

February 14, 2023

Good morning, Town Board.

It's Valentine's Day! So, apropos, I'm here today to speak about "love" and "poetry." First ,regarding the "love" part:

Back in December, there was a public hearing in front of the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding an application for an oversized spec house proposed to be built on a fragile, small lot right smack in the heart of one of the most cherished spots in town – a true intersection of natural beauty, history, and joy. 30 members of the public participated in that public hearing --something of a recent record for a ZBA hearing for a single house.

In January, the ZBA, based on numerous code standards, voted unanimously to deny the application, and when, on Feb 4th, the *East Hampton Star* posted their story about the decision on Instagram, it received 1389 hearts and 193 comments --all expressing joy and gratitude about the decision. Something of a record for engagement with just one *EH Star* post.

Last week, there was a much bigger thing: the public hearing was held in the matter of the redevelopment of 70 acres of sand pit into a massive industrial & commercial complex—the largest ever on the South Fork. Dozens of members of the public participated across 4+ hours, and many-- maybe even hundreds -- more have and will submit letters to the public record.

Why are citizens turning out in number to participate in hearings? Why did so many people respond so positively and intensely to just one story in the *Star* about one permit denial?

Because people are seeing every day the environmentally profligate destruction being wrought by overdevelopers, and indeed, not only are they "mad as hell and not going to take it anymore," but mostly, as I hear and see it, they are speaking out ofLOVE

People at the Pit hearing last week spoke cogently, grounded in fact and comprehensive plans, but they also spoke from the deepest place in their hearts. People are engaging genuinely and passionately to protect the beauty, sense of place, affordability, and quality of life, and they speak out of love for our community and for each other.

And now for the poetry... In my youth, when I was studying literature at the university, I used to recite a LOT of poetry --all the time. Seriously, I could really wow 'em at a party with my recitation of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or the "Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales"....in Middle English. I still can.

But these days, I find myself reciting something very different that I find poetic: actual verses from Chapter 255: our Town zoning code. Consider this passage from 255-1-11, from the "Purposes" section: of 255-1-11.

"Aesthetic attributes: to perpetuate and enhance areas of natural beauty/to retain outstanding water views and other open vistas available to residents and visitors/ and to perpetuate generally those aesthetic attributes/and amenities which not only please the eye/ but which together are the essence of the nationally recognized character of the Town."

See...pure poetry. Honestly, Wordsworth didn't do any better than this.

And there are other poetic stanzas about Code purpose such as B. Protection of Neighborhoods. C. Proper Use of Land; D. Affordable Housing; E. Preservation; F&G Water; H. Safety & Health; I. Prevention of Overcrowding; J. Property Values

And perhaps this most lyrical –and most important- stanza:

“Orderly growth: to guide and regulate the orderly growth/development and redevelopment of the Town/ in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan and the long-range objectives/ principles and goals set forth therein/ as beneficial to the interests of the people.”

But the reality is that what is being built is no longer consistent with the poetry or prose of the Code as written. What’s happening on the ground is most often fully incompatible with the purposes. And it’s far from “orderly” – it is disorderly. It’s overwhelming our neighborhoods, its obliterating affordability, and it has broken our town infrastructure.

In October, I came before you to ask respectfully for 5 things. Among them, I asked that the Board initiate a formal process to reconsider, amend and evolve the zoning code. And I also asked that you might consider putting a pause on the most aggressive forms of development while you assess changes.

Today, I want to ask the board again to not only proceed with the code reassessment process, but to move it up to the top of your priority list.

And I am here to make my ask for a pause more urgent: it’s not just time to “press the pause button,” it’s time to “pull the emergency brake.” So ,I ask this board to implement a moratorium on new development and re-development for a reasonable period of time to accommodate a code review and revision process.

So ,in short, here is my Valentine’s Day poem for you: “Roses are red. Citizens are blue. Please change the code. Board we need you.” Thank you and Happy Valentine’s Day.