

Journal Tribune

Readers' Forum

Tuesday, April 10, 2012

Residents of Lower Village

Want to retain small-town feel

Lower Village residents attending the April 5th Kennebunk site plan review board meeting to continue to voice their concerns about the change use application of Grand Hotel at One Chase Hill road instead were presented with the developer's plan to install a sidewalk to the leased parking lot up the hill. The twenty neighbors were stunned when town attorney, Natalie Burns, volunteered an opinion that residents could speak only about the sidewalk proposal and no other issue, an opinion echoed by the developer's lawyer, Ralph Austin.

I ask, what are they afraid of? Do they not know that sensitivity to requirements of residents in a mixed use zone is the mark of a civilized society? Fortunately, member Brenda Robinson expressed alarm and said: "Do not shut off voices of residents" a view reiterated by members Philip Parker and Leo Costa. The Board voted to continue the public hearing next April 19th at 7pm and invited residents to submit concerns in writing by Wednesday, April 11th not later than 4:30pm.

The addition of a sidewalk does not settle all of the concerns of residents. They are still hoping for the "big picture" discussion and dialogue suggested by member Brenda Robinson at the previous public hearing on the consequences of this escalation of traffic and noise generated by this change request along with other recent developments in the area.

The town's website reads: "Kennebunk's comprehensive plan reflects a desire to maintain the small town ambiance of its village centers." Those values are embodied in the residents who continue to voice concerns over escalating use of a road which remains essentially the same as it was over a hundred and fifty years ago when walking and horse drawn carts were the modes of mobility. It is a short road which must accommodate the requirements of 13 residences, 1 event center, 2 galleries, plus additional traffic generated by a 127

seat restaurant/bar using the road for access to leased parking and now absorb an escalation of volume and flow by the Grand Hotel change of use request. Zoning codes, waivers and legal opinions cannot change the physical realities of what is hardly more than a boreen where some sections permit passage of only one car at a time.

Mixed use in Lower Village has been going on since Clement Littlefield was making hay on a grass plot adjoining his large 1808 home at One Chase Hill, and making fine vessels at his nearby shipyard. (This from Jules Righter's interview in Biddeford Journal, 1887). That house was demolished to make way for shops--a historic link, vanished. Most houses there were not connected to the town sewer until the late 1960s when H.R. Brown dug trenches for the new line under the supervision of the late John T. Dickson, Supt. of Works. That opened the way for development in what was and still is a predominantly residential neighborhood. The Board must consider if the ne plus ultra has been reached for this part of Lower Village—the point beyond which we cannot go without totally destroying any sense of privacy and livability for long time residents.

Our fishermen sometimes are forced to pull back their nets when they acknowledge that they have jeopardized their livelihoods by over harvesting. Farmers recognize when it's time to move cattle from an overgrazed pasture if they expect anything to grow there in the future. Many residents wonder if the Trojan horse has already entered Lower Village and wonder what will be in the next change request?

It is my hope five years hence, it might be said: "the Town of Kennebunk does get the bigger picture; we did get it right." The board might ponder the words from Daniel Webster's landmark Dartmouth College case before the U.S. Supreme Court (1819): "It may be a small Village, yet there are those who love it."

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