

From Elaine Harris:

Was the process of creating a Rehabilitation Designation transparent? Absolutely not. The Village website response stated only three groups were engaged in the process: The Irvington Avenue Corridor Advisory Committee (now the "Seton Village Committee"); the South Orange Village Center Alliance (SOVCA); and the South Orange Village Development Committee. So for example, why does SOVCA, which was formed to control the central business district, and is funded by the property owners in that district, have any input in a procedure that affects the remaining entirety of the Village? That was never part of its mission. How did it get involved in this process to the exclusion of the rest of us?

The Village website response says: "The Rehabilitation designation was the result of over nine months of deliberation, study and public discussion." That statement does not appear to be factually correct as there was no public discussion and the public did not deliberate. To be specific: The minutes of the March 2, 2015 Planning Board state as follows:

*DISCUSSION: Mr. Lewis discussed Resolution #2015-42 Proposed Resolution Designating the entire Village as An Area In Need of Redevelopment. \* \* \* made a motion that the Planning Board agreed with the Planner's recommendation and the Township be named an area in need of rehabilitation and therefore the Board of Trustees should proceed accordingly. The motion was seconded \* \* \* .*

The motion was passed unanimously with no record of any deliberation. The public never had a chance to review the Planner's report. One week later, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to accept this recommendation, again, with no deliberation or public input. The entire process was rubber stamped under the radar.

What is most important to note is that the Board of Trustees Resolution states: "**(this) designation allows the Board of Trustees to, among other things, enter into Redevelopment Agreements. . .**" Thus while the website response addressed "Rehabilitation," it was totally silent with reference to "Redevelopment" which is the operative component of the Village Resolution. By now we are all familiar with the concept of "Redevelopment" and that it means no public bidding, more tax abatements, and local zoning can be adjusted to suit the developer's needs regarding setbacks and height, for example, like the project on Valley and Third. The only significant difference between Rehabilitation and Redevelopment is that the former eliminates the threat of eminent domain and favors a 5 year tax abatement in lieu of a 30 year tax abatement. Aside from those two issues, Rehabilitation compared to Redevelopment, is simply a slightly lesser form of a blight designation.

Have any of the other 565 or so communities in New Jersey done this to their premier residential inventory? The Village did not cite to any. It would be prudent to compare. So we should ask: After 150 or more years, why now do we need "greater controls" and "stricter controls" to "preserve the essential character of our community?" Do we not now excel with our exceptional housing and tree lined streets? Or do they need these "controls" to be free to select the developer of their choosing with no public bidding? You decide who is right. I stand by my position. Global Rehabilitation or Redevelopment is not appropriate for this Village. It is a major blemish, it invites abuse, and must be rescinded.

