

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
FOURTH JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

Matter of Rochester Eastside Residents for Appropriate
Development, Inc. v. City of Rochester

580 CA 16-01413 (N.Y. Ct. App. 2017) · No. 580 CA 16-01413 · Decided May 5, 2017

SUMMARY

The New York Appellate Division, Fourth Department, held that petitioners had standing to challenge a negative declaration issued under SEQRA for a proposed ALDI supermarket. The court reversed the dismissal of the CPLR article 78 proceeding, annulled the negative declaration, and vacated related zoning variances and a special use permit because the declaration did not adequately address preexisting soil contamination.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Whalen, P.J.; Carni, J.; Nemoyer, J.; Curran, J.; Troutman, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	May 5, 2017
DOCKET	580 CA 16-01413
DISPOSITION	reversed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from a judgment of Supreme Court, Monroe County, dismissing an amended CPLR article 78 petition challenging a negative declaration issued under SEQRA and related zoning approvals.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Judicial review of a SEQRA determination is focused on whether the lead agency identified the relevant areas of environmental concern, took a hard look at them, and made a reasoned elaboration of the basis for its determination; SEQRA requires strict compliance with its procedural mandates.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published appellate memorandum and order
PARTIES	Rochester Eastside Residents for Appropriate Development, Inc., Igatopsfy, LLC v. City of Rochester, City of Rochester Zoning Board

of Appeals, Rochester City Planning Commission, City of Rochester
Director of Planning and Zoning, Steve Cleason, ALDI, Inc., Crlyn
Acquisitions, LLC, CBL, LLC

TOPICS

environmental impact review environmental law judicial review of agency action administrative law
appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

environmental law administrative law municipal law land use

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Igatopsfy, LLC and Rochester Eastside Residents for Appropriate Development, Inc. had standing to challenge the SEQRA negative declaration.
2. Whether the SEQRA negative declaration was invalid because it failed to provide a written, reasoned elaboration addressing preexisting soil contamination on the project site.
3. Whether the developer's promise to remediate the contamination excused the lead agency's SEQRA obligations.

HOLDINGS

1. Igatopsfy, LLC had standing because it owned property less than 300 feet from the proposed project and was therefore arguably within SEQRA's zone of interests; adverse effect or aggrievement could be inferred from proximity without pleading and proving special damage.
2. RERAD had associational or organizational standing because two of its members owned property within the relevant proximity to the project and RERAD established the other requirements for organizational standing.
3. The negative declaration was invalid because it contained no findings or reasoned elaboration addressing the undisputed preexisting soil contamination on the project site.
4. The developer's promise to remediate the soil contamination did not absolve the lead agency of its SEQRA obligations.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“It is well settled that SEQRA’s procedural mechanisms mandate strict compliance, and anything less will result in annulment of the lead agency’s determination of significance” (-2)

“The purpose of that regulation “is to focus and facilitate judicial review and . . . to provide affected landowners and residents with a clear, written explanation of the lead agency’s reasoning at the time the negative declaration is made”” (-2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The proposed project involved construction of an ALDI supermarket on property with undisputed preexisting soil contamination. Igatopsfy, LLC owned property less than 300 feet from the project property line, and two members of Rochester Eastside Residents for Appropriate Development, Inc. owned property less than 500 feet away. The lead agency issued a negative declaration that contained no findings concerning the soil contamination, while a document purporting to explain the agency's reasoning was prepared only after the negative declaration.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Petitioners commenced a CPLR article 78 proceeding seeking, among other relief, annulment of the City Director of Planning and Zoning's negative declaration concerning a proposed ALDI supermarket. Supreme Court dismissed the amended petition, determining that petitioners lacked standing. The Appellate Division unanimously reversed, granted the amended petition, annulled the negative declaration, and vacated the related variances and special use permit.

DISPOSITION

reversed

CASES CITED

- Matter of Ontario Hgts. Homeowners Assn. v. Town of Oswego Planning Bd., 77 AD3d 1465, 1466
- Matter of Shapiro v. Town of Ramapo, 98 AD3d 675, 677, lv dismissed 20 NY3d 994
- Society of Plastics Indus. v. County of Suffolk, 77 NY2d 761, 775
- Matter of Jackson v. New York State Urban Dev. Corp., 67 NY2d 400, 417
- Matter of Dawley v. Whitetail 414, LLC, 130 AD3d 1570, 1571
- Matter of King v. Saratoga County Bd. of Supervisors, 89 NY2d 341, 347
- Matter of Hartford/North Bailey Homeowners Assn. v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Town of Amherst, 63 AD3d 1721, 1723, lv denied in part and dismissed in part 13 NY3d 901
- Matter of Penfield Panorama Area Community v. Town of Penfield Planning Bd., 253 AD2d 342, 349-350

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department 580 CA 16-01413 PRESENT: WHALEN, P.J., CARNI, NEMOYER, CURRAN, AND TROUTMAN, JJ. IN THE MATTER OF ROCHESTER EASTSIDE RESIDENTS FOR APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT, INC., AND IGATOPSFY, LLC, PETITIONERS-APPELLANTS, V MEMORANDUM AND ORDER CITY OF ROCHESTER, CITY OF ROCHESTER ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS, ROCHESTER CITY PLANNING COMMISSION, CITY OF ROCHESTER DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ZONING, STEVE

CLEASON, ALDI, INC., CRLYN ACQUISITIONS, LLC, CBL, LLC, ET AL., RESPONDENTS-RESPONDENTS.

