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Town of Vestal Planning Board

Madeleine Cotts

Timothy Mulvey

Robert Warner

Michon Stuart

Thomas Gorman

Dear Planning Board Members,

As you are likely well aware, the Town Board passed Local Law A for a PDD to allow for “The Retreat” at Bunn Hill. This was passed even with overwhelming opposition from the local neighborhood as well as the greater Vestal area. The 533 letters opposed to this project came from a widespread area of Vestal and represented a 16:1 ratio of those opposed to those in favor. Similarly, two public hearings were ~90% opposition.

Unfortunately, the Town Board has now left the Planning Board in the unenviable position of reviewing a site plan for a VERY UNPOPULAR project. As members of the community, we would ask that you do everything in your power to minimize the negative impacts of this project on your fellow citizens. This plan, allowing 161 units of mostly 4 and 5 bedrooms, will be increasing the density of the direct neighborhood by 15x. The increased density of population will also come with numerous traffic and environmental impacts.

Landmark Properties has stated in the press that they want to be “good neighbors”. In that vein, it is hoped that they would seriously consider stipulations that the planning board puts forth. We would ask the Planning Board to seriously consider the following:

* REDUCE the overall density of this project to make it more compatible with the RR zoning surrounding it. The proposed density is considerably higher than allowed in RR zoning. The best way to do this might be to significantly reduce the number of 4- and 5-bedroom units. Clearly this is for a student population and not for “professionals”. True professional housing is needed in the area, but this design is not for them. By creating true professional housing, it would also accomplish a substantial reduction in density.
* INCREASE both setbacks and buffers to better “hide” the development and provide greater separation from the RR neighbors. The current plan has the buildings fairly close to Bunn Hill Road and presents itself as an almost 1/3 mile “wall” of buildings.
* Incorporate NATIVE trees and landscaping as much as possible.
* Landscaping, such as trees, should be LARGE trees to start and to act as a screen for the property.
* Have the developer show a plan for the bus shuttle system and commit to doing it. What will the size of the buses be? How will they run in conjunction with BU’s class schedule on MWF and T/R? Will it just be a shuttle to BU or bus service to the community?
* What does the SWPPP (Stormwater Pollution Protection Plan) look like? Can it be incorporated into the plan in such a way to be an attractive feature that will support wildlife as well?
* What is the actual line the sewer will take? How far into yards and driveways? Who will pay to replace and fix the driveways and make sure they are back at comparable levels? Who will pay for street trees that are damaged? Or if they need to be removed after damage? How will you limit damage to old trees along the sewer route? Further down Bunn Hill road the western edge is along a VERY steep drop-off / ravine. How will the line be run there while protecting the creek below?
* It is hard to fathom that with 700 students placed on Bunn Hill at the project site that NONE of them will be walking / biking to the Campus. How will the safety of students walking on Bunn Hill be ensured? (Should sidewalks be revisited?)
* The old “Bunn Hill manufacturing” dilapidated house on the site should be tested for dangerous chemicals and asbestos by a reputable lab (the results sent to the Planning Board) and then properly demolished and REMOVED from the site (not just buried somewhere there).
* What is the proposed color scheme for the buildings? Those shown in the pictures seem garish and out of place. It would be better to utilize colors that blend in with the surroundings and make the overall project less noticeable.
* What will the actual lighting look like at night? Can mock-ups be provided to show this? Please, no lit sign out front. It is out of character for the neighborhood.
* Bear proof dumpsters should be required to minimize wildlife / resident encounters.
* Fencing should be included on the side and back property lines to limit trespass into private properties and the Nuthatch Hollow Nature Preserve. Buffers of trees should be kept between the fencing and neighboring properties so that the neighbors are not looking at a big fence.

As already noted, there is substantial community concern in regards to this project. It does not fit the RR character of Vestal. We are hoping that this massive intrusion into the RR neighborhoods of Vestal and it negative impacts can be mitigated as much as possible by the Planning Board.

Thank you for listening to your fellow residents’ concerns.

Sincerely,

Victor S. Lamoureux