

EDITORIAL

Wayside's proposal

We live in communities where every voice gets a chance to be heard - and most of them are objecting to something being built next door.

We've seen neighbors complain about stores being built near them, even when the property in question has long been zoned for retail. We've heard neighbors demand their ears be protected from noise on the Mass. Pike, even though the Pike was there long before they were. We've seen neighbors try to stop houses, parks and even cemeteries from being built "in my back yard."

They have a right to protest, but they are wrong about their back yards. People ought to know where their property lines are, and unless the developer is putting something on your side of the line, it's in their back yard, not yours.

In Framingham, the back yards currently in question adjoin property being developed by Wayside Family Services. Wayside wants to build offices, classrooms and housing for 72 troubled kids on 14 unused acres a stone's throw from Rte. 9 off Lockland Ave.

This is not pristine woods the neighbors are protecting. The land was used for decades as a dump site for construction materials. It includes Sucker Pond, which is about as scenic as its name. The soil contains heavy metals, petroleum and other

waste products Wayside will have to clean up before it can build anything.

Some neighbors welcome the development, but others raise familiar objections - traffic, drain on town services, and so on - that have been adequately addressed by Wayside. They insinuate that the kids who are referred to Wayside by social workers, not police or courts are a danger to the neighborhood.

They aren't. These children, most of them from MetroWest, have trouble at home and need help. Wayside, a respected agency with a long record of service in our communities, offers them a safe place to stay and the education and counseling they need to get back to their families.

Opponents also criticize the Dover Amendment, which allows non-profits with an educational purpose to bypass municipal planning boards. The Dover Amendment was designed to protect public-service projects from intransigent neighbors and regulatory obstacles. In the Wayside case, it is doing just what was intended: Helping make an idea that is both good for the environment and good for the community, a reality.

Wayside is doing good, important work. Cleaning up a toxic waste site and turning an eyesore into an attractive development is a bonus for Framingham. Wayside should be welcomed, not harassed.