Gregory Nobles

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To the Northport Village Council:

I am pleased that the Village has scheduled a public meeting to address the future use of the parcel of land abutting Seventh Street and North Shore Drive, and I am especially grateful for the many months of good work done by the Planning Commission to make this conversation possible. As it happens, I will be out of the country the day of the meeting, March 7, so I would like to submit my comments in writing, hoping they can be included in the meeting packet and acknowledged in the meeting itself.

I urge, above all, that the parcel be kept in its natural state, not subjected to development. It is important to recall at the outset that this particular piece of land was conveyed by the State of Michigan to the Village of Northport with the understanding that it remain a natural area. It is, for the most part, a combination of woodland and wetland that provides a valuable habitat for wildlife, a means of carbon capture by old-growth trees, and a natural filter for groundwater that flows directly into Northport Bay—quite an environmental asset for our small community.

I also point out that the proposal to sell the parcel for development did not originate as a call from the community, but as a plan devised in the Village Office with only financial, and not environmental, considerations in mind. I understand the motivation, largely to generate immediate revenue for the Village and to create four new sewer hookups to help increase the cash-flow for the NLTUA system. Such a plan, however, is both short-sighted and wrong-headed—too small to do much long-term good, but big enough to do permanent damage. The NLTUA issue is, of course, a problem that extends throughout the Village and the Township, but it cannot be effectively addressed, much less resolved, with four house lots on less than six acres of land.

I also understand that the sale and development of the land in question for house lots would help address another pressing concern in the area, attainable workforce housing. I have been an advocate for housing for low-income people for several decades, and I know quite well the challenges of finding suitable sites, not to mention the importance of acting quickly to secure them. The Seventh Street parcel is not such a site, certainly if it is divided into acre-plus lots for large and presumably expensive houses.

We have before us three proposed options: 1. To leave the parcel as is, in its undisturbed state, as a natural area for the community; 2. To keep the parcel in Village hands for possible development on the section of the parcel that faces Seventh Street, which has already been partially paved, and save the rest s natural area; and 3. To keep the part facing Seventh Street in Village hands and sell the four remaining lots for real estate development.

As I hope I have made clear, I think the third option is a grave mistake, a decision that most of us will quickly, and deeply, regret. I consider the second option viable, assuming that the Village makes wise but limited use of the already-paved section, perhaps for small units of attainable workforce housing. I much prefer the first, preserving a small but environmentally valuable piece of land as an accessible asset for the community.

I will add, in closing, that I have enormous respect for the long-term Northporters who built this community over time, some going as far back as five generations. I have equal respect, however, for the five generations yet to come, and I would urge that we leave this land as a legacy to them.

With best regards,

Gregory Nobles