

OPINION

Our Opinion

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at historic Farm Colony

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Never has there been so dire a need for affordable middle-class housing on the Island for our senior citizens. The oldest Boomers are in their late 60s and past retirement age.

So a big step in the right direction was the approval by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission of a proposed residential complex for senior citizens at the old Farm Colony in Sea View.

Unanimously approved was the \$91 million Landmarks Colony project, which is to be built on a bucolic 45-acre site adjacent to the Greenbelt. There will be about 350 housing units at 475 Brielle Ave., along with 17,000 square feet of commercial space.

It's designed to be a viable option for older Island homeowners who are seeking to downsize to a lower-maintenance lifestyle.

Speaking about seniors, Borough President James Oddo has pointed out: "People don't want to do the shoveling or cut the grass, and they don't want to pay someone to do it. They don't want to go up and down stairs in their home, and they certainly want to be near their physicians, friends and family. This is the community they helped build and they want to stay here."

Keeping Islanders here

But the lack of reasonably priced housing for older people on Staten Island has forced many to depart, often to New Jersey or elsewhere in the metropolitan area and beyond.

"For the last two decades many seniors have been forced to make a difficult decision, and that has been to leave all they know to go to a senior community they can afford with all the amenities they want," Mr. Oddo has said.

Even since his years on the City Council, he has urged the city to find a good use for the abandoned Farm Colony tract, one of its largest vacant properties on Staten Island.

In the 19th century, the city purchased the land from a farmer and built a community where poor New Yorkers were housed in return for labor. It became a highly productive working farm.

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the population of Farm Colony swelled to nearly 1,500 Islanders in need of food and shelter. Such needs waned with the advent of Social Security and prosperity that followed World War II.

Abandoned in 1975

In 1975, the old Dutch Revival-style buildings were finally abandoned and left to squatters, vandals and the elements.

The city designated the site of the original Farm Colony as a historic district in the 1980s, along with the building that became Sea View Hospital Rehabilitation Center and Home.

It's a perfect location to construct senior housing. Landmark Colony, to be developed by NFC Associates of Staten Island, will include five of the historic buildings that are fit for rehabilitation. Five others are to be demolished because they have decayed too much over the years.

The new complex for residents 55 and older is to include housing in landmarked dormitories, new elevator buildings, cottages and period-inspired carriage houses.

Other features: A modern but historic-looking clubhouse; a dining hall, a metal, glass and brick retail building; and a central green with park-like pathways, lighting, benches and trees.

'Sensitive approach'

John Kilcullen of the Preservation League of Staten Island said the organization was pleased with the "sensitive approach" being taken to develop Landmark Colony.

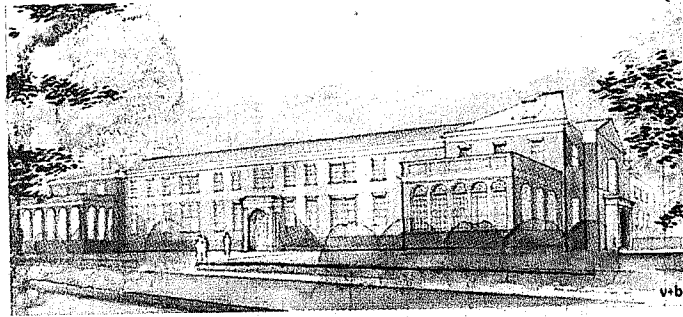
It ought to serve as a model for the private development of mid-priced senior housing elsewhere on the Island.

According to Christopher Widelo, associate state director of the AARP: "Staten Island is aging at a faster rate than all the other boroughs. ... A lot of people [who are now seniors] came from other boroughs, like Brooklyn and Queens, when the [Verrazano] bridge was completed."

