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To the Selectboard - May 25, 2016

I'd like to set the record and it may be helpful to consider some background information related to the Selectboard meeting held 5/11/16 when Christopher Ashley stated that he had served on the Planning Commission with Stuart Richards and that Richards was a poor choice to be on the Planning Commission. Apart from the fact that he didn't state why Richards would be a poor choice, he left out a few important details. First, he didn't mention that it was a short period of time that we served together. The reason it was short was that he resigned with a minority of the Planning Commission because they didn't like the positions that were taken by the majority and the minority didn't like the way the majority of the Planning Commission was proceeding. There was a good deal of anger expressed by this minority as they resigned their posts.

Second, subsequent to his resignation, Ashley decided to come back to the Planning Commission as its Secretary for a second short period of time only to resign again stating that he didn't agree with the positions that the Planning Commission was taking and that he couldn't in good conscience work for the Planning Commission. Needless to say on the current Selectboard there have been strong differences of opinion and Ashley has been part of a very vocal minority with strongly held views on a number of topics including municipal buildings which has cost the Town by having a second Town meeting.

I've always thought that having a number of viewpoints is helpful in getting to reach the best outcome on any given issue and that being in a minority doesn't disqualify a person from expressing his/her views. Ashley's resignation and anger seems to demonstrate his unwillingness to abide views that he doesn't agree with.

The Selectboard vote put another like minded person on the Planning Commission who would agree with the current thinking. Obviously, I do not

favor large oversize developments that are inconsistent with the character, scale and traditions of Norwich. These are the sorts of developments that have been discussed by the Planning Commission. I also don't believe that changing Norwich's zoning regulations to promote large scale development is in the Town's or taxpayers' best interest.

Steve Thoms, the candidate selected by the Selectboard for the vacant Planning Commission post, stated that he was hoping to see additional commercial and residential development in Norwich which would increase the tax base to reduce taxes and keep the town from gentrifying. Perhaps he may be unaware of the departure of many people from Norwich who couldn't afford to live here. Perhaps both the Selectboard and Planning Commission are unaware of the studies and work done by Vermont Land Trust. One study in particular contradicts the conventional wisdom that more development reduces taxes. Deb Brighton a tax policy consultant in her study states, "In general, the towns with the most commercial and industrial taxable property value have higher, rather than lower, tax bills." In her conclusion she further states, "The conventional wisdom is that more development means lower taxes and more conservation means higher taxes. Except in communities that have a high percentage of vacation homes, the reality is often just the opposite. Open space tends to require few public services. More people tend to require more public services, resulting in higher taxes."

Ms. Brighton's thoughtful study can be found at: [http://www.farmlandinfo.org/sites/default/files/Land\\_Conservation\\_and\\_Property\\_Taxes\\_in\\_Vermont\\_1.pdf](http://www.farmlandinfo.org/sites/default/files/Land_Conservation_and_Property_Taxes_in_Vermont_1.pdf)

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