8/17/2026

To the Planning Board,

I'm an abutter to the proposed "Tilden Commons" development. Years ago I bought a home in this beautiful town of rolling hills and lush swamplands to NOT have to live near a massive apartment complex, and to learn what it means to care for land without overdeveloping it. I bought a home here because New Lebanon felt different than certain country towns that are suburban in look and feel, with cookie cutter main streets and overpriced everything.

I appreciate that the town comprehensive plan identifies affordable housing and a grocery store as priorities:

Sub-goal: Expand housing options for seniors with emphasis on safety, affordability, and access to daily needs. Also expand housing options to retain and attract younger and lower income individuals and families. ***The location and density of homes must match the ability of the land to support them and the community's desire to preserve the Town's rural, small-town character****.*

We already know that the land designated for the Tilden Project cannot support the development. Per the DOH, there is a requirement of "100-feet of ownership and 200-feet of control surrounding the well… **Neither of these are met and there are no proposed additional measures to mitigate this reduced separation distance."**

That should've been enough to pause this project, and yet various Boards have continued to proceed with approvals.

I'd welcome a grocery store with the footprint of the existing Tilden mall. I'd welcome low-income housing. The Zoning Board recommends renovating existing out-of-use buildings for housing, and if creating new rental housing (new multi-family dwellings), to do so by building structures that "have an appearance of a single-family dwelling," similar to the ones adjacent to the existing grocery store. If we were to build new properties, **I'd support the construction of rent-to-own family homes alongside the renovation of existing buildings into rental housing and coops,** per the recommendation of town zoning policy. I recognize that renovating existing buildings is costly, but I also know that the Town Board has identified multiple potential funding avenues to make it possible.

I've overheard seniors at the post office talking about wanting to stay in their homes but not being able to afford major repairs. I've seen local homes as a result getting sunk into disrepair, no longer available to be passed onto the next generation when the owner passes on.

If it doesn't already, it would be great if the town hall had a program that helped seniors who can't afford to do major repairs on their homes to apply for home maintenance grants that would allow them to actually age in a place, in their own homes, and would preserve these homes for the next generation.

And for seniors that do want to scale down, they deserve senior housing that does not require being packed into a 41-unit building between a grocery store and a 116-car parking lot. As two who spoke up at the last public comment session noted, **many seniors in town cannot actually afford these apartments at their projected rental rate.** We have yet to hear from a senior who is actually interested in downsizing to an apartment of this scale, cost and density.

Food access-wise, the developer previously received a $500k Dept of Agriculture grant to open a grocery store that is simply too expensive to live off of. I don't have faith that the developers scaling up and getting more government money will benefit the rest of us.

And honestly, I miss the farmer's market, and the flea market behind the mall. These were places to connect directly with local farmers, and a weekly place with live music where we could see our neighbors. That felt like a true commons. As one speaker mentioned at the public comment session, the developer has expressly tried to limit local farmers' self-determination on how they distribute and sell their wares in New Lebanon, wielding power that comes from running the town's one grocery store. To learn of that store owner using that power to make it harder for farmers to turn a profit in a very challenging economy was disturbing. I don't think it's asking too much to want to preserve spaces where farmers can sell directly and to have an affordable grocery store for our town.

We've been lied to consistently, promised at different points that a certain amount of units will be set aside for seniors (even still in the 8/5/26 narrative: "We anticipate reserving 10 apartments for seniors aged 62 and up" – this simply isn't true), that locals will be prioritized (not how the lottery system works), and that the developers will be "the biggest tax payer in town"(even though a PILOT program would certainly affect the amount of tax money coming to town and to the school district). These are fictions we've been fed by developers despite Hudson River Housing contradicting them in past town meetings. I am concerned we will find out far too late that this process has been rushed and we have also been lied to about the environmental impact, effect on drinking water, noise and light pollution, and crucially — the affordability of food and homes in this town.

My biggest concern is that this development is far too big for this plot, and the size, scale and cost does not actually meet community need, and cronyism has allowed for it to bypass zoning regulation and town planning. **This proposed development meets only the state funding requirements – while NOT meeting DOH regulations -- and I wish that instead of approving it, the Planning Board would identify (or advocate for) funding that is aligned with the feel and the needs of our town.**

Lastly, we've been threatened that if we say no to this, no developer will ever touch New Lebanon again. We could also consider the alternative — we say yes to this, and New Lebanon becomes a playground for developers who know that they can make a buck off violating our zoning laws, DOH regulations and the community's wishes for its future.

Sincerely,
Tyler Morse