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In response to the Times Herald Record article, "Chester buying property to keep the Hasidic out"

Deputy Supervisor: Robert Valentine

Board Members: Cindy Smith, Ryan Wensley, Brendan Medican

The Chester Town Council Members disavow the anti-Semitic, bigoted and insensitive statements quoted in the Times Herald record article. Having spoken to members of the Chester Town Board, I must go on record to unequivocally state that neither I nor any colleagues that serve on the Town Board have ever, nor will ever, support or condone the type of rhetoric stated in the Times Herald Record article last week. This headline is untrue, inaccurate, and inflammatory.

This article fails to acknowledge that land acquisitions are a result of The Town of Chester Comprehensive Plan that began in 2013 and culminated in the 2015 adoption. The Comprehensive Plan had not been updated since 2003 and like many other towns, we try and update within a 10-year timeframe. Completion of the Comprehensive Plan gave rise to one of the common elements of rural communities - "The Preservation Plan." This plan acted on the preservation criteria such as scenic vistas, farmland preservation, ridgeline preservation, historical and artistic property, wetland and endangered species areas to name a few.

The funding mechanism for the Preservation Plan was the enactment of PDR Policy, including a community preservation transfer tax, much like our neighboring town Warwick has instituted. This tax levy would provide a secure flow of revenue to pay debt on land purchases or development rights, bonded out over time.

It was not "fear" that is driving the Town Boards decision, but rather a deliberative planning process. We identified key parcels that Chester should protect to preserve unique characteristics. This is nothing new for the Town of

Chester. In 2004, we purchased “Knapp’s View” for \$4.1 million, setting precedence for open space purchases. During these planning stages, there was never any discussion about who would be living in Chester. Let’s be clear The Greens of Chester was approved long ago - a dormant project without a developer at that time.

The Ward System of Government was an idea brought to the town board by Preserve Chester, a group of Chester residents. This was not an endeavor of the town or any of its board members. Preserve Chester brought forth this notion clearly stating that it was to provide equal representation in all areas of the town. When it was clear that a petition to bring the Ward System to a special election would easily be provided, the town board voted unanimously to place this on the November ballot.

In reference to the subject land parcels that served as part of last week’s article in the Times Herald Record, these specific properties have been discussed and identified many times over the years in our planning process.

The Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center has been reviewed extensively, with a great deal of time spent to be certain this establishment can be preserved and continues serving the public. The action plan that was presented at our meeting provided a vision of what this will become. It will be an asset to Chester and will have the ability to finance its own existence.

26 Acres on Route 94 has also been discussed for some time. Its naturally flat topography, easy access and proximity to the Village of Chester make it a key location for either a public building or park. Many ideas have come through public comment; such as a community pool, running track and fitness trail. All great plans for consideration by the Town.

The Laroe Property in Sugar Loaf is thought by many to be a property of scenic significance and an entryway into Chester. Few disagree on its preservation value. This property would most likely be turned over to the PDR once a funding mechanism is in place.

Other properties have been listed as candidates for the PDR. There has been no contact with any property owners other than the properties cited above. Although, we hope they will be open to the idea of preservation for future generations.

The Town Board of Chester feels last week's article undermines the efforts and hard work performed by its board members, committee members, and resident volunteers. Their efforts to preserve the rural character of The Town of Chester have gone unrecognized. We that presently serve as the elected representatives for the Town of Chester take our responsibilities very seriously and would never look at excluding any single person or group of persons from enjoying the benefits of Chester. Any and every property owner in our town has the right to build or develop their property according to the rules and regulations set forth in the town code.

Robert Valentine

Councilman/Deputy Supervisor