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By LISA RIGGIOLA  
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD NEWS

I have been a resident of Pompton Lakes most of my life. I'm a graduate of Pompton Lakes High School Class of 1978 and, like other kids growing up in North Jersey in the 60s and 70s, I felt I was a lucky when my parents took the leap from the city and moved to Pompton Lakes.

It was paradise! Beautiful lakes, clean streets, beautifully maintained sidewalks, curbs, street lights that were always working and an uptown that was a gem for us and surrounding communities.

My love for this town has been a very long love affair. It was a great place to grow up, and I have made lifelong friends. It is a place where I still feel safe walking down the street. I have not been able to obtain this feeling anywhere else but in this place I call "home."

Many people here care about our community. Our taxes continue to rise, and we currently have to put more tax dollars towards education. There are many reasons for tax problems in Pompton Lakes, which brings in turn more responsibilities falling on resident volunteers. We ask ourselves being one of the highest property tax payers in Passaic County, why? Where is the rest of our money going to?

Why aren't the parks operating as they did when I was a kid? We have a severe shortage of ball parks, but it seems there are no issues when it comes to finding space for developers to build condo and townhouse complexes. The number of residents who donate their time and serve Pompton Lakes make it a great place, what we call "A very special place."

The Police Force, First Aid Squad, Fire Department and Department of Public Works should all be commended. Yes, we have had our problems including DuPont's toxic dumping and other things along the way, but it has always been the people of Pompton Lakes who make Pompton Lakes what it is.

Frank Oz, when he filmed the movie "In and Out" in Pompton Lakes, said that he loved the "mid-west friendliness" of Pompton Lakes. I do too and it is the reason why I have spent most of my life here.

Although it has always been my Utopia, there are a couple of serious issues I feel need to be addressed.

Our "Uptown" as we natives call it, or Wanaque Avenue as others know it, needs help. And not just the revitalization that has been talked about for years that has yet to commence.

After the first open meeting, this revitalization poses some concerns. At the initial Streetscape meeting, I saw mostly developers and a few current business owners and a handful of residents. It was supposed to be all about residents. It was an opening meeting for all residents, but the announcement to the public was not adequate, therefore, I ask myself, "Although it is said that input from Pompton Lakes residents is wanted -- is it really"?

The next meeting is scheduled for March 23, to date I have not received a letter or seen a press release announcing the meeting.

The state of Uptown is embarrassing. It seems that's its future may have a more "urban" feel. I know many people in Pompton Lakes, and know they would not be happy with what I saw at the Feb. 23 at the meeting.

Current housing on Wanaque Avenue has not brought anything good to our high tax paying citizens of Pompton Lakes. A business district without housing could solve problems or overcrowding in apartments along with the serious illegal immigration problem that has become a major concern for us and other neighboring towns such as Butler and Bloomingdale to name a few. Butler and Bloomingdale are taken measures to solve this problem.

I ask Pompton Lakes officials what will they do to help change this situation? Inspections of properties need to be made and proper authorities notified if illegal immigrants are present. Residents also need to be proactive and report suspicious activities. People hiring illegal immigrants must be held accountable and fined heavily. Rental property owners need to be held accountable, too.

There seems to be another major problem that other towns are also experiencing and are taking steps to stop the madness. Apartments that are meant for two people, should only be rented to two people -- plain and simple, not four, 10 or 20. If you are not on the lease, you shouldn't be residing in the apartment or private rental home

Besides the above, business and property owners need to take pride in their buildings. Again, our laws need

to be enforced. And if laws are not in existence, they need to be implemented. To me, it seems it is time for stronger action to be taken.

Lisa Riggiola lives in Pompton Lakes.