

To Tistrya Houghtling and the Town board of New Lebanon,

I've been moved to see so many folks coming together in their love of Mount Lebanon recently!

We clearly have our work cut out for us **to figure out how to steward this place** that is so special to us all - and so integral to the identity of New Lebanon, which we love!

Before I share some thoughts, I just wanted to remind everyone that **the circular saw was invented by a Shaker woman!**

I just want to invoke that image here today --

As we consider the miraculous integrity of the Shaker built environment on Mount Lebanon..

As we consider together what the purpose of having heritage is..

As we consider how easy it could be to chop it up and sell it off to the highest bidder..

HERITAGE

Mount Lebanon is an **irreplacable and extremely fragile historic site.**

The World Monuments Fund listed Mount Lebanon, twice, on its biannual watch list of the **most endangered historic sites in the world!**

It is one of very few Shaker sites that have never been abutted nor threatened by commercial development, unlike Hancock which is abutted by strip-malls and commercial sprawl and unlike Watervliet, which was nearly demolished to make way for the Albany Airport. Pretty embarrassing in retrospect!

If you've been up on Mount Lebanon then you know that it feels magical. You know it's full of portals that open up and transport you, as if through time travel, to *a time before ...*

That protected sense-of-place up on Mount Lebanon isn't just thanks to the Shakers. It has been **held intact over many generations by the very nature of being a residentially-zoned, dead-end neighborhood**, tended lovingly by families and non-profit organizations.

This new rezoning proposal threatens to destabilize that fragile stewardship.

The 'Mount Lebanon Historic District Zoning Proposal' offers very little in the way of preservation protection, but what it does do is it offers 'a carrot' to developers by expanding the zoning code to allow a multitude of dense commercial uses and small lot subdivisions on Mount Lebanon.

This commercial rezoning opens up a Pandora's box of potentially irreversible unforeseen outcomes. There are currently insufficient guardrails in this proposal to protect our town's most valuable historic resources against overdevelopment. Shockingly, despite landmark status, there are almost no legal safeguards protecting our Shaker buildings from being demolished. There are also no current safeguards constraining the town from allowing a 'Shaker' McDonalds or a 'Shaker' Glamping resort or a 'Shaker' Subdivision from being built on Mount Lebanon under this rezoning.

TRANSPARENCY

As a resident and a longtime preservation advocate who is deeply committed to the future of Mount Lebanon, I watched the committee meetings (the ones that happened in public) and I was honestly very disturbed to hear members of the Shaker Preservation Committee repeatedly affirming that their main goal was to attract developers and development to Mount Lebanon, and that, quote, **"preservation is the icing on the cake" of redevelopment.**

In order for us to actually help each other out here, we need to understand transparently, what's really going on.

Why has there been no transparency about what is being planned for resale or redevelopment if this rezoning proposal passes? Why is Darrow considering a wastewater treatment plant?

Would the town be favoring the rights of some neighbors at the expense of others?

Many of us believe that this commercial rezoning proposal is **an urgent threat** facing the Mount Lebanon Historic Landmark. Preservationists around the country are just beginning to hear about this situation and they have expressed their concern and their interest in helping our community chart an alternative path.

Our town board can easily **press pause on this reckless proposal** and revisit the future of Mount Lebanon with the help of the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** and the other non-profit organizations that **fund and facilitate comprehensive preservation planning.**

We deserve a process that is held in the light of day; that is more cautious, more creative and more participatory in seeking the full range of public and private solutions for preservation and community-driven development.

There's not going to be one silver bullet, but we can build a framework together. The Design Standards could be helpful, with tweaks. It is possible that partial rezoning and appropriately sized subdivisions could even end up being part of the puzzle. But our community needs to do our **due diligence about what is at stake - and what could go wrong, first.** Only after that, can we craft a pragmatic vision that takes everyone's needs into account.

DUE DILLIGENCE

Let's say a major investment group wants to buy up Darrow and say - turn it into a sports complex but, say there's not enough return on investment for them, so they decide to parcel it up and sell it off to smaller commercial interests and housing developers. This proposal encourages that outcome and we could very easily end up with a dense mixed-use commercial mall district in what was once a peaceful national landmark.

What will happen to the Shaker's first Meeting house - the cradle of Shaker spiritual expression. It has been so sweet to see it adaptively reused as Darrow's library - but how are we gonna feel if it gets adaptively reused into a mall food court? Or a private mansion?

I think that would also be pretty embarrassing!

Has the town thought seriously about what could go wrong? **Have they thought about how much negotiating power they are ceding to developers** by opening up these unusual 'Permitted' land uses?

The town needs to know what the septic and drinking water implications are going to be if all of this speculative development happens - Will it compromise the aquifer? Will people lose their drinking water? Will a wastewater plant need to be built for the mountain too? Who will pay for that? Will that threaten the farms on the mountain and the ecology of the Shaker Swamp?

The town owes it to its historic resources, to its fiscal responsibility and to its citizens to actually **take the time to game out the worst case development scenarios**, to educate itself about its options, before it commits to such an expensive and destructive undertaking.

The town needs to consider that there are Federally protected wetlands, Federally protected landmarks and landmarked cultural landscapes as well as protected archeological sites here that will require and will trigger federal approval processes.

These could potentially be **drawn out and expensive** for the town - particularly if private neighbor lawsuits ensue or if a Section 106 preservation review occurs. That likelihood could require an in depth cultural resources management plan to be made and would require additional input from the public.

Why rush into such an expensive, drawn out and contentious process and then set the town on a collision course for internal conflict instead of just slowing down and pressing pause to consider all the implications down stream.

ALTERNATIVES

Not only does this proposal weaken the town's negotiating power, it is also giving away our historic resources to random developers, with no strings attached. This is unheard of in preservation circles.

By allowing this proposal, **we are actually taking a lot of possible preservation tools off the table** such as conservation districts, preservation easements, revolving funds, demolition delay ordinances, and creative overlay zones that protect local character and support equity in preservation outcomes.

Usually a town or a state would want to protect its historic resources by seeking easements; or it might create or take advantage of existing revolving funds for acquisition and reassignment; by establishing 'assignable options', this way the community can have a say about future buyers and they can encourage preservation stipulations be written into any sale. It's major undertaking, yes, but this town, this community.. we could actually have more control with these tools.

The SPC committee considered and then rejected common guardrails such creating a town '**Preservation Commission**' for guidance and redevelopment review. It also considered and rejected the State's best-practices 'preservation ordinances', despite the fact that New Lebanon is eligible for funding and targeted guidance to develop such an ordinance, through the SHPO's Certified Local Government program.

The committee was tasked with stopping demolition, but only added mere suggestions against it in the final document. Why take away the town's moratorium authority?

We clearly all have to come together now to steward the future - or else we cede that power to developers.

Let's get the support of the National Trust, along with the entirety of the preservation field.

Let's get other fields engaged and find some angel investors to start a revolving fund.

Let's get creative. Why not support communal living and working & agriculture again?

There are local and regional funds for affordable housing for farmworkers and for farmland, and there are funds for affordable housing cooperatives as well as community land trusts. **We don't have to have pursue the commercialization of these buildings in order to find funding and uses for them.**

Why not pursue perpetual preservation easements in partnership with the National Trust? And conservation easements in collaboration with the Columbia Land Conservancy, Scenic Hudson, or the Open Space Institute?

Why not collaborate with traditional building trades organizations and train our own local workforce with high-paying preservation trade skills that are in danger of being lost? There is a tradition of preservation trade workshops that have preserved Mount Lebanon's buildings and there is certainly support for it's return.

The preservation field is itself in crises and undergoing internal reflection right now. National parks and public lands are threatened everywhere. Despite that fact, we have options. All of the preservation organizations I've spoken to have understood the huge stakes of our local crisis, and they have all expressed interest in lending professional support to our community.

Again, we are here because we are talking about **one of the most threatened historic sites in the world.**

If we don't act with caution, we could lose these buildings and these open spaces, which are also cultural landmarks.

Once they're gone they're gone.

Even well intended historic preservation efforts have been known to raise property values in such a way that the end result is displacement. That's why newer preservation efforts try to look beyond the buildings to consider the existing community, as integral.

To quote the Providence Preservation Society **"We work to preserve people in place"**

The Lebanon Springs, the Shaker Swamp, the Mount Lebanon Shaker Village - these are arguably our town's most historic and valuable resources.

The Shaker Swamp literally represents **the birthplace of American medicine** (the very place where indigenous herbalism became a pharmaceutical industry in the hands of the Shakers and later the Tildens).

Scholars such as Chris Jennings have argued that The Mount Lebanon Shaker Village represents **the birthplace of all American utopian movements.** Mount Lebanon was the spiritual and administrative center of all Shaker life and the 'heaven on earth' they created here was a community of care and of land and labor held in common. This community of care was a direct response to the exploitation of the industrial revolution as well as the horrors of slavery and gendered abuse.

The Mount Lebanon Shakers represent one of the first settler communities committed not just to pacifism and the radical equality of the sexes, but to actively abolishing slavery and racial hierarchy. This site tells a completely unique story in America - it is one of the earliest outliers in this country's long struggle for equality and justice.

Again - this is not some random neighborhood of quaint, underused buildings just waiting to be exploited for new profits - this is an irreplaceable world heritage site just waiting for a new era of collective stewardship to **step in with vision and resources and time** to safeguard the legacy and the future of this profoundly important place.

All my thanks and respect to the town board and to the town committees that have carried the process thus far..

Sincerely,
Midnight Forman
New Lebanon, NY

A large blacked-out redaction covering the signature area, likely obscuring the name and contact information of the sender.



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

re-zoning proposal

1 message

Sarah Westwind <silvermaple218@gmail.com>
To: "Town Supervisor (New Lebanon)" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 8:16 AM

Hi Tistrya,

I can't be at today's meeting so please read my short comment at the meeting:

I've been a resident on Chair Factory Rd. for over 20 years, and at the Abode for another 20.

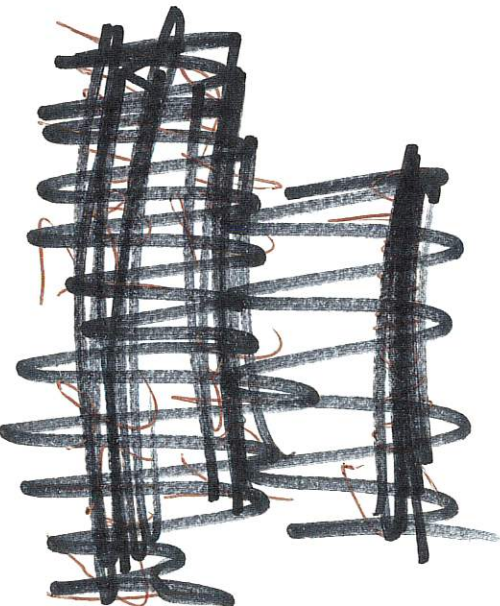
I do not want to see this area lose its rural character.

If it is re-zoned as Commercial this is exactly what will happen. In addition to opening it up to many new structures, the ecological damage to the land has not been considered.

