

'Friends' opposes pollution of Niantic River, not affordable housing

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Mary Biekert's recent article about sewer capacity and proposed development in the Oswegatchie Hills ("**East Lyme officials: Recent court ruling strains town's dwindling sewage capacity** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20181130/east-lyme-officials-recent-court-ruling-strains-towns-dwindling-sewage-capacity>)," Nov. 30) provided an informative overview of the longstanding battle over the last remaining undeveloped acreage in the Hills adjacent to the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.

It is the highlighted comment of the developer Glenn Russo, president of Landmark Development Group, that prompts my response.

Russo states, "Let's not kid ourselves. East Lyme does not want affordable housing in their town. They have been fighting me tooth and nail for 17 years." Indeed, the "fight" has been going on since 2001. In that time Russo has submitted six different proposals, ranging in size up to 1,720 units. The current application calls for 840 units on 123 acres of the parcel, of which less than a third would be "affordable." Plans for the remaining 113 acres, bordering directly on the Niantic River, remain unknown.

I want to state emphatically that the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills are not opposed to affordable housing in East Lyme. I am also quite sure the town is not opposed, as it has approved other applications for such housing. The Friends are simply opposed to development of any kind on such environmentally fragile land.

The harmful effect development would have on the Oswegatchie Hills has been recognized by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). In its communique to the East Lyme Zoning Commission May 20, 2015, DEEP states, "the proposal would allow for inappropriately dense development (for 840 units and 1,767 parking spaces) ... in an area incapable of supporting intensive development without potentially significant environmental consequences."

The DEEP letter further states "the subject site is characterized by both shallow depth-to-bedrock and steep slopes, which ... would necessitate significant alteration. Such alteration of this natural area would create significant stormwater runoff that would adversely impact coastal resources and water quality. Such development could also cause potential sedimentation and erosion, nitrogen loading, and impacts on SAVs (submerged aquatic vegetation), fin fish, shellfish, and wildlife on the site, along Latimer Brook, the Niantic River, and ultimately Long Island Sound."

We should listen to these environmental experts. Because of the irreparable harm Russo's proposed development would cause to both forest and river, the Friends have stayed the course for 17 years and will continue to work tirelessly to oppose development and to acquire the last unprotected acres of the Oswegatchie Hills.

Kristin Lambert is past president and a current board member of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.