



Orange County News

For Immediate Release
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County Executive Steven M. Neuhaus: My View

The recent application to annex over 500 acres of land into the Village of Kiryas Joel is concerning. This action would effectively double the size of the Village, dramatically altering the landscape of Orange County.

The political reality of the Town of Monroe, where I grew up, is that the voters in Kiryas Joel elected the Town of Monroe Board. There is skepticism that the Town of Monroe can review the annexation project fairly and independently.

Orange County will therefore take the following steps to ensure that there is a fair review process related to this annexation:

1. **Orange County will undertake its own SEQRA process as if it were the Lead Agency.** While we may not be able to force the Town of Monroe or Village of Kiryas Joel to accept our findings, both Kiryas Joel and Monroe have promised a complete environmental review. Again, we will post our findings on the County website and share them with the Town of Monroe and Village of Kiryas Joel.
2. **We have asked the Town of Monroe and Village of Kiryas Joel to provide us with all annexation documents.** We will then post those documents on the Orange County website in order to provide the public with as much information as possible on the proposed annexation.
3. **We have asked the state DEC Commissioner to amend the SEQRA regulations to allow for Counties to be “Lead Agency” whenever there is a large annexation which would expand a municipal border by 10 percent or more.** In a letter to the Department of Environmental Conservation, I have asked Commissioner Martens to name Orange County Lead Agency. Although there is an argument to be made that we do not have legal standing to be “Lead Agency,” I am asking for it anyway and the Commissioner may interpret the SEQRA regulations to allow it. Hopefully, however, the DEC Commissioner will amend the SEQRA regulations so that large annexations such as this one allow a County Planning Department to be Lead Agency.

This is not the time for political grandstanding; this moment demands credible action backed up by facts. In a spirit of nonpartisanship and independence, I look forward to working with the public, citizen advocates, and the elected representatives not only of Monroe and Kiryas Joel, but all communities affected directly or indirectly by the proposed annexation, in order to ensure a true, fair, and thorough review of the annexation is completed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "St. M. Neuhaus", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

STEVEN M. NEUHAUS
Orange County Executive