

Revisiting Ramblewood Apartments debate of 1977-78

COMMENTARY

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I looked with interest at an article in the March 18 edition of the Boston Sunday Globe ("Petition calls for town to seize land slated for project") and a similar article in the March 23 edition of the Sun ("Old English Square site eyed for eminent domain.")

The petition is scheduled to be on the May 15 Town Meeting warrant. The petitioners are seeking to take the proposed site of Old English Square on Union Street by eminent domain for \$1.9 million and create a golf course and drinking water wells.

It appears ludicrous to use \$1.9 million of taxpayers' money to take a parcel of property (78.6 acres) assessed at \$7 million. As for the town wells, see a reprint of an article in the June 3, 2005 Sun regarding the South Street wells.

A few years ago, the town acquired another parcel of land at the end of Lantern Road for the purpose of a municipal golf course, which was never imple-

mented. Now another site for a golf course?

Let's look back to the 1977-1978 debacle, in regard to the building of the complex known as Ramblewood Community Apartments, of 170 mixed units, not low income units of undesirables, as was argued by the opponents of the project, but luxury apartments in concept.

This project was finally built on land sold to the developer/manager, Corcoran Mullins and Jenkinson (CMJ). The owners of the land (Sycamore Equipment Corp. of Holbrook, Bertie Blanchard of Weymouth, and Arthur Salvucci and the late John Yunits of Holbrook, the father of present Town Administrator Michael Yunits) sold the land to them.

I was a member of the board of selectmen at the time and was informed by another town official that he was upset that these persons who owned the land were going to make so much money on the land deal. My response was "Since when is it the business of the Town of Holbrook to be involved in or regulate the private enterprise system?"

At a meeting on July 1, 1977,

according to a Brockton Enterprise article, a former town official exclaimed, "We could wind up with a situation not unlike Columbia Point." Columbia Point was a federal housing project in South Boston that was considered a disaster.

At another meeting in the upper room of the town hall, which could be more described as a vigilante mob, Mr. Joseph Mullins of CMJ was trying to field questions from the angry and certainly not objective group who were stirred up by certain town officials and others in hysterical objection to the proposed building complex.

Fists were raised and insults were hurled at Mr. Mullins. I was embarrassed for the town.

The finance committee, I believe, was also caught up in the hysteria generated by this small group of protesters and estimated an extreme impact on town department budgets increasing to \$154,000 plus if the project went forth. The fincom continued, saying that even the library budget would be increased from \$8,000 to \$16,000. This never happened to the budgets. The complex would do its own plowing, trash pick up, maintenance, etc. which

they have always done.

A special Town Meeting was conducted on Nov. 2, 1977 to raise money to hire a law firm to stop the housing project, again by a small group, even though they had a large petition. This small group consisted of some town officials and others. Caught in the vigilante hysteria, it was voted to raise \$25,000 to hire a law firm.

The case was finally resolved in favor of the developer. There would be no snob zoning in Holbrook. The project then went forward.

I look it upon myself to investigate the other developments of CMJ in Salem - Cape Cod and especially Queen Ann's Gate in Weymouth, as this would be a model for Holbrook. CMJ kept coming up triple A as a developer/manager. The impact on the schools and other town departments in these towns was negligible. The angry group was not interested in my findings.

After losing the legal battle, the project went forward and today this project in Holbrook stands as an asset and an example of good business for the town.

I could write a book about the unrest in Holbrook regarding the Ramblewood project. I am sure

that many persons who were protesters or affected by the small group were motivated by a sincere purpose, but with the passing of time, it has been proven that their purposes were reactionary and misguided. Vigilantism only creates chaos.

I am pleased that there were no protest petitions to stop the recent and beneficial construction projects of the Walgreens Pharmacy in Holbrook Square or the CVS Pharmacy project in Brookville Square.

It may be that some of the 1977 angry group are still smarting after losing the battle to stop the Ramblewood project, and some of them are now deceased.

I hope that on May 15, Town Meeting members will reject the petition to take by eminent domain the land scheduled as Old English Square unless the petitioners withdraw it before hand.

As an added footnote, the population of Holbrook, at about 11,000, is about what it was 30 years ago or more, and that says a lot about regressive thinking.

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