

Good evening, Councilors.

I did voice my strong support for the draft ethics ordinance at the prior Administrative Committee meeting, and I've submitted written comments for the record with them. Tonight, I'd like to use my three-minute comment to focus on a separate issue—not because ethics aren't important, but because of the mounting urgency of a matter that has received too little attention in our local discourse: the reinstatement of Village District protections and design guidelines for Ledyard Center and Gales Ferry.

I understand that the Town Council does not have direct jurisdiction over land-use regulations. However, you do appoint the members of the Planning and Zoning Commission. And when zoning regulations are changed in ways that fundamentally alter the future of the town—such as allowing by-right approvals and 50-foot building heights without meaningful public input—those decisions become political issues, whether the Commission recognizes them as such or not.

These changes carry real consequences. They risk fueling public opposition not only to large-scale development, but also to related initiatives like sewer expansion and infrastructure investment, because residents feel they have lost any meaningful voice in shaping what their community becomes.

Last summer, the town commissioned an independent study of the Route 12 Development Corridor—an area that, only a few years ago, was designated the Gales Ferry Design District. Both the initial public outreach and the follow-up survey responses from that study show there is little local support for the type of large-scale, high-density multifamily development now allowed by our zoning regulations and being contemplated by developers almost to the exclusion of any other use. Instead, residents consistently called for sidewalks, pedestrian safety, beautification, preservation of green space, modest commercial growth, and village-scale improvements—the very qualities that have in fact already been implemented successfully in Ledyard Center.

I'm here tonight to begin building political support within this Council to reinstate these protections. We had Village Districts. They were removed. And residents want them back—not to stop growth, but to guide it responsibly. **Village Districts** and **special-permit review** are **proven tools** that help manage building scale and design, balance competing interests, and support growth that benefits residents, businesses, developers, and the town's tax base alike.

Ledyard is currently vulnerable to development on a scale this town has never experienced before, and that vulnerability is the direct result of recent zoning changes made without meaningful public input. Furthermore, by-right approvals remove the public from the process entirely—and once projects are approved, there is no going back.

Finally, Gales Ferry's historic village center remains an underutilized economic and cultural asset. Its waterfront setting, historic character, and ties to Mount Decatur and the War of 1812 give it unique potential—if it is properly protected and planned thoughtfully.

I urge the Town Council to treat this not as a technical zoning issue, but as a political responsibility to reflect the clearly expressed will of the public and to support a more deliberate and balanced path forward for the future of the town.

In closing, I again ask the Council to formally consider separating the Planning and Zoning Commission into two distinct and separate commissions so that they can function as intended, as several of you indicated openness to during the last election cycle. I recognize budget season is approaching, but I hope a subcommittee or working group could examine this issue in a timely way.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to the town.

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