

A response to Empower Pownal and the town plan

I have read the Pownal town plan thoroughly and found it an excellent vision for Pownal's future. Nowhere in its discussion of trailer homes in the flood plain and affordable housing options did I find the words "forced relocation," or their equivalent. It does talk about possible relocation in purposebuilt affordable housing. Perhaps the planning board might add the words "voluntary" or "negotiated" to the phrase to reassure people. It seems many people still have perceptions of "affordable housing" going back to the 70s and 80s, when many housing projects were poorly planned and went downhill. As I read it, the planning board intends to include substantial and ongoing input from residents in any such housing. When done right and when residents have a strong voice, today's affordable housing can create very attractive communities.

I commend the Planning Commission for doing their job, planning ahead. As I understand the way FEMA works today, any time there is a major flood, like Irene or Harvey, FEMA requires residents to raise their housing above the latest flood level before they will provide grants to rebuild. This costs money, and often costs towns. Since Pownal made an investment to put a sewer system in the parks near the old dog track, any further investments will of course be carefully studied.

But as we learned from hurricanes Maria, Harvey, Irma, Katrina, Irene etc., flooding is a fact of life all over America. The question we must ask ourselves is, do we plan for it in advance with commonsense solutions, or do we simply rely on government to fix it up afterward?

Finally, with regards to the fear I've heard expressed around town about "Big Wind." I have spoken to several people in the alternative energy field who tell me Pownal would not be a suitable site for wind turbines. Also, residents should understand that the Public Service Board is under a new mandate stating that they will give special deference to towns in negotiations over any proposals by outside interests if the town has a town plan. To vote down this well thought out town plan would be to shoot ourselves in the foot. The plan states clearly that only certain spaces will be eligible for such projects. In today's political climate, it is so counterproductive to stir up unwarranted fear and rage. Please let our very intelligent select persons and planners do their job without obstruction.

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