Outlook

Northport - Seventh Street Parcel

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Date Thu 9/18/2025 1:31 AM
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Dear Mr. Ottenwess and Village Council Members:

Consistent with my public comments at Village Council meetings and work sessions, I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed housing development on the approximate 1.25-acre parcel facing Seventh Street and along North Shore Drive. I urge you to reject any proposal for development on this property and, with assistance from Mr. Newell's tree committee, allow this parcel to return to its natural state.

I am grateful that, at the September 4 work session, Mr. Ottenwess asked this Council for time to outline the process for considering the Seventh Street proposal and it is not on your September 18 agenda. I know Mr. Ottenwess also met with many of my neighbors a few days ago and listened to what they had to say. Respectfully, I hope you will come to recognize that any development on this Seventh Street parcel would be unwise.

In an era in which clean air, clean water, and land conservation regulations are being unilaterally repealed at the national level, you have a rare opportunity to preserve this uniquely situated corner for present and future generations. After a great deal of study and consideration (and extensive work by the Planning Commission), this Council's conclusion that the adjacent forested wetlands should be preserved means they will continue to function as a habitat for wildlife, a repository for rainfall and snow melt, a filter of water that drains into Northport Bay, and a purifier of the air we breathe.

When that decision was made in March 2024, the Council directed the Village Manager to explore options for this 1.25-acre parcel – all options not just housing. I see no evidence that other options were presented or considered. Yet at the September 4 work session, you were presented with a housing plan that exceeded the perimeters of the parcel, allowing for 2 six-unit buildings with parking during phase 1 and eventually, 46 proposed units and 105 parking spaces through phase 3 (consuming property that was supposed to be

preserved in its natural state). This came as a shock to me (and likely many others who live and have homes along this corridor). Apparently, this was not a valid plan and was substituted by another drawing that was not in the work session materials when I accessed them the day before the meeting. I have since reviewed that plan, which provides for 15 units, 30 parking spaces, 30 carports, and 4 guest spaces (among other appurtenances) on a parcel that invades the protected area and appears to well exceed the 1.25-acre parcel under consideration. As far as I could tell, there was no evidence at the September 4 work session that the end result of the Seventh Street plan would be affordable. Unlike the West Street housing proposal presented by Mr. Mawby, which included a frank discussion of the categories of costs that would make its development impractical for affordable housing, I do not recall any information regarding costs and affordability on the Seventh Street parcel.

I am bewildered by the Homestretch plans and wonder if this is what the Council is considering for this parcel or whether the lines of communication have been seriously off-kilter (and if so, how that organization could have gotten so far afield). I don't think anyone could argue that such proposals will not have an effect on the surrounding ecosystem or on the tranquility that beckons so many residents to take their walks down North Shore. Of course, the character of the neighborhood would change.

I have struggled with the somewhat perplexing question as to why the Council would proceed in such an advanced fashion with the Seventh Street housing proposal without first taking a robust look at ***all*** Village-owned properties and the possibilities they present for development. A typical decision-tree strategy would reasonably consider the options before zeroing in on any one parcel. Why not here?

We all now know that the Township is considering a housing plan on the site of the current recycling center property, and, as I understand it, there are other Township properties that might be suitable for housing. Given these circumstances, is it really necessary to rush to "solve" the housing issue on a small environmentally sensitive parcel when the Township's plans could provide sufficient housing to make the necessary difference (which this Seventh Street parcel would not)?

The future master plan denotes this property as conservation/quasi-public or something along these lines. As I mentioned during the public comment portion of the July 17 Village Council meeting, the Leelanau County Land Bank Authority's Policies and Procedures identify green space or conservation as a goal of the Authority with respect to obtaining and transferring properties. (Paragraph G f, page 8). Mr. Ottenwess's June 27, 2025 memo to the Village Council states: "The County Land Bank Authority operates a program whereby they acquire properties owned by local units of government *to conduct site remediation* and development preparation activities and then return ownership to the local unit of government or a developer. *The LBA funds site cleanup* and development preparation activities under this program in partnership with third-party consulting firms" (emphasis added). If this means that the Land Bank Authority would remediate and return

the property without charge to the Village for preservation as a green space, why not investigate the possibility of doing this?

Lots of questions, I know, but I am trying to be transparent in my thinking, which I hope is also a goal for the Council.

Sincerely,

Joanne Geha Swanson