2/6/23

**WHITE LAKE MANSION HOUSE: NEW DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL**

Continuation of the 1/9/23 public hearing on site plan approval

  Good evening Chairman Crowley and Planning Board members:

  I am Jonathan Hyman, President of the Smalwood Civic Association and a Steering Committee member of the citizen’s group SmART.

  My wife and I reside at 55 Starlight Drive in Smallwood. We raised our adult daughter here, and in fact she attended this very school. We have been residents for almost 30 years. I am quite

  familiar with the Town, its various functions and the issues we all face here in a rapidly changing technological and environmental world. Almost two decades ago I led the Citizens group

  Preserve Smallwood Country life in a ten year struggle as we fought to save the former Smallwood Golf Course from an enormous destructive townhouse development proposed to be built on

  top of a major aquifer and over 100 acres of dense forest and wetlands. We succeeded and then, with the collaboration of the Bethel Town Board, Dan Sturm and Denise Frangipane, the end

  result was The Forest Reserve at Smallwood. The resident of Bethel and beyond will benefit greatly for generations because wise choices were made by people who deliberated very

  methodically and carefully.

  Some things are worth  advocating for and that’s why so many people are here

  Thank you in advance for considering my comments.

**The size and scale of the project proposed for the corner of Rt.17B and State Rt. 55 is enormous. The height of the buildings alone are over 20 taller than what the code permits. The rendering submitted as part of the application for site plan approval illustrates that this is indeed a proposal that is not only massive, but its "community character" is out of scale with its rural surroundings. Ten years ago, in 2013, a similar project was approved for the same site. Those approvals have expired. The Planning Board has determined correctly that the proposal before it now, by law, must be considered a NEW application.  We ask that the Planning Board slow the process down and treat the application like any development proposal in its infancy.**

**There are additional reviews required, studies needed, and information about the site plan itself that must be very seriously considered by not only the Bethel Planning Board, but by the NY State Department of Transportation, the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, the NY State Board of Health.  All of this is necessary prior to arriving at the point of a thorough public hearing on the project’s site plan. In fact, I and many others believe you will conclude that a project of this scale in the heart of the Hamlet of White Lake**

 **directly across the Street from the lake itself requires a full EIS or Environmental impact statement, inclusive of a comprehensive traffic study.**

**There are many Issues involved in the review of this project. They include, but are not limited to:**

• A thorough and necessary “Hard Look” required by the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) **prior** to site plan approval, including declaration of a Lead Agency to facilitate the review process. You must evaluate the potential impacts and study which ones may or may not be able to be mitigated? If so, what is or what are, these impacts, what type of study on the part of qualified professionals will be required?

• A clear and approved stormwater prevention plan should be in place and be part of understanding the project’s site plan and in turn, the potential impacts of the overall build-out and intensity of use of the land.

• A thorough review of the comments made by the Sullivan County Division of Planning as part of its 239 GML Municipal Review and the incorporation of these comments as part of your own review (As of now, the County considers its review incomplete.)

• The project’s proposed use of Bethel’s sewer district and the effects on the district's capacity is critical to understand and evaluate.  What effect will this project have on the Town’s sewer treatment facility and its ability to operate as required by regulatory agencies such as the New York State DEC and the Federal EPA? (The effluent from the sewer treatment plant flows through White Lake Brook and into Smallwood’s  Mountain Lake.  Mountain Lake and its ecosystem are already under great stress from unregulated discharge into the lake from Smallwood homes and the immediate surrounding area, which include bungalow colonies. Additionally, there are problems related to the sewer district treatment plant that are, in part — as revealed by testing --  high nutrient and E.coli content. The result has been associated with toxic, cyanobacteria (also known as blue green algae) in Mountain Lake.)

• Traffic and road safety along the Rt. 17B corridor. Rt. 17B is the gateway to Pennsylvania, the Delaware River corridor, Bethel Woods, the Kauneonga business district, and the western end of the County. It is the busiest and one of the most dangerous roads/highways in the region other than State Rt. 17 east and west. There have been, and will continue to be, fatal accidents on this highway in Bethel and, at and around the five entrances to the densely populated Hamlet of Smallwood.

• Ingress and egress at the intersection of State Rt. 17B and State Rt. 55/aka County Rd. 13 is a very serious concern. The NY State Dept. of Transportation’s comments must be considered now, and potential traffic impacts genuinely studied and not put off until after a site plan approval. Given the recent revelation after having reviewed FOILed documents that indicate the project also proposes to erect 72 multi-family housing units, knowing that in 2012 a variance was granted to reduce the number of parking spaces from 278 to 206, and knowing that a traffic study was in the offing as part of the original approvals, it is very important that a full and independent traffic study be ordered.

  • The White Lake Fire Department has posed a number of questions that must be addressed. Smallwoodians are concerned with emergency access because a significant part of our hamlet is

  actually served by the  White Lake Volunteer Fire Company.

• Bethel and the world beyond were VERY different places when the previously approved project for the Mansion House property was brought before the Planning Board by a different developer, who more than ten years ago participated in the planning process and the creation of a plan before receiving approval, unlike the current applicant, who is unidentified at this time. Certainly, ten years after the 2013 approvals, things are different in Bethel with regard to real estate pressure, second home ownership, traffic and road safety, transient short-term rentals, and issues related to flooding and stormwater runoff due to global warming and other variables.

• The Planning Board is obligated to follow Bethel’s established laws, NY State law, and Federal law. And while this Board has obligations under the law to those who wish to develop land in our town, you also have significant discretion regarding the manner in which you both conduct the review of this proposal and permit it under Bethel’s zoning.   At this time there is not enough information available to the Planning Board and the public for this development proposal and its suggested intensity of use to be properly evaluated. If the developer sees fit, he or she should begin again with much, much more information, a detailed project narrative, updated plans, a traffic study, and transparency on the table as to whether or not this is a time share, hotel, a multi-family housing development, catering and event hall and so on.**For this reason and the reasons stated above, the best outcome for this public hearing would be for the Planning Board to close the public hearing, deny this completely deficient application.**