Downtown New Lebanon is already zoned as commercial. It's a short ride from Darrow and Chair Factory roads to get there (everyone here has a car or access to one). If more commercial establishments are needed, downtown is the place for them. I can imagine developers waiting in the wings for a new opportunity to cash in on a (thus far) semi-untouched area.

The Shaker Preservation Committee has mis-named itself. For the sake of honesty, it should name itself The Committee to Develop the Shaker Historic District.

Sarah Westwind





Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Letter Concerned With Mt. Lebanon Rezoning

1 message

Sarah Steadman <SarahSteadman@gmail.com>
To: Town Supervisor <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 11:46 PM

Dear Tistrya and the Town Board,

I'm writing with deep concern about the rezoning of Mt. Lebanon. Growing up in New Lebanon as part of the Abode community, I returned home to run the Abode Farm on Mt. Lebanon 15 years ago. I love the land of Mt. Lebanon. Each morning I drive up the mountain to the farm fields and I think about the Shaker's tending them, walking from North Family to South Family, it's why I chose to be a farmer here to honor their history on the land. There is nowhere like Mt. Lebanon, it is a singular historical site which visibly holds the history of the Shaker's, a religion founded by a woman and a society that believed in the equality of all people regardless of race and sex who stewarded the land and lived communally. What could be a more important history to preserve.

Once when I went to the Niskayuna site in Albany the woman working there, upon learning that I was a farmer at the Abode, said "oh how amazing, it's the way Shaker buildings should be, used for the purpose of caring and feeding each other. It's what the Shakers would have wanted." The Shaker's, though industrious, were actually oriented toward cooperation, charity and interdependence, they would not want their land to be subdivided into 1/4th acre plots and turned into shops for commercial profit.

Deb Gordon brought up including the Shakers in the rezoning proposal at the meeting I attended in December saying, "[the Shakers said] We are going to create our own society from the ground up and demonstrate how it's done...the product was the Mt. Lebanon Shaker village and because of that, I think this is the result of their trying to create heaven on earth, and we should respect that."

John Dax replied, "That will turn off a bunch of people. I just don't think we need to saddle it with all the philosophies of the Shakers."

I responded by bringing up the specifics of why the Shaker's history is so unique, after Deb Gordon received push back for even including their story in the Shaker Preservation Committee's proposal. This is the response I got from John Dax:

"We are talking about a land use plan here. Trying to preserve it in the here and now and for the future, and if people want to learn about it and be aware of it we can certainly emphasize what this community started out as, but it's not that way anymore. It is now these buildings that are beautiful, and five clusters of buildings that are beautiful, and landscapes that are beautiful, regardless of what came before and I wouldn't want to alienate people by linking this too tightly to 'if you love this you'll love the Shakers' or 'if you love that Shakers you'll love this'. I don't think we need to get too wrapped up in that."

Why are people who are on a Shaker Preservation committee trying to distance this project from Shaker history? As someone who works on the land at Mt. Lebanon every single day, I can say the community and spirit of the Shakers is very much alive here. Mt. Lebanon is still a spiritual home for many people and it is a site of retreat and contemplation. The fragile ecology of the Shaker Swamp, the mountain's aquifer, its

agricultural land and character, and its rare native and medicinal plants must be protected. When I brought up the plants of Mt. Lebanon at a Preservation Committee meeting, I was told that's not what a preservation plan is about. Considering that the medicinal industry of America started in New Lebanon, with these very plants, I think that's a huge oversight of the people tasked with preserving this heritage. I still harvest the same plants that the Shaker's made medicine from on Mt. Lebanon, always careful to protect and cultivate them. These are plants, not to mention a spirit of place, that could be lost forever with the wrong kinds of development.

Mt. Lebanon has been a historic district since the 60s, I hope there is a vision where we utilize that status to get funds to support its owners to preserve the buildings and protect the land. I strongly urge the town board not to destroy New Lebanon's most precious historical site with rezoning. The potential of Shaker land falling into the wrong developer's hands is too great a threat. We the people who live and work here should have a say in Mt. Lebanon's protection and future beyond superficial design standards and an unenforceable promise of "artisanal industry." These are false promises which could subdivide and destroy one of our town's greatest resources. Let's work together to make real preservation, conservation, and a future possible on Mt. Lebanon without this short-sighted rezoning proposal.

Sincerely,
Sarah Steadman



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Letter for tonight's meeting

1 message

Erica Dawn Lyle <ericadawnlyle@gmail.com>
To: "Town Supervisor (New Lebanon)" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 1:11 PM

Hi Tystria

I am going to attempt to read this letter below in person tonight but if time will now allow it, I wanted you to see it either way. It is also OK if you read it out loud.

THANKS
EDL

Erica Dawn Lyle
SOBBETH/Bermuda Triangle Press
Pronouns: She/Her
www.ericadawnlyle.info
<https://ericadawnlylevicecoolerbandcamp.com>

To the Town Board and Town Supervisor of New Lebanon, NY:

I live in another part of town now but when I first came to New Lebanon, I lived for a short time on Chairfactory Road and it is there that I fell in love with this town and decided that I would change my life and move here. Mt. Lebanon is the place where the Shakers believed they had created heaven on Earth. When I consider the stunning natural beauty of this place, the kindness I have been welcomed with, and the wonderful community I have found in my time here, I think, *who could blame them?* I even get to taste a little bite of that heaven on Earth each day in the vegetables I am so grateful to eat, vegetables that are grown right there on Mt. Lebanon.

I have been here for eight years now. I know that in the local conception of time, that means I am a newcomer and that I will always be a newcomer. It's OK. I totally understand why there might sometimes be concern here about outsiders who come here from the city with Big Ideas of how they want to change this place. But I am here today to speak on behalf of many of us who are newcomers to this place who love New Lebanon *exactly the way it is* and do not want it to change at all.

That is because I have been on the other end of that equation my entire adult life. I am from Miami and now I have read that Miami has become the most expensive city to live in in the country and I could never afford to live in my old neighborhoods I once loved so much there.

I also lived for 16 years in San Francisco. In many ways, my life in that city was like my life in New Lebanon in that I lived there in an area with many beautiful historic buildings, where I was part of a very tight knit community. Where it felt like everyone knew and looked out for each other and helped each other get by. But eventually people with far more money than us came and thought the life we had made together looked really cool and thought we were naive because we didn't feel motivated to commercialize it and those people bought everything in sight. First slowly, a little at a time – and then very quickly and all at once – all of the places where we gathered with our friends were all closed. Our historic but run down Victorian houses got bought and renovated and we all got kicked out of them. The cultural centers and the neighborhood dive

bars and cheap restaurants where we could afford to eat were all shuttered. New establishments reopened in the same buildings, but they were somehow different, upscaled. They were no longer for us.

I know for many it might seem difficult to imagine that kind of change ever coming to a place like New Lebanon. But I imagine it also once felt impossible to imagine a small town like Hudson could ever turn into what it is now. And if we look around Columbia County, we see this kind of makeover has actually come to many similar once out-of-the-way little towns. Kinderhook, Chatham. Hillsdale. I love New Lebanon and I love my life here very deeply. I had once naively imagined that with my graduation to home ownership, I might have finally outrun lifelong anxieties about real estate speculation. But, alas, my property taxes have doubled in the past few years and now when I read this proposal for commercial development on the mountain, I cannot help but imagine a couple years down the road a town newly full of restaurants I can't afford to eat at, stores I cannot afford to shop at, or – like Hudson – stores that don't sell anything I need at all but only sell vintage furniture. I can't help but see down the road the open space on the mountain either developed or possibly closed off within the confines of new commercial entities or private estates.

I think everyone here has a lot of sympathy for the dilemma that the Darrow School is in right now with the high cost of upkeep of its historic buildings. I do not envy anyone who is charged with the honorable task of keeping a school open in this political and economic climate. But I think it's important to point out that there are actually a LOT of property owners right now in town who are worrying about how to make ends meet.

Because New Lebanon already has an affordable housing crisis. The local real estate market has already become so expensive that it is almost impossible for younger families here to find a reasonably priced first home and there is a lack of rental units available that fit the budget of the people who currently work in the town.

It is implicit that the millions of dollars this commercial development seeks to raise will not likely come from those of us who already live in our town but from new people who will be lured here to build, and, work, and settle.

Where will these new people live?

Encouraging an influx of a large amount of wealthy new residents from elsewhere can only worsen scarcity of housing and send prices higher in an already over inflated local housing market, putting home ownership even further out of reach for many working families in New Lebanon. Encouraging greater levels of tourism will also likely lead to more housing units converted into short term rentals, taking desperately needed and potentially affordable housing units off the market.

In closing, while I personally believe commercial development on the mountain to be deeply at odds with stated goals of historic preservation, I concede that the future is indeed unknown and that my views – however formed they are by my personal experience of economic displacement – are only conjecture. But one thing I think that is apparent about this proposal is that the sheer amount of commercial development that would likely be required to bring in the revenue to upkeep all of these buildings would require a very large transformation of the current character of the mountain and, by extension, would remake the entire town.

In this light, the proposal under discussion actually asks us to pause here for a minute to consider the question, who is the town FOR? And what is the meaning of this place? Is this town to remain a historic, peaceful town where you can know all your neighbors, a place where it is still possible to share together a high quality of agrarian life in a stunningly beautiful location on modest means? Or is New Lebanon to

become a facsimile of such a town, the mere representation of such a place that is used to sell the town out from under us?

We all want to see historic preservation here on Mt. Lebanon. The design standards included in this proposal are a good first step in this direction. Lets see more of that, please, and in the meantime, let us reject the commercialization of the mountain.

Thank you for your consideration,

Erica Dawn Lyle



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Concerns about rezoning proposal

1 message

Katie Fowley <kfowley@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 12:12 PM

To the New Lebanon Town Board, Supervisor Tistrya Houghtling, and Members of the Community,

My name is Katie Fowley, and I live at [156 Chair Factory Road](#). I am writing to express my deep concern and strong opposition to the proposed commercial rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District.

I first came to this area in 2015 to participate in a writing residency at the Abode Farm. Like many who encounter Mount Lebanon for the first time, I was struck immediately by its singular character: the quiet, the land, the sense of care and shared stewardship, and the spirit of community that runs deep here. This is a place where history, ecology, and human connection all intertwine—and where the values of creativity, mutual aid, and respect for nature are still palpable.

Over a year ago, I moved onto Chair Factory Road, the quiet dead-end road that would be most directly impacted by this proposal. Living here has only deepened my sense of what makes this place so special. It's not just the rich Shaker history or the beauty of the landscape—it's the ethos of care and community that still defines life here. Neighbors help each other with meal trains, snow shoveling, gardening, and health care. We watch the seasons change together. We share sightings of bobcats, bears, coyotes, and rare birds. This mountain is home not only to humans but to a fragile and intricate web of life that cannot speak for itself.

The rezoning proposal would allow—for the first time in this mountain's long and carefully protected history—commercial uses like hotels, marketplaces, glampsites, event venues, and short-term rentals. I worry deeply that this would irreversibly harm the ecology of the mountain, the peace of the neighborhood, and the values that brought so many of us here in the first place.

