

Ken's speech to the Chapel Hill Planning Board regarding Ephesus-Fordham Proposal

February 4, 2014

My name is Ken Larsen. I've been a resident of Chapel Hill for 37 years, and I'm ashamed to admit that throughout most of those 37 years I've been apathetic about town government.

On October 20th I attended a Briarcliff neighborhood function at which Dwight Bassett gave a presentation on the Ephesus redevelopment project. That presentation cured me of my apathy. Immediately after the presentation I posted a note [actually a rant] to the Briarcliff listserv. I gave a big thumbs-down to the whole project. I said that I was horrified by the idea of putting seven story buildings in a flood zone, predicted that it would exacerbate flooding in Briarcliff, aggravate traffic congestion and not provide the tax benefits that were alleged. I concluded that the whole project smacked of something that would only benefit developers.

As the days passed, I felt motivated to conduct research to ferret out the facts. I like to do things in a methodical fashion and ask lots of questions. My favorite methodology is a "white paper", so I've created a white paper on the Ephesus project. Yesterday I emailed each of you a copy.

The white paper begins with an executive summary. That is followed by some project goals and data that I found on the town web site. Next is a series of pages – one for each major goal of the town:

1. Affordable housing
2. Project financing
3. Form Based Code/Zoning
4. Traffic
5. Trail ways
6. Storm water (The back of the document shows pictures of recent floods in Briarcliff + a link to a video.)

In creating the document I talked to many people and viewed many files. The more I learned, the more questions arose, and I added them to the document. I'd like to enlist your help to answer those questions.

The principal questions are:

1. What are the true traffic numbers?
2. Will the project be able to provide affordable housing?
3. Will the project provide a positive financial benefit to the Town?
4. Will the project aggravate downstream flooding?

The early answers that I have obtained have made me more resolute that my original assessment was correct. At this juncture I once again give a big thumbs-down to the whole project. However, I remain open-minded and welcome any answers that you can provide which might change my opinion.

Lastly, in talking to people from other focus areas, I realize that many of the Ephesus issues like storm water and traffic are the same as other focus areas such as Obey Creek and Central West.

A lesson learned is the need to approach traffic and stormwater issues holistically and to solve the problems before making land use changes.

Thank you for letting me speak, and thank you in advance for any answers that you can provide.

