

TOP 10 REASONS

Bernhard

WHY THE RTM SHOULD OVERTURN THE REZONING OF BARON'S SOUTH AS PASSIVE OPEN SPACE

1. Westport needs to retain its seniors, who are the backbone of all volunteer committees in town and contribute in every way to what makes Westport wonderful and special. That is an irrefutable fact, as is the need to provide affordable housing designed for seniors so that they can remain here. This project includes 60 affordable units (a mix of those priced for low and moderate income senior households), as well as 40 market rate units.
2. Many in Westport seek to find suitable living arrangements for their aging parents, often looking at Meadow Ridge or Edgehill as options for their parents to live independently but close to family members. Having independent senior living in the center of Westport, along with a superior 90 bed Assisted Living Facility, will be a tremendous asset—not just to seniors currently living here, but to the entire community.
3. The developer, at its expense, will clean up and improve the remaining 16.7 contiguous acres of Baron's South to allow for passive recreation—and it will maintain the property thereafter. Since purchasing the property in 1998, the town has not been able to budget for improvement or maintenance of this site. We are devoting only 3.3 acres of the site for development, retaining the vast percentage for open space.
4. The project's amenities (pool, exercise room and equipment, and meeting rooms) will be available to patrons of the Senior Center, which is currently bursting at its seams. The need and expense for the town to expand and enhance the Senior Center (projected to be \$4 million +/-) will be addressed at no cost to taxpayers.
5. Traffic will be limited to Imperial Ave and a new access road will be built. The project includes underground parking.
6. The selected developer of the project has a national reputation for building and running well built, quality facilities, and has demonstrated great commitment to the project and the values it espouses.
7. Financially, the plan is highly advantageous to the town, with an upfront sum of \$1,000,000 for a very long term ground lease, and property taxes of approximately \$700,000 annually thereafter. Revenues generated could be set aside for a variety of town goals, such as the purchase of other properties for open space or further downtown improvements.
8. Because it will be a privately financed project, there is no legal requirement for the owner to advertise outside of Westport, mitigating concerns regarding the use of town owned land.
9. This project has been years in the making—with countless meetings over two administrations over the course of about 7 years. The final iteration, accepted by the Baron's South Committee and the Board of Finance, is thus an expression of the community in its truest sense, and the opportunity to continue the process so that the project gets a fair hearing at the PZC is up to the RTM as representatives of the entire town. The Baron's South Committee, First Selectman and the developer have worked assiduously to adapt the plan to the concerns of retaining the park like quality of the property by retaining the vast majority of the acreage for open space.
10. Finally, Baron's South was purchased in order to control its development, not strictly for open space. In a preliminary 8-24 Request made by First Selectman Gordon Joseloff to the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Commission voted to allow further efforts of the Selectman's Office to seek a Senior Living Community on Baron's South. Rezoning the property for open space at this point contradicts their earlier decision and kills a project that is highly beneficial to the town.