Of course we want to preserve the historic Shaker buildings. But commercialization is not preservation. There must be better, more thoughtful, more community-rooted ways to support stewardship of the land and buildings—ways that don't rely on speculative real estate development and tourism.

This is a huge change being proposed. Once that door is opened, it cannot easily be closed. We need more time as a community to explore truly sustainable preservation options that respect the character of Mount Lebanon—its ecology, its history, and its people.

Please do not rush into a decision that could forever change this place. Say no to commercial rezoning. Press pause. Give us the time and space to find a better way forward—together.

Thank you for listening, and for your commitment to New Lebanon.

Sincerely,
Katie Fowley
[156 Chair Factory Road, New Lebanon, NY](#)



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

rezoning

1 message

Katherine Taylor <katherinetaylor@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 2:36 PM

Dear Supervisor Houghtling,

My name is Katie, and I've been visiting New Lebanon for about a decade. For the past year, I've lived full-time on Mount Lebanon, where I've come to know the land and the people who care for it. My neighbors still tap the sugar maples here, a living tradition that connects the mountain's natural rhythms to the community's way of life.

I'm writing to urge you and the Town Board to reject the proposed rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District. While I value the preservation of the historic Shaker buildings, my greatest concern is protecting the land, water, forests, and wildlife that make Mount Lebanon so singular and irreplaceable.

The "Shaker Preservation Committee" plan would rezone nearly the entire historic district to allow commercial uses for the first time ever—retail shops, hotels, short-term rentals, restaurants, glampsites, event venues, and marketplaces along Shaker, Darrow, and Chair Factory Roads.

Although promoted as a way to "save" the Shaker buildings, the 30-page document reads more like a speculative real estate blueprint. It contains **no binding protections** against demolition or major renovations, relying only on superficial "Shaker-themed" façade guidelines. Every decision about new construction, demolition, or renovation would be made case by case by the planning board, creating a piecemeal path toward large-scale commercial development.

Even a handful of such developments would **permanently change Mount Lebanon** by:

- Bringing **traffic and noise** to narrow, dead-end roads.
- Straining **aquifers, wetlands, and streams**, risking contamination, flooding, and depletion.
- Creating more **stormwater runoff and pollution**, damaging fragile habitats.
- Driving up **short-term rentals**, deepening the town's housing crisis.
- Potentially raising **property taxes** for residents.
- **Increasing wildfire and drought risks** by removing vegetation, paving soils, drawing down groundwater, and introducing more human ignition sources—conditions that dry the landscape and make forests more flammable.

Mount Lebanon's forests are still recovering from the 19th century, when New York was heavily clearcut for timber and agriculture. By the 1880s, **less than 25% of the state remained forested**, and areas like Columbia County saw severe soil erosion and stream contamination. Clearcutting released nitrates and aluminum into waterways, wiping out native **brook trout** and damaging aquatic life. I adore New Lebanon but notice a huge difference in the forest's character when compared with old growth forests such as those found over the border in Stockbridge at Ice Glen. It is clear that this forest is indeed still recovering from earlier clearcutting. The choices we make now matter tremendously. Buildings can be rebuilt, but forests cannot easily revive themselves.

Though saplings return quickly, **mature forests with stable soils, intact water cycles, and thriving wildlife can take decades or even a century to regrow**, and soil nutrients often remain depleted even after 60+ years. Fragmenting these forests now, just as they've begun to heal, risks undoing generations of natural recovery.

Mount Lebanon supports a rich community of wildlife, including forest birds that rely on large, connected habitats, such as:

- **Black-throated Blue Warbler** – an interior-forest species that nests in dense understory and declines when forests are fragmented.
- **Mourning Warbler** – sensitive to edge disturbances and reliant on thick, regenerating growth.

- **Eastern Towhee, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, and Blackburnian Warbler** – all species documented in Columbia County that need intact forests to thrive.

The maple trees tapped by my neighbors aren't just a resource—they're part of a balanced ecosystem, where healthy soils and steady water cycles keep the trees vigorous. Overdevelopment risks disrupting these systems for both wildlife and people.

We live on what's called the Wildlife Urban Interface. Development in these zones increases wildfire and drought risk tremendously (please read this article. It is brief and so crucial!)

The Shakers, who made Mount Lebanon their central community, built their lives on values of **simplicity, stewardship, and communal benefit over private profit**. They saw the land as sacred, to be cultivated with care and humility. Turning their historic home into a commercial tourist strip—fragmented by hotels, parking lots, and glamping sites—would betray that legacy rather than honor it.

Preserving the mountain's buildings cannot come at the cost of its forests, streams, and spirit.

Sincerely,
Katie Taylor
156 Chair Factory Road, New Lebanon, NY, 12125



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Re: Commercialization of Mt. Lebanon

1 message

tyler m <tylerfmorse@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 5:56 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as a home-owner in New Lebanon, deeply concerned about the proposed rezoning for Mt. Lebanon. I submit this letter in advance of the Town Hall meeting this evening, to be read into the public record.

I've lived in New Lebanon for years, and am invested in this area and its affordability for current and future inhabitants. I participate in and host local events, patronize small businesses here, and aim to support the thriving life and history that make New Lebanon special. I love this place and the people in it, and I am hopeful that as it grows and develops, it does not lose the characteristics that set it apart from other areas of upstate NY where housing is prohibitively expensive, and people and longstanding businesses are pushed out by over-development.

I understand that the town's "Shaker Preservation Committee" has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal portends to answer the financial demands of sustaining older buildings, I know, with years of experience in arts-and-culture fundraising, that commercialization of a sacred, historic space is not the only way to fund preservation work and will in fact irrevocably alter the character of the thing it claims to save.

Mt. Lebanon has been home to so much life that has not relied on unchecked commercialization — Shaker archives, free arts residencies that bring in people who patronize local businesses and restaurants, the Abode commune which offers open spiritual services and pay-what-you-can community meals, farms that work with local youth groups and offer sliding scale CSAs, and a robust community that supports and cares for each other. I can't fathom what this area would look like if all of these things were replaced by commercial enterprises. What was once a community would easily be overrun by speculative development, Airbnbs that spike local home costs and don't prioritize consistent inhabitants that will steward this area and its land, and a range of other extractive economies. There are so many ways to support the healthy growth of an area — where people drawn to the region might actually be able to afford to move there without competing with short-term rentals — that don't rely on people who simply see the mountain as a cash cow.

I know I'm not alone in saying that I am **not anti-growth**, and certainly not against welcoming in people who seek out this space to learn more about its history and experience the beauty and calm of the area, and to patronize local businesses. I have seen the way that community-rooted, noncommercial growth has served Mt. Lebanon in so many different ways over the years, honoring its history as a communitarian site while finding 21st century solutions to local concerns (like a farm CSA that takes EBT in an area with fewer grocery stores). I have seen the way that different projects and programs have welcomed newcomers in, and I've seen what's made possible when those people often find ways to give back to the area in turn. However, the quick fix that tourism-centered commercialization offers is not a fix at all — it's a radical shift away from what draws people to this area, what gives it its unique character, and will turn it into just another unaffordable place in upstate NY, available only to the developers and tourists that can afford the price tag. We have plenty of those upstate already.

- It risks irreversible commercialization of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- It lacks enforceable restrictions, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
- It sets a dangerous precedent by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- It threatens the ecological health of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to threatening the aquifer, the soil and drinking water access on the mountain.
- It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported by many neighbors and residents.

The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

I love this place, these people, this land. I love that the soil is steeped in history, and that this history is evident from simply walking around the area, with no Shaker-themed luxury boutiques interrupting the breadth of its beauty, no large

7/30/25, 6:33 PM

Town of New Lebanon Mail - Re: Commercialization of Mt. Lebanon

hotels capitalizing on the legacy while damaging the environment, no developers propping up short term rentals that they manage from afar. I love walking up Chairfactory Road and crossing paths with the many people who live and work on the mountain and are invested in stewarding its community-oriented roots into the present day.

Please do not let this rezoning pass — places like Mt. Lebanon are so rare. We have to fight to protect them.

Thank you,
Tyler Kayla Morse,
West St, New Lebanon



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Mt Lebanon rezoning

1 message

Justus Kempthorne <justusyouandme@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Mon, Jul 28, 2025 at 10:36 AM

Dear Tystria,

I write as a resident and someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- **It lacks enforceable restrictions**, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
- **It sets a dangerous precedent** by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- **It threatens the ecological health** of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to threatening the aquifer, the soil and drinking water access on the mountain.
- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Justus kempthorne



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

public comment

1 message

perry <perryhohlstein@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 3:54 PM

To: "supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

hi Tistrya,

im on the beach right now but i wrote a little comment for the rezoning meeting. please feel free to read it out in the meeting if you feel it's appropriate.

thanks!

Perry

As a homeowner on chairfactory road I strongly oppose the proposed rezoning of our mountain. I grew up in new Lebanon but as an adult I've lived all over and I've seen firsthand what it looks like when you hand over the keys to developers. They cash in on what makes a place special, and they end up destroying it in the process.

Since back before European settlement, this mountain was recognized as a unique place to pray and to have gatherings. This legacy continued on through the shakers and again through the Sufis. To this day our mountain is a quiet place, populated by spiritual leaning people living in community.

We've already gotten a taste of what a commercialized mount Lebanon will be like: our baby was born last summer and our many trips back and forth from the hospital was always interrupted by partiers and teenagers Illegally directing traffic at the upscale Sassafra wedding venue.

I understand that people here want jobs in new Lebanon, and I'm sure the proposed rezoning will create some gig work cleaning up after wealthy tourists here and there, but we have a downtown just down the road. If you want to create jobs, do it there. That's what it's there for. Handing mont Lebanon over to investors may seem like an easy win for new Lebanon but I believe that it will result in a tremendous and permanent loss.

Perry Hohlstein

--

perryhohlstein.com

604-275-4063



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

My letter for tonight's meeting.

1 message

Rowen <~~rowenhenning@gmail.com~~>
To: Supervisor <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 3:55 PM

Here it is in case you have trouble printing from the official Google Doc I sent you the link to...

Dear Community and Town Representatives:

My name is Rowen Henning. I have lived on Chair Factory Road for 14 years in a home built by my partner, Mark Walcroft (aka "Kyther"), 36 years ago. When Mark built this home, Chair Factory Road was less a road and more a dirt and often axle-deep mud path. As you might imagine, no one chooses to build on such a road unless they have a profound love for living in close and quiet intimacy with the natural world. And so it is for both of us.

Something Mark said to me recently inspired a few thoughts that I want to share. He said, "The history of a place is not just the buildings but the space between the buildings...the paths, the open spaces, and so forth". This led me to investigate what that meant in a Shaker design context. I found an article entitled "Shaker Style" on the National Park Service website. In that article, it states-

"Shaker headquarters, in Mount Lebanon, published the Millennial Laws in 1821...It included standards of both the natural and built environment as a means to create paradise on earth...Typically, family buildings were located about three-quarters of a mile apart in a linear arrangement.....Barns were large and visually dominant, which reflected the importance of agriculture..."