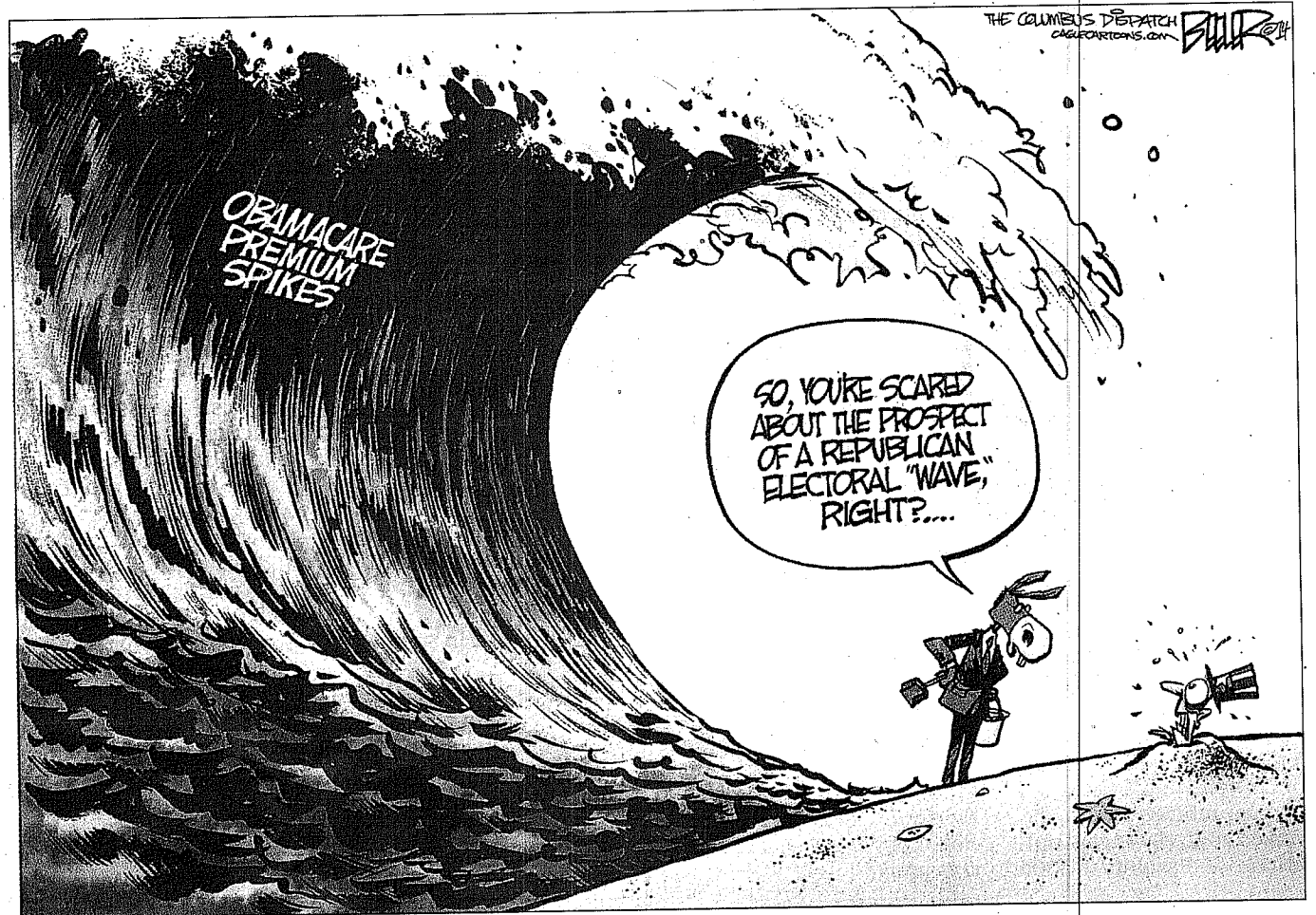
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The Farm Colony in Sea View is slated to become Landmark Colony, a senior citizen community with approximately 350 residential units.



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Letter to Obama: Don't be fooled
if Beijing's skies are blue

By Simon Denyer

The Washington Post

BEIJING — When President Obama arrives in Beijing this month for an important Asia-Pacific summit, he shouldn't be surprised if the skies are a brilliant blue.

The Chinese government is mounting a concerted campaign to make sure the capital's infamous smog is under control when Obama and regional heads of state arrive for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. It is an operation similar in scale to that mounted for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Hundreds of factories in Beijing and surrounding provinces were told to close down for 12 days from Nov. 1. Steel production in the neighboring province of Hebei is expected to fall by 10 percent in November, Bloomberg reported, while the province has helpfully vowed to keep household heating at "the lowest acceptable level" during the summit.

