Dear Planning Board,

I love this town and have lived on West Street my whole life. I hope to get old here and I believe this town can grow in a thoughtful way if we work together. As a local farmer, there are no issues closer to my heart than affordable food and housing for our residents.

I do not believe that the Tilden project will offer these things to New Lebanon. The development plan of 41 apartments is far too large for a 3.2 acre parcel. All of the problems with this plan are because the development is too dense. Why is an incomplete hydrology report being trusted? Why is the Shaker Swamp being ignored? It is up to our planning board to listen to the residents of New Lebanon and make sure that developers and funders do not control the planning boards decisions. The developers made a miscalculation on their funding that is forcing the project to be too big, and move too quickly, and we should not pay the price.

We would all agree to a few apartments and a grocery store that is the size of the current Tilden plaza, that would be a perfect scale store for a town of this size and a great reuse of space. It could have a small park, seating areas and lots of room. It would probably be easier to fund and sustain, and pay for itself more quickly. And it would not risk sitting like a giant empty shadow over our town if it fails but could be easily repurposed.

So many communities are promised affordable housing and get giant developments that sit empty. Housing needs to fit the needs of the community and be developed with the community. We are being fed a vision of affordable housing, but the reality is that these 41 unit apartments will be too small and too expensive. I am a young resident of the town and I do not know anyone who would be able to pay for or willing to live in a small apartment for $1200. The median income of this town is skewed by weekenders and we have very few jobs here that are high enough paying to afford this amount of rent. Most of us do not live in a rural town to live in a tiny apartment with no yard above a loud grocery store.

As a farmer who has worked with the New Lebanon Farmer’s Market for years, I have experienced pressure from the store on local farmers not to sell our produce directly to customers. Farmstands and CSAs are a staple of rural life because it is more affordable for farmers when a middleman does not take a cut. Trying to shut down on-farm sales is not good for farmers, and in fact creates a monopoly, not a farmers’ market. I want to know how a store that already sees farmers as competition, while using their image to sell produce, will be able to support itself with this level of scaling up.

I want an affordable grocery store and I want housing. I believe it is possible to meet the needs of New Lebanon without the density and scale of the Tilden development. Even the town engineer suggests that the planning board not approve the development as it stands and the DOH has identified many problems with the plan. Maybe this is an opportunity to work with the state to get funding for a housing project that is an

appropriate scale for a small rural community. I respectfully ask the Planning Board to protect the health, safety, property, and quality of life of the residents it serves.

In Thanks,

Sarah Steadman