

# The Eagle has landed and will stay on Flocktown Road

## Roadwork change means landmark will remain

WASHINGTON TWP. —“Bert the Liberty Eagle” will continue to nest on Flocktown Road.

The Township Committee's plans to reconstruct part of the intersection of Flocktown and Schooley's Mountain roads, which could have resulted in the eagle's relocation, have been scaled back.

The township has plans to do drainage work and repave much of Flocktown Road. As part of the plan, the township was going to improve the island on which the eagle sits. Part of the reason for the plans was that motorists coming up Schooley's Mountain Road and turning left on Flocktown Road often cut the corner short and run over and damage the island's curb.

The landmark wooden eagle sculpture has gained the informal moniker of “Bert” because motorists can often only discern the letters “bert” in “Liberty.”

Township Engineer Carl Denzler had suggested narrowing the island and installing Belgian block curbing.

Stephen Zaikowski, chairman of the township's Shade Tree Committee, wrote the Township Committee, urging them to stay at least five feet away from the eagle when doing any work. Zaikowski said he was concerned that work near the eagle would damage the roots of the tree, from which the eagle was carved, and cause them to begin to rot.

He said that if work was going to proceed, the eagle could be cut down and the island eliminated. The eagle could then be put on a pedestal

and moved to another site, Zaikowski said.

### Eagle Uproar

The uproar over the suggested move was loud and angry. Residents of the Flocktown and Schooley's Mountain roads area, located in a Historic Preservation District, were distraught that the eagle would be moved.

Based on concerns by residents and from the Historic Preservation Commission the Township Committee has decided to only pave at the intersection while leaving the board alone. The rest of the work on Flocktown Road will continue

as planned. At its May 21 meeting, the committee awarded a bid to Owl Construction of Rockaway for \$412,840.

Eileen Stokes, chairwoman of the Historic Preservation Commission, said her group was surprised to learn the committee was considering moving the eagle. By ordinance, the commission has authority over work that involves the historic district.

The ordinance requires that the commission be part of the planning process when it comes to projects in the Historic District, Stokes said.

While the eagle is not historic, the tree it was carved from has (Please see The on page 9.)



(Photo by Gloria Grey)

### Staying Put

The wooden eagle sculpture off Schooley's Mountain Road in Washington Township will not be relocated. Instead, a project to shore up the intersection will be reduced, leaving the bird alone.

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been a landmark in the historic district for almost 300 years, Stokes said.

"It's been a part of the township's folklore for a long time," she said.

As part of the Historic District process, Stokes said the committee is required to hold a public hearing on any road improvements planned for the district. Township Administrator Dianne Gallets said she will be meeting with Stokes and Denzler to decide on the course of improvements.

Stokes also commented on the concern that the tree base for the eagle might be rotting and might have to be taken down. Stokes said Harry Robinson, a Bernardsville sculptor who carved the tree, has said a preservative has been applied to the eagle each year to

keep bugs from boring into it. Also, each year, a preservative chemical has been injected into the eagle, Stokes said.

The tree is a white oak and, according to Stokes, contains a natural anti-rot agent. She said white oak was one of the main woods used to construct sailing ships because of its resins and sustainability.

Stokes said the township should hire an expert to evaluate the condition of the tree and recommend the best way to preserve it. If the eagle does have to be taken down, it should stay put, Stokes said.

Stokes said that since the time before settlers came to Schooley's Mountain, the area was known for its "healing waters." Area Indian tribes would visit the Schooley's Mountain area to bathe in the stream that ran through the

mountain. The water was said to have healing qualities.

During the late 1700s, word began to spread about the water on Schooley's Mountain and people from New York and Philadelphia started to travel to the area. Schooley's Mountain Road soon became a coach road to bring the tourists into the area. Throughout the time, the large oak street at the top of the mountain was used as a landmark, Stokes said.

At one point, the tree became known as the "Liberty Tree," Stokes said. For the nation's Bicentennial, an area Boy Scout troop carved a wooden sign with the words "Liberty Tree" and tacked it to the tree. Also, a veterans marker was placed at the base of the tree.

— By **ROBERT FORD**  
Staff Writer