Schools closed; cars banned

Beijing's government, meanwhile, has ordered a week-long break Nov. 7 to 12, with schools told to close and cars ordered off the roads.

But no one should be fooled. Despite the government's 2013 declaration of a "war on pollution," there is no sign yet of an improvement in air quality in Beijing, environmentalists say.

Indeed, October was a particularly

ugly month. It began with what was dubbed Beijing's second "airpocalypse" of the year, with air quality frequently reaching "hazardous" levels for three days.

Confined to hotel rooms

The Brazilian soccer team, here to play a friendly match against Argentina at the iconic Bird's Nest stadium, was reportedly confined to their hotel rooms for most of their time there, advised not to venture out apart from brief training sessions.

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Images of runners wearing face masks proliferated on the Internet, and many competitors simply withdrew from the race.

The end of the month has, if anything, been worse, with air quality levels frequently "hazardous," according to most international measures, and visibility dropping sharply.

There are many reasons for this.

Experts blame the early October smog on the burning of agricultural waste after the autumn harvest, on unfavorable weather patterns, and on what Greenpeace calls the "post-holiday syndrome."

Factories and power stations, forced to shut down for the Golden Week national holiday at the start of October, ramped up production in the following week, sending unusually heavy doses of car-

cinogenic chemicals into the air.

Residents skeptical

Many residents of Beijing suspect that those same factories and power stations are still in overdrive, making up for losses they might incur during the APEC summit.

Beijing's residents, many people speculate, are paying the price now for next month's cleaner air.

Last year, the Chinese government unveiled a \$280-billion plan to improve air quality, including plans to curb coal use and vehicle emissions. But the challenge is immense and solutions far from immediate; so far, there has been little noticeable effect in the capital.

Indeed, heavy polluters around Beijing continue to violate legal pollution standards with impunity, said Ma Jun of Beijing's Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, citing real-time data collated by his organization.

There is no evidence that directly links this month's poisonous skies with the blue skies that are expected for the first half of November.

But there is every reason to suppose that the air quality will start to deteriorate again as soon as Air Force One takes off, at the end of Obama's visit here.

[Simon Denyer is The Post's bureau chief in China. Washington Post staff writer Xu Jing contributed to this report.]



Residents use masks to ward off pollution outside Bird's Nest National Stadium in Beijing, China. (AP PHOTO/NG HAN GUAN)

Your Opinion

Take Mount Manresa air testing seriously

I was in attendance at the Community Board 1 meeting regarding Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Buildings officials being questioned about Mount Manresa. The goal of the Committee to Save Mount Manresa is to protect the community and public against the deadly asbestos that was being released into the air.

Mr. Gilsenan of DEP stated, "It is highly unlikely any dust or fibers migrated off the site," and that was the best he could tell you. He also stated that air-monitoring tests have taken place.

Dust from demolition was at its height on Sept. 2-5. Air testing did not begin until Sept. 6.

What is most disturbing is that the

contractor who collected the air samples, had its asbestos license revoked in 2013.

The court order stated: "Revoke the contractor's asbestos handling license and such asbestos contractor shall [not] be eligible to apply for a new asbestos handling license for a period of up to two years."

Even though their asbestos license was revoked, they are still allowed to collect asbestos air samples as a trained technician.

How can the honesty and integrity be trusted and believed of any contractor who has their license revoked, do any kind of testing with the sensitivity of asbestos air-sampling that could put the public's health at risk.

I [am] incredulous that DOB and DEP treat these licenses being revoked in such a light manner and to not even do a thorough background check on any license that involves public health.

Any contractor whose license has been revoked should be immediately placed on a red flag list within all city agencies. The air samples taken by [this contractor] should be considered null and void.

In the case of Mount Manresa and the public health risk to exposure to asbestos, DOB and DEP are still not taking this matter seriously.

