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To: Chairman St. Vil
Ledyard Town Council

Concerns Regarding Reappointment of Nate Woody to the PZC

Before I begin, it is important to know that I like and respect Nate Woody. Nate is intelligent, a natural leader, honest, and talented, and he cares deeply about housing and the economic development of our town. His reappointment will have a significant long-term impact.

My concerns, based on his statements and voting record, are that the types and magnitude of development Nate supports are not consistent with the *preservation of the rural residential character of our town and the protection of its quality of life* that many residents prefer. I believe that Nate will support regulations and vote in a manner that will accelerate the *urbanization* of our town, which is why I prepared this letter.

I attended the “*meet the candidates*” events on October 5 and October 14. It was clear during both events that almost everyone who is a candidate for the council believes it is more important to protect the *rural residential character and quality of life* in our town than it is to allow large multi-hundred-unit five- and six-story multifamily developments, such as those on Howard Street in New London and the 304-unit Trident Square apartments just west of the Chinese restaurant on Rt 12 in Groton.

Most residents believe that such massive complexes may be appropriate for cities such as New London and Groton, but not for Ledyard. You should know, before you vote, that Nate supports zoning regulations that allow equivalent multi-hundred-unit single-structure developments, by right, in Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center.

Nate was the chairman of the PZC when it was responsible for the last update of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), which the Council endorsed. Although the goals in the POCD are not binding, they are important because they must be *considered* whenever zoning regulations are amended.

The POCD contains several conflicting goals, which is not unusual. For example, page 10 includes a goal that the “... Regulations must carefully *protect the character of Ledyard* while providing the flexibility needed to continue *to attract new residents* and new businesses.”

The council, before it votes on his reappointment, should ask Nate how the town should *attract a significant number of new residents* and, at the same time, *protect the character* of Ledyard.

It is a fair question to ask Nate how he intends to balance the conflicting goals in the POCD or the types of changes that he plans to propose for its approaching update.

Page 16 in the POCD includes a goal to “... *guide the residential growth and development* of Ledyard and *ensure high standards of design and quality of life*.”

Page 16 also includes a goal to “... *encourage a diversity of housing types and ensure an adequate supply of housing at affordable cost*,” which, if not done carefully, will conflict with POCD's *quality of life* goals.

Page 70 includes a goal to “... *maintain property values ...* .”

However, Nate's voting record shows that he places a much higher priority on the economic development and housing goals in the POCD than on its goals to protect *the rural residential character of Ledyard and the maintenance of property values*.

On December 12, 2019, during a special meeting of the PZC, as its chairman, Nate stated that “*the need for affordable housing is a no-brainer*.” At every opportunity, Nate voted for regulations intended to provide housing to “*attract new residents*” but has never suggested or supported regulations intended to *protect the character of Ledyard, quality of life, or property values*.

For example, Nate, while chairman of the PZC, supported modifying a stipulated agreement requested by the owner of Stonegate Village to reduce its 5/12 roof pitch requirement to the less costly and more common 3/12 roof pitch *in return for accelerating development of the community*. Nate voted to approve the requested change, even though Stonegate's residents submitted a petition urging the PZC to retain the requirement; the change would not increase the total number of homes in the development, and there was no obligation on the PZC to amend the agreement.

Nate knew, or should have known, that the change was unnecessary, unfair, and would bifurcate the community into two quality levels that would harm its overall desirability and the value of its homes. The change would also, in the long term, reduce tax revenues to the town.

Page 17 in the POCD includes a goal to “Adopt regulations to *allow by-right development of multifamily and infill housing*.”

Nate presumably used this “goal” to justify supporting the current zoning regulations that *allow multifamily developments, as-of-right*, in Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center that are equivalent to the multi-hundred-unit developments on Howard Street in New London and the 304-unit 4, 5, & 6-story Triton Square Apartments west of the Chinese restaurant on Rt 12 in Groton. As a result, even though such developments would conflict with the *protection of the rural residential quality of life* goals in the POCD, the current regulations allow them, as of right, without a public hearing, in Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center.

