

EX#210

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HISTORY MATTERS

Land Use Department

ID: I am Anne Roberts-Pierson of 4 Anderson Drive, Gales Ferry, CT ... Nov. 21, 2024 or a Thurs. in Dec.

Could we put Exhibit #143-2 up on the big screen please ?

A CITIZEN'S COMMENTS REGARDING: **LEDYARD P/Z APPLICATION, PZ#24-8SUP and PZ#24-9CAM** GFI

Thank you all for your service on Ledyard's Planning and Zoning Commission and for allowing me to comment on this proposed quarrying application. I understand that the responsibilities and charges of this commission are large and that training and resources given you are small. Your volunteer positions are not for the faint of heart. Your inquiring minds and focused attention to this application, the outcome of which will affect our entire community, forever, is very much appreciated.

Whether or not this application complies with Ledyard zoning regulations is all that matters here. Your decision to approve or deny should be based on that. Do not be distracted by extraneous declarations of what this project may or may not do for our town. Quarrying is not an approved use in our zoning regulations. This is a quarrying application and it should be denied.

Public commentary has been extensive during these public hearing sessions regarding our zoning regulations and many valid concerns involving air quality, traffic safety, home value depreciation, noise, vibration from blasting, environmental degradation, and threats to wildlife, but a big concern for me is the contextual destruction of this rare historic resource related to the War of 1812. While the proposed quarry design will not destroy the entire mountain, the integrity of the context of the historic fort site will be lost. If the landscape around the fort site is destroyed, removed, and no longer exists, then the context of the historic resource is missing which makes interpreting the site to future generations of Americans very difficult. A quarry would do irreparable harm to the site which one can never get back.

From a regulatory perspective, the goals of Ledyard's Plan of Conservation & Development do include **protection of historic resources** and minimization of encroachment and impacts of development to various building types, stone walls, other stone structures, **cemeteries**, and **archaeological sites**. This document even goes so far as to say that the Ledyard Historic District Commission should seek additional federal grants to continue the process of nominating properties to the National Register and undertake an inventory of historical archaeological sites.

Section 9.9 of Ledyard Zoning regulations concerns *ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER, AND HISTORIC AND LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION 9.9.1 General Provisions states: The overall character of the proposed site layout and the architectural character of proposed structures shall be designed, to the extent feasible, to protect property values in the neighborhood and the Town; preserve the existing historic character in terms of scale, density, architecture, and materials used in construction of all site features; protect the existing historic patterns of arrangement of structural and natural features, including circulation patterns; and preserve public access to scenic views and vistas and to water courses.*

This quarrying application does not comply with this zoning regulation and should be denied.

Our zoning regulations go on to say: *A. Historical and Archaeological Sites: When a site or portion of a site has been identified by the State Historic Preservation Officer, or the State Archaeologist, as historically significant, the applicant shall identify on the plans the nature and location of the resource and shall indicate what measures are being taken to protect such resource.*

The State Historic Preservation Office agrees with the Heritage Consultant report regarding the important significance of this mountain. Indeed, this mountain is a very rare and significant historic archaeological site.

We now know this because of 2 significant archeological investigative studies that the applicant commissioned. I would like to thank GFI for doing so. GFI Community Liaison Mike Cherry told me months ago that copies of these 2 studies once completed would be donated to both of our Ledyard libraries. I hope that is still going to happen as the library staff informs me now that they have not yet received their copies. I just wish that GFI's take on these surveys, and very sophisticated professional archeological testing and evaluation efforts was more of a wholehearted embrace of the findings within our community and a desire to showcase what a historical gem we have here rather than the current focus which is seeing the mountain as a commodity. I focus attention on the application's Exhibit 38, Phase II National Register of Historic Places Testing & Evaluation of the Fort Decatur Archaeological Site in Ledyard, CT prepared by Heritage Consultants of Berlin CT that was designed to supplement previous work (their Phase 1A/1B Cultural Resources Assessment) at Fort Decatur, as well as to investigate other areas on Mount Decatur that may have contained artifacts and activities related to the War of 1812.

David George of Heritage Consultants presented this Phase II report in person to the Commission during the September 26, 2024 public hearing session for this P/Z application. The results of the investigation confirmed that the Fort Decatur site and the mountain it was built on is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for all four elements of significance, **unlike any other site in CT!**

Exhibit 45 from Preservation Connecticut, Exhibit 95 from the Archeological Conservancy and Exhibit 124 from the American Battlefield Trust all advocate for preservation of Mount Decatur due to its rarity and **national** significance.

