



CHAIN DRUGSTORE

S u c c e s s S t o r i e s

Oak Tree Pond *Edison, New Jersey*

The Threat

In 1999, a developer began building a Walgreens pharmacy at Oak Tree Pond, site of a Revolutionary War battle and an important green space in Edison. Though the British failed in their attempt to destroy George Washington's army in New Jersey, this project would have ruined wetlands and woods that had helped define the community. Traffic concerns led the town planning board to turn down the developer's original proposal in 1999, and construction was stopped in 2000, but the chain appealed so it could resume building.



JIM HEBENSTREIT

In late 2000, STOP's attorney filed an injunction to stop the demolition that had already begun on the site. The judge hearing the case issued the injunction, noting that the developer had not completed the mitigation process required under Section 106 of the federal National Historic Preservation Act. The argument against the project became even stronger in December of 2001, when the

New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office determined the site eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Result

STOP's perseverance paid off in April 2002, when Oak Hill Pond was saved. Edison Township purchased five acres of the pond tract for approximately \$5.5 million, with much of the money coming from the state—including the Green Acres program and environmental grants—and the county. The developer, who will now build the drugstore across the street from the battlefield, must replace the 200 trees that the initial work destroyed, and the township is planning to preserve the site as a recreational space and as a memorial to the 1777 battle. Oak Tree Pond illustrates the importance of early and active citizen participation, political support, and the consideration of alternate locations for development.

The Preservation Effort

Save the Oak Tree Pond (STOP), a citizen's group, fought the property development from the beginning. It began working with, and in many cases pressuring, local officials. It asked the National Trust for help with grassroots organization, technical assistance, and support letters. As part of the Trust's Drugstore Initiative (to learn more, see page 2), the Northeast Office also contacted Walgreens to explain the community's concerns.

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The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. Recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Trust provides leadership, education and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize communities. Its Washington, D.C. headquarters staff, six regional offices and 21 historic sites work with the Trust's quarter-million members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. For more information, visit the National Trust's web site at www.nationaltrust.org.

The National Trust's CHAIN DRUGSTORE Initiative

Chain drugstores are expanding rapidly into traditional American downtowns. Unfortunately, they often damage a community's historic places and its character. Chains have frequently demolished significant structures, replacing them with freestanding buildings whose design — extensive parking, drive-through windows, and standardized architecture — fit poorly with their surroundings. Even when stores use open land, their suburban-style boxes are inappropriate for a traditional, pedestrian-oriented downtown.

The National Trust has taken a number of steps to protect historic buildings from chain drugstores. We have produced

research on the industry, placed "the Corner of Main and Main" on 1999's list of *America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places*, and met with key leadership at the largest drugstore chains.

We have obtained commitments from CVS, Eckerd, Rite Aid, and Walgreens not to demolish sites individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places; when threatened buildings are not listed in the National Register, but hold substantial historic or architectural significance, we discuss the proposal with the appropriate corporate leadership to try to avoid a destructive battle.

Top Ten Drugstore Strategy Tips

The National Trust continues to develop approaches and resources to help communities respond to chain drugstores. The following are basic strategy suggestions to help communities prepare and organize their efforts in protecting historic resources from chain drugstore proposals. Contact your National Trust regional office to discuss these and other strategies in more depth.

- 1 Monitor demolition permits, building permits, and site plan applications in the planning, zoning, and building departments. Study your regulations. Board and commissions need legal reasons to turn down an application or to require modifications.
- 2 Form an organization or committee to spearhead all efforts. Give your group a name that will establish a positive identity at public hearings and in the press.
- 3 Try to cast your message in a positive light. For instance, you are not against growth or development. You are for development that is compatible with community character and enhances your town's quality of life. You will want to attract others who may be sitting on the fence.
- 4 Make your case to the press. Write press releases and letters to the editor regularly. Make your points short and pithy, a lengthy analysis probably won't win the day. Always try to appear reasonable and sensible; you don't want to be labeled strident. Sometimes a meeting with your local newspaper editor or local board can influence their editorial opinions.
- 5 Find out if threatened buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places. National Register listing or eligibility may influence editorials and public opinion. If federal funds are involved, the project will be subject to review by the State Historic Preservation Office. Call your State Historic Preservation Office.
- 6 Write a petition and conduct a signature drive for registered voters and property owners. Submit your petition to elected officials and enter it into the record at any public hearing. A large number of signatures can influence public officials and town boards or commissions. Petitions may also influence the press.
- 7 Form coalitions with the business community, local elected officials, state legislators, even congressmen or the governor's office. Obtain support from local, regional, statewide, and national preservation, environmental, and civic organizations.
- 8 Turn out your members and supporters in force for any relevant meetings and public hearings. This is important even if you will not be allowed to speak. Set up a phone tree to help muster your supports efficiently.
- 9 Coordinate your speakers at public hearings ahead of time. Make your points clearly and succinctly; cite or summarize specific regulations if you can. Always be courteous to members of the board or commission, even if you are angry. Submit your statements in writing, so that they become part of the file. (You may want to give written copies of your statements to any member of the press covering the meeting.)
- 10 Get a lawyer, pro bono if necessary.

Excerpted from *Better Models for Chain Drugstores* by Anne Stillman, available for \$6 from the National Trust's Preservation Books department. 202-588-6296 or email: preservation_books@nthp.org.



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For more information about the National Trust's drugstore initiative, contact:

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Or learn more at:

www.nationaltrust.org/issues/drugstores/