

DAVISON

The Coalition for Westport is concerned on many levels about the Planning and Zoning Commission's recent decision to change the zone of the Baron's South property to Recreation/Open Space.

In our view, the primary issue is not whether the property should be devoted to senior housing or to open space. That has never been an either/or proposition as is demonstrated by the chosen developer's most recent plans which preserve much of the property as open space, using only a relatively small area for housing.

P&Z Commissioners are public servants and must represent the best interests of the Town including conducting honest and fair dealings with whomever appears before them.

If Commissioners lead a developer to believe that certain changes to a proposal should be reconsidered and invites him to go back to the drawing board, they have an ethical obligation to hear the revised plan.

The P&Z Commissioners also have an obligation to treat owners of property, (in this case the Town itself), in a fair and impartial manner. The Town Administration issued a request for proposals to use the property for senior housing and required the chosen developer to revise his plans multiple times. The P&Z action, which ignores the efforts of two administrations and the interests of the general public in favor of its personal agenda, creates an atmosphere of distrust.

In the case of Amendment #687, the P&Z Commissioners ignored statutory requirements and conducted themselves in a manner that violates procedures that have been in place for decades.

For example, the Chairman admitted to having conversations with a member of the public in advance of and outside the hearing.

What is more, map amendments affecting Town owned land are sponsored by the Town. It is unprecedented for the P&Z on its own authority and without consultation with any other Town body to impose its will on Town owned property.

The change of zone also violates a fundamental principal of zoning by rendering the Center for Senior Activities non-conforming and preventing its expansion.

In the view of the Coalition, these are more significant issues than whether the property should or should not be devoted to senior housing (although it seems entirely possible to have both housing and open space). The integrity of the zoning process and the reputation of the Town as a reliable negotiating partner are what is really at stake. Those things have been damaged by this action of the P&Z and the way it was accomplished.

Concerned members of the Westport community should restore order to the process by repudiating and reversing this altogether improper and embarrassing decision, so that we may continue to discuss what is the best use of this property.

Jo Ann Davidson
Apr 6 2015

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