These words speak well to the heart of why we strongly object to the inclusion of commercial activity allowances in the proposed historic district rezoning. Our choice to live where we do is a deliberate one, based on our desire to live a quiet life, away from commercial activity, as well as the ability to have an active relationship with the very fields where our food is grown and the farmers who work them. It is a life of simplicity, which is foundational to Shaker values.

Indeed, the history of this mountain is more than its buildings. It is a way of life that even now continues the long history of living harmoniously and peacefully as a gentle, caring community and a living expression of sustainable agricultural practices. We also cherish and hold a deep appreciation, respect, and care for the natural world we are surrounded by. Those of us who live back here are in a very real sense a continuation of an *unbroken living history*. It is this history - we the people currently living here and our way of life - that we feel passionately must be upheld, respected, and protected by the town. The proposed commercial and development allowances would work in direct opposition to that history and our way of life.

In closing, others have already expressed significant safety concerns and the inadequacy of the current infrastructure back in our tucked-away environment. I am in complete agreement with those concerns. As it is, we already have the folks at Sassafrass Farm planting themselves in the middle of the road (changing the speed limit and stopping traffic in favor of their customers) during their every weekend commercial event venue activities. According to the NY State Department of Transportation, this is illegal. It is also extremely

unsafe. We do not need more of this. We encourage the authors of the proposed zoning change to go back to the drawing board.

Respectfully, Rowen Henning

To: Mount Lebanon Historic District Re-zoning Committees

From: Jerry Grant, 3367 County Route 9, East Chatham, NY 12060

Resident of the Town of New Lebanon

- 1) I recommend that the set-back requirements for buildings constructed in the Historic District be amended to exempt any building constructed solely on the established foot-print of a historic Shaker building.

For example, if Shaker Museum desired to reconstruct the North Family Dwelling on its original site, it would under the existing proposal, require a variance since it was historically only 10 or so feet from the Darrow Road. Or, if one of the buildings on the Darrow campus that stands along the road burned and it was desirable to replace it one its original location, it would require a variance.

- 2) Also, I would like to see the proposed changes allowing new construction on $\frac{1}{4}$ acre lots be changed to only allow construction of new buildings (and then if it meets all of the design guidelines) on the historic footprint of building erected by Shakers with requisite archaeological studies being performed first.



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Re: MLHD - July 26th Presentation

1 message

Iamz <zinelamni@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 6:27 PM

To: Elizabeth Brutsch <nlpb.brutsch@gmail.com>, "Town Supervisor (New Lebanon)" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>, Sarah Steadman <sarahinsteadman@gmail.com>, "savemountlebanon@gmail.com" <savemountlebanon@gmail.com>

Greeting Elizabeth and Tristia ,

Is there a zoom link to attend today's meeting? Also, I know it is late but can you please read my letter as well?

Dear Rezoning Committee,

New Lebanon sits along the Hudson River Valley, a critical flyway for millions of migratory birds and development without proper environmental assessment could devastate these migration patterns that have existed since the glacial ages.

Under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), this level of development requires a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement examining effects on wildlife corridors, bird migration patterns, and protected species. The area may qualify for designation under the Important Bird Areas program, which could limit development.

The committee should commission an immediate wildlife impact study through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and consider pursuing Audubon certification for any approved developments. The town of Bethel, New York successfully balanced development with wildlife protection by creating designated conservation corridors and implementing "dark sky" lighting ordinances to protect migratory birds.

The rezoning plan presented unfortunately does not include any environmental study and overlooks the extraordinary and invaluable immaterial capital of the mountain. Rather than generic tourism development, the plan can aim to position New Lebanon as a premier wellness destination that honors its authentic heritage. New Lebanon could develop boutique wellness inns specializing in traditional herbal treatments, educational workshops on medicinal plants, and guided birds tours connecting the Shaker heritage with modern wellness practices and natural specificity.

Consider Rhinebeck's wellness tourism approach, where historic properties have been transformed into destination spas and wellness centers that attract visitors seeking authentic experiences while preserving local character. Similarly, the Mohonk Mountain House has successfully combined historical preservation with wellness tourism for over 150 years.

The plan also lacks crucial limitations on permit numbers and applicant criteria. Unlimited development permits risk transforming our mountain into an overcrowded commercial zone rather than a carefully curated destination that preserves community character.

Implementing a cap on the number of each category of permits, and requiring a 5-year residency requirement for permit applicants to maintain the small-town character while creating sustainable economic opportunities for long-term residents. This residency requirement has precedent - many Vermont and New

Hampshire communities have successfully implemented similar provisions to prevent speculative development.

While we appreciate the committee's authority in this matter, we want to clarify that community members retain legal standing to challenge rezoning decisions through Article 78 proceedings and environmental review requirements under SEQRA. Rather than pursuing adversarial approaches, we strongly prefer collaborative solutions.

We propose forming a stakeholder working group including committee members, long-term residents, environmental specialists, and heritage tourism experts to develop a comprehensive plan that serves our mountain's ecological integrity, honors our unique historical legacy, and provides sustainable economic opportunities for our community.

Our mountain deserves a plan that recognizes its irreplaceable natural and cultural value. We pray that we will work together on a vision that protects what makes New Lebanon special while creating meaningful opportunities for our residents.

Respectfully submitted,

On Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 2:42 PM Elizabeth Brutsch <nlpb.brutsch@gmail.com> wrote:

Good afternoon,

Thank you all for your attendance at the Mount Lebanon Historic District Public Information meeting this morning. Your comments, questions, and feedback are helpful to the working group as we continue to tune the proposal to get it right.

Attached are the MLHD documents that were referenced today, along with the PPT that was shown. The documents, and eventually the PPT, will be available on the Town's Committee page. If you visit this link below and scroll towards the bottom, the Shaker Preservation Committee (SPC) has a spot and all of these documents are or will be linked there.

<https://townofnewlebanon.com/committees/>

If I have gotten anyone's email address incorrect, please feel free to forward this along to the person(s).

We will be having another public session this coming Wednesday evening starting at 6:30pm at the Town Hall.

If you have any questions or comments in the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Town Supervisor, myself, or one of our working group members. Any communication that is shared with one party or another will be circulated to all parties.

Thank you again for your time this morning and on behalf of the working group, we look forward to continuing the conversation on Wednesday night.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Brutsch

Planning Board Chairperson
Zoning Rewrite Committee Member
Town of New Lebanon



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Possible rezoning of Mount Lebanon

1 message

Michael McCanne <mccanne@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 1:30 PM

Dear Tystria,

My wife and I have been visiting New Lebanon for the past 10 years, spending summers with the rich community of friends and neighbors who live on Chairfactory Road and in New Lebanon itself. We love this place so much that we plan to buy a house in New Lebanon in the coming years.

We have been drawn by the unique and beautiful character of Mount Lebanon and are worried that the proposed rezoning could fundamentally damage its historic and spiritual character. We are also alarmed that this rezoning could open the way for construction and environmental degradation as well as businesses and developments that could degrade the quality of life on the mountain and the unique collection of Shaker buildings. This area's character is not only culturally, ecologically and historically rich, it also serves the local community and local businesses. I have been to countless events, festivals, readings and performances on the mountain that have brought hundreds if not thousands of people to the area, who then go on to eat at Jimmy D's or Blueberry Hill, buy groceries at the farm store, etc. They are drawn by the mountain's utopian feel and its historic connection to spiritual practice and communal life. Allowing widespread development, instead of careful case-by-case review, could ruin those qualities and deprive New Lebanon of something that makes it unique.

Thank you for your time,

--

Michael McCanne, LMSW
[Psychology Today profile](#)



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Note on the MLHD

1 message

Matthew Pellegrino <pellegrino.matthew@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 3:38 PM

To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Cc: Matthew Pellegrino <pellegrino.matthew@gmail.com>

As a preliminary matter, I respectfully request that each member of the Town Board affirm, for the public record, that they have complied with the New Lebanon town code of ethics, article 2, and that they have not received any gifts or items of value, directly or indirectly, from individuals or entities related to the MLHD.

The town comprehensive plan was adopted by the New Lebanon town board on December 14, 2021. It aims to preserve the Rural Character of New Lebanon while promoting and protecting the following:

1. Natural Resources
2. Environmental Sustainability
3. Agriculture
4. Tourism through the awareness of cultural and natural resources
5. Historic Resources

With respect to Historic Resources, the Town Comprehensive Plan articulates its goal as "Preserving and promoting New Lebanon's historic heritage as an integral part of the Town's culture, character, attractiveness and economic future."

The Comprehensive Plan explicitly calls for the "exploration of historic overlay zones" in the areas of the Shaker Museum and the original Mount Lebanon Shaker Settlement.

By definition, a "historic overlay zone" is "a layer of local planning regulation which incorporates the restrictions of the underlying zoning for a given geographic area, with the main goal of preserving the historic character of the neighborhood."

Instead, the so-called "Mount Lebanon Historic District" proposes a historic overlay zone in name only. It seeks to remove and radically alter the underlying restrictions of the existing zoning regulations while imposing a superficial design standard.

Therefore, the MLHD proposal here submitted to the Town Board does not qualify as a "historic overlay zone," and thus must be rejected as it violates the adopted Town Comprehensive Plan.

If the Town Board decides nevertheless to accept the proposal, in clear violation of the Town Comprehensive Plan, it should expect the possibility of extensive and costly litigation. To the extent these costs are not covered by the town's liability insurance, this would negatively impact the town budget or necessitate an increase in town taxes.

Furthermore, no compelling argument has been made why the proposed MLHD is necessary given that an existing zoning variance process is available and has not been exhausted by the interested parties. The parties submitting this proposal, some of whom openly flout existing zoning regulations, would prefer that the town give up its authority to review concrete land use proposals on a case-by-case basis in the existing zoning variance process. This could result in unintended consequences for which the town would have little recourse.

In summary:

1. The MLHD should be rejected
2. The existing zoning variance process should be utilized if/when there are concrete proposals for land use
3. The proposed Design Standards should be explored as an additional layer of regulation on the existing RA 2/5 zoning - i.e., as a true "historic overlay zone" in alignment with the Town Comprehensive Plan
4. Existing zoning regulations should be enforced

Thank you,
Matthew



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Commercial rezoning of Mt. Lebanon

1 message

Christiane Hull <christianehull@yahoo.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 12:28 PM

To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Hello,

Unfortunately I cannot attend tonight's meeting and hope that my voice will still count. As a resident of a home off of Chair-factory Road, I am concerned about plans to rezone Mt. Lebanon.

I have lived here for almost 30 years and enjoyed the quiet and sacred land and neighborhood.

Mt Lebanon needs to be preserved and I oppose any commercializing of this land and respectfully request that the residents of our community will be heard.

Sincerely,

Christiane Hull

(518) 528-7664

8 Tariqa Nur

New Lebanon, NY 12125

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPad



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

feedback for tonight's meeting

1 message

Ellen Ash <nizamash@yahoo.com>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 12:14 PM

Reply-To: Ellen Ash <nizamash@yahoo.com>

To: "supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Hello, Friends and Neighbors,

As a 40 year resident of New Lebanon, I walk daily on Chair Factory Rd. and Tariqa al Nur. And I drive almost daily on Darrow Rd. and Shaker Rd.

