

A dangerous precedent

I need to weigh in on the Fox Hill debate one more time. Again I would like to go on the record as being in support of a high-end alcohol/drug rehabilitation center in the greater Midcoast .

Here is what troubles me about the plan that is being put before us. What you have is a residential property that has been “overdeveloped” and is purportedly no longer suitable for residential purposes. Then you have a mostly undisclosed private investment group that has purchased it at a bargain basement price and requested a zoning change to establish a commercial enterprise in the middle of a long-established residential neighborhood.

What this suggests to me is that every time someone is unable to sell a residence as a residence they can request a zoning change to accommodate the interests of a particular buyer. Wow! This sets a very dangerous precedent. If one exception is allowed what is to prevent the domino effect? Someone else could argue that “you did it there, why not here?” And it wouldn’t apply just to rehab centers. I would hasten to add that there are several large residences in proximity to Fox Hill that could have a similar fate.

In my opinion there are plenty of people with deep pockets who could well afford to purchase Fox Hill, tear down unwanted structures, restore the main house and end up with a perfectly glorious residential estate on fourteen in-town acres with killer ocean views. They would also pay substantial taxes. The idea that it might be a “summer” person is offensive. Let us not forget that it was those summer people who gave us the Amphitheater, the village green, the yacht club, the children’s chapel, and numerous other public facilities and who also have supported many other worthwhile causes up and down the Midcoast!

People made gobs of money on real estate prior to the economic downtown. It is not, repeat not, the responsibility of the taxpayers to bail out buyers or sellers who invest in real estate and then are forced to sell it at a loss. Nor is there some sort of time limit in which residential property must be sold before reverting to another use. Real estate can be a bad investment just like anything else.

There are other areas in town where a rehab facility could be built with no zoning changes. Would it cost more? Probably. But that is not my problem or yours unless you happen to be an investor which carries with it a certain amount of risk!

I am aware that Camden and Maine in general have aging populations and less than stellar employment opportunities, but I don’t think that the promise of a couple of dozen jobs warrants the potential unraveling of the zoning ordinances. Furthermore, do we really know what the commitment of McLean is at this point other than having a representative at the planning board meetings?

I would urge the selectmen and potentially the voters to take a long hard look at this proposal and consider the consequences before voting for or against it.

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