

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

After two decades serving on the Planning & Zoning Commission, and, in recent years serving as its Chairman, I have decided to resign prior to the expiration of my current term this coming November. My decision is based on the need to have a reconstituted Commission in place to focus on a number of issues of major import coming before the Commission over the next several months. These issues, including affordable housing and commercial redevelopment, will transcend the election in November and will continue to consume the Commission's attention over the next several years and beyond.

Over the many years on Planning Zoning I have come to view our town almost as a corporation with our 6,500 individual property owners as its shareholders. The Planning & Zoning Commission is, in effect, a fiduciary utilizing its regulatory and planning role to preserve and enhance, where appropriate, the value of this shareholder equity. As detailed in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development, our objective has been and will continue to be the preservation of the residential character of Darien to the benefit of us all.

The issues on the horizon for the Town are both short and long term in nature. Just how the Commission and Darien as a whole confront them will determine what our community may look like ten years from now and the financial burden its citizens may be forced to carry by a State government that sees us as a source of revenue and an implement of social policy. Although State government is controlled by a single political party, each of us at the local level, as shareholders, will be affected regardless of our personal political affiliation. Notwithstanding the State's motives and objectives, locally we are bound by a communal vision of our community as detailed the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development.

On a macro level, the regionalization of State government represents the single greatest threat to our Town's sovereignty as well as all the municipalities in Connecticut. Regionalization will dilute the State's accountability. Local planning and control will be mandated to comply with the regional authority that, in turn, will reflect the State's agenda. Our financial sovereignty could be substantially impacted in an effort to redistribute and balance these resources among the communities within each region. Regionalization will not be kind to fully developed and fiscally well-managed communities such as ours.

Being fully developed, even seemingly miniscule changes in the demographics of Darien have potentially major consequences for the Board of Education relative to average class size, student teacher ratios and facilities, the Department of Public Works on the capacity of our sanitary and storm water systems that were built so many years ago, the Park and Recreation Commission on the utilization of open space that is crucial to the character of Darien, Planning & Zoning on traffic patterns, land use and the geometry of our commercial centers. Concepts such as "Transit Oriented Development" promoted by the State serve as nothing more than a means to justify programs designed to increase residential density and development along transportation corridors such as I-95, Metro North, and Route 1 each of which bisect Darien. With our community at maximum capacity we have little flexibility for incremental development without compromising the stated objective of maintaining the residential character of our town. At the local level State policy will not discriminate between political parties, but will affect us all.

On the bright side, we have significant targeted "value added" opportunities in the

redevelopment of our commercial centers. The Golden portfolio of properties in Noroton Heights was recently purchased by a \$7 plus billion dollar publically traded Real Estate Investment Trust for a reported price in excess of \$47 million. Several years ago, the Planning & Zoning Commission established an "Overlay Zone" over the entire Heights area in an effort to stimulate its redevelopment into a mixed use master planned project to include both retail, office and residential properties. The potential redevelopment of this commercial area will occupy a substantial portion of the Commission's agenda over the next several years, will have a positive effect on our tax base, and may help solve local flooding issues as well as addressing a number of traffic related issues. The "Overlay Zone" can also be used on other commercial districts including the northern segment of the Post Road.

Finally, on a micro level the Planning & Zoning Commission will continue to address regulatory and planning issues including the health, safety and welfare of our community, storm water management, the protection of coastal resources, the encroachment of development on residential neighborhoods, and land use. Over the next two years, the Planning & Zoning Commission will be putting together our new ten year Plan of Conservation and Development. This document will lay the base for ongoing policy designed to protect and enhance our shareholder value. Local issues, such as lights at the High School and other recreational facilities, have a significant impact on shareholder value as well the regulatory protections enjoyed by all. While we must staunchly defend our community's sovereignty from the State, we must also ensure we preserve the residential character of our town from within.