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PUBLIC COMMENT

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To: Town of Amenia Planning Board.

Ref: Silo Ridge Resort Application for Site Plan Review and Subdivision Approval.

This correspondence represents my additional written comments related to the Silo Ridge Resort development application currently before the Amenia Planning Board. I ask that these comments in their entirety be included in the official comment record of the application.

Throughout the various stages/iterations of this project application, I have contributed earlier written comment letters, and spoken at various public hearings expressing concerns for certain components of this project. However, to be honest, I don't believe my comments, or those offered by many residents, also those from local and regional agencies have even been, or are currently being seriously considered, nor is there much hope that those supposedly representing our town and residents are giving the application the review it deserves.

If successful, this project will result in tremendous change, and there is little to suggest that anything other than lip service is being given to the entire review, or seriously considering the greater good of the community and inherent risks.

The professionals engaged on all sides have offered valuable consultation for project revisions and amendments, some of which has been ignored or avoided in the latest responses, When a good number of the Town's elected and appointed officials declare their unquestioning and ebullient support for the project, prior to it receiving a full review one can only conclude that they made up their minds before considering the consequences, reviewing professional consultation or hearing the opinions of Town residents. Further, it seems clear that our Town and Planning Boards did not deem it necessary to actually do their jobs and make necessary informed decisions based on more cautious review, on behalf of our community, as they were elected and appointed to do.

This is their obligation - not their whim - and in shirking their responsibilities they have miserably failed out Town, and/or exposed it to avoidable risk.

This is a very large and complex application, which takes much work to understand. It is clear that those leading the review have employed a policy of inviting minimal input, while shutting down anything they find threatening to their own preconceived determinations about the benefit of this project.

This is sad but unfortunately quite true and to the overall detriment of our small Town. Many minds were made up well before any applications were submitted, and a hard look has not been taken. The few Board members who publicly questioned project specifics have been discouraged.

The majority of the review process has been conducted by a Planning Board choosing to meet in private sessions whenever possible, at the request of their Chairman, who has admonished Board members to not speak publicly of their concerns and has lorded over this process dictating which, if any, legitimate technical review comments would be considered by the Board. These clandestine and autocratic proclamations are in the best case in direct opposition to the policy of 'open government' and in the worst case – patently illegal.

There have been more Planning Board meetings closed to public attendance, than those open to the public. And as no records are kept from such private meetings, no member of this Town can ascertain what was discussed or decided.

The Planning Board Chairperson and various members of that Board and the Town Board have maintained a sense of entitlement, which quite honestly is tantamount to nothing less than a pandering to the Applicant's wishes.

Categorizing legitimate questions from residents as 'holding up the Applicant', directly contradicts the essential job of these appointed Board members, which is to protect the interests of ALL Town residents not just the wealthy elite, who are promised to reside in a gated residential community, where current residents are not welcome.

Our Town has been sold out to the highest bidder and the Boards are not protecting us, while deferring and pandering at every opportunity, to a developer and their intended financial benefits.

Many residents have spoken out regarding their concerns concerning various components of the Silo Ridge Application materials.

Many of these comments were made available at www.ameniainformer.com

The Millbrook Independent (www.themillbrookindependent.com) has followed the process closely throughout, and raised many legitimate concerns. Most recently, www.ruralintelligence.com published a very balanced article, pointing out potential project benefits, but also questioning some of the projections.

On the other hand there has been slightly more skewed press coverage in the Poughkeepsie Journal, the Millerton News, and the New York Times, all choosing to offer unquestioning presentations of the project benefits. This coverage generally offered little more than a list of unproven projected benefits taken directly from the developer's own press releases.

Coincidentally, this coverage also appeared at the same time as press events and multiple postcard mailings were sent town-wide by Silo Ridge.

As this application nears the finishing line and the Planning Board races toward issuing blanket approvals and countless waivers, it is pretty clear that previously provided comments have been lumped together, and have generally been responded to by Silo Ridge with little consideration by the Planning Board of their content or change to project components. I see little change within the latest review unless it suited the developers, and more so, none reflecting comments from others.

Specific concerns repeatedly expressed by residents, the Dutchess Land Conservancy, Dutchess County Department of Planning, the NYSDEC and other state and local agencies include: **six (6)**-estate home sites located on higher steep elevations of the site, all six of which still remain in the proposed site plan. It does beg the question, how can the Planning Board issue a waiver for these homes claiming that there is no other viable location within approximately 800 acres of entirely unencumbered land.

The Planning Board is poised to approve many such waivers, which side-step our zoning law, without a legitimate and legally defensible position to support their determination. Such capricious decision making leaves our Town wide open to a lawsuit – and you know who pays to defend that lawsuit? We do; the current residents of the Town of Amenia. So perhaps, more people should consider that these legal fees will be borne by us, when and if advocating blind support of the irrational decision making of our elected and appointed officials

There has been a general public cheerleading support for this project, generated greatly by the glossy publicity and unsubstantiated claims by the developer. If their claims for tax revenue and jobs for Amenia are true, we will all be happily living in Utopia. Of course our elected and appointed leaders are publicly in favor of the promise of these benefits. They need to get reelected. However, what happens when benefits do not materialize as predicted and this project ends up costing us money?

We are also the beneficiaries of a failed promise, and a landscape forever altered.

Our leaders have failed us by not representing our residents, or serving as stewards of our municipal fiscal health, our environment, and local character.

When you sell your soul to the devil, you can't be surprised when you get burned.

This proposed development bears no relationship in design or function to Amenia, but introduces an artificial imposed version of 'country lifestyle' behind its own security-gated perimeter.

I might hope that at this late stage, this project application receives some changes that would make it more palatable, and more likely to blend into the region, or even to be successful, with less potential long-term financial risk to taxpayers. It could easily be a project that is more environmentally sensitive, compliant and respectful of zoning laws, or more openly reviewed. But will it?

A significant minimal step in protecting taxpayers would be to professionally and independently set the bonding values protocol for the project now, and not to simply wait to see what the developer wants to offer at a later date. This is common-sense insurance for taxpayers, and should not be a negotiable donation from the developer!

Nor should any other part of the project be exempted from full public SEQRA review now, and left to local building inspectors to interpret future complex issues.

Although all signs point otherwise, I remain hopeful that some changes will be made, and I ask that everyone will remember these current discussions and cautions if the project fails to meet the developer's touted targets, or advertised benefits.

Yours sincerely,
Andy Durbridge.