

**40 Pepperidge Trail
Old Saybrook, Connecticut 06475
February 16, 2011**

Good evening, Commissioners: My name is Daniel J. Walden. My wife and I reside at 40 Pepperidge Trail where the residence we own directly abuts the so-called "Preserve" parcel proposed for development by River Sound LLC.

First, I would like to point out that the very name of this out-sized development is a contradiction. Its transparent intent is to outpace our town's cherished history to accommodate a discredited organization - the bankruptcy of which led the way to the recent near collapse of the world's financial system - and to enrich various faraway interests from the legal, real estate and consulting fields.

Those are slightly stronger words than my statement began with at a Town public hearing eight years ago when the applicant suggested what was then yet another new rationale for a plan that would result in extremely high impacts and very low benefits for our Town. Since that time all of River Sound's repeated attempts to

circumvent Old Saybrook's planning and zoning regulations by marginal tweaking of its consistently defective proposals have been denied by our Town authorities and/or summarily rejected by our courts.

Many of our neighbors and other Old Saybrook residents have pointed out the huge impacts the proposed development likely would have on our Town's environment and livability, including issues of safe groundwater supplies, sewage disposal, wildlife habitat, vehicular traffic, schools and other Town services, and taxes, as well as on the preservationist ethic of a community that rightly takes pride in its rich historical heritage.

My wife and I agree with all of these concerns, but my principal purpose here tonight is to relate the sad experience of our former hometown, Fairfield, when it was faced with an analogous zoning situation some years ago.

The largest undeveloped tract of land - several hundred acres - in the section of town where we lived had been owned continuously by one family

since colonial times when they had received title by means of a land grant from the King of England. The site held a number of picturesque watercourses, mature forests, unusual plant species and an abundance of wildlife such as we still are pleased to find in the proposed "Preserve" development.

A quarter century ago, the last descendant of this family passed away. She had no heirs but was determined to preserve her land for others to enjoy, so in her last will and testament she bequeathed the property to several not-for-profit co-owners, including a nationally prominent educational institution and the local historical society, with the clear and unambiguous written understanding that the site not be developed.

At the time, those of us living in the community were greatly relieved by this unselfish act. However, it also was regarded as a challenge by developers, attorneys, real estate agents and venture capitalists. So, within a few years, these interests had taken an option on the land and made proposals to the zoning and wetlands commissions to preserve a portion of the

property as “buffer space” and to deed another portion to the Town as open space, in turn for permits to develop the balance of the tract. These permits were opposed by virtually all local residents, but after a number of amendments to the application were agreed to by the successor developer (the initial applicant had gone bankrupt, a fact that might reverberate here in Old Saybrook), the permits were granted and the site underwent its initial development.

Now here's the worst shame of all: as time went by, the initial developer and others sensed an opportunity in the buffer and open spaces that the initial permittee had guaranteed to maintain. Using a rationale that amounted to “the neighborhood already is near ruin, so we might as well finish the job!,” they sought and gained permits to build additional housing units on the original parcel.

Eventually, the increased school-age population resulting from these and other developments forced the Town to construct new schools or to expensively retrofit existing ones and to provide other infrastructure improvements. Old friends

and neighbors reported to us that their property taxes then increased at the rate of about \$3,000 per year, or about the entire current annual tax bill for many homes here in Old Saybrook.

The sequence I have just described serves as a warning of what likely would happen here in Old Saybrook if our zoning, environmental and planning officials do not faithfully serve as stewards for Old Saybrook's citizens, our heritage and our future.

Commissioners, I thank you for the opportunity to be heard here tonight, and I urge you to reject River Sound's latest development proposal.

D. S. Walsh

#####