

Dear members of the Washington Zoning Commission,

March 4, 2023

I realize you are all elected volunteers doing a difficult job. I am sure you have other things to do than read yet another letter about 101 Wykeham Road. But I wish I could help you see the 101 Wykeham situation from my perspective. I live across the street. While an owner is permitted to do what they wish with their property, that right is within certain guidelines to preserve the rights of the neighbors.

I realize that a special permit was approved for "an inn" for 101 Wykeham Road, such that many protections for neighbors are unable to be maintained. Town regulations have always been understood to mean an inn must be built on a state road with 500 feet of frontage. The wording of that regulation has now been clarified to say an inn must be built on a state road with 500 feet of frontage.

After the request for a 44-room inn was denied as too intense for the R-1 district in 2008, a settlement agreement was reached for a larger development in 2013. The approval was issued after a short discussion among members of the commission who received the 32-sheet site plan the day before. This made it difficult for the commissioners to understand what they were voting on. There was no time for the public to read what was being presented. There was no public hearing.

The special permit was approved by a zoning commission that included members the applicant had supported for election, thereby changing the composition of the commission to be favorable to the owners' wishes.

The desire for more tax revenue or job opportunities should not be pursued at the destruction of a historic residential neighborhood, creating significant danger of inadequate water for all the surrounding homes, and increased traffic on a narrow winding town road. To handle the increased amount of traffic that will exist if this is built, Wykeham Road will probably have to be widened and straightened looking more like 202 than a rural town road. I do not think the people who come to live in this town because of its beautiful winding roads, open fields, historic buildings, and lovely Steep Rock will be pleased with that. What will happen to traffic on Green Hill? We will need stop lights. The last traffic study was done in 2008.

There are so many issues with these plans, including the lack of water for fire suppression. This is a very serious issue. I watched the fire across the street when Wykeham Rise burned in 2017. Ash and burning sparks blew on the wind into my yard and all my neighbors. The firemen I spoke with were anxiously waiting for water tanker trucks to come back from the pond behind town hall. After a fire of that intensity, permitting a vast commercial development without water for fire suppression is a recipe for disaster.

The house I live in was built by Daniel Platt, father of Senator Orville Platt, whose commemorative bronze plaque is in the Gunn memorial Library's Wykeham Room. My house was his carriage house. To my left, the white house with pillars was his home, and to my right, that house was originally his barn. Daniel Platt's relationship with Frederick Gunn was such that they were both run out of town by the Congregational minister for supporting abolition and women's suffrage. These houses were on the underground railroad. Putting a huge commercial hotel development across the street destroys part of our town's history.

This is a time in the world when we are all searching for ways to help the warming planet, to create a more reasonable financial life for American working people, to build homes they can afford to buy, and wages that allow a decent life. We do not need a gigantic luxury hotel in town (hotels are not allowed in town). We can provide jobs by building a few homes, housing for seniors, who are downsizing, a mixed-use residential project that includes much needed affordable housing, or an elegant small inn with a restaurant that fits the neighborhood.

If we destroy the beauty we have, to create jobs or revenue in a meaningless cycle, we will not survive.
We can do better.

Sincerely,

Matilda Giampietro
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