

Aug. 29, 2013

Letters, Camden Herald

Larger implications

I am a bit confused about the re-zoning of Fox Hill to accommodate a rehab clinic. First it was simply a re-zoning issue for a future issue, but now it has taken on larger implications. The principals have now purchased the property and are seeking a rezoning ordinance for the future site of their alcohol and addiction clinic. By buying the property, it seems they are by-passing procedural steps and heading directly to construction for their clinic.

Do Camden residents truly wish to have a rehab center for alcohol and drug rehabilitation prominently situated in one of their residential zones? Personally, I doubt it, but I believe it must be brought to the ballot box for the citizens' decision. The issue is too important to evade the democratic process.

Carefully consider the Board's ignorance of the re-zoning process. According to the Herald, "Several planning board members noted they were not familiar with contract zoning." Although that's not reassuring, Mr. Gibbons said "it is his intention to move forward with the special exemption" even though he "has no experience with existing contract laws." Now ask yourself: can you accept the Board's recommendation when some of them do not know the laws? Or others, like Mr Gibbon acknowledges, are willing to push this through with no experience in the matter?

So here we are, Citizens of Camden, relying on the future of our town by Board members who are making important decisions out of arrogance and ignorance. The Charter places "restrictions on the use of property that cannot be altered without town approval." Yet it seems that our Board is doing everything it can to circumvent public opinion. The voters know what they want for their town and what their town should look like. Let the voters decide; let's not leave it to a Board that seems to have another agenda.

And who is this rehab center going to benefit? Not us Maine residents, that seems clear. According to Dr. Amsel, the center's patients are "expected to come from outside Maine." With a price tag of \$50-60,000, this rehab center will focus on the wealthy outsiders. Remember Maine ranks 32nd in the United States with a household income of \$46,000. Most residents cannot afford this treatment, yet we are willing to allow our Board to rezone a residential area for the few outsiders who can afford it. Whom does this Board represent? Is it the special interest group that can afford this type of rehabilitation? Do they represent the people and town of Camden, preserving its New England Heritage and solving the problems that need solving?

We have our own sets of problems, including alcohol and drug addiction. If it wasn't tragic, it would be laughable that, Dr. Amsel "is stunned by the amount of alcohol and addiction we have here [Maine]." Yet his rehab center excludes the very people who need his services, except for a few alcohol scholarships he may consider offering to the locals. Nevertheless, Dr. Amsel is adamant that his rehab center "will be the best one in the country," provided you can afford it.

So fellow citizens, what do we get for this rehab center? We get to rezone a residential area so that the historic flavor or features are permanently altered, maybe even ruined. We get a first class rehab center that most citizens have no possibility of ever using. The clinic, in order to appease some groups and gather additional support, plans on providing meals to the rehab patients from locally owned eateries

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For a first class rehabilitation clinic, it seems that we receive very little or nothing at all by its presence. On the surface, it sets the foundation for future projects, so that they may sail through with ease. Look at the Frye House: demolished in hours. Let us return the future of our historic towns and neighborhoods back to the voters and the ballot box. I cannot, in good conscience, allow the future of our town and its historic districts to be ruined, altered, or changed by any Board that disregards its historic integrity or allows residential neighborhoods as avenues for questionable services and motives.

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Camden