



October 27, 2020

TO: Tarrytown Planning Board

As a follow-up to the comments made during Monday night's Planning Board Meeting, I would like to address the question that Joan asked regarding what people want. First of all, we want less of a dismissive, condescending attitude on Joan's part towards people who, in heartfelt terms, try to express how much the character of the village that attracted them to live here means to them. It is fairly safe to speculate that what most folks want, quite simply, is an approach to development that is inspired by and respectful of the scale, style, and design of our historic building stock. We want smart development driven by criteria that represent the community's interests, not oversized development driven by developers seeking to make a huge profit at the expense of the community's character. Communities in other places have accomplished this ... why can't we?

The Comprehensive Plan makes vague reference to density. However, neither village officials nor developers have made a compelling case for why Tarrytown needs more people to live here. Who among us walks or drives around the village thinking, "You know what this village needs? More people and more cars." Adding a few more renters to our mix will not do that much for local businesses. Meanwhile more people translate to more demands on our infrastructure, municipal services, schools, etc. along with more traffic congestion. What does help our local businesses is attracting people from outside the community to visit our community and spend their money here. New development that enhances the appeal of our historic village will do that. New buildings that look like they do not belong here will not.

You should not be surprised when people express dismay over proposals involving sixty-foot-tall blocks of generic buildings that wall off whole sections of the community from each other, obstruct views, and overwhelm the historically low rise profile of the village. You would get a much more positive reaction from people in response to a mixed-use proposal for 39-51 North Broadway that is more evocative of our historic Main Street and Broadway-to-Central Ave streetscapes. This would require the project to be designed to look like it is a series of individual buildings with varying roof heights of three to four stories and architectural features that connect them with the character of our building stock instead of clashing with it.

This vision may not be completely realistic, but it is not an unreasonable perspective among people who have chosen to live here as opposed to somewhere else. Do you really think a village-wide survey asking what people are looking for would produce results favoring the current 39-51 proposal over the above alternative, more modest concept? I would encourage you to commission such a survey as part of a public engagement process intended to address outstanding questions such as the following, which should be resolved so we can define new standards for development instead of allowing developers to do it for us. The Comprehensive Plan provides a conceptual framework, but the proverbial devil is in the details.

1. Does the population density of the Village really need to increase? If so, what order of magnitude would optimize the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts?
2. What is the optimal mix of more affordable housing/market-rate housing/commercial space/open space that would preserve the essential character of the Village in a more economically sustainable manner?
3. What approaches/incentives for encouraging development would be most likely to result in achievement of this optimal mix?
4. What plans should be initiated for mitigating the impact of growth already in progress (including Edge on Hudson) on infrastructure and traffic congestion in particular prior to issuing zoning variances and making changes in zoning regulations that would generate further population growth?
5. What plans for mitigating the impact of future growth on village infrastructure, public viewsheds, local schools, traffic congestion, parking availability, etc. should be initiated prior to issuing zoning variances and making changes in zoning regulations that would generate population growth?
6. What might the tipping point be in terms of beneficial vs harmful side effects of development in the riverfront/station area on Main Street businesses and how should that inform decisions regarding zoning variances and permanent changes to zoning regulations?
7. How tall do new buildings really need to be in order to provide an RROI (Reasonable Return on Investment) as opposed to an OROI (Obscene Return on Investment) to developers?
8. How sensitive to the architectural legacy of the Village can we expect new building designs to be in order to preserve the historic character of the Village while allowing for an RROI (Reasonable Return on Investment) as opposed to an OROI (Obscene Return on Investment)?

So, if you would like to know what we want, just put out a survey asking for input on the kinds of specific standards that should apply when considering new development proposals. Then you can evaluate proposals with confidence that you are well positioned to act in the best interests of the Tarrytown community.

Sincerely,

Howard Smith