

*Town Board Report  
Sept 9, 2010  
Staburn*

The proposed changes in the zoning law should not be accepted by the Town Board. Neither the portions that permit home businesses nor the portion that permits mixed-use development—at least not for those living in McKownville. Furthermore, the mixed use portion of the report is more inimical for McKownville than the portions permitting home occupations.

The linear business strip along Western Avenue already threatens the sustainability of the nearby residences. The proposed zoning changes puts the area more in danger of becoming more like Central Avenue and less like a residential neighborhood.

The home where my wife and I live—5 Norwood Street—has a plot that is 51 feet wide. On a clear day, I can listen to telephone conversations coming from several nearby homes as well as the car radios along Western Avenue. There are 41 homes on Norwood Street---43 if you count the two corner homes facing Western—Norwood Street is about 1200 feet long--how many homes are there within a quarter mile of the homes of those who created this zoning report? And then there are the homes directly behind us.

Home businesses are nearly immediately obvious to neighbors when the lots are so small—there is practically no such thing as a home business that does not impact neighbors—that is how neighbors usually become aware the home business is there.

There are numerous homes in the McKownville that have narrow lots—some wider, certainly but some even more narrow. How much traffic and noise and business can a neighborhood sustain before it loses its residential character? How many home business can it sustain. How many mixed use businesses next door can occur before the residential character of the street is forever lost?

This report seems to return to an earlier era when McKownville was deemed to be a fine place to put more and more business development.

In 1949 McKownville petitioned the Town to create a sewer district to maintain and improve the sewer system, taxes and fees to be paid by the McKownville sewer district, of course. State legislation was passed by both houses of the legislature but vetoed by Governor Dewey upon request of the Town Board. McKownville reapplied in 1950 and it was again vetoed. This was when McKownville was overwhelmingly a residential area.

Then came Stuyvesant Plaza in 1959, and Crossgates, and the Northway, and the Thruway and the State University, and the Harriman campus and NanoTech—we now have about 78 retail stores in McKownville and many many offices for dentists and so forth. The over development of businesses in McKownville has been a major problem—we were changed, with either the active support of the Town or its benign neglect, into an area where homes are threatened to become business properties.

This pattern of neglect was to continue until recently, when Ken Runion became Town Supervisor. He has tried very hard to make up for those lost years and with major success..

Sometimes we have been able to beat back a proposed fast food restaurant—one was rejected at the corner of Parkwood and Western in 1974—but it is not hard to see where we have lost—just look at the homes that have been converted along Western Avenue—or ask someone what used to be where the

Five Guys burger place is, or where Germano's auto shop is, or where Starbucks or where Dr. Esmay's dental office is and so forth. All--lost homes—lost homes—lost homes. Once lost, they do not return. Once lost, the residential sustainability of McKownville is diminished.

Ask how many times we have been invaded by widened highways, which take away our front lawns and threaten the sustainability of the adjoining properties as residences. Or how often have we been threatened by wider highways, which also prevent neighbors from crossing the streets safely—and we still have too few safe crossing areas. This topic again was raised at the recent meeting at NanoTech on the proposals for the Fuller Road Washington Avenue intersection---how many times did people raise the objection that they cannot get out of their driveway and cannot cross their street because of traffic. How can a residential neighborhood survive if neighbors cannot walk across the street to visit neighbors?

The mixed use provision of the proposal makes it easier to take one of our cherished residences along Western Avenue—there are 39 residences along Western Avenue in McKownville—and make it into a mixed use building. But a family does not want a suntan parlor next door with an apartment overhead—it wants another family just like itself. Such mixed use diminishes the value of the residence as a residence—just as putting a cap of 2,000,000 square feet on Crossgates diminishes its value since its present square footage is 2.1 million square feet. The mixed use development option in an older neighborhood robs the residences of a portion of its value as residences.

It may be fine for a neighbor who lives west of Town Hall to have a residential business in the adjoining property that is 500 feet away or a quarter mile away, but it is threatening to those of us who live 51 feet or so from our neighbors.

Clearly, the Town has many different parts—changes in the zoning law need recognize the many parts and their differences.

This zoning proposal should be rejected, a new zoning study committee appointed and the Town residents should be polled and asked how they would like the zoning law changed.

In my view, this zoning proposal harks back to an earlier era when the Town attempted to make McKownville into an over developed business zone, with businesses on both sides of Western Avenue and Schoolhouse Road and Fuller Road and McKown Road. It is very upsetting to see 60 years of struggle by the Association to keep McKownville residential threatened by a zoning proposal.