

Zoning Commission - Town of Washington

Re: Wykeham Rise Inn Letter of Support for Conditions Approval

Wykeham began as a creative, passionate vision of Erika and Matthew Klauer - sibling developers who saw opportunity in the abandoned Wykeham Rise and Swiss Hospitality School grounds (27 acres, classrooms and dorms for 115 students) and inspired by the neighboring Mayflower Inn and numerous New England world-class inns and their family's deep early roots of innkeeping in Litchfield County. After getting Zoning Office assurance that the inn use was a "specially permitted use within residential zones" and Washington's 100-year precedent of inns on country roads along Lake Waramaug's shores and the prior intensive commercial school use of the property, they proceeded with the costly purchase and plan and community outreach. 90% of town residents were thrilled and supported the removal of the blighted school buildings and their plans for the best small Inn to be built in New England since the Ocean House in Watch Hill - for far better futures for local students, contractors, designers, artists, shop owners, restaurants, and farms that the owners had committed to support and better for property values (including for abutters) and property tax revenues.

Some of the immediate neighbors saw this development as more traffic (contrary to the minimal impact noted in the traffic study) and a commercial use in their residential neighborhood and preferred a park or homes to be built instead of other approved uses of a school or inn or affordable housing or addiction recovery facility. The Commission closely denied the application due to scale but ultimately through the courts and appeal process the Town and the abutting neighbors settled and approved the proposed design with 25 technical conditions to be met.

Unfortunately, a few neighbors opposed to the project never conceded nor wished to honor the compromise settlement made by the Town and original neighboring litigants. They have confused some of the public into writing letters of opposition to the **already approved application** for a luxury inn instead of focusing on the only issue of discussion – the 25 technical conditions of compliance - typical of most zoning applications. They have successfully waterboarded and delayed the zoning approval process and Commission with never-ending detailed new recommended requirements in specs that are very unusual to a typical development plan. In the sense of true fairness, reasonable commission members would work during the special developer meetings to discuss the Settlement requirements to meet these technical conditions. And if basic compliance requirements were clearly conveyed, the developer and their local design team, who have been exceedingly cooperative in this 15-year multi-million-dollar approval process, will simply meet the conditions as they are easily resolved. As David Owen, a former ZC Chair wrote – "Zoning commissioners can't simply ignore or overlook regulations they happen to disagree with. If an application complies with the town's regulations, it must be approved, if it does not, it must be denied."

As others have expressed, Valerie Anderson, a sitting ZC member, should refrain from pre-judgment and not put the Commission in future litigation jeopardy. Attorney Ziska should review her comments on the record as grounds for recusal and stepping aside to let an Alternate ZC member with better knowledge of the history and impartiality replace her. Anderson has made numerous comments during ZC meetings. "Should we vote perhaps not in the affirmative?" "How did this happen?" "How do we get to no?" "How do we unravel all of this?" "I would like to see an attempt at mediation." "We've allowed a business to be established in a residential area ... and we are destroying a neighborhood... and all of a sudden we caved." Anderson also requested an "Executive Session" meeting privately with Attorney

Ziska so she could understand how we got here. She improperly demands a site clean-up pre-approval instead of as part of the normal pre-construction development process to delay and deny the approval especially with neighbor claims that our FD has created environmental pollution and despite repeated counsel advice that the clean-up is separate from the Settlement conditions and knowing the neighbor's efforts to delay work by opposing access points to the site. She shows no impartiality nor open-mindedness to resolve the conditions of approval but in fact shows a clear pre-disposition and bias against the inn and Settlement Agreement and has a basic misunderstanding of where the proposal now sits in the application process. As Owen quotes Ziska's book What's Legally Required?, "No member of any commission should publicly take any position on the granting or denial of an application before the application has been formally heard and considered by the commission. Each commission member should avoid making statements that could suggest the member has made up his or her mind about an application before its merits have been fully considered." The public expects a sense of fairness in her exercise of zoning power, yet she has clearly made up her mind to delay and derail any final approval.

I support the Commission in its efforts to resolve the conditions to their reasonable satisfaction. Washington will enormously benefit from this extraordinary inn – the largest economic growth and prosperity proposal since the Mayflower Inn was built in 1991. Hospitality revenues typically produce \$4-\$6 locally in other benefits to a community relative to every dollar spent at the inn (local vendors, employees, sub-contractors, retailers, and nearby restaurant expenditures). This will positively improve the welfare of our community forever. Unfortunately, our economy, property values, community reputation and taxes and employment of local students and residents have suffered from this 15-year blight and loss of this luxury inn. I hope this will be brought to a positive conclusion so we all can move on.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephen Brighenti

Washington Resident