

My name is Alex Casertano.

I moved with my parents to the town of Washington 28 years ago. My current address, 20 Short Road, has been my, my wife and our children's permanent residence for just under a year.

We have a profound appreciation for the natural beauty and the open spaces that define the town of Washington's landscape. It is why we chose to live here. We want those spaces to be maintained, protected, and cared for. We do not want the town of Washington to be transformed, but we do believe it needs to evolve and respond to impacts that are inevitable.

We do not see the aforementioned desires as being inherently oppositional, as many have argued in this discussion around reviewing the comprehensive plan to consider hospitality uses. Rather, we feel that the town's special committee's task is critical to both the preservation of the open spaces and the economic future of Village of Millbrook and the people that rely on it for their income or their commercial needs. We feel it is important to recognize the people who need jobs, who need customers and who need the chance to succeed, NOT just to scrape by.

Comments made during the public forum that the Village of Millbrook and the greater town are perfect, doesn't need to more business, and is crowded on a weekend are just false. We have been living here full time since March 2020, and regret

that the reality we have observed is that Millbrook is empty most of the time even with the increase of a full time population from the pandemic.

Unfortunately, this discussion reveals a tale of two towns. Wealthy landowners -predominantly weekenders and often not in the workforce themselves - who live outside of the village, and locals who live in the village and need to make a living. The former seems to be content to see Main Street shuttered in the name of protecting the open spaces, and are making simplistic, uninformed, and short-sighted assessments of what lies ahead for the town.

Our concern is that large estates will go up for sale in the rural areas in the town in the coming years. As has happened with Migdale, we fear these properties will be too expensive to attract a residential buy and too expensive to maintain. Ultimately the structures and the land will fall into disrepair, as we have seen with private and institutional structures in previous years, the price will be driven down, and they will eventually be subdivided and developed by groups with deep enough pockets to get what they want.

In response to the comments of folks who express their desire for hospitality to exist only in or very close to the village, we would argue that many tourists looking to visit the Hudson Valley and experience the rural beauty do not want to stay in a village. They want to stay in a bucolic environment that feels like a departure from towns or cities from which they are

visiting, and it would behoove the Town to consider how to attract these visitors in a responsible way and in the right environment. This community offers many amenities and activities unique to a rural setting – hunting, fishing, equestrian – and should be conscious of that advantage over other areas in the Hudson Valley seeing additional tourism interests in recent years.

In response to the folks who have sighted the lack of labor as an argument against allowing hospitality projects, this only points out a failure to promote enough responsible and sustainable development of housing to allow for a workforce to support the economic infrastructure of the area. We applaud efforts in the previous plan to allow for accessory dwelling units in certain areas and feel that the town has made steps toward prioritizing additional housing, but the fact that the optimum levels have not been achieved should not be an argument against new and positive economic drivers in the area.

We want there to be economic opportunity in the village, we want for to be more to do outside of the private clubs, and we want places to stay for visiting friends and family members.

We want there to be fewer empty buildings on main street with more businesses that truly contribute to the community, culture, and economy outside of real estate.

We want people to want to come to Millbrook. We think if you have a town with a main street that is full of shops that people

want to visit, it's a good thing. It means the town is healthy, it's thriving. There is opportunity. If we want folks to visit the town and take part in the recreation that is available here in the town of Washington, they will need places to stay. Claims that existing lodging – namely the Cotton Wood – and potential new lodging in the village alone ought to suffice are disingenuous or uninformed. Several appealing lodging options on the west side of the Hudson have recently been developed that provide lodging, dining, and additional recreation opportunities as well as employment opportunities, and they sit on substantial acreage and boast bucolic views and outdoor activities. Roadside motels and a small inn will not be able to compete, or frankly provide the caliber of lodging necessary to support the wealth of events that already draw visitors to Millbrook. It just doesn't make sense that people would claim otherwise.

We urge the committee to acknowledge that the town is in full control of any projects that it decides to allow because of the change to the plan. Concerns over economic benefits, infrastructure demands, and ecological impacts can all be addressed by the proper studies. We urge the committee to address the degree and scale of conjecture and fear mongering that have become a part of this discussion. We feel that the town can provide proper oversight of limited proposed developments in rural areas in ways that residential, institutional, not-for-profit and religious developments avoid, and can take an active role in steering the future of the area in a direction that benefits us all. Thank you.