

Fun Time

Bay Street lays out a season of comedy. **pg B1**

Bees Take D

Bridgehampton wins county championship. **pg 10**

Drip Guitars

Instruments inspired by Pollock paintings. **pg B3**

EDITORIAL

Charmless

When we were first pitched John Leonard's proposal for his "country market" at the Harbor Heights Service Station over two years ago, the idea was somewhat appealing. A cozy blue building that promised easier milk runs for the East Hampton side of Sag Harbor did not seem like something that could threaten the charm we fervently protect living in this village. The original rendering even had an almost rustic look.

But the devil is in the details, and frankly, as the details on this project emerged, it has become clear this proposal is not about adding a simple country market to the Harbor Heights property. It is a large-scale re-development involving the expansion of the gas station itself, the addition of a massive canopy structure – perhaps one of the more worrisome aspects of the plan in our view – and a store that we believe is three times larger than the village code says it should be.

And it shouldn't be.

This is not simply the addition of a country market to help buoy a neighborhood gas and service station. If approved, this project will take a pre-existing, non-conforming use and expand it into something more in line with what we see at a Montauk Highway gas station.

And the truth is Hampton Street is not Montauk Highway. A development of this scale is not appropriate smack in the middle of a residential neighborhood, particularly at one of the gateways to our historic district.

We have daily, weekly, monthly and annual conversations about what sets Sag Harbor apart from other communities; how we work together to protect it, and preserve it without totally halting the natural evolution of our village. We actually believe in John Leonard's right to redevelop his property and to do so with a country market. The provision that allows a convenience store was written into law for a very specific reason, and that was the understanding one of the two gas stations in Sag Harbor – one for now – may want to pursue this kind of amenity.

What was also written into that code were very strict regulations on what was required in order to access that right. This includes requirements for landscaping, buffers and setbacks, meant to protect the community from the obvious likelihood the addition of a market on a gas station property would increase traffic, noise and potentially could change the character of a neighborhood.

Blanketing that store in greenery is a way to blunt its impact and this application has not gone far enough to accomplish that.

The size of the store was also restricted in the code and purposefully so. Instead of complying with a 600 square-foot limitation, we have been presented with a building that wall-to-wall is over 1,800 square-feet. And that is before the basement.

The argument for the size of the building? Without over 970 square-feet of display sales space, the store will not be able to carry a full offering of products traditionally found in a convenience store.

Clearly, this should not be the community's burden to bear.

If approved at 600 square feet, we imagine a lot more business would be driven to Harbor Heights for even the most basic array of products. That the full line of Doritos and Hershey products may not be available is not something we believe is worthy of a variance.

This is an application that seeks to stretch so far beyond the code that unless it is drastically scaled back we feel it would be unconscionable for the zoning board to approve it. The building is too big, the canopy obtrusive and the protections for neighbors are simply not great enough.

Is it viable to have a country store at Harbor Heights? Absolutely. But a project of this scale not only flies in the face of the village code, it flies in the face of all of us who have worked so hard to make sure Sag Harbor doesn't become another in-place.