



## OPINION

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# Time to take a stand in Lower Village

By ROBERT F. LYONS

Lower Village residents attending the April 5 Kennebunk Site Plan Review Board meeting to continue to voice their concerns about the change use application of The Grand Hotel at 1 Chase Hill Road were presented instead with the developer's plan to install a sidewalk to the leased parking lot up the hill.

The 20 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 Lou Costa. The board voted to continue the public hearing at 7 p.m. April 19 and invited residents to submit concerns in writing by Wednesday, April 11.

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 150 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, one event center, two 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 1 Chase Hill, and making fine vessels at his nearby shipyard. 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, superintendent 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 (adapted) 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."

***Robert Lyons**, a Lower Village homeowner for 42 years, teaches Irish studies at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, USM, Portland. A retired public school administrator, he has lived in Ireland where he experienced the positive impact of traffic calming programs in small congested villages to ensure safety and livability for residents, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.*