To the members of the New Lebanon Planning Committee:

I am writing to strongly urge the committee to vote no on the Tilden Commons Project that is under consideration this week.

The reasons to vote No are so numerous and elementary that it boggles the mind that the project has somehow even advanced this far. According to existing town zoning regulations, the site is simply too small for a 41-unit apartment complex and 12,000 square foot grocery store. While the project is on its face greatly out of scale and character with the surrounding built environment and will greatly increase the annoyances of traffic and light pollution, there are additionally important environmental considerations that make the proposal in its current form out of compliance with many state and local environmental regulations: **there is nowhere on the site to put the well and the site is too small to allow for the legally mandatory 200 feet separation between the well and the waste water.**

The developer has not put forward any compelling reason why the project should be allowed to be granted again and again variances and exemptions from the zoning and environmental regulations that the people of New Lebanon depend on to protect our drinking water, our ecology, and our town's character and quality of life. **The failure to meet these legally mandated environmental safety and zoning requirements should have made the project a no-go immediately.**

Additionally, **there are many environmental factors that the board has not considered including the possible presence of a spring on the proposed site of the development and the possible impact on endangered species in the historic Shaker Swamp**, which sits less than a hundred feet across the highway from the proposed development site.

While much has been made of the town's undeniable need for affordable housing and a grocery store, the developer's assertion that this development will ease New Lebanon's housing crisis is deeply cynical and misleading. **It is simply not true that New Lebanon residents will be able to rent the units in this development. Affordable housing units in the state of New York are offered by lottery and are open to residents of the entire state.** There is no legal way for the developer to receive state monies to develop affordable housing and then to set aside units for locals only. Meanwhile, local farm hands or workers at places like Maverick's or M&M's are not going to be able to afford the estimated $1200 monthly rents on the "affordable" units. While I sympathize greatly with the many who have spoken in favor of this project out of a desire that their grandchildren might somehow be able to return home to New Lebanon were this approved, I am sorry, but that is simply not a possible factual outcome of this development. **This development will not help the town's housing crisis and in fact is likely to exacerbate it by contributing to greater displacement due to gentrification, higher property taxes, and the replacement of affordable local stores and restaurants with higher end and more expensive retail outlets that cater to tourists and weekenders, as has been the case with the developer's existing high-priced grocery store.**

Additionally, **much has been made of the idea that local elderly citizens who are no longer physically able to care for their large land plots might prefer to sell their land and to move into these apartments downtown. I have been closely following the Tilden proposal since its public debut and I can confidently say that not once has such a person spoken up at a public committee meeting to voice their support for this project.** It's no surprise. I doubt that such a person even exists. The fantasy that local elders will sell the land their families have lived on for generations and move into a tiny apartment (that lacks special senior accessibility provisions) is a kind of city transplant view of what life in a small town might be like. In truth, no one lives in rural America to live in an apartment if they can help it. The access to open land and privacy is the entire point!

Those who are paying attention can see that many small towns in Columbia County have in just a few short years become increasingly unaffordable enclaves of wealthy second home buyers. Hudson, Kinderhook, and Chatham have all gentrified considerably in recent years. Our neighbors in Canaan have recently passed a year-long moratorium on ALL NEW DEVELOPMENT while the town's people try to slow things down long enough to make sure there is sufficient community input to decide the future of the town's growth. The dramatic changes in the demographics and outward appearance of these nearby towns is a cause of great concern for those of us who have seen our property taxes rising steadily in New Lebanon since the onset of the pandemic. Meanwhile, **the proposed Tilden Project is just the first and most visible of many efforts currently being rushed through the town's committees to make the town more amenable to upscale development. The town is currently considering changing the zoning on much of Mt. Lebanon to allow commercial development on the mountain for the first time in its history while the town is also very quickly trying to rush through a municipal water district that would also make greater size developments possible. Darrow School is currently openly in discussion with architectural firms to consider plans for luxury hotel and restaurant development on its campus.** The outcome of bending or ignoring existing zoning and environmental law in order to allow Tilden Commons to be built would thus set a precedent, demonstrating that the town's carefully considered planning and zoning legal requirements offer no meaningful opposition to any development proposed to the town and would signal to outsiders that a new era of high end development has begun.

I want to close by saying that while much has been made by the town's current officials about the supposed lack of decorum that has entered the town's public discourse about civic matters, I would argue that this supposed incivility is a result of the sense of helplessness and distrust of democratic process that longtime local residents have begun to feel as they have seen local laws bent and waived in service to allowing this development to move forward this far in the process. When residents see developers and investors in a development allowed to serve on important local boards considering the legality of the development, and when residents can clearly see that the developers are known to publicly drink at local watering holes with members of the zoning and planning committees, it is not surprising that they would become angry and feel betrayed. When they show up with their justified concerns to speak out at town meetings

designed to solicit public comment and are told they need to be more polite about the town government's apparent lack of concern for their well water, it is deeply insulting.

The residents of New Lebanon depend on the elected and appointed officials of the town to uphold the zoning and environmental regulations that exist to maintain the small town quality of life we love so dearly here and to care for the commons of the natural world and the drinking water that we together steward. It is urgent that the members of the planning committee take their role seriously and uphold these laws rather than bend them at the slightest pressure from any ill-conceived and poorly prepared project that comes along. **I find it deeply ironic that those accused of lack of decorum and civility are the ones among us who are speaking up in favor of protecting drinking water and endangered species, are those who are speaking up for the importance of upholding existing regulations. What principles are the local officials who would scold them upholding?** I urge the planning committee to vote No and send this unfortunate proposal back to the drawing board and to thus send a message to the rest of us in the town that we can rest easy with the knowledge that our town government has our best interests at heart.

Thank you for your consideration,

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