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Leave the Hills Alone

Home/Editorial

Developer Glenn Russo should call off his relentless effort to develop housing in the Oswegatchie Hills in East Lyme and work with conservationists who want to buy the property and preserve it as open space.

Mr. Russo's Landmark Development Group has been trying since 2001 to win approval for the condominium project that would include affordable housing. In challenging the town's refusal to approve his plan, Mr. Russo points to a state law intended to assist developers overcome zoning regulations that exclude affordable housing.

Last week, for the second time, a Superior Court judge rejected Mr. Russo's appeal. Judge Eliot Prescott correctly found that the state law intended to encourage affordable housing was trumped by the need to protect a "unique and important environmental setting."

Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the end of the matter. Mr. Russo has two other state court appeals pending and has also filed a civil rights lawsuit in federal court alleging the town is discriminating against poor and minority families by not allowing the affordable housing project to move forward.

The evidence simply does not support such claims. All the evidence suggests instead that the public's interest is to preserve these vital woodlands overlooking the Niantic River. The town, state and private groups have worked together to begin buying up open space in the Oswegatchie Hills and want to acquire the property from Mr. Russo, should he abandon his plans.

There is surely a need in this region for more housing that working families can afford, but there are plenty of places to build it that make far more sense than in the Oswegatchie Hills.

East Lyme