

THE WAUBEEKA ISSUE

By Sarah Gardner¹

This election is happening while our town is in conflict over the Waubeeka development proposals. Mike Deep has asked the board to rezone the 203-acre golf course for commercial use so he can build a resort there.

Everyone on the board supported the golf course and everyone supported the idea of a “country inn,” as Deep presented it. We worked hard to reach consensus around a bylaw that would allow him to build a development, but there was complete disagreement about what size development would be appropriate. It’s a beautiful and historic entrance to town. My instinct was to proceed with great caution but I support the golf course and I would support a country inn at Waubeeka if it would help make it viable.

The process was fraught and Deep kept changing the size and nature of the project: In January it allowed for timeshares on 40 acres; In February we voted to table the issue so that the developer could provide more specifics. The developer chose to by-pass the planning board with a citizens’ petition. The citizens petition has been amended multiple times. **The most recent version from the developer is for a 120-unit hotel plus a clubhouse, 200-seat banquet facility etc.**

This week the board passed an amendment for vote at Town Meeting, by a 3-2 vote, for a 50,000 - 60,000 sq.ft. development (the Orchards Hotel is 50,000 sq.ft.) that includes 67-107 acres in a conservation restriction. I, and two fellow board members (Liz McGowan and Ann McCallum), felt this was a fair compromise. **But the 2 board members who voted against this bylaw wanted to allow Deep to develop a much larger 10-acre resort that would include a 120 unit hotel, which is the size that chain hotels require.** I feel this was too large and that it would have an adverse effect on South Williamstown and our southern entrance to town. **I think Williamstown voters deserve to know the size and scale of a project before approving a major zoning change.**

Because of our position that an Orchard’s sized hotel is more appropriate for the site than a Jiminy Peak sized hotel, opponents in town are accusing us of crushing economic development in Williamstown. Again, I don't agree. **If you drive around the country you can see lots of examples of poor planning. When you drive into Williamstown you can feel a difference. This isn't by accident. It's because of carefully enforced zoning.** Our role on the Planning Board is to write the zoning bylaws that The Zoning Board enforces. Williamstown has always done careful planning, for the most part, keeping development in town and protecting our natural resources and farms. **It's upsetting that civil discourse around this issue has been supplanted by hostility and aggressive tactics. I have always remained polite and respectful.**

If elected to the Planning Board I intend to continue my work to promote smart growth: encouraging business development in our business and industrial districts. I believe this is in the long-term economic interest of our town. I appreciate your support for the 5-year seat on the Planning Board. We’ll work hard between now and Tuesday. Polls are open from 7am to 8pm. Thanks for reading this and thanks for your support,

Sarah

<https://www.facebook.com/SarahGardnerPlanningBoard/>

¹ -- Source: Email from Sarah Gardner, May 7, 2016.