More traffic on any of those would be dangerous for drivers, people walking, running and biking, campers, children, high school students, CSA pick-ups, animals, deliveries, and more.

I am very concerned on an effect on the water table as I sometimes loose water in August.

thank you,
Ellen Ash



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

(no subject)

1 message

svensvendsson <svensvendsson@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 11:17 PM

Hi Tistrya

Anthony (Sven) and Aliz Swenson here, [177 Chair Factory Rd.](#) Aliz's daughter Kawpan graduated this year from NL high and her son Peace will be going into 6th grade at WBH.

Writing today about first our excitement for the future upgrades to the downtown. Thank you for all your work in helping secure the grant monies and for helping push that project over the finish line with the vote approval. We are also excited for the proposed Tilden housing and retail space project. The new Stewart's has dramatically changed traffic patterns and habits in town, and with the sidewalks, medians, crosswalks coming; along with a slower speed limit (??? I think thats the plan right?); the down town is ripe for future opportunities. Hopefully the mid town mall owner will start to put in some effort of maintenance and curb appeal. It would be a shame to lose a strong anchor such as M&M's. Its not hard to imagine every property owner along the main drag being able to capitalize on a slower more aware and engaged driver checking out and supporting our current and future businesses. As you know, we have this "pass right through" to Pittsfield or Albany kinda vibe. So kudos to all of this hard work of town planning; im excited for downtowns future.

For us, choosing New Lebanon to put down roots had more to do with its rural pace, clean water, clean air, quiet forest tranquility. We have found this on Chair Factory Rd.

We have supported Carole and Jerome in their amazing transformation of Sassafrass. While it has a small impact on traffic and footprint, overall so far we feel added value. We hope some day to bring added value to that business and the downtown with Aliz's food business which we are slowly growing with little impact.

The new bustling at the Abode and the Abode farm are adding small impacts and added value.

We worry about Darrow's near sinking blow last year. We worry about its future.

We know these businesses need to be able to diversify to survive.

But we also know the current status quo of our beloved Mountain environment needs to be protected.

From what we have discerned of these zoning changes, we are worried about he overdevelopment of these lands . We hope that moving forward the working group proposing these changes, the business owners, the home and land owners can continue to be transparent and forthcoming about their visions of this land and way of life. We hope there can be some happy medium to foster income generation without trampling on the land and increased traffic. We don't think big new development like hotels or mixed use large buildings supporting retail and restaurants is the right path forward. Minimal impact will sustain its value. We must preserve our Mountain's rural quiet pace, but we gotta support what's here already with smart growth that doesn't destroy what it is. Special permitting with complete transparency is where its at. Smart small zoning changes is where its at. We have a commercial district that can work and provide to the rural district. Shuttles up to paradise!

No easy task.

Thank you for all you do!

Sven & Aliz Swenson
177 Chair Factory Rd.

413-854-7486

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy Note9, an AT&T 5G Evolution capable smartphone



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

save mount lebanon

1 message

Casper Lucia <casperluciahello@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 11:26 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history.

I live in a town about an hour away from New Lebanon but spend a good portion of my time every week there. All around this region I see towns full of development (shops, restaurants, event venues) that primarily cater to tourists and the wealthy as opposed to the people that live in them. The result is places that are drained of their livability -- by way of becoming unaffordable/alienating -- and consequently their culture. This rezoning opens the way for development that isn't in service of the community it's in, and makes money for the few.

There is nowhere like Mt. Lebanon, not only because of its profound spiritual and agricultural history, but also just the simple fact of its peace, its quiet. Everytime I'm there I feel it, and its value is immeasurable.

There are more than enough businesses in the Berkshires and the Hudson Valley serving tourists. Mt. Lebanon is one of a kind and deserves real preservation that doesn't include the risk of commercialization.

Keep Mt. Lebanon a place for the artists and contemplatives it inspires, and most importantly for the people who live on and work the land.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Casper



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

MLHD rezoning proposal - public comment

1 message

Jocine Velasco <jocine.velasco@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 8:00 AM

Hi Tistrya,

I will not be able to make the public input session tonight and I have already said my comment on Sunday but I wanted to send it to you, in case you need a tally the number of people who have sent letters. Please read it also if there's time.

“

My name is Jocine Velasco and I own a home on Chair Factory Rd. I'm deeply concerned about the proposed Mt. Lebanon Historic District re-zoning and the short and long-term impacts on the residential community that surrounds the mountain. I live with my husband and our son in the house his grandfather built. My son will be the fourth generation of my husband's family to have lived on our land. As a working mom, I commute to Albany multiple times a week for one of my three jobs and since reading the rezoning proposal, I've been worrying about what the future will look like on my street. What will it look like when my one source of ingress and egress will be blocked off due to constant construction if this proposal is approved? What will it look like when the one road my neighbors and I take in case of emergencies just so happens to be during the hours of operation of future commercial businesses on Shaker Road? Who will hold developers and property owners accountable, when they eventually build large-scale commercial projects with special-use permits on a right-of-way meant specifically for rural residential-agricultural zoning? To me, this rezoning proposal is a safety issue for the residents living on Chair Factory and if the Shaker Preservation Committee does not have a sound and transparent plan to address the impacts of heavy traffic and congestion imposed on Chair Factory residents, then sadly this re-zoning proposal puts our safety at risk and I sincerely hope the Town Board opposes it.”

salamat [thanks],
Jocine



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

concern about planned rezoning

1 message

Kira Josefsson <kira.josefsson@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 12:03 PM

Dear Tystria,

My name is Kira Josefsson. I've been coming to New Lebanon since 2018, when my friends moved to West Family and invited me to spend a month working on a writing project there. I was immediately struck by the unique atmosphere and environment and have been coming back ever since. I care deeply about the historical, cultural, and ecological importance of the mountain.

Learning that the town's Shaker Preservation Committee has proposed a rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District was deeply distressing to me, especially when I looked at the plan. If the town allows commercial and touristic development, the truly unusual place that is Mount Lebanon will be irrevocably lost. I am not a particularly spiritual person, but it is doubtless that the mountain holds a history that shows up in the present in strange and palpable ways. You can feel it when you walk down Shaker Road or sit by the pond. You can feel it when you help the farmers at the Abode Farm weed. You can feel it when you wander up the mountain.

Allowing hotels, campgrounds, and retail marketplaces would crowd out and ultimately kill the special atmosphere, one I have never experienced anywhere else in the United States—save for, maybe, the desert. To do so would be deeply irresponsible stewardship of the history of the mountain, which is a living cultural landscape, an ecosystem of communal life that has drawn scholars, visitors, artists, and writers like myself from around the world.

Some of the concerning aspects of the plan include the lack of enforceable restrictions and the threat to the mountain's ecological health, while privileging a few landowners and thus sidestepping the normal review processes meant to preserve public trust.

There are a myriad commercialized and developed places in upstate New York. Why add another to the mix, when what you have is so truly unique? I urge you, from the bottom of my heart, to reconsider this rezoning proposal. Preserving Mount Lebanon cannot mean making space for commercial growth only. The way forward is one that respects heritage, ecology, and community values over short-term economic gains.

Please do think carefully before you destroy an extraordinary place. Mount Lebanon is unique. It would be a generational tragedy to introduce such reckless change.

Thank you for your time, and with hope,

Kira Josefsson

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[kirajosefsson.com](#)

[+1 347 543 4272](#)



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Regarding the rezoning of Mount Lebanon

1 message

Iemanja Brown <lemanjabrown@gmail.com>

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 9:17 PM

To: "supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Dear Tystria,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing because I am very concerned about the news that the mountain might be rezoned. I was born right over the mountain in Massachusetts and have spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon. I have seen the ways that our mountain towns have fallen victim to reckless development, causing pain and displacement to residents, wildlife, and the culture that we so deeply value. It may sound good now to bring in tourist dollars to the area, but we can look in any direction and see how those dollars end up hurting those who actually live and work in the area.

If you are not ready to stop the rezoning, I at least urge you to bring everyone together to discuss the matter in honest and open ways, looking specifically at how the rezoning will affect the historic, cultural, and environmental aspects of the area. The Shakers carefully built their community there in conversation with the natural world and with one another. How can we move as they moved, with slowness and attention to the larger questions in life that are outside of short term economic gain? If we cannot pause and consider this sort of question, the things that we value so deeply about New Lebanon will become commodities for people to buy up, export, and outprice us from. Please do everything in your power to not let that happen.

Thank you for reading and I hope you have a wonderful day,

Iemanja Brown



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Comment for this evening's meeting

1 message

Michael Libsch & Ellen Poggi <nynewleafarm@gmail.com>

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 9:29 PM

To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Hi Tistrya,

My name is Mike Libsch. I am a resident of New Lebanon. I am unable to attend this evening's meeting concerning the possible rezoning of Mount Lebanon. However, I would like to submit this short comment on the proposal. I hope that it can be read during the meeting.

My strong opinion is that Mount Lebanon should not be rezoned for commercial development. Allowing commercial activities on Mount Lebanon would threaten our town's unique agricultural and cultural history, its fragile ecosystems, and its rural beauty. These are the things that make New Lebanon such a special place to call home.



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

NO to rezoning of Mount Lebanon Historic District

1 message

Hana van der Kolk <hjvanderkolk@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 9:37 PM

Dear Tystria Houghtling,

I write as someone who has visited New Lebanon frequently over the past decade and has many good friends living in the area. I care deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history.

I have been made aware that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. This proposal is being presented as a tool for "preservation," but in actuality it is a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this incredibly special and historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- **It lacks enforceable restrictions**, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
- **It sets a dangerous precedent** by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- **It threatens the ecological health** of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to threatening the aquifer, the soil and drinking water access on the mountain.
- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Hana van der Kolk
Chatham, NY



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

letter for 7/30 meeting regarding rezoning Mount Lebanon Historic District

1 message

Tennessee Jones <tennessee.jones@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 9:26 PM

Dear Tystria,

I am attaching a letter with the request it be read at the town meeting on July 30th regarding the proposed rezoning of the Mount Lebanon History District. I am currently out of state and unable to attend. I've also attached as a pdf for your convenience.

Thank you,

Tennessee Jones

I am a licensed clinical social worker in New York State, and a local homeowner. I am writing to express concern and opposition to the Shaker Preservation Committee's proposed rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD).

While this proposal is presented as a tool for preservation, the details of the plan indicate its purpose is not preserve Mount Lebanon's unique and priceless history, but to make a nationally significant historic site vulnerable to widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development.

The proposed rezoning of the MLHD would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere of Mount Lebanon, the most significant Shaker settlement in America. This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- **It lacks enforceable restrictions**, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
- **It sets a dangerous precedent** by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- **It threatens the ecological health** of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to threatening the aquifer, the soil and drinking water access on the mountain.
- **It is short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

I write as someone who moved to this area because I have been enriched by the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm.

I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place, as it is, for future generations.

Tennessee Jones, LCSW

 **Mt Lebanon letter.pdf**
91K



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Re: My *updated* letter to be read at 7/30 Town Hall

1 message

Maria Molteni <mariazitamolteni@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 3:17 PM

Hello again Supervisor Houghtling,

I hope you will accept this *updated* letter to be read at tonight's meeting (attached).