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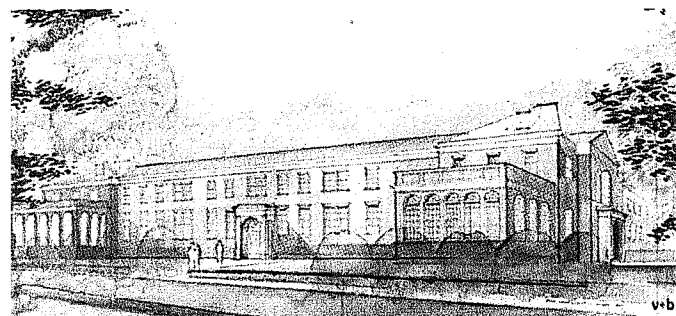
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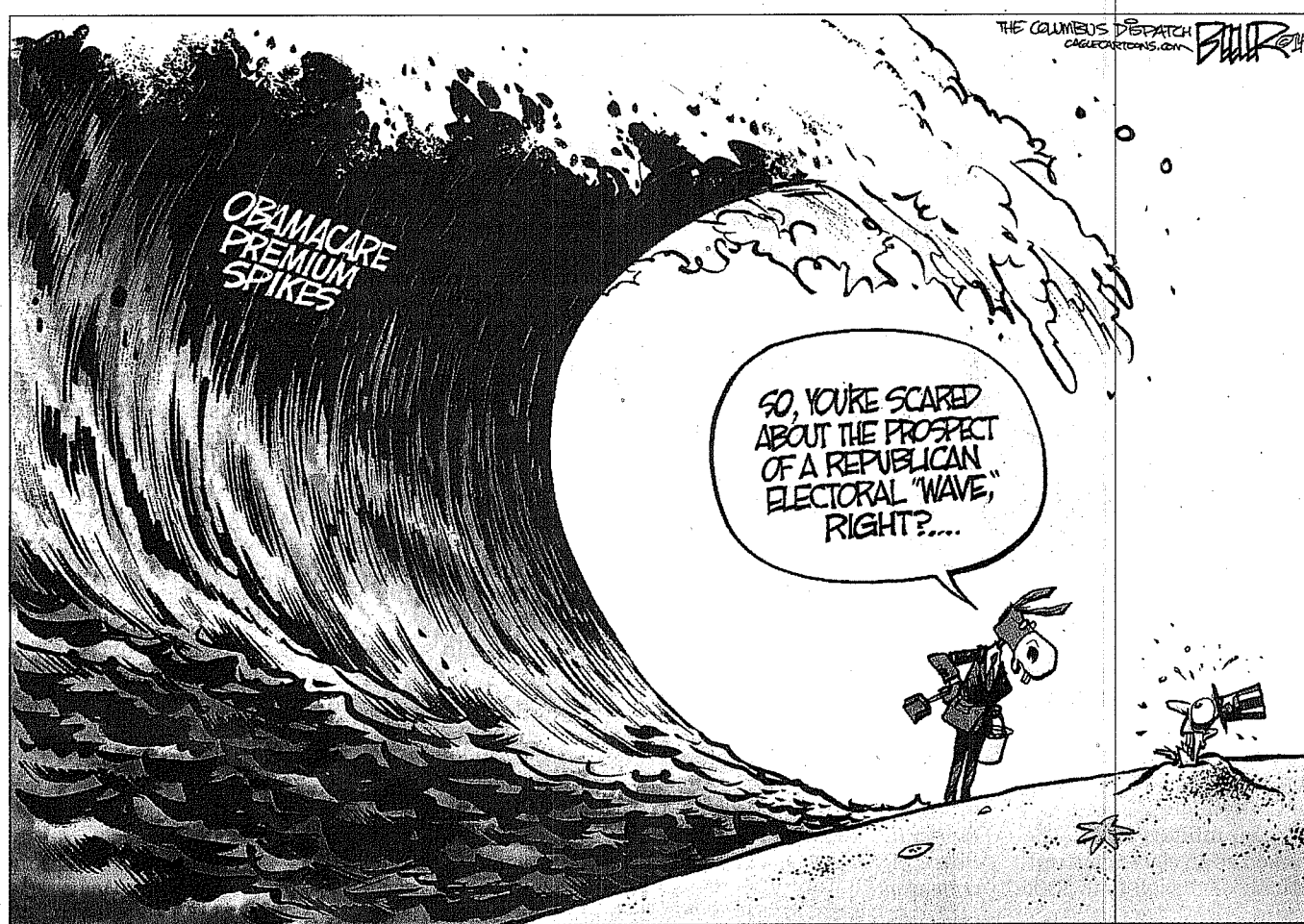
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