

Dec. 6, 2014

The following was written by Tom Newkirk, co-owner of Saratoga National Golf Club, and Kevin Bette, a partner in the golf club and president of First Columbia LLC in Latham. It is addressed to city officials in Saratoga Springs, New York:

Apparently City Leaders don't understand the ramifications of their recent vote on disallowing Planned Unit developments (PUD's) in the City's Conservation development District or CDD. Instead of listening to their Consultants and hand picked comprehensive plan committee members and implementing smart planning principals they are being lead down a path of economic destruction and continued sprawl by the so called "Sustainable Saratoga" - or more appropriately "No Growth" crowd. The funny thing is, the city council did not need to take this action. By city law, all PUDs would have to be reviewed by the city council AND the planning board on a case by case basis. If the city leaders thought the project being proposed did not fit in the city, they could simply deny that particular project. However, Tuesday's vote was a blanket "NO" to this creative planning tool - whether it was for a good project or a bad one.

Without the option for a PUD, the so called CDD zone, would allow for only the creation of two acre residential building lots similar to large scale suburban sprawl developments built previously in the recently referred to "green belt" area. This is the same zone that a new Fire Station is proposed to be built by the City, certainly not a Conservation project. A review of the Bulk Table in the City's Zoning Manual will clearly identify the large Suburban sprawl houses as the permitted use in this zone. Also, in an interesting side note, you will not find the term "Green Belt" anywhere on the Zoning Map as it's not a land use and doesn't really exist yet the sustainable group repeat it as Gospel!

In an even more underhanded move, Mr. Geoff Bornemann, as the Mayor's appointee as Chairman of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, recommends the implementation of protecting open space, providing linkages to wildlife areas and incorporating land use policies that reduce sprawl all without any way to implement them under current regulations- which is exactly what a PUD will allow! PUD's are used by most other communities to encourage creative ways to incorporate smart planning principals which deliver projects that provide cutting edge solutions to the economic and environmental problems that are key to balanced growth. Also, PUD's are allowed and used in every other Zone in the City of Saratoga.

Despite leading the Comprehensive Plan Committee for the past year, the Committee recently voted to allow PUD's in the CDD overriding Mr. Bornemann's strong dissent. They did this after carefully hearing from the entire community the pros and cons of this action, listening to their experienced Consultants, and more importantly looking to the future planning of Saratoga. The language of their proposal was very strict and protective to ensure that only environmentally sensitive projects with many conservation requirements could be approved. It is very unusual that the City Council would entertain a special motion to advise against the Comprehensive Plans recommendations, even though they haven't had the chance to hear from the voters nor gain the technical expertise that is required for an informed vote. It will be interesting to see what the Council does when the official Comp Plan is presented to them after Tuesdays Public Hearing.

One of the essential mandates of a Comp Plan is to study the Economic Impacts of the recommended changes. Mr. Bornemann, as Chairman of the Comp Plan, has repeatedly refused to include that analysis, therefore, a flawed plan is proposed. Without this key piece of information it would be hard for any City official to gage the impacts of the proposed changes and make an intelligent informed vote which would be protective of the fiscal needs of the city and its' residents, especially with looming budget deficits on the Horizon.

The inevitable consequence of this prohibition of creative planning techniques, coupled with the overdevelopment, congestion and parking problems in the core of the city, will result in large future Tax increases on the backs of existing homeowners and businesses. It will also continue the Suburbanization of the undeveloped lands as property Owners have no alternative to the current zoning restrictions other than residential sprawl. The recent influx of Condos downtown only add meagerly to the City coffers as they are taxed as Apartments under State Law leaving the City Finance Commissioner with little aid to shore up the City's precarious Finances.

The health of a City starts with smart planning and Leadership. Most of the City's revenue is derived from the use of its real Property through Sales and Property Taxes and especially in Saratoga, the strength of its Tourism industry. City leaders would be wise to look to the future and responsibly regulate the remaining lands to provide economic stability while protecting the environment. PUDs are the only vehicle in which to meet both of these essential needs. We encourage all taxpayers to let the comprehensive plan and city council hear you clearly when they consider the upcoming comprehensive plan draft. We also

encourage our City Leaders to listen to all who have concerns and professional opinions before making rash decisions that affect the City's future.