



UNPACKING THE ISSUES: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND THE SEQR PROCESS

I keep hearing people talk about “Seeker” in debates over Hudson’s Waterfront. What is that?

SEQR, pronounced ‘Seeker,’ is an acronym for State Environmental Quality Review. Based on the State Environmental Quality Review Act – passed in New York in 1975 – the law requires state and local government agencies to consider environmental impacts equally with social and economic factors in making decisions that affect the public.

If you’ve been to recent Hudson Planning Board meetings, you’ve probably heard people urge the Board to initiate a full SEQR review regarding the riverside property owned by A Colarusso & Son, which is now seeking permits to re-industrialize our waterfront. As stated above, the Planning Board is required to assess the environmental impact of the company’s operations involving this site and Hudson’s South Bay wetlands.

What exactly is Colarusso doing that’s demands this kind of review?

A Colarusso & Son’s proposals pose a number of threats to our waterfront and the surrounding ecosystem.

- First, the company’s proposed two-lane truck highway connecting its Greenport mine with its Hudson waterfront operation would run through our protected South Bay and Marsh. It would disrupt this delicate ecosystem that helps protect the Hudson River and could be instrumental in helping Hudson manage rising water levels in the future due to climate change. Further, it plays a vital role for wildlife as well as air and water quality. A busy private road for massive industrial trucks poses a serious risk to our natural resources.
- On the riverfront, A Colarusso & Son’s gravel operation already creates significant dust, air and noise

pollution, not to mention dangerous traffic situations on land and water. This would be compounded if the company were allowed to expand there.

- The City of Hudson has been unable to access and inspect A Colarusso & Son’s waterfront operations to determine whether environmental laws and other regulations are being followed. In fact, the company sued Hudson when the City tried to inspect the facility. The City won the lawsuit, reaffirming its right to inspect and assess operations to ensure that they are in compliance with state and local laws. SEQR is the framework for managing that process.

So, if SEQR is New York State law, why hasn’t the Hudson Planning Board already started the assessment process?

The Hudson Planning Board is currently reviewing several proposals from A Colarusso & Son and will have to make a determination about what to do under SEQR.

As ludicrous as it sounds, the Planning Board could decide that the Hudson operations of A Colarusso & Son do not have significant adverse impacts and therefore demand no further assessment. However, given the threat to the South Bay and Marsh, our waterfront land and the Hudson River itself, our group believes strongly that such a decision would be wrong and even illegal – especially since the SEQR law requires environmental impacts to be on equal footing with social and economic impacts when it comes to making a decision. This is why the members of Our Hudson Waterfront – and a growing number of fellow Hudson residents – are demanding the Planning Board initiate the full SEQR process.

What is the full SEQR process anyway?

If the Hudson Planning Board decides on a “Positive Declaration” for the full SEQR process, the City of Hudson will begin an evaluation using New York State Environmental Assessment Forms to gather information. This leads to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to help the Planning Board make an appropriate and informed decision about the company’s proposals.

It's important to note that the SEQR process encourages public participation. This includes:

- Participation in scoping the draft Environmental Impact Statement
- Review of SEQR documents and the ability to provide comments to agency decision-makers
- Participation in SEQR hearings on the environmental impacts of the project

Wait, I heard A Colarusso & Son went through the SEQR process with Greenport and can move ahead without an Environmental Impact Statement for Hudson. Is that true?

No. Because A Colarusso & Son operates in both Greenport and Hudson, the Planning Board from each municipality must make its own SEQR determination.

The town of Greenport, where A Colarusso & Son is based and whose Planning Board was the lead agency, determined that the company did not require the full SEQR process as far as it was concerned. This was unfortunate and questionable, given the potentially greater impacts on the City. This brings us back to the court case that Colarusso filed against the City, which the City won. In that decision, State Supreme Court Judge Michael Melkonian ruled that Hudson has the full right to make its own determination based on the operations within Hudson city limits.

Our Hudson Waterfront, along with a growing number of fellow Hudson residents, believes the City must get as much information as possible about impacts -- to our homes and businesses, to our environment, to emerging economic opportunities. That's the only way to make the best decision for Hudson and its future. Following the full SEQR process, including a detailed Environmental Impact Statement, will provide the data and insight our Planning Board needs to do its work, and we implore the Board to initiate this critical review.

So, if the idea is to enable the City to make the best, most informed decision, who would be against that?

Rationally, the only ones who would oppose such a review would be people who fear that the process would reveal problems that might compel the Board to reject the permits the company wants. In effect, this would mean overlooking impacts that might harm natural resources and dampen the City's future in order to support the interests of a single, well-

connected company. We believe this would be wrong for a number of reasons, not the least of which would be enabling Colarusso to avoid laws and regulations that, in protecting our City and its environment, all other businesses in Hudson must follow.

OK, I agree that the Hudson Planning Board should immediately begin the SEQR process, make a 'Positive Declaration' and get a full Environmental Impact Statement in regard to the A Colarusso & Son proposals. What can I do to move that along?

There are many ways to get involved:

Learn more about the issues at **www.ourhudsonwaterfront.com**

Come to meetings of the Hudson Planning Board and speak your mind. The Planning Board meets monthly, every second Tuesday. You can also leave your thoughts in writing at **www.cityofhudson.org** (click Departments, then Boards and Committees, then Planning Board).

Join us!

The more of us there are, the more we'll get done. Reach us at **ourhudsonwaterfront@gmail.com**

Most importantly, get down to our amazing waterfront, enjoy the public space we have and spread the word!

