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Closing time for the Courtesy Hotel

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To the Editor:

How does that old song about the Hotel California go? “You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave!”

Indeed, the days of short stays, king-size beds and free continental breakfast every day (as the ad that continues to run in Newsday rubs in the faces of West Hempstead residents) at the Courtesy are numbered. There is every reason to believe that the wrecking ball, accompanied, no doubt, by a smiling, hard-hat-donning Town Supervisor Kate Murray, will soon be at the Courtesy’s door, the final checkout at hand.

And still, having fought this battle to shutter this longstanding assault on our town, one realizes that, its certain demise notwithstanding, the Courtesy has, going on a generation now, left an indelible stain on this homey community with a downtown in transition, as The New York Times put it back in 2007.

No, it is no longer a question of “if” the Courtesy will close, though the “when” is still a matter of debate. Sooner rather than later is almost too little a consolation for a community that — petition drives, Mother’s Day rallies and attempts to have officialdom padlock the hotel under an impotent nuisance law or condemn it under eminent domain aside — has had to endure the mugging of its dignity and the battering of its landscape lo these many (and I do mean many) years.

Kudos, to be sure, to Civic Association President Rosalie Norton, whose persistence in the cold war between town folk and Town Hall may finally result in that Reaganesque moment when they tear down that wall. Much the same to Town Councilman Ed Ambrosino, a true friend of this community, who, well-versed in the value of development and reclaiming of neighborhood portals, fought fiercely (sometimes with the supervisor herself) on behalf of his constituents.

And let’s not forget the stoic warriors, the civic-minded, the folks who staged protests, attended hearings, wrote letters and kept the home fires burning, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, never, never, never, never giving up.

No one said taking back our town from the ravages of neglect (benign and otherwise) would be easy. No one would have thought it would have — or should have, by any reasonable measure — taken this long.

We, as a community, may soon claim victory in the campaign to close the Courtesy. The struggle to take back our town from that which the hotel leaves behind may take a bit longer.

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West Hempstead

Bykofsky, a longtime community advocate, is a former president of the West Hempstead Civic Association.