

SHEENA



FOR
VILLAGE PRESIDENT

April 30, 2019

Deborah Davis Ford
Candidate for Village President
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Dear Trustee Davis Ford,

Today another mailer hit South Orange households questioning various redevelopment projects, all of which you've been a part of as a sitting member of the governing body for 12-years. I'm somewhat perplexed as to the misleading statements and half-truths, particularly since you're aware of the status of all projects.

First, **I again request that we have a debate** in order for ALL our residents to have an opportunity to hear from two-seasoned elected officials. I believe one focusing on redevelopment is certainly appropriate given your recent mailer.

Second, just to recap the information you are aware of and have approved:

- **Village Hall** is being repurposed into a restaurant and beer garden – an effort that I led saving taxpayers over \$8M and resulting in a historic renovation by one of the most reputable restaurant groups in the region. When you say “nothing has been done”, that’s a falsehood. You know the interior has been cleaned out and that Landmark has been working with our Building Department over the past several weeks. I regret the hold-up, but as you are aware, the Village was sued by an adjacent property owner which delayed the project significantly. I, nor you, have control over the courts and ultimately, we entered into a settlement agreement, a measure you supported.
- **The Meredia Project** has all approvals from the governing body (you voted in favor of it) and received an approval for a financial agreement and approvals for the site-plan from the Planning Board. As we discussed at a recent event (and you agreed), the Village does not control the property. As you are also aware, this project was developed with extensive community input, will produce three times the amount of retail space than 3rd and Valley, include affordable housing, and has the most advantageous financial agreement to benefit our taxpayers (and not developers).
- **The Blockbuster Site** is in its final stages and as you are also aware, the remaining issue was a fair parking agreement between the town and the developer. It’s in our best financial interest to ensure that structural issues remain the responsibility of the property owner while the Village be responsible for annual maintenance of public parking. I’m excited for this project as it not only will be one of the largest revenue generators for our town but will feature co-retailing space for our small businesses, and an off-site financial contribution to benefit our community. It will also feature much needed affordable housing.

- **The Gravel Parking Lot** is not owned by the Village. It is owned by a private property owner who is yet to submit a plan to the Village. As you are aware, the Village was advised the developer was interested in high-end condos (\$850,000/unit) with no retail and was seeking a long-term tax abatement and would need a parking variance. It should come as no surprise I would reject such a project. There's no reason for taxpayers to subsidize luxury housing with no affordable housing on-site. These are the type of agreements I put a stop to once I was elected. We need to negotiate from a position of strength and not desperation.

You propose a "Revitalization Committee". Can you explain how that is different from our existing Development Committee which already meets regularly, reviews all projects, hosts public meetings, has representatives from the governing body, residents, and subject matter experts? They have assisted our governing body on every project and it's a shame you would undercut their work. As a Trustee, you approve all the members who currently sit on the Development Committee. Let's also not forget our dedicated Design Review Board who also continues to serve us and the residents of our community with their expertise.

I am urging you to please accept this invitation to have a debate on planning and redevelopment. As a part of the debate, I would love if we could also speak about project finance, tax abatements, ratables, affordable housing, community give-backs, local redevelopment and housing laws, community form and design, density, residential site improvement standards, walkable urbanism, our master plan, and any other topic you feel is relevant to this particular topic (I will have no objections to whatever you propose).

Thank you for your consideration on this offer and as previously mentioned, you can pick the time, venue and the moderator. In the interest of transparency and community engagement, I think this would be a wonderful opportunity for us all!

I have copied members of the press to assist us in promoting this opportunity. We have some of the best hyperlocal journalism in South Orange and Maplewood and there is no doubt in my mind they will work to help us promote this debate and engage our community in a healthy and honest conversation.

Sincerely,



Sheena Collum
Candidate for Village President

Cc: Village Green
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