



NEWTON CONSERVATORS, INC.

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THE CONSERVATORS -- NEW STAND ON PUD?

Conservators listened to opposing views on the desirability of permitting PUD developments in Newton at the Board meeting on October 9. Robert Brandwein and Adele Fleet of Harbridge House, an economic consulting firm in Boston, presented their analysis which showed that PUD is not economically justifiable; and Charles Thomas, Director of Planning for the City of Newton, presented the Planning Department's viewpoint.

PUD, or Planned Unit Development, is a kind of development which allows a builder to cluster the dwelling units on one portion of a piece of land at higher-than-normal density in exchange for leaving open space around them.

PUD is not allowed under current newton ordinances, but the Planning Department intends to submit an amendment permitting this kind of development to the Aldermen. Mr. Thomas thought it would not be until next spring, at the earliest, that the issue would come up.

The Conservators had previously voted on January 20, 1971 to support the PUD concept and had urged that the zoning ordinances be amended to permit it. Now, however, particularly after the Harbridge House report, many members and directors are having second thoughts.

The thrust of the Harbridge House report is that any large-scale residential development--such as the proposal to allow PUD's on Newton's golf courses--would cost the City more to service and maintain than it would pay in taxes. Newton, says Brandwein, would be far better off to somehow keep the golf courses as open land.

Harbridge House decided to study the PUD type of development rather than more conventional types because they "didn't want to stack the deck for open space preservation." Since PUD is the least expensive kind of development for a city to service, they reasoned, it would be the most likely to receive a "favorable" economic analysis. But even so, the study shows, *the City would lose money on such a development.*

Although a number of other studies conducted in other towns in the United States have reached similar conclusions, the Harbridge House report is particularly interesting because

* one of the major costs of servicing a growing community is the construction of new schools, and Newton's declining school population and consequent surplus of classrooms would tend to tip the balance in favor of development;

* Newton is a relatively affluent community, and it is the wealthier communities with high property taxes in which new developments tend to "pay their own way."

Given these two factors, it has been said that 'if development were economically justifiable anywhere, it would be in Newton.'

The Harbridge House report defined three categories of cost associated with PUD development:

ECONOMIC: the direct costs of the facilities and manpower needed to provide services to the new residents--extra policemen, a new fire engine, etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL: the cost to the community of the pollution--particularly air pollution--that would be created by the residents of a new development. It is possible to calculate how much air pollution is generated by an average person (through automobile use, burning heating oil, etc.), and to assign a dollar cost to that pollution. That cost is born by us--the present residents of Newton--in the form of increased cleaning and laundry costs, more frequent colds and other minor respiratory ailments, and the increased chances of contracting lung cancer, emphysema, bronchitis, or some other serious disease.

PERSONAL-SOCIAL-PSYCHIC: this category includes such things as the increases in the number of traffic accidents and crimes which occur when a community grows. Brandwein and Fleet indicated that their study had just briefly touched on this category, and that they were doing further work in this area.

In all these categories, they said, their estimates were "generally pretty conservative," giving the benefit of the doubt to the development side of the balance.

Mr. Thomas countered the Harbridge House report by saying that the Planning Department was conducting a study of PUD which was "much wider in scope" than the study done by Harbridge House, and which included factors other than just economics. He admitted, however, that neither he nor the Planning Department had "reviewed in detail" the Harbridge House report.

Major points raised by Mr. Thomas were:

1.) *Economics is not the only basis for decision-making.* That is, open space preservation of an area might be desirable even if it were not economically justifiable, and, conversely, development of an area might possibly be desirable even if it were not economically justifiable.

2.) *A policy of no growth would create "trauma" in the housing market,* with higher rents and prices resulting from an increased demand for the same supply of houses. This would be hardest on poor and middle income families. Mr. Thomas did say, however, that even developing all of the golf courses in Newton would not affect the housing market appreciably, and that what was really needed was a unified policy for the entire metropolitan area.

3.) *The Planning Department is investigating some other highly sophisticated development types,* which, Mr. Thomas said, "might make PUD studies academic." He mentioned the "transferable development rights (TDR)" concept, which drew considerable interest from a number of Conservator members present.

Under this system, a property owner owns not only his land, but a certain number of density credits. Parcels of land are zoned for different densities, but each owner receives the same number of density credits per acre. If a person owns land in an open space or low-density zone, he can sell all or part of his "density credits" to someone in a high-density zone.

