

I apologize for not being able to attend tonight, but I had a business trip which required me to be on a flight this evening.

As a Commission, we need to separate the issues in front of us into two questions: one, a **substantive** question of what we should do with the Baron's South property; and two, a **process** question of how and when we should make this decision.

On the substantive question, this is a tough call. The arguments for the revised senior housing proposal are that it accomplishes a critical goal of providing housing to an important population, provides more affordable housing, helps us on 8-30(g) requirements, and still preserves about 15 acres of open space. The arguments for the full open space designation are that it protects a resource we can never recover, and limits the density of development. I don't know yet where I will come out on the merits of this question.

What I do know, however, is that the process question we have here is very simple. The Commission voted down the last Baron's South proposal because there was not enough affordable housing and because of potential congestion issues. A group of Westporters who have worked very hard on this for over five years has come back with a new plan designed to be responsive to our concerns. A vote to suddenly rezone this all as open space is the equivalent of us covering our ears and refusing to even listen. To not even give this proposal a chance is disrespectful to the town, disrespectful to the first and second selectman, and disrespectful to the Baron's South Committee. Is this really such an urgent question that we shouldn't even bother to listen to the full answers to the questions the Commission itself asked just last week? Voting on the rezoning question now is inconsistent with our duty to the town for a thoughtful consideration of what is best.

I voted for the last Baron's South proposal even though it was imperfect. The next one may be better but still imperfect. We don't know yet. We simply don't know enough yet to make an informed decision.

I'll end with a quote from a letter that was published on the 06880 blog after the last vote: "Remember, there still stands a regulation allowing a project of the Baron South type. That has not changed. To those who are passionate and committed to this: The door is not shut."

You know who wrote that letter? Chip Stephens. So to Chip, and to my other fellow commissioners, I say, let's live up to our commitment. Let's not shut the door. Let's leave it open to a revised proposal for senior housing.