

April 15, 2026

Northport Village manager, Jered Ottenwess and Village Council members via email

315 E. 7th Street History, recorded public hearings and public opinion

I have written regarding my thoughts on the plans presented in March for the Village owned property located at 315 E. 7th Street. I hope you will choose to keep the property natural. If you choose a housing plan, 2-3 houses, not a minimum of 7-9, are the best fit with surrounding homes. Please delay narrowing your selection until there is a public hearing and there is a lower density rendering as a potential choice.

There have been significant changes to the proposed project since a public hearing was held in April of 2024- over two years ago. The major differences noted are the land split on the parcel, proposal to donate land for affordable housing (as opposed to a sale for increasing revenue), give possible tax and other incentives to the builder, and a significant increase in density from what has been presented to the public in the past. Without a methodical sampling, we do not know where public sentiment for the current plan stands. For these reasons, I am writing to discourage Village Council members from choosing a single best draft plan for 315 7th Street at the April meeting this week. The VC has stated they want public input. To do this, a public hearing should be held PRIOR to narrowing selection from the renderings developed last month.

I have heard VC members on several occasions, administration and a few members of the community claim that the public is in support of housing on 7th. I did a thorough review of the history of publicly recorded opinions going back to 2018 after the reverter clause on the deed was removed and find public sentiment consistently against using the 7th Street parcel for housing. In the past, the few in favor of housing hoped for increased Village revenue and monetary relief for the cost of sewer. Some supported 2-4 homes on 7th for affordable housing. The remainder of this letter is a summary of recorded public letters and comments about housing on E. 7th. It does not address housing on High Street.

The first public hearing was held (September 2018) to create a public task force led by Gerald Schatz with the goal of determining the best use for 7th. In Gerald's written reports sent to the VC in November of 2018, he indicated a general lack of public interest. Gerald wrote "Opinion: Not methodically sampled." He reported a small number of people he interviewed had a range of opinions; some for a park, and some immediate neighbors who wanted to SELL lots for private housing to reduce sewer costs or have more of a neighborhood. He reported all were unaware of the site's wetlands situation and its status under the Village's recently adopted master plan and future land use map which he indicated did not align with development.

As an environmental expert, he recommended that “our community and environmental values and master-plan commitments—including natural beauty and protection of our waters--are best served by keeping this site (7th Street parcel) as a natural area, an educational park with the barest minimum required amenities and minimal required maintenance. This site is one of our last remaining open spaces and is the only public access to the conservation area to its north. ...” He noted we should not try to schedule public hearings when many residents are away. His extensive reports were apparently ignored by the VC at that time (Personal conversation with Gerald Schatz) who favored financial return over environmental values.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/0a37gzput7hoyw4yofxlr/AGCRTSwX8PHp6ifiah7BpxA/REPORT%20FOR%207TH%20ST%20BY%20GERALD%20SCHATZ.pdf?rlkey=duom3se2g6mi98vndhbbvaybd&st=06ut021m&dl=0> . (Letters can be read in full in the 7th Street Dropbox.)

The move toward developing private housing was underway even as the citizen’s task force was starting (FOIA from the State of Michigan dated October 10, 2017, and personal conversation with VC members). After the public discovered the Maude Court, there was a backlash. Many letters and comments were written and found in the 7th Street folder

(<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/0a37gzput7hoyw4yofxlr/AH0MJT44AzcLS7KlroaCoM?rlkey=duom3se2g6mi98vndhbbvaybd&e=1&st=qc4icknj&dl=0>;

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/fo66rbhuykz6d61j7oemr/AJXulunmx7p-s_d62XqpswM?rlkey=zq7luryin8ev9y3c51fxlqyx5&e=1&st=o5bue9ry&dl=0 .) Between

2021-2023 meeting comments recorded show 12 were opposed to housing and three in favor. Issues mentioned at that time: 8 noted lack of transparency with 5 asking for more public input. 4 wanted recreation. 9 were in favor of prioritizing environment and habitat. Those who supported housing: 2 noted monetary and sewer benefits of the 4 proposed lots. In written comments 15 were opposed to housing and 2 wanted to develop for public use mentioning low density housing of possibly 4-6 units. Public recorded opinions were against housing and for environmental preservation in the 2021 to 2023 Maude Court era.

