

Martha's Vineyard Commission  
The Stone Building  
33 New York Avenue  
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

January 27, 2014

Re: Bar/Bowling Alley on Uncas Avenue

Dear Commission Members:

We are the homeowners at 12 Hiawatha Avenue. We have attended both the neighborhood meeting held by the developers in early January, and the Cottage City Historic Commission meeting one week later. After listening to the plans at both of these meetings, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed sports bar/bowling alley on Uncas Avenue.

It is not the bowling we are opposed to. It is the liquor. We have written to the Planning Board to request that this building site be rezoned to something less than B-1 since it is located directly next door to residential homes in an otherwise historically residential neighborhood.

This project is being promoted as a "family bowling center," but with a full liquor license, a oblong 20 seat bar, plus seven to nine tables for additional eating and drinking, it sounds more like a sports bar - with bowling being the "PR" component that gets the full liquor license approved. We are particularly concerned since the new plans show a reduction in bowling lanes (from the original 12 or 14 lanes down to 10 lanes), but no reduction in bar seating. This is now primarily a bar with a bowling alley, not the reverse.

We believe a full liquor establishment would invite nightly rowdy drunken behavior in our otherwise quiet neighborhood, reduce our ability to park in front of our home where parking is already tight, reduce the value of our home and our neighbors' homes, and be detrimental to the Copeland District's goal of quaint and charming neighborhoods surrounding parks. Specifically, the proposed structure will distract from the beauty of Hiawatha Park, which is directly across the street, and its contribution to the African American Heritage Trail.

The developers said publicly at the meetings we attended that the sports bar/bowling alley will close at 10:30 p.m. on weekdays and 11:30 p.m. on weekends. We read in documents later that these are the times for "last call" - not closing times. "Last call" and "closing" are two very different things. Why does a "family bowling center" need to be open so late anyway?

The Oak Bluffs Police Department is already stretched at the liquor establishments at the other end of town. Will existing resources allow them to adequately police what could turn out to be a new nightly trouble spot in the middle of a quiet neighborhood at the other part of town? Will Oak Bluffs Police be able to respond to what will most likely be an influx of complaint calls from surrounding residential homes?

We are concerned about late night noise from car doors slamming and rowdy bar patrons who've had too much to drink at the full liquor bar wandering through our neighborhood. We also fear bright lights from a commercial property shining on our yard at night.

We are also concerned about future use of this building if the bowling alley is not successful, but a full liquor license has been approved. What then? And what if the bowling alley is so successful the developers need to expand? Why not put it in a location where this will be possible?

There is also the problem of parking. There will be increased congestion and an increased demand for parking even though the plans call for a 32 car parking lot. This establishment can minimally accommodate over 100 people at one time – PLUS employees PLUS residents in the two apartments in the building. Specifically, there are now 10 bowling lanes (4 people to a lane - but could be more), an oblong bar with 20 seats, plus a restaurant that seats another 28 (this is with seven dining tables seating four people each - but there could be nine tables), plus an “event” room of 20 people. We are not sure what “event” room means, but the space will surely hold at least 20 people. That equals at a minimum 108 people, PLUS employees PLUS apartment residents – all trying to fit into 32 parking spaces. Customers, employees and residents will be parking throughout the residential streets in the neighborhood. We have a tough enough time parking in front of our own home. We do not want the increased traffic and parking.

Current plans call for existing neighborhood fences to be used as a border. We feel strongly that the developers should be responsible for installing AND maintaining a minimum of 8 foot fencing around the structure where it is adjacent to a residence. The burden should not be placed on homeowners. The current neighborhood fences are irregular and piecemeal and most are six feet or less. A continuous high fence would look much better and do much to reduce the noise and inconvenience being inflicted on residential abutters.

Current plans also show apartment picture windows staring into our bedroom and backyard. We respectfully ask that these windows be changed to ventilation windows, smaller and higher up towards the ceiling, not picture windows staring into our bedroom windows. Any picture windows should be facing away from adjacent homes. We installed these windows in our own home in the past and it was an excellent solution. This a common practice in neighborhoods where houses are close together.

More year-round activities on the Island are always welcome; however, we believe this is the wrong spot for this particular project.

We have nothing against bowling; however, we feel it is inappropriate to put a full liquor bar right next to homes and Hiawatha Park, where residents enjoy the quiet and serene beauty of their town. There are plenty of bars in Oak Bluffs. Another one is not needed at this location.

We love Martha’s Vineyard and we love our home. After visiting the Island for 30 years, we purchased a very run down property and invested a considerable amount of time and money to bring it back to life. We have tried to make it nice for our family and friends, and occasional renters, who come to the Island to relax and spend their vacation money. We have tried our best to help improve the neighborhood. We are devastated at the prospect of a full liquor bar right next to us that will do the exactly the opposite.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Byron and Kathleen Barnett

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