It is the same letter I sent yesterday, but co-signers have continued to flow in, so I've alphabetized and attached the most recent version, co-signed by 48 people.

Thanks so much if you can confirm receipt!

Maria

MARIA MOLTENI
(They/Them)

LATEST NEWS: <https://www.mariamolteni.com/mms>

Recent/ Upcoming Exhibitions:

Dazzle Camouflage at Bes Millerton (NY), closes June 23

"All Around the Room" at Hancock Shaker Village (MA), opens June 21

"Heart of Stone" at Practice Gallery, (Philly), closes April 27

"Beautiful Seven" at San Luis Obispo Museum of Art (CA)

"Soft Score" at Fuller Craft Museum (MA)

 @strega_maria

 @newcraft_artistsinaction

 Consider joining me on Patreon: <http://www.patreon.com/MariaMolteni>

*Pardon my inability to embed links from my apple devices 😊

On Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 4:31 PM Maria Molteni <mariazitamolteni@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Supervisor Houghtling

Please accept the following letter, which we would like to be read into the record at the July 30 Town Hall meeting and shared with any relevant parties.

I recognize that it is a bit longer than most, but it is co-signed by several dozen concerned professionals in lieu of submitting this many additional letters. I hope your audience will find it heartfelt and educational.

See attached

Thank you!

Maria Molteni
15 Channel Center St
Boston, MA 02210

██████████
██
████████████████████

July 28, 2025

Dear Supervisor Houghtling,

Please accept the following letter, which we would like to be read into the record at the July 30 Town Hall meeting and shared with any relevant parties. I recognize that it is a bit longer than most, but it is co-signed by several dozen concerned professionals in lieu of submitting this many additional letters. I hope your audience will find it heartfelt and educational.

My name is Maria Molteni. I'm an artist, writer, educator and long-term independent Shaker researcher, currently based in Boston, MA. I'm originally from Tennessee, where several generations of my ancestors farmed land near South Union Shaker Village, Kentucky. For the last 18 years, I have delivered artwork, essays, short films, and lectures related to the Shakers and their 250 year influence in America, since my first visit to the living Shakers at Sabbathday Lake in 2007. I currently have an installation called "All Around the Room" on view down the street at Hancock Shaker Village.

The purpose of my letter is to push against the current re-zoning proposal for Mount Lebanon Historic District. I stand with the many reasons listed in statements that oppose such reckless plans for future development, plans which would most likely yield: overdevelopment of the area, tourist traffic overload, increased property taxes and threats to affordable housing, interruption of the robust natural ecosystem, and beyond.

However, my letter brings focused awareness to issues that lie within my particular experience and expertise with Shaker legacy and influence. I write on behalf of the "Shaker nerds" out there who, despite life's many demands, assume a commitment to fostering and protecting the indispensable bestowal of the Shakers. We are committed to preservation but also regeneration of the crucial and increasingly threatened ideals that are central to Shaker philosophy and brighter sides of American values. These include simple, communal living, sharing of resources, practical innovation, equality of all beings, presence of the divine in daily living, business and labor, to name a few.

I am deeply woven into the social, creative and spiritual fabric of Shaker history and community. Among my varied areas of research, I rarely come across a phenomenon so widely celebrated as the Shakers. I think many root their hope for the future in the unprecedented accomplishments of the Shaker past. The Shakers grew incredible strength despite status quo pressures of rapidly shifting and corrupting outside worlds, pressures that persist today. Though there have been just a handful of living Shakers over the last

few decades, I believe that our broad community of individuals, who care deeply for their ongoing efforts, adds up to an entire new generation of Shaker-aligned stewards. While we defer to and respect the living Shakers for their own official statements, we feel called to step forward in defense of Shaker principles as we know and share them.

Over the years, I've visited and conducted research within most of the extant Shaker Villages from Maine to Kentucky. I've experienced and recorded the nuanced differences between them, their histories in the hands of Shakers and afterwards. I've noted the many ways that Shaker villages and buildings were destroyed, repurposed, and reclaimed. From the structure at Pleasant Hill Shaker Village which became an auto-mechanic shop, to the small Shaker office which was moved from Harvard Shaker Village to Fruitlands Museum. I've heard countless reflections by museum historians, archivists, educators, guides, directors, etc which mourn decisions made when preservation was not better considered. What has occurred to Shaker land and buildings when not in the hands of knowledgeable, intentional caretakers, becomes very difficult to reverse. Many of today's more vibrant villages, which are now museums, non-profits, farms, schools, places of worship, and multi-use spaces for creative and social programs, had to go to incredible lengths to win and buy back these spaces. Many of them express regret for what happened in the time between and what was lost.

The Shakers intended, and still intend, to live on and influence the world. They create(d) for the utilitarian needs of the moment as well as for the spiritual and ethical integrity of the future. They were known to sell off objects and buildings as populations dwindled or different resources were needed. We as historians, artisans, tenders of land, objects and communities gasp at the thought that such gems have been displaced. In many ways, it is now our challenge to intercept and guide the handling of such assets, to keep them in alignment and service of community.

The Shakers are often referred to as America's longest lasting Utopia. In my writing, I emphasize that "Utopia" is not the phrase they used to describe themselves. Rather, they seek to bring or build "Heaven on Earth". I find this framework important in that it recognizes Earth as part of ethical, spiritual, communal, intentional living. It refers to the dream of the present and responsibility for the future. Despite the valuable Shaker history of this land and who it's served over the years, it has always been a nourishing and largely undisturbed haven for wildlife as well. As Jane Jacobs presented in her book "Death and Life of Great American Cities", even urban or developed spaces can model diverse ecosystems as they change and grow. While Utopia often operates in a top-down manner, the Shakers operated from a place of practical communal adaptability as much as perfected ideals.

Like a parent tasked with choosing a favorite child, I can hardly love one Shaker Village most. However, Mount/ New Lebanon is uniquely special among them for a few reasons. It was essentially the capital of the Shaker world, the village from which the Central Ministry made decisions pertaining to all Shaker communities. As is illustrated in the iconic Shaker Gift Drawing "The Holy City" (1843, by Polly Jane Reed) recently exhibited at the American Folk Art Museum, New Lebanon was seen and designed as a literal and metaphysical blueprint for paradise. Though it hasn't operated as an active Shaker space for many years, the fostering of a Sufi community, school, farm, forest and home to many devoted residents is beautifully aligned with the original purpose of the space. Shakers welcomed outside members of "The

World” to their worship services so that all could partake in Shaker experience, but they created intentional structure for visitors that considered self-preservation and privacy.

Brother Arnold has spoken in many interviews about how the Shakers have operated within a capitalist and communist paradigm in the United States. Cherished, but accessible Shaker design proliferated because they participated in the selling of goods and services to interested citizens of the outside world. Shaker women handled money and signed official financial documents long before it was legal for women in America to do so. It's not that Shakers were opposed to engaging with commerce as a partial means for survival. And it's not that Shaker spaces and structures can only be repurposed as museums, frozen in time. But there must be care and rigorous community involvement in what these spaces become and how they are preserved. They are not simply old or quaint. They are incredibly special.

Brother Arnold has been outspoken about his disappointment with knock-off Shaker branded restaurants and products that do not center authentic Shaker interests and values. He goes on record saying “Nay!” to them. We, the Shaker nerds, though not proper, traditional Shakers on the level of Brother Arnold and Sister June, are passionate stakeholders in defending the radical values that have kept Shakers so vibrantly alive in American imagination. In Brother Arnold's words, we say “Nay” to the current proposal for re-zoning which is not rooted in such care or alignment.

The following co-signers are artists, historians, designers, archivists, preservationists, builders, curators, people of faith, and others that I have worked with or alongside over the years.

Sincerely,

Maria Molteni

Visual artist, educator, independent Shaker researcher
Previous artist in residence at Canterbury, Hancock, and Harvard + Shirley (via Fruitlands) Shaker Villages

This letter is Co-signed, with explicit written permission, by each of the following:

Ann Antonellis

Builder, bookbinder, artist, activist
Boston, MA

Julia Whitney Barnes

Visual artist, educator
Planting Utopia Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Scholar/ Winterthur Research Fellow
Poughkeepsie, NY

Bryce W. Bayer

M.S. Ed

Philadelphia, PA

Brianna Bowman

Artist & Bathkeeper
South Portland, ME

Laura Campagna

MFA
Dedham, MA

Lili Caruso

Cofounder, publisher, and technologist
Brooklyn, NY

Edwige Charlot

Artist
Providence, RI

Conrad Carpenter

Preparator
South Portland, ME

Lynne Cooney

Associate Professor/ Director of Exhibitions + Galleries
Montserrat College of Art
Beverly, MA

Nerissa Cooney

Designer
Boston, MA

Shay Curran

Drag performer, community organizer, Shaker history enthusiast
Boston, MA

Denise DeSpirito

Garden Manager and Herbal Educator
Lincolntonville, Maine

Shana Dumont Garr

PhD Candidate, Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
Asst Curator, Affiliated Faculty, Emerson College
Boston, MA

Annika Earley

Artist, curator, teacher
Belfast, ME

Angel Favorite

Artist
Hyde Park, NY

Jess Fijalkovich

Visual artist, archivist, independent curator
Curator of *Manifesting of Light: Exploring the Shakers' Celestial Inspiration*, Shaker Historical Society,
Shaker Heights, OH

Sair Goetz

Artist, Boston MA
Sigil, letterform, modular type obsessive at Letterform Archive, San Francisco, CA

Nathan James Harkins-Oberbeck

Resident artist, Hidden Vibes Tattoo Studio
Cambridge, MA

Hilary Irons

Gallery and Exhibitions Director, University of New England Art Galleries
Former Artists' Residency Director, Canterbury Shaker Village
Portland, ME

Vanessa Jagodinsky

Artist
Brooklyn, NY

Jameson Johnson

Founder + director, Boston Art Review
Boston, MA

Jennifer Joy Jameson Merchant

Arts Administrator + Cultural Worker
Long Beach, CA

Tara Kirmse

Educator, gardener, artist, Shaker fan
Austin, TX

Cassidy Klein

Journalist, writer, editor
Chicago, IL

Faythe Levine

Women's Studio Workshop Archivist & independent researcher
Mellenville, NY

Dr. Patrick Mansfield

Doctor of acupuncture and east asian medicine, educator, visual artist, Shaker nerd
Los Angeles, CA

Cristina Marcelo

Writer and researcher
Los Angeles, CA

Jane D. Marsching

Artist, contemplative
Professor at Massachusetts College of Art Sustainability Department
Boston, MA

Marianne McCarthy

Artist, educator
Brooklyn, NY

Louise Mittelman

Project Manager and Certified Hypnotist
New York, NY

Daryl Morazzini

Educator, Lecturer Boston University
Yale Divinity School 2005
Boston, MA

Lauren Van Mullem

Writer, Shaker history enthusiast
Los Angeles, CA

Melissa Nierman

Educator, regional historian
Founder and radical tour guide, Now Age Travel
Salem, MA

