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## City fails residents on project

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At the intersection of Taft Hill Road and Harmony Road, there is a vacant plot of land of about 4.5 acres.

In the fall of 2005, representatives of Habitat for Humanity met with the city Planning & Zoning Board to seek approval to build a multi-family "affordable housing" project on about 3 acres of that land as an initial step in full development of the plot. The other 1.5 acres would be developed later for additional housing or a 20,000-square-foot commercial center.

In a sharp departure from Habitat's customary practice, the plan presented to the board called for construction of five two-story buildings that would house a total of 27 families. These five buildings would be placed immediately adjacent to a neighborhood of single-family homes valued in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Not only was the proposed project completely incompatible with its neighbors, it also called for construction of two buildings that would infringe on the Taft Hill Road right-of-way and would create traffic problems and consequent safety hazards at the intersection because of the proximity of its entrance to the safety island in the intersection.

Further, the proponents of the project falsely asserted that it would be close to medical facilities, family shopping and public bus service, none of which is within approximately 1.5 miles; that there was no other affordable housing in the vicinity; and that the 27 occupant families would put no more than seven new pupils in nearby schools.

Residents of the neighborhood whose lives and property would be most directly affected presented arguments to the P&Z Board in opposition to the project, but the board gave them short shrift. Despite the misleading arguments of the proponents, despite the proposed variance from established regulations and disregarding the appeals of the neighbors, the P&Z board approved the project.

When the plan was presented before the City Council early this year, nearby residents who would be adversely affected presented arguments against it, but as the hearing progressed, it became clear that the project had the full support of the (city) "staff."

In point of fact, the entire process - Planning & Zoning Board hearing, City Council hearing - was merely a charade to make a public pretense of correctness on an issue that had long since been settled. For in a document published by Community Planning and Environmental Services on June 7, 2005, the city had allocated \$51,000 of taxpayers' money to Habitat for Humanity to be used for land acquisition.

By their own admission in the hearing, not one member of the City Council had ever bothered to look at the property or the neighborhood in order to inform themselves on a decision that would have a profound effect on hundreds of nearby homes. But that did not disturb their peace of mind, which apparently places their faith in the belief that the good of the few outweighs the good of the many - when their own personal interests are not affected.

In the end, unsurprisingly, the script was followed. The council voted 6-1 for the project, the one dissent cast by a member who said it was cast in sympathy for the neighbors whose lives would be affected. Even the council member in whose district the project will be placed, and who supposedly should have some interest in the concerns of his constituents, voted for it.

The city government owes at least as much respect to its residents as it gives to favored causes and special interests.

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