

Statement of Richard Brummel to East Hills Village Board 5-23-12
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Well here we are. This meeting was proposed in January or February and passed by the board to consider a moratorium on construction and tree removals, asked for by residents in Norgate prevent the destruction at 37 laurel lane. Now that property has been demolished, and two huge trees are gone, the developer has cut a hole from lot line to lot line and now a neighbors 75 foot tree has been so damaged it is going to be removed by the builder. On the neighboring property. so much for the moratorium.

You trustees now have a petition I gathered over two weekends that covers excess tree removals and overbuilding. About 7 dozen signatures I gathered over four weekend days going door to door throughout the village.

After the tree hearing last month it seemed like no one cared. Now you know differently. 8 PM meetings are not the way to gauge community concern

I have since learned that this is no new issue – you passed a law in 2005 that promised to fix this issue – rampant demolition and overdevelopment. It obviously did not work – and you know it.

I have reviewed building codes in Great Neck Estates, Munsey Park, Mamaroneck and here. There is not much difference I could see as a layman. This tells me that developers are probably rampaging everywhere, which is no surprise. And that a change needs to come from within.

On Laurel lane we see all the backyards disappear on new building. Obviously 20 or 30 feet of backyard is really not significant. The original builder knew that – they built large yards that I grew up in, and they need to be preserved as much as possible.

These building issues cut across income levels in east Hills. All segments of the community – Norgate, Strathmore, Fairfield Park, Country Estates, Nob Hill, Lakeville Estates, etc. -- everywhere people are unhappy about the overbuilding, the lack of setbacks, and the devastation of our tree canopy that results from building.

The Architectural Review Board is not doing the job it was intended to do. It is not preserving neighborhood character, not protecting neighbors from intrusion and offensive bulk, not preventing trees from being destroyed.

When I went to a professional independent architect with the Laurel Lane designs, he wrote an extensive critique of the design based on the East Hills code – from blank walls to inappropriate cosmetic features to failure to respect the natural contours of the lot. But the ARB would not even hold a proper publicly announced hearing to review that information. Incidentally a judge found that there was sufficient basis to grant an injunction, which as you know I then failed to enforce due to my own lapse in nerve.

But the Zoning Board of Appeals is also ineffective to protect neighborhoods – when the firehouse issue was up, they did not require studies, did not required a state environmental review, they did not protect the residential character, and it was done in the middle of the night until I notified neighbors and the papers.

The common denominator in all this is you – you the village leaders have not been requiring better performance or showing concern about what is going on – despite obvious and freely expressed concern by MANY neighbors and residents. All I had to do was ring people's doorbells to hear the frustration and dissatisfaction. I a stranger. In East Hills you must surely have known these issues were not fixed.

In fact I met with <Mayor Koblenz in 2009 about a rebuilt neighboring house next to my own, which tower and looms over the property line where it used to be a demure harmonious modest presence for 45 years before, even with the addition of a family room in the 70'so.

But the Mayor dismissed all the complaints, as I am sure he has done with others and as he did with the firehouse.

A vast number of people in East Hills apparently do not trust this village government and they do not look up to it. They tolerate it until something better comes along. Why is that? Because of issues like this overbuilding.

Incidentally I cannot understand how the housing stock is turning over to million dollar homes and the tax rate stays constant but the revenues do not increase and the budget stays about constant. As with other complex financial arrangements of which we have seen recent denouements, it seems peculiar at best.

As you have the tree and building laws re-written the village residents want a transparent process, a professional neutral process, and most of all a successful process.

We also need far better administration of the laws. We should not have approved excavation plans suddenly destroying many trees and even neighboring ones. That is the result of poor administration. Your boards need to be opened up to a transparent appointment process and new blood needs to be added each term. Term limits are needed. People on these boards become cliquish, ingrained, overly familiar, or overly convinced of their own infallibility.

There are many issues that come together on this crisis in land-use policy the village is facing – transparency, professionalism, honesty, candor, accountability, and oversight.

I seriously question whether this government is up to the challenge.

(This text was delivered almost verbatim, but some points were then expanded extemporeously.)