(<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/0a37gzput7hoyw4yofxlr/AOfRV9Am1xnuiXMeJ38wGg4/7th%20Street%20Correspondence%20Addendum.pdf?rlkey=duom3se2g6mi98vndhbbvaybd&st=5lk8ayz5&dl=0>).

Two years ago, the planning commission was praised for its thorough work in delineating possible best uses for 7th. Under Jim Dyer’s leadership, a public hearing was held in March of 2024 (<https://youtube.com/@villageofnorthport172?si=lyWRnvhHkaXJTNo4>). Public sentiment recorded keeping the 6-acre parcel “green” (seven people). There were 2-3 people who were in support of housing, but at a much lower density than being considered now. Two “habitat” homes or a four-unit apartment were mentioned. One wanted to sell the property for 4 lots (Maude Court) for increased revenue, and one believed selling and

building homes would reduce sewer costs. Written correspondence again showed a significant majority against housing preferring keeping it in a natural state with a few coming out in support of affordable housing on 7th.

After this public meeting, Village planning and administration were developing a concept for affordable housing at Buster Dame Park. This was acknowledged, and still is by many in the VC, as the best location for housing. Appraisals on Buster Dame and E. 7th were obtained. The plan was to swap the park designation from Buster Dame to E. 7th. Once again, after the public became aware, Buster Dame housing was abandoned due to public resistance. The parcel had been surveyed for a split during this process. The Village has since, split the parcel, designating the largest portion for preservation/park.

As other affordable housing options in better locations were eliminated, 7th and High Street became the focus despite environmental sensitivity and continuing public resistance. Feedback in 2026 is hard to determine. Many letters still want the 1.2 acres to remain natural with others expressing a desire for housing.

I would like you to consider one last piece of recorded public opinion. A survey was completed in May of 2024 as part of drafting the new Master Plan. Results can be found in the June 2024 planning meeting packet. It is helpful to inform VC members of public priorities and bears on decisions on 7th Street and the proposed zoning changes being voted on this week.

First, question 4 asked residents to rank three issues that are most important. The top choice from the list: “Natural resources (wetlands, woodlands, water)” selected by 19 people, “village character/atmosphere” 18 people, and local consumer services and shopping by 7 people. One rationale for affordable housing has been to support local businesses in need of employees. It is interesting to note that local employment was selected as a top priority by only two people with most concerned with natural resources and character that make Northport so great.

Question 6 asked residents to rank three options for housing that are important to the Village. Attainable/affordable housing was selected as number 1 for 37 residents, 22 chose single family housing, 9 chose apartments, 3 chose mobile homes on residential lots and assisted living. There were no first choices for condominiums, mobile homes or duplexes. Clearly affordable housing is important, neither location nor how to achieve that goal was specified. Single family housing was the preferred type of housing.

Another question asked residents about the population of the Village. Results were mixed, with 63 wanting it to increase and 71 wanting it to stay the same. 6 wanted a decrease in

the population of Northport. There should be a cautious approach to the amount of housing encouraged through tax support and other government incentives.

On question number 10. Residents were asked to rank qualities most important to the future of the Village. 19 chose protection of forests and natural resources as first, 10 chose locally owned businesses and village-maintained parks, 9 chose safe walking and biking, 6 chose public safety, 4 chose historical homes and structures, 2 chose village maintained recreational opportunities, including bike and hiking trails. It is interesting that environmental protection of forests and natural resources was the top choice again.

We are at a very different place than we were two years ago when the last public hearing was held. Claiming the public is in support of affordable housing on E. 7th is not supported by recorded evidence. Public sentiment has clearly been keeping 7th Street in a natural state. Since the history and information available is extensive spanning many years, I may have missed things. Please let me know. A lower density plan should be rendered for E. 7th Street. Offering housing only at these higher densities for our VC to choose from is not in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood or with publicly conveyed information in the past. The process for developing affordable housing along with the financial implications should be made clear to the public who have in the past wanted increased revenues through property sales and tax collection as well as sewer relief. Showing renderings is only part of the story.

If this Village Council respects and wants a broad public sampling of public opinion on the latest development plans for 7th, it is time for another public hearing before narrowing selection. We should not schedule public hearings when many homeowners are away.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Vickie Slot