J. Fred Sparke Elementary School on Condor Road, Rosenberg is trying to prevent the school district from converting an open field into a parking lot.

"I've never known anyone to feel pride in a parking lot, but in a piece of land, yes," she said.

With this concept of land use comes resident responsibility, she said.

Residents become "stakeholders" and keepers of the land, taking action when a park isn't being maintained and taking pride in the land they share.

"People are so willing to point a finger, but it [land] should be maintained by the people in the neighborhood," she added. "Stop expecting George to do it."

Not many of her efforts have been easy, but she doesn't shy away from confrontation-she's done it at town meetings, protests, on television and radio.

Nassau County District Attorney spokesman Ed Grilli expressed amazement at Rosenberg's energy in opposing the cell towers.

"She captivated the audience-she was able to grab everyone and just hold them in the palm of her hand," he said. "She's articulate, she's energetic and she's unwavering on her efforts."

Rosenberg plans to take a short vacation later this summer, to help alleviate the stress from work and from her struggle with lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease that can result in inflammation of the skin, joints or other organs.

Her dedication to the Hempstead community is unwavering, and she believes that being aware gives people the power to produce change.

"I can come off as a very tough ol' broad, but you always have to reach out and try to find a better way."

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