KNAUF SHAW LLP, ROCHESTER (ALAN J. KNAUF OF COUNSEL), FOR PETITIONERS-APPELLANTS. BRIAN F. CURRAN, CORPORATION COUNSEL, ROCHESTER (MAUREEN K. GILROY OF COUNSEL), FOR RESPONDENTS-RESPONDENTS CITY OF ROCHESTER, CITY OF ROCHESTER ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS, ROCHESTER CITY PLANNING COMMISSION, AND CITY OF ROCHESTER DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ZONING. WOODS OVIATT GILMAN LLP, ROCHESTER (REUBEN ORTENBERG OF COUNSEL), FOR RESPONDENTS-RESPONDENTS ALDI, INC., CRLYN ACQUISITIONS, LLC, AND CBL, LLC. Appeal from a judgment of the Supreme Court, Monroe County (Thomas A. Stander, J.), entered May 24, 2016 in a proceeding pursuant to CPLR article 78.

The judgment dismissed the amended petition. It is hereby ORDERED that the judgment so appealed from is unanimously reversed on the law without costs and the amended petition is granted. Memorandum: Petitioners commenced this CPLR article 78 proceeding seeking, inter alia, to annul the negative declaration issued by respondent City of Rochester Director of Planning and Zoning under the State Environmental Quality Review Act ([SEQRA] ECL art 8) with respect to the proposed construction of an ALDI supermarket.

We agree with petitioners that Supreme Court should have granted the amended petition. As a threshold matter, we agree with petitioners that the court erred in determining that they lack standing to bring this proceeding.

The record establishes that petitioner Igatopsfy, LLC owns property -2- 580 CA 16-01413 that is less than 300 feet from the property line of the proposed construction project, and thus Igatopsfy is “arguably within the zone of interest to be protected by [SEQRA]... and [has] standing to seek judicial review without pleading and proving special damage, because adverse effect or aggrievement can be inferred from the proximity” (Matter of Ontario Hgts.

Homeowners Assn. v Town of Oswego Planning Bd., 77 AD3d 1465, 1466 [internal quotation marks omitted]; see Matter of Shapiro v Town of Ramapo, 98 AD3d 675, 677, lv dismissed 20 NY3d 994). The record further establishes that petitioner Rochester Eastside Residents for Appropriate Development, Inc. (RERAD) has “associational or organizational standing” (Society of Plastics Indus. v County of Suffolk, 77 NY2d 761, 775).

Two members of RERAD own property that is less than 500 feet from the property line of the proposed construction project, and thus they have standing to sue (see Shapiro, 98 AD3d at 677; Ontario Hgts. Homeowners Assn., 77 AD3d at 1466; see generally Society of Plastics Indus., 77 NY2d at 775), and RERAD established the other two requirements for associational or organizational standing set forth in Society of Plastics Indus. (see generally id. at 775).

We further agree with petitioners that the negative declaration did not contain a “ ‘reasoned elaboration’ of the basis for [the] determination” (Matter of Jackson v New York State Urban Dev. Corp., 67 NY2d 400, 417). “It is well settled that SEQRA’s procedural mechanisms mandate strict compliance, and anything less will result in annulment of the lead agency’s determination of significance” (Matter of Dawley v Whitetail 414, LLC, 130 AD3d 1570, 1571; see Matter of King v Saratoga County Bd. of Supervisors, 89 NY2d 341, 347).

The lead agency must “set forth its determination of significance in a written form containing a reasoned elaboration and providing reference to any supporting documentation” (6 NYCRR 617.7 [b] [4]; see generally Jackson, 67 NY2d at 417).

The purpose of that regulation “is to focus and facilitate judicial review and... to provide affected landowners and residents with a clear, written explanation of the lead agency’s reasoning at the time the negative declaration is made” (Dawley, 130 AD3d at 1571).

Here, despite the undisputed presence of preexisting soil contamination on the project site, the negative declaration set forth no findings whatsoever with respect to that contamination. The document containing the purported reasoning for the lead agency’s determination of significance, which was prepared subsequent to the issuance of the negative declaration, does not fulfill the statutory mandate (see *id.*; cf. Matter of Hartford/North Bailey Homeowners Assn. v Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Town of Amherst, 63 AD3d 1721, 1723, lv denied in part and dismissed in part 13 NY3d 901).

Contrary to respondents’ contention, the developer’s promise to remediate the contamination before proceeding with construction did not absolve the lead agency from its obligations under SEQRA (see generally Matter of Penfield Panorama Area Community v Town of Penfield Planning Bd., 253 AD2d 342, 349-350).

We therefore reverse the judgment and grant the amended petition, thereby annulling the negative declaration and vacating the variances granted by respondent City of Rochester Zoning Board of Appeals and -3- 580 CA 16-01413 the special use permit granted by respondent Rochester City Planning Commission.

In light of our determination, we do not reach petitioners’ remaining contentions. Entered: May 5, 2017 Frances E. Cafarell Clerk of the Court