

Norm Fontaine, Chair
& the Planning Board
Amenia Town Hall
4988 Route 22
Amenia NY 12501

06 May 15

Silo Ridge Testimony from Public Hearing

Dear Mr. Fontaine and Planning Board members,

As noted last night, I appreciate the countless unpaid hours you have all devoted to reviewing this complex project. As an architect, I can't speak to the significant legal or environmental issues brought by Silo Ridge, so will restrict my comments to the visual impacts. I've lived here now twelve years and have come to love the specific character of the buildings and rural landscape. That is what draws new people here.

While the Discovery Land Company offers a quality product, they have not paid much attention to what makes Amenia unique. Their clubhouse and multifamily homes are massive - each much bigger and taller than any barn or commercial building in town. The architectural precedents shown in their brochures are from all over America, but specifically NOT from Dutchess County or the Hudson Valley. So there remain design problems of both scale and style, which contradict Amenia's Comprehensive Plan.

Much of the site plan is carefully considered, but as development moves away from the Village Green and climbs the steep slopes, our Zoning Code (intended to insure everyone gets treated evenly) gets tossed out the window. The first waiver requested (for minimum size & maximum slope of lots) involves EIGHTY parcels. It means more than a third of Silo homes need zoning exemptions to get built. If you allow that precedent, how will the PB or ZBA ever get future applicants to follow the Code?!

I've reviewed topographic sections proposed for the Estate Homes, and they involve major re-grading including series of 8'h retaining walls and extensive vegetation loss. The applicant last year hung white tarps between (leafed-out) trees to indicate the visibility of a mere three (out of 26) houses. These were VERY prominent from across much of the valley (and along Old Route 22). After those trees have been cleared for roads & foundations - we'll see two lines of new houses, rather than a wall of green. I am surprised the application has gotten this far without proper wood frame and orange netting mockups, to show folks the changes in store here and at Delavergne.

No one that I know wants to stop Silo Ridge. This project promises Amenia economic development, with much-needed jobs and taxes. But we can have it without forever giving away the natural beauty of our Town! It simply requires the Planning Board to be tougher negotiating on our behalf, which is your responsibility. You all ought to be asking more from this developer, rather than trusting their good intentions.

Ask the Town Assessor to verify their promised tax numbers, and that the sum in lieu of payment you negotiated can actually build 21 affordable housing units. Demand instead that they contribute the \$1.3m to fund a town sewer as originally agreed. Hire a risk expert to make absolutely sure DL/SRV are adequately bonded to restore the property if needed. Require them to remove the nine most visible estate homes, and a large proportion of the vineyard cottages, as proposed by the Town's paid consultants. Do NOT allow the owners to bypass this huge number of laws – laws enacted for our protection - simply to conveniently move the process forward.

Thank you,

Leo J. Blackman
ZBA Chairperson (interim)
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