



Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition

May 20, 2020

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are writing in our role as co-chairs of the Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition (OCAHC), which is comprised of a couple dozen representatives of local housing nonprofits and allied organizations. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate our firm commitment to ensuring that the former American Legion property be developed to include a meaningful amount of affordable housing, including units serving households earning less than 30% AMI.

We recently became aware of a petition to Council from the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission asking that the entire 36-acre site be designated for use solely as a park. We have serious concerns with this proposal both from a process and policy perspective.

On process: Is it commonly accepted practice for Town-appointed commissions or advisory boards to petition the Council outside of a planned input process? This is not something we've heard of happening regularly, and it seems to deviate from the spirit by which these bodies typically carry out their responsibilities, which is to deliberate and add to established public processes by gathering community input rather than advocating on its own. We hope that if such advocacy is considered appropriate that these expectations will be made clear to the Housing Advisory Board and other bodies so the input Council receives is more balanced going forward.

On policy: OCAHC has always felt that dedicating the full 36 acres to open space and park land would be a major mistake. The Town paid \$7.9 million plus transactional costs to acquire the American Legion property, a valuation based on the property's potential to be developed, and did so largely to stop a multifamily developer from moving forward with a proposal that was not well liked by many citizens. While OCAHC certainly thinks the Town should look closely at preserving some of the land for parks, there is more than enough land to meet these interests while also creating much-needed affordable housing and leaving open the potential of market rate development (housing or commercial) to help the Town achieve other community goals and recoup some of its investment.

Recommendation: We appreciate that the Town has engaged in a community process in the past but do not think it broadly reflected potential site opportunities and diverse perspectives. The Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition encourages the Town to re-start its public process by forming a new committee to explore *design and financial* scenarios of how the American Legion could be put to broad public use to support multiple community goals including parks, housing, economic development, and more. OCAHC is happy to name a representative to participate in any such process.

Thank you for your continued attention to this absolutely critical public project,

Jennifer Player

Delores Bailey

OCAHC Co-Chair

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