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Crossgates tactic

After these many months of argumentative discussion over the Crossgates Mall, the \$85 million shopper's heaven proposed for Pine Bush land near the foot of the Northway, we have reached no decision yet about the wisdom of the project.

When the environmental reports are in, the traffic studied, the impact on surrounding area stores estimated, and all of a multitude of facts are available, it may be possible to come to a reasoned conclusion.

But the get-rid-of-'em tactic now being tried — with some success — by Concerned Citizens Against Crossgates merits comment.

The citizens group has successfully lobbied the Town Board to rescind Guilderland's participation in a state law granting tax incentives to new and expanding businesses, denying Crossgates a local tax break.

That's something like aiming a kick at an annoying dog and not only breaking the ankle, but missing the dog.

Attempting to thwart unwanted development is all well and good, but Guilderland residents must face up to facts. The land is zoned for commercial use. Wild schemes to the contrary, it will remain zoned for commercial use. No one could down-zone it without facing long and expensive (and potentially successful) suits filed by owners of the land.

The land will be used by businesses of some type. The only question open to discussion is, exactly what types of businesses will be built?

Do Guilderland residents want this area, edged by Western Avenue, to turn into a Wolf Road? Sandwich and pizza eateries, candy, clothing and paint stores lined up, one by one, facing the busy street? A handful of developments well back out of sight, linked by virtually inaccessible narrow access roads with no traffic signals? What else is there for the Crossgates land except this undesirable type of uncontrolled development if it's not a well-planned, integrated mall?

And it's likely the only persons Concerned Citizens will spite are the residents of Guilderland. The tax incentive was designed to aid new and expanding businesses in a governmental climate of regulation and an economic climate not really suited to new investment.

But new businesses bring prosperity, jobs, an increased tax base. Concerned Citizens hasn't only chopped off the Crossgates development, it has managed to rescind aid to anyone wanting to open or expand a business in the town.

And it's also likely Crossgates developers won't be that disturbed by this little nip on the flank. A possible tax break of one or two million dollars sounds large to the average man, but to developers of shopping malls, considering the potential state and federal tax breaks available to those with good accountants, it probably would not be a make-or-break matter.

There are prices to be paid for economic vitality. The object of government should be to minimize those prices for the taxpayers and the citizens. The Guilderland Town Board reacted like a weak political animal when pressured by Concerned Citizens. And Concerned Citizens was myopic when it applied the pressure.