Exhibit 95 from Archeological Conservancy goes on to say that GFI has agreed to donate 3.44 acres of their property which contains the main portion of the site of Fort Decatur to them for permanent preservation. While this is a start and a step in the right preservation direction, they go on to tell us about some of those inappropriate distractions I mentioned earlier which you as a Commission **cannot** consider in your deliberations, such as how additional acreage will be donated by GFI for preservation among other preservation-minded stipulations including preparation of a nomination of the site to National Register of Historic Places **IF** they, GFI, are able to secure approvals for proceeding with their quarry plan thru a permit being granted to them by this P/Z Commission. It is more than inappropriate for GFI to make such claims in an attempt to sway your decision to approve or deny this quarry application. Does this application comply with our zoning regulations? That is the question. Forget the distractions.

Not only is Mount Decatur a historic naval defensive site, the GFI property also holds Allyn's Point historic cemetery which contains the mortal remains of 3 of the defenders of Fort Griswold killed in the Battle of Groton Heights in September 1781; Capt. Simeon Allyn, and brothers Benadam Allyn, age 20 and Belton Allyn, age 17. I recently got permission on Veteran's Day to revisit this peaceful place of final rest for these young patriots and 100 ancestors of Thomas Allyn. A pall of sadness swept over me for the loss of such young lives but also for the potential loss of historic Mount Decatur which one looks up at directly from this small historic graveyard.

Speaking of context, let me also say that southeastern Connecticut is particularly known for at least a couple of things; one being big stones and large ledges thanks to the Ice Age, as well as a long and proud tradition of maritime naval defense, from the age of grand handcrafted wooden sailing ships on the high seas to present day stealthy hi-tech nuclear submarines that patrol the deep seas. We have made and still make vessels to defend our nation. This area is known as the Submarine Capitol of the World after all. Not only do we craft such vessels, we man them with real people; you and me, as it were, the collective us, young, strong, dedicated, and brave sea warriors, just like the brilliant young naval officer Commodore Stephen Decatur, for whom Mount Decatur is named. We are defenders now, and always, just as Decatur and his sailors were during the War of 1812 at Fort Decatur. Ours is a courageous maritime legacy of an emerging nation. Many, many of the people in this room tonight and listening and participating via Zoom, and their families, including myself and my own, serve today and have served this nation proudly in a military capacity, on, under, or beside the deep blue sea.

I share this to provide you with a brief context for this proposal involving Mount Decatur which is to deconstruct and demolish through a quarrying operation most of this historic mountain, Mount Decatur, with its panoramic view of the Thames River. It is part of the story of an emerging nation, part of its history, part of a much larger whole and should be left INTACT because important NATIONAL maritime history happened here. Remember, Ledyard zoning regulations, section 9.9. How can the story of Gales Ferry's involvement in the War of 1812 be told without all of Mount Decatur? It is why the Belton Allyn Society of the Children of the American Revolution of Gales Ferry, had a commemorative boulder inscribed and an unveiling ceremony held in May 1898; so future generations of Americans through the ages would remember even if the Fort site itself ever rotted away. A photo from that ceremony atop the mountain is on the screen in front of you tonight. I will share with the Commission members now a copy of the May 18, 1898 Day newspaper article, [Exhibit 143-3](#), that tells us all about that ceremony in great detail including the names of every local adult and child participating that day. Most of these adults and children went on to enjoy long lives here in Gales Ferry and became part of the fabric of who we are today. Many of their graves can be found here in Gales Ferry, along with present day families linked directly to them, as well as many of their existing historic homes. Our streets are named after them as well, Hurlbutt and Allyn being common names here. History matters.

America's 250th anniversary will soon be upon us in 2026. Will historic Mount Decatur still stand tall at that time, its **national** legacy honored appropriately and continuing to reveal priceless historical information for future generations, OR will Mount Decatur be plundered, ground into aggregate and cast down to the cold dark depths of the sea perhaps for off-shore wind towers to rise or will it be thrown under the bus as it becomes a commodity in road construction projects?

Demolition of almost half of Mount Decatur, a local, state, and national historic landscape, degrades the historic character and integrity of the whole site including the historic vista of the Thames River. **This application should be denied** as it does not comply with many of our zoning regulations as demonstrated by well-presented public testimony over many weeks.

Thank you.

