

Miranda Bergmeier

From: Calli Guion <calliope54@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, March 06, 2017 3:44 PM
To: Miranda Bergmeier
Subject: Attn: members of the Planning Commission and Selectboard
Attachments: Norwich development..pages

Norwich Rezoning proposal

The Planning Commission (PC) in Norwich has been working on a development plan for affordable housing. I have lived in the middle of this proposal off of Route 5 since 1996, on Hopson Lane, in what was a development built in 1987. The Norwich Condominiums were being built at that time, and when they ran out of money for the project, they sliced off a section of their land creating lots for 6 houses. Today there are 5 houses here with shared septic on an easement from the Condominium project for our leach fields. We are set right in the same Connecticut River watershed as the 350 acre rezoning proposal of Norwich.

The PC starts off their slide show with indicators of population decline in Norwich, and a regional need for affordable housing of 5,000 units. (Page 4 of the PC plan). I am in agreement that we need to settle the inequity in housing costs in our town. We must make it possible for young families, the elderly, and local workers to live here. Do young families want to move here to live in what were described in one PC meeting as five story apartment buildings with commercial enterprises on the ground floor? A neighbor has been polling co workers, with families, who commute 30 minutes for work, to see if they want to live in Norwich. The answer has been no, because they have land and a house at a cost that allows them to have a horse or a safe yard for their family. Apartment buildings on Route 5 will not provide that kind of lifestyle.

“By enrolling more children in the school system, Norwich could reduce per-pupil spending and thus lower (or slow the growth) of school tax rate” (PC slide show pg 7)

The PC asserts that more children in our schools will lower our property taxes. Opening 350 acres up to high density, mixed use and commercial zoning options does not guarantee that any families with elementary school aged children will move here. In fact, our senior housing in town has a waiting list that is double the number of housing units currently provided. Population projections show across the country, that family sizes are smaller, with couples marrying and having children later than in the past, and a large generation of aging boomers on the horizon with the possibility of living longer than ever before. We are more likely to have an influx of retiree's and the elderly than families.

What is the optimum number of students for our school? There is a relatively small window of growth for the school that would in fact create a difference in taxes. There are tremendous benefits to smaller schools that allow more energy and attention from teachers for students and their interests. Often that is just the quality that brings parents to find a way to pay for a private school. We have a terrific school as it is. Growth here would likely lead to more spending for buildings, staff and faculty, as well as, transport and safe walking to and from school. The biggest asset a school can offer, particularly to younger children is a sense of belonging and being seen within a local school community.

The PC refers to Downtown infrastructure. We have one state Highway- Route 5. When King Arthur

was expanding, a Route 5 study indicated that it could handle any amount of traffic. I am unaware of any study following the expansion, but there is a significant growth in traffic on Route 5 and on Hopson Road. The Ledyard Bridge was rebuilt not too long ago. It is still a two lane bridge and there is considerable traffic at commuting times. Ledyard Bridge is not only access to jobs in Hanover, but the only way for students at Richmond and Hanover High to get to school. What is the projection for a needed expansion of this bridge, if we succeed in bringing in large number of new residents on Route 5?

We on Hopson Lane have spent a good deal of time and money studying and supporting our septic and water systems. Norwich has no municipal septic and the water district is, in fact a separate municipality, referred to as the fire district. The PC suggests that individual developers would be responsible for septic and water systems. Either septic would be provided on site or farmed out to Hanover or Hartford municipalities. Septic in this way, done piecemeal, as projects are proposed and accepted, is not economical or responsible in a significant wetlands environment as is the case on the Route 5 corridor. The condominium and Hopson Lane septic systems were an expensive obstacle when they were developed in 1987.

It is also suggested that the wetlands and topography of the Route 5 corridor would limit development. However, it is legal if you propose development in a parcel with significant wetland restrictions, to put all of the building permitted for the total acreage on the "dry" portion of the parcel, in higher density. With two projects on Hopson Lane alone, additions caused basement flooding in other homes and a collapsed well in another. Wetlands are not superficial obstacles, but work underground in ways that are difficult to predict.

I believe that community grows with equality of belonging among residents and space for housing that is aesthetically designed for the environment it depends on. The town of Norwich has little infrastructure in place for development and that is perhaps part of why we find ourselves struggling with how to move forward in inclusive growth today. A septic study done in 2005, determined that municipal septic was unaffordable to the town of Norwich. If we cannot find a way to have septic infrastructure, how can we support high density affordable growth in Norwich? Beautiful homes on Main Street attract people to Norwich, yet most of these former homes are now used commercially and several of them are poorly maintained.

I have heard there is a capital fund that is part of the town administration. Is it maintained and how is it used? Should we be looking at our current downtown, maintaining it and offering incentives and tax rebates for mixing use in those buildings, stabilizing them for the long term and remodeling for apartments above the commercial ground floor?

I am inspired by the story of Grafton Village, VT. Their foresight and work with The Windham Foundation (<http://www.windham-foundation.org/>) to stabilize historic village buildings and create a diverse economic community downtown and in their school system, has allowed them to benefit from a functional community in a rural setting, that attracts small business and tourism. This seems relative to the development discussion for Norwich's future. I would like to see the PC and Selectboard focus inward to the town center, what makes it vital and viable for the long term with acquisitions and remodeling to allow for mixed use and more housing options in town. Longterm studies indicate that conservation makes communities vital and affordable.

Our town plan warns- do not conflate land use with tax reduction. Incremental, integrated growth, working with infrastructure limitations and close observation of response from the region, seems more responsible than creating an opportunity for unrestricted and unconsidered growth through generalized rezoning for high density and commercial mixed use in a segregated area of town, in

order to keep the majority of the town(95%), uninvolved and protected in their rural designation, is neither inclusive nor conducive to healthy growth for our community.

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