

Kennebunk Post

The paper of Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Arundel



Free

11,000 press run
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March 23, 2012

Letters to the Editor

Residents turn out for Lower Village Meeting

Nearly two dozen residents of Lower Village Kennebunk witnessed and exercised democracy in action at the March 15th. Kennebunk Site Plan Review Board meeting. They gathered to express views on the requested change to The Grand Hotel development from a primarily retail first floor to a restaurant-take away establishment.

A critical concern voiced repeatedly by more than a dozen Lower Village residents and their lawyer representative, Chris Neagle, was the sustained livability for residents of Chase Hill and the control of traffic flow and safe passage for pedestrians who live and regularly walk on this narrow 14-foot road as well as for the Grand's guests who would walk to the leased unmonitored parking lot at Windows On the Water.

A point of contention was the town code's requirement for "a curb, sidewalk or swale" to separate pedestrians from traffic flow. Residents learned that a swale is a ditch along the side of the road and that the town lawyer had ruled that pedestrians could jump onto the grass of residents' homes if they needed to avoid being hit by a car.

There is no swale or curb or sidewalk on Chase Hill Road which residents reported is in a state of potholes, deterioration and crumbling from current heavy use. Board of Selectmen liaison, John Kotsonis reported that there is no plan by the town to repair or repave Chase Hill Road nor did the developer give any sign of doing so.

Director of Community Development, Planning & Codes, Caroline Seagalla, cited a town study that said

the pedestrian traffic flow generated by the new development would be "three people per hour".

Bonnie Clement, owner of H.B. Provisions reported that the traffic flow directly across the street was 3,000 persons per day in peak season.

Philip Parker of the site plan review board made a motion that the town attorney appear "in person before this board" with her written opinion which waived the code requirement for a curb, sidewalk or swale. Brenda Robinson, in seconding the motion, said: "we have created a monster in Lower Village". She commented that we have looked only at this code requirement and that code requirement and the legality of issues without considering the larger issues involved in the community, but "we, as representatives for the town have the responsibility to look at the big picture". The motion was unanimously approved and the town attorney is expected to appear at the April 5th public hearing.

The site plan board members now have the opportunity to rise to the challenge of this review with a vision of the needs of the entire community of Lower Village, not just the developer. We can talk of give and take, of what should be and what not; but it is a Village, only if you can keep it. I suggest that in this month of St. Patrick, they might take courage from the example of Edmund Burke, who told his constituents, "A representative worthy of you ought to be a person of stability. I am to look, indeed, to your opinions; but to such opinions as you and I must have five years hence....to be a pillar of the State, and not a weather-cock on the top of the edifice...of no use but to indicate the shiftings of every fashionable gale."

Robert F. Lyons
Lower Village Kennebunk