Cate O'Connell-Richards

Visual artist, educator, broom maker

San Diego, CA

Adela Park

Designer, Preservationist
Philadelphia, PA

Sam Panken

Local farmer, Shaker enthusiast
East Chatham, NY

Darryl Ratcliff

Artist, cofounder of Ash Studios, Black Arts DFW
Executive Director, Friends of Darryl Ratcliff
Dallas, TX

Flora Jay Rodriguez

Legal historian
Boston, MA

Miriam Saperstein

Artist
Northampton, MA

Catherine Shortliffe

Public Historian and Environmental Educator
Harvard, MA

Jackie Sumell

Artist, abolitionist, organizer
Founder: Solitary Gardens + Freedom to Grow
New Orleans, LA

Eliza Swann

Artist, Educator, Writer
Founder: Golden Dome School and Emerald School
Hyde Park, NY

Shannon Taggart

Artist, independent researcher
Minneapolis, MN

Penelope Taylor

Housing advocate
Medford, MA

Zoe Tuck

Writer and Educator
Northampton, MA

Walker Tufts

Artist
New York, NY

Grace Woodard

Therapist, artist, concerned citizen
Hudson, NY

Kirsten Doyle

Proud CHamoru (indigenous people of Guam) utilizing my extensive multidisciplinary
Development/academic philanthropy knowledge to share ancient wisdoms with the world, presenting
modern sciences and lesser known histories to help showcase the interconnectedness of humanity
Quechee, Vermont



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

No to Mount Lebanon Historic District Re-zoning Proposal

1 message

Fiona Feng <fiona.feng7@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Fri, Jul 25, 2025 at 4:46 PM

Hi Tistrya,

I am deeply concerned by the proposal to re-zone the Mount Lebanon Historic District to commercial. Mt Lebanon is a place of deep historical and spiritual significance for many folks who have come through New Lebanon. As someone who deeply values the peaceful atmosphere and living legacy of the Shakers embodied by the current inhabitants of Shaker Rd/Chairfactory Rd, it would be a great disservice to the spirit of Mount Lebanon by granting this re-zoning. The proposal and proposers, the so-called Shaker Preservation Committee, clearly have no respect for the land or local community and are only interested in personal profit. Approving this proposal would destroy the sacred nature of Mount Lebanon and would put the mountain at the perpetual mercy of self-serving developers.

I consent to having my letter read into the public record.

Yours sincerely,

--

Fiona Feng (she/they)



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Pls. read into the public record at hearing July 26

1 message

s Goldenberg <golden.suz@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 2:37 AM

To the Honorable Town Supervisor,
Tistrya Houghtling:

As a former resident, and longtime friend of Mt. Lebanon, I am writing to express my grave concern and strong opposition to the proposed commercial rezoning of Mt. Lebanon.

New Lebanon is a cherished community defined by its unique character, residential serenity, and vibrant local atmosphere. This rezoning initiative poses a severe and irreversible threat to the very soul and essence of what makes our community special.

My concerns are amplified by several critical factors: Briefly, they include:

- **Increased Traffic Congestion**
- **Environmental Impact**
- **Impact on Existing Small Businesses**
- **Loss of Residential Character**
- **Strain on Public Infrastructure- —most urgently, increased housing scarcity and affordability.**

The cumulative effect of these impacts will fundamentally alter Mt. Lebanon, transforming it from a beloved residential haven into a generic, traffic-choked commercial zone. This would be a profound loss for all of its residents and friends .

I respectfully urge you to reconsider this proposal. Let us instead prioritize sustainable growth that enhances the existing communities' assets and protects the unique character and quality of life we deeply value.

Thank you for your care and discernment.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Goldenberg



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Mount Lebanon Historic District Re-zoning Proposal

1 message

Lara Lorenzo <laraorenzo@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 9:07 AM

ATTN: Tistrya Houghtling, New Lebanon Town Supervisor

Dear Ms. Houghtling,

I would like to submit the following statement to be read into the public record at the upcoming Town Hall meetings on July 26th and July 30th.

Respectfully yours,
Lara Lorenzo

My name is Lara Lorenzo. I am writing to express concern about the Mount Lebanon Historic District Re-zoning Proposal. Although I do not live in New Lebanon, I have many dear friends who do, and over the years I have been honored to visit them many times and to learn from them about Mount Lebanon's unique history and culture. I write to amplify my friends' worries that passage of the Proposal could pave the way for destructive commercial development on Mount Lebanon.

As a longtime resident of New York City, I am intimately familiar with the unexpected and often devastating impact that apparently well-meaning rezoning proposals can have on local landscapes and communities. Rezoning is often presented as a means of "revitalizing" areas that are seen by its proponents as decrepit and in need of saving. There is a fantasy that an infusion of money will preserve and breathe new life into a place. However, experience has shown that such so-called "revitalization" efforts are often, in fact, responsible for the death of communities and the eradication of precious local lifeways and textures. It would be a tragedy for Mount Lebanon to be faced with the prospect of such irreversible loss—a likely scenario if the Re-zoning Proposal is passed.



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Against Rezoning on Mount Lebanon roads

1 message

Farnoosh Fathi <farnoosh.fathi@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Mon, Jul 28, 2025 at 11:00 AM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history. I have been an artist in residence for several summers since 2018 and spent time studying at the Abode as well as at the Shaker Archives. I have volunteered at the farm and made a community out of my friends living there, and built my life around this community even though I live in Troy, I come to Mount Lebanon several times a week for the sustenance of this land and community which is rare and sacred.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like mysekf from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- **It lacks enforceable restrictions**, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
- **It sets a dangerous precedent** by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- **It threatens the ecological health** of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to potentially threatening the

mountain's aquifer.

- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Farnoosh



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

commercial zoning in New Lebanon

1 message

Melissa Clare <melissaclare01@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 11:50 AM

Dear Tistrya,

It has been many long years since I called the Abode my home and you probably wouldn't remember me - I sang in the choir with Quan Yin...

However, like most of us who experienced that unique and spiritually-oriented life, I hold the land very dear in my heart. I think the residents of New Lebanon may not realize how many hundreds of people living locally or very far afield, have been touched by the pristine beauty of this land.

I understand there is a public forum available today and next Wednesday when people can comment on plans to change the commercial zoning. Sitting down last night to write from my heart, the following is what came to me and I ask that you share it on my behalf

The jewel that is beyond price has no commercial value

The Mountain that is recognized as Sacred

By more than three spiritual groups

We be revered by those who are able to listen to it.

The future children will want to come here to pray

They will treasure the peaceful moments

The quartz-patterned rock outcroppings

The grandfather oak trees

The vista from that place where the ancient mystic lived so long ago

Listen to the bullfrogs, the mist rising from the pond

The breeze at dawn rustling the leaves...

Oh yes, perhaps there will be a bus to drop them off for the day

Perhaps there will still be residents to offer prayers and meals.

-Preserve the historical buildings

They will never be built the same again.

-Preserve the Sacred Mountain

And be careful not to impinge on its **peace** –

The greatest blessing for future generations.

Let the buildings be in the valley,

the accommodations needed for all

- human expansion is inevitable – and may it be

Conceived with kindness for the greatest good.

I would also like to add to this that in the current state of economic uncertainty in the US as well as globally, there is no guarantee that the tourist industry will expand in a way that could benefit the town commercially. At this time I would recommend that you leave the zoning as it is and focus on providing affordable housing and encouraging residents to collaborate with one another in growing and sharing food .

Wishing the very best for the town of New Lebanon as well as for the Mountain (a shout out to Buddy Godfroy, who sat in the ambulance with me the day I was badly burned - thank you to the local fire brigade and to all who serve this community - it is a beautiful place!)

Warmly,

Melissa

Melissa Clare - resident for 17 years and still keeping in touch

 2025 Comment on town planning in New Lebanon.docx

11K



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Dear Tystria and New Lebanon Town Board

1 message

Jacqui Cornetta <jacqui.cornetta@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 6:03 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant place.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular.

This isn't to say that all forms of development would be detrimental to the community and ecosystems of New Lebanon. The issue here is that the proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
- **It lacks enforceable restrictions**, including no protections against demolition of Shaker structures and no binding limits on new construction, event frequency, or noise.
 - **It sets a dangerous precedent** by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.
- **It threatens the ecological health** of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to threatening the aquifer, the soil and drinking water access on the mountain.
- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Sincerely,

Jacqui Cornetta



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Letter in support of maintaining residential zoning of New Lebanon

1 message

Leah Pires <leah.pires@villanova.edu>

Sun, Jul 27, 2025 at 1:37 PM

To: "supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com" <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history. I am an art historian versed in the cultural significance of the Shaker legacies in New Lebanon and I have also been a regular visitor to the area over the past decade. Many beloved friends are residents of New Lebanon, which we appreciate for its bucolic natural beauty, communal spirit, and for the relative absence of commercial development and tourism.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists and art workers like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

- **It risks irreversible commercialization** of a quiet residential and rural area, opening the door to dense mixed-use development, subdivision, traffic, noise, and large-scale events inconsistent with the site's historic and ecological character.
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As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Leah Pires

Leah Pires, PhD



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Urgent request

1 message

Marley Freeman <marley.freeman@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 6:35 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history. I went to Mountain Road Children's school in the 1980's. Those years at Mount Lebanon were life affirming - the connection the community had to each other and to the land was HUGELY impactful. It's so special and rare to have this place in America. A few years ago my friend and I painted a mural on the outhouse at the Abode Farm to show our love for this place. Growing up while being amongst the architecture of the shakers and the spirit of the sufis has really set the baseline of decency and belief in work and commitment to community that has been a constant throughout my life. It's impossible to imagine the ways that this place formed my young person. The important feeling of the place has 100% stuck with me since I was 4 and has contributed to my success in art as an adult. I fully saw how alternate forms of family are completely possible and how spirit lives in what I do from the day to day. This is something I still do- every day of my life. It's impossible to imagine me doing this - had I not spent my elementary years at the abode- away from the commercial realms of life fully immersed in the communal reality- doing selflessly with love and passion for the community.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is not just a collection of buildings. It is a living cultural landscape—an ecosystem of communal life with long-standing intentional communities, schools, an artist residency, a farm, many sacred sites, unique architecture, and remarkable historic integrity that has drawn scholars, visitors, and artists like myself from around the world. Turning it into a commercial zone is not preservation; it is erasure.

This rezoning plan raises multiple concerns:

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- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for

7/28/25, 10:47 AM

Town of New Lebanon Mail - Urgent request

commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Marley Fremean



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Shaker property

1 message

PAUL FREEMAN <textileguy@aol.com>

Sun, Jul 27, 2025 at 2:38 PM

To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Cc: Marley <marley496@yahoo.com>, jordan freeman <coalstories@gmail.com>

As a former resident of the area and someone whose children attended the mountain Road school for many years, I am very disappointed that you're even considering this option. That land is sacred space and should not be commercialized for the purpose of personal enrichment of a few to the detriment of the many. So please shut this down as once passed there are absolutely no safe guards of any sort.

Paul & Bonnie Freeman

Jordan Freeman -Emmy nominated filmmaker and business owner educated on those grounds

Marley Freeman- highly regarded abstract expressionist also educated there.