Unless a special permit is required, the PZC does not have the authority to impose conditions of approval to protect property values, health, safety, convenience, or natural resources; or to consider traffic impact, require the development to be in harmony with the existing neighborhood, or if the development will impact nearby property values, impact historic features of the neighborhood, or cause impairment of natural resources. Landscaping requirements cannot be enforced for uses unless a special permit is required. A special permit should be mandatory for such developments. You should ask Nate why he is opposed to requiring special permits for developments that accelerate the urbanization of our town.

To better achieve the *protection of the rural residential character and quality of life* goals in the POCD, I recently proposed a regulation change *that included requiring a special permit for multifamily and mixed-use developments* in Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center, which is currently required for multifamily developments in residential and transition districts. A special permit requirement is necessary to “*ensure high standards of design.*”

Nate, as expected, voted to retain the existing regulations that permit such massive multifamily developments *as-of-right*, which means it continues to be impossible for the PZC to *ensure high standards of design*. Nate's decision to allow massive developments, *as-of-right*, will also accelerate the *urbanization* of Ledyard, which most residents oppose.

I anticipated that Nate would be opposed to my proposed amendments and requested that he recuse himself from the proceedings. My concern was that he would prioritize the housing goals in the POCD above its *protection of the rural residential character, protection of property values, quality of life, and high standards of design* goals, which were the objectives of my application.

My concerns were confirmed. As expected, Nate did not recuse himself. Instead, he led an effort to continue to allow massive *as-of-right* multifamily developments in Gale Ferry and Ledyard Center, even though similar developments in residential and transition districts have always required a special permit.

In addition to requiring a special permit, my application included a proposal to reduce the height limit of multifamily developments from 65' (six stories) to 35' (three stories) in Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center. 35' is essentially the same limit provided in the zoning regulations that were in effect from 1963 to about 2019, which have worked well and are consistent with Ledyard's rural residential character and quality of life.

Nate voted to reduce the height limit to 50', which still permits massive five-story multifamily and mixed-use developments as of right. He did not explain why he believes 50' is acceptable, but 35' is not.

He also argued and voted against requiring a special permit for such developments. He explained that the special permit *standards* for multifamily developments were inadequate, even though a special permit, with the same standards, is currently required for multifamily developments in residential and transition districts. Multifamily multi-hundred-unit five-story buildings, especially if allowed as-of-right, are still inconsistent with the POCD goal to *protect the rural residential character of Ledyard*.

Page 38 (in the POCD) includes a goal to "*Encourage traditional village development*" in the Ledyard Center Development District and [the] Gales Ferry Development District.

However, presumably in the interest of encouraging economic development and more affordable housing, Nate supported the deletion of the Gales Ferry Village District and its corresponding Design Guidelines from the zoning regulations.

He also discounted the Design Guidelines when Gales Ferry was a Village District when the PZC approved the CITGO gas station on Route 12. He also failed to enforce the Design Guidelines for the CITGO Station on Rt 117 when Ledyard Center was also a designated Village District. (Fortunately, during the public hearing, the applicant voluntarily agreed to comply with the design guidelines.) Nate should be asked, before you vote on his reappointment, if he supports reinstating the Village District designation and the corresponding Design Guidelines for Gales Ferry, and why.

Page 23 of the Affordable Housing Plan shows the majority of residents who responded to its survey prefer single-family homes on large lots, followed by single-family homes on small lots, followed by townhome developments consisting of 12 to 36 units. Few, if any, members of the public expressed a desire for massive multi-hundred-unit four-, five-, and six-story multifamily developments or massive affordable housing complexes. The council should ask Nate why he ignored the public preferences in the Affordable Housing Plan for the development of housing in our town.

I would not be surprised if Nate also chooses to ignore the preferences of those surveyed for the Rt 12 Corridor Study, who reported that although significant mixed-use developments are acceptable, they do not want massive four-, five-, or six-story multi-hundred-unit multifamily developments in Gales Ferry.

Based on his statements and voting record, Nate is pro-development and, because he does not support a requirement for special permits, does not appear to care about *ensuring high standards of design* that are necessary for *protecting the rural residential character* of our town. He should be asked about this before you vote on his reappointment.

I believe Nate's reappointment will accelerate the *urbanization* of our town, which would conflict with the statements many of you expressed during the recent "*meet the candidates*" events.

Please delay your vote. Interview Nate first, before voting, to provide him with a fair opportunity to respond to the above concerns before you reappoint him to the PZC.

Respectfully,

Eric Treaster