

August 19, 2013

Dear Stephen,

My wife, Faith, and I live at 168 Chestnut Street and our property directly abuts the Fox Hill estate. We live here year-round and work full-time.

Concerning the current Fox Hill proposal, we think there are two important issues to consider.

The first is the consideration of the proposed zoning change in general, as this process needs to be taken very seriously. Important aspects to review are whether the change significantly benefits the town, community, and neighborhood involved; whether there is an existing unmet need for this change; and whether a hardship exists which unfairly harms the property owner. We believe these standards need to be met because zoning ordinances exist to protect all citizens of the town and should not be changed to only benefit individual property owners.

The other issue we would like to address is the specific proposal being made by McLean Hospital and Mr. Rodman, to create a treatment facility for wealthy substance abuse patients on the Fox Hill property. I am a registered nurse, working in critical care, and have many years of experience working with substance abuse and addicted patients. These are among some of our most challenging and unstable patients, demanding nearly constant monitoring, assessment, and treatment for frequent and abrupt changes, medically, emotionally, and psychologically. While I do believe these patients need appropriate ongoing treatment, this is needed across the economic spectrum, not for just a wealthy few.

While it remains to be determined whether this proposal would be defined as spot zoning--because it includes the entire Coastal Residential District--it is certainly written to specifically define the Fox Hill property, excluding all others in town except for one (the Beloin's property north of town).

So my questions are:

~ Does this proposal significantly benefit the town, community, or neighborhood? There would be a handful of jobs created, but not many. The suggestion put forth that the patients exposed to Camden during their stay would then decide to buy homes and start businesses here is far-fetched. These patients would primarily remain on the property, and not supporting local businesses during their stay.

~ Is there an existing unmet local need for this facility? I doubt that wealthy addicts have great difficulty accessing treatment programs when they decide they need them. And the local need of a facility at this price point is likely minimal.

~ Is there an existing hardship unfairly harming this property owner? Most property owners have lost value in their holdings over the past few years. In this case, however, it is not an issue of someone losing their home due to financial hardship, or not being able to use the property for its intended use. For the owners of Fox Hill to demonstrate a hardship, wouldn't they have to show that there is no other location where they could establish this program? That would seem unlikely, considering the money available to a hospital with the prestige of McLean. This property has instead been purchased by a large group of investors who, I assume, expect to make a profit on their investment by leasing the property to McLean. And McLean in turn expects to make a profit from this venture, as well. Thus turning a formerly established residential property into a business.

~ While McLean has an excellent reputation, what happens should they decide to terminate their lease? And a lower-caliber lessee is chosen to replace them? Once the door has been opened with this zoning change, what are all of the possible future ramifications?

My conclusions are that this project would not be of significant benefit to Camden and would instead have a negative effect on the town and this neighborhood, in particular.

Would you please forward our letter to the members of the Planning Board.

Thank you,
David and Faith Hague
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