This way, profits are spread more equitably, and one person does not make a windfall profit because his land is zoned high-density, and another take a loss because the community decides his land should remain undeveloped.

A discussion followed the presentations by Harbridge House and Mr. Thomas. Among the points raised were:

* The "open space" in a PUD is not necessarily either natural or public. Paved tennis courts or swimming pools for the exclusive use of the subdivision's residents would be counted as open space.

* Conservator President Susan Wilkes noted that "if a developer has a piece of land that is 60% wetland, he can use all of that wetland as

his open space requirement and thus build at a greater density on his remaining land than he would have been able to do before planned unit development, given the wetlands protection act."

The Board decided to postpone voting on whether or not to modify the previous Conservator position favoring PUD until the November 13 Board meeting. Whichever position the Conservators take, the issue will probably be before the Aldermen sometime next spring. In the meantime, Brandwein and Fleet say that they are "expanding and refining" their arguments.

AUTUMN IN THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

BY: Sharon F. Francis
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As shadows lengthen and the air grows chill in fall, you will be squeezing the last hours of productivity out of the sunshine and your garden. Plants under an insulating blanket of mulch will survive the first breath of cold, whereas those which have been left exposed will shrivel and lose potential yield.

The first frost is almost always a teaser. It comes several weeks before cold weather really sets in. Those plants which you protected from frost will continue to give a rich harvest in the newfound warmth of Indian Summer. Some gardeners invert bushel baskets, boxes, or "tents" of newspaper over plants on the eve when a frost is expected. Four stakes can be driven around a plant and then draped with burlap or sheets. One of the best methods of protecting plants from freezing is to give them several thorough sprinklings in the evening before a frost. Then, the following morning, if frost is evident, they should be sprinkled again before the sun hits them and damages their tissues.

A fine mist of water, sprayed all night, can keep plants safe down to 20° F. The sprayed water gives off heat as it freezes, and this heat, absorbed by the plants, protects them.

Early frosts will be worse in open fields than near trees. They will cling to the ground, thus bush beans may be damaged while pole beans flourish unscathed. If frost arrives unexpectedly and your plants were not protected, damage may still be averted in the morning by sprinkling or covering them to shield them from the sun's early rays.

Pumpkins and winter squashes should be kept on their vines until after the first frost, and then brought inside and stored where it is dry at a temperature of between 50 and 60°.

Brussel sprouts are a good after-frost crop. Their flavor improves when the weather turns cold. If they are brought to the basement in a box of moist earth shortly before the ground freezes, the sprouts will continue to mature.

Carrots and beets are best stored right where they grew, in the ground, with a very heavy layer of mulch on top. It is useful to mark their location with stakes for winter digging.

Late fall, when cold is irrevocable, is the best time to prepare the garden for the next spring's use. Stalks, vines, and other plant residue should either be added to the compost pile, or shredded and put back directly into the soil. Old mulch and any other composted material you can find should be rototilled or dug into the soil.

If you have not already done so, it would be well to invest in an inexpensive soil test kit, available at garden stores. Test the garden soil, and add the correct amounts of lime, phosphate, potash, and nitrogen, all available in organic forms.

Adding these nutrients in the fall means that they will be well worked into the soil by spring. One of the best soil improvers is manure, and the best time to apply it is in the fall so it will have the winter to decompose and mix with the soil. When the weather is cold enough, even fresh manure can be added to the garden without damaging perennial plants or causing odor problems. Riding stables are usually glad to let gardeners take all the manure they want.

This winter, as you enjoy your frozen beans and late pumpkin pie, you can add up what has been saved on your family's food bill. Undoubtedly, you will be dreaming of a larger garden, or new crops, for next year. Remember that seed orders should be placed no later than February 1. Between now and then, you can try lettuce under growlights and tiny tomatoes in a pot on your windowsill.

THE NEW ENGLAND WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

Are you trying to think of a good Christmas gift for someone who loves the out-of-doors? One appropriate idea might be to give a membership in the New England Wildflower Society. Members are entitled to free admission to the 'Garden in the Woods,' the largest collection of native plants growing in natural surroundings in the Northeast. The Garden is located in Framingham. Members also receive a newsletter and a 10% discount on publications, and are eligible to go on Society field trips. Annual membership is \$7.50. For information, write the Society at Hemenway Road, Framingham, Massachusetts 01701.

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