It's a special place and once desecrated will be forgotten for all time.

Regards

Paul Freeman

Sent from my iPad



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Hi Tystria !

1 message

Rahill Jamalifard <radiorahill@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 7:45 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history. I moved here 5 years ago and this area is so meaningful and important to me. The community here and the historic and cultural landmarks are so integral and important to this community old and new. I would be devastated to have these areas become developed and marketed to outside people who have nothing invested and no true interest in NL.

It has come to my attention that the town's *Shaker Preservation Committee* has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

This rezoning would permit high-impact uses such as event venues, restaurants, mixed-use developments, large-scale hotels and campgrounds, retail marketplaces, manufacturing, and more. These commercial activities—especially in such volume—threaten the peaceful, contemplative, and communal atmosphere that makes this site sacred and singular. The proposal lacks firm limits and grants sweeping permissions that would replace careful stewardship with unchecked development.

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- **It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported** by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

7/28/25, 10:47 AM

Town of New Lebanon Mail - Hi Tystris !

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Rahill jamalifard



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Against Commercial Rezoning

1 message

Eta Demby <nicoledemby@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Mon, Jul 28, 2025 at 7:03 AM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history.

It has come to my attention that the town's Shaker Preservation Committee has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

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It sets a dangerous precedent by creating a special zoning district for a few landowners, sidestepping the careful, case-by-case review processes that are meant to preserve public trust.

It threatens the ecological health of the mountain by permitting tree removal and grading with minimal replanting requirements, in addition to potentially threatening the mountain's aquifer.

It is recklessly short-sighted & not supported by many of the nonprofit neighbors and residents.

As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

Thank you,

Eta Demby



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Fwd: Mt. Lebanon Rezoning

1 message

Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Mon, Jul 21, 2025 at 8:47 AM

To: Elizabeth Brutsch <nlpb.brutsch@gmail.com>

To be read into the record on 7/26. Thanks!

Tistrya Houghtling, Town Supervisor

Town of New Lebanon

P.O. Box 328

14755 State Route 22

New Lebanon, NY 12125

www.townofnewlebanon.com

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Ellyn McCormack Gaydos** <emg2222@columbia.edu>

Date: Mon, Jul 21, 2025 at 8:34 AM

Subject: Mt. Lebanon Rezoning

To: Town Supervisor <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Dear Tistrya,

My name is Ellyn Gaydos. I live on route 20 in New Lebanon with my husband Graham and our two young kids. I worked at the Abode farm for 8 years. I am writing to you to voice my concern over the proposed rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District. It is a place near and dear to my heart whose buildings I've broken bread in, fields I've worked in, and mountain I got married on.

I'm sympathetic to the large burden of keeping up the Shaker buildings and I want visitors to be able to learn about the incredible history here, but I think approving a rezoning plan that allows for new building and development does little to preserve the history of the area. Instead, I would support plans that allowed for the preexisting buildings to be better used for myriad kinds of work and habitation.

I also worry the mountain is not set up to handle such an increase in traffic. While farming on Shaker and Chair Factory Road the events and construction equipment at Sassafra often held up traffic and became disruptive to residents (and farmers) using the roads. It is my hope that we can share the nature and history of New Lebanon without dramatically changing Mt. Lebanon in the process.

I just wanted to send a note in case I can't attend the in-person meeting. Thank you for listening!

best,
Ellyn



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Zoning meeting

1 message

Caitlin MacBride <caitlin_macbride@gmail.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sun, Jul 27, 2025 at 9:18 PM

Dear Tystria,

I write as someone who has spent a great deal of time in New Lebanon, who cares deeply about the historic, cultural, and ecological importance of the Mount Lebanon site—home to the most significant Shaker settlement in America, a rich farming tradition, and unique communitarian history.

I first visited New Lebanon in 2018 when I did an art residency at Abode Farm. It was a deeply moving experience in my life to get to know the land and the history of New Lebanon. It shaped my future as I eventually moved from NYC upstate in 2020 inspired by the time I'd spent in New Lebanon. I'm not a particularly spiritual person but the first time I drove down Shaker Road I felt a shift in what I can only explain as my spiritual awareness and I've forever considered it a sacred and special place since then. I spent a month living on Chair Factory Road for this residency and it helped me find a peace of mind and physical health I found evasive in Brooklyn. I studied the Shaker History which inspired my art practice and I eventually had an art show at the Shaker Museum pop up in Kinderhook in 2023. I now live in Hudson/Stockport and return to Mt Lebanon to visit the historical sites with friends who care about the same history- we've begun bringing our children here to experience it. It breaks my heart to think of this special place being altered by commercial and tourism development.

It has come to my attention that the town's Shaker Preservation Committee has proposed rezoning the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD) to allow widespread commercial and tourist-oriented development. While this proposal was presented as a tool for "preservation," the details reveal a plan that would fundamentally alter the character of this nationally and internationally significant historic site.

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As someone who's been enriched by the legacy of the Shakers, the sanctity of this land, and the cultural and ecological contributions made by the Shaker Museum, the Mt. Lebanon Residency, the Abode, and the Abode Farm, I urge you to reconsider this rezoning proposal. The preservation of Mount Lebanon must mean more than making space for commercial growth—it must reflect a commitment to heritage, ecology, and community values that transcend short-term economic gain.

Please preserve this extraordinary place for future generations.

7/28/25, 10:44 AM

Town of New Lebanon Mail - Zoning meeting

Thank you,

Caitlin MacBride

Caitlin MacBride




Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Shaker Historic District

1 message

Vimala Steadman <vimala9@mac.com>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Wed, Jul 23, 2025 at 9:45 PM

Town Board, Town of New Lebanon N.Y.

With all due respect for all the individuals who have worked to create the "Shaker Historic overlay" I question both the need and logic behind its creation.

It is my opinion relaxing zoning codes on Mount Lebanon will encourage development. What I don't understand is why we would do this to the most valuable, beautiful, and historic piece of land in our town.

In around 1985 I had to appear before the zoning board to get a zoning variance at 60 West St. where I was to have my Artist's studio. I was grilled vigorously by the board. Mr. Murad came to my aid to convince them to grant the variance for my small business, and that I was not a threat to West St. or the Town. I now understand forty years later how this scrutiny if removed from the zoning process could lead to the destruction of the most historic piece of land we have.

I believe that there are many in town who have strong feelings for both the spiritual and physical history and many have done much to beautify and preserve it's unique landscape.

My fear is if smaller parcels were to be sold to people or worse, developers, with no particular connection to the land, and it's history, that it would destroy the whole because of its parts.

After Living in New Lebanon for 50 years, ten of those at the Abode of the Message, and almost forty years at 60 West St. and still owning a home in Town, I hope the community can appreciate my concern for this unique and beautiful piece of land.

We should not accept this new zoning overlay. I am vehemently apposed to making Shaker Rd., Darrow Rd., and Chairfactory road a commercial zone.

Sincerely,
Vimala Steadman

Sent from my iPad



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Fwd: Mount Lebanon Historic District hearing

1 message

Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Mon, Jul 21, 2025 at 8:46 AM

To: Elizabeth Brutsch <nlpb.brutsch@gmail.com>

See below to read into the record on 7/26 AND 7/30 per this person's request.

Tistrya Houghtling, Town Supervisor

Town of New Lebanon

P.O. Box 328

14755 State Route 22

New Lebanon, NY 12125

www.townofnewlebanon.com

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Philip Good** <poetryworkshop1@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Jul 21, 2025 at 7:15 AM

Subject: Mount Lebanon Historic District hearing

To: <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

To: Town Supervisor, Tistrya Houghtling

please read the following letter into the public record at the town board hearings on July 26th and July 30 on Mount Lebanon Historic District Rezoning Proposal.

It is very disconcerting to learn that the New Lebanon Town Board is considering restructuring their zoning laws for the Mount Lebanon Historic District that would potentially invite a friendly environment to create business opportunities that could be harmful to citizens who live in the area.

Rather than change zoning laws the town should be investing time in trying to find ways to improve existing commercial properties that are either looking abandoned or in disrepair.

The beautiful, historical zone in question needs environmental protection as there are many questions of the quality of health and life issues to consider.

The town board needs to obey the wants and needs of the majority of people who do not wish for the kind of development that is being explored by a seemingly profiteering vision.

Thank You,

7/21/25, 8:46 AM

Town of New Lebanon Mail - Fwd: Mount Lebanon Historic District hearing

Philip Good
East Nassau, NY resident
New Lebanon school tax payer



Town Supervisor (New Lebanon) <supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com>

Letter for Today's Meeting on Mount Lebanon

1 message

Savannah Strenz <[REDACTED]>
To: supervisor@townofnewlebanon.com

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 9:32 AM

Hi Tistrya,

My name is Savannah, I am a farmer at Abode Farm on Chair Factory Road. I am not able to attend the meeting this morning, however I will be there on Wednesday. In the meantime, I thought I would send over my letter that I am planning to read on Wednesday in case it would be helpful to have more voices in the room today as I know many people are away.

Thank you so much!

All the best,

--

Savannah Strenz

<[REDACTED]>

[REDACTED]

**Mount Lebanon_SSTRENZ.pdf**

55K

July 26, 2025

To the Members of the Town Council,

As someone who actively farms the land on this mountain, I write in strong opposition to the proposed rezoning of the Mount Lebanon Historic District (MLHD). This is not a minor zoning adjustment—it represents a significant shift that invites commercial opportunity into what has long been a residential and agricultural landscape.

While the proposal frames itself around preservation and Shaker values, it also explicitly aims to expand development opportunities—introducing uses like event venues, inns, marketplaces, and artisanal manufacturing (many of which are currently restricted or prohibited under RA zoning). These are not passive changes. They will bring increased traffic, construction, and ecological disturbance to an area that has been ecologically and agriculturally stable.

From firsthand experience, I can already attest to the disruption caused by recent construction activity near Şassafras. The clearing of trees and new parking areas have displaced wildlife in ways that are affecting our farm. We have seen a noticeable increase in animal pressure on our crops, leading to significant losses—both in food supply and farm income. These are not theoretical risks; they are already happening, and this rezoning will accelerate them.

What's most troubling is the lack of any ecological impact assessments in this proposal. When ecological concerns were raised during a public meeting this past winter, I had hoped they would be addressed in earnest. Yet this proposal offers little evidence that those concerns were meaningfully considered.

In addition to preserving the mountain, I understand the urgency around creating housing and jobs. But this plan does not convincingly deliver on either front. It opens the door for high-end residential and commercial development under the guise of preservation—without clear provisions for affordable housing or long-term job creation. If anything, it risks contributing to displacement and speculative development in one of the town's most beloved landscapes. The Mount Lebanon Shaker site is historically, ecologically, and agriculturally valuable. We cannot preserve that heritage by turning it into a luxury commodity.

I urge the Town Council to reject this proposal in its current form. At the very least, delay its adoption until a full ecological review is completed and a transparent process for addressing community concerns is established. The community deserves more than glossy preservation language; we deserve a process that respects the people who live and work on this land every day.

Sincerely,

Savannah Strenz

Farmer at Abode Farm