

Letter: Cape Vincent is not wise to support developer

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The state Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation issued a letter stating the Carleton Villa project may impact the historic nature of the island. Watertown Daily Times

I am writing to express concern over the Cape Vincent Town Board's decision to again support a Restore New York Grant application for a Florida-based developer seeking to install a campground on Carleton Island. This decision raises serious questions about the board's commitment to responsible development.

Equally troubling are statements from some town officials that "all development is good" and that they will support anyone bringing investment to the town. While fostering economic growth is important, not all development is beneficial. Blindly supporting projects without proper scrutiny can have long-term negative consequences, especially when taxpayer-funded grants are sought for an out-of-state developer with an unknown track record.

This proposed campground conflicts with Cape Vincent's long-term interests. Carleton Island is a pristine, ecologically sensitive area protected by conservation easements. The developer violated these easements by clearing land without permits, resulting in a court-imposed restraining order. Such actions raise serious doubts about the developer's reliability and respect for local regulations.

Many believe that the developer is using his promise to restore the Carleton Villa as a means to secure zoning changes for his campground. It is concerning to many, and should be a concern for Town officials, that the person they are supporting for a state grant has said that the income from a campground will help him to restore the Carleton Villa. Pennies and dollars from overnight campers will never measure up to the tens of millions of dollars that will be required to conduct that renovation.

Furthermore, little is known about the developer's qualifications or ability to complete a project of this scale. Supporting a taxpayer-funded grant without fully vetting a developer's experience and wherewithal to complete such a project risks public resources and undermines trust in local governance.

Prioritizing development for its own sake risks harming the environment, disrupting neighborhoods, and devaluing properties. Poorly planned projects can:

- **Strain Resources:** Inadequate infrastructure planning burdens taxpayers with costs for roads, utilities, and emergency services.

- **Disrupt Community Character:** Projects incompatible with the Town's Comprehensive Plan and conservation goals erode what makes Cape Vincent unique.

- **Introduce Financial Risk:** Supporting an unvetted developer with public funds exposes the community to potential financial losses if the project fails.

Responsible development enhances the community's economic, social, and environmental well-being. Cape Vincent officials should:

- Fully vet developers, requiring a proven track record of success.

- Ensure projects comply with zoning laws, conservation easements, and the comprehensive plan.

- Prioritize projects that promote sustainable growth and protect natural resources.

I urge the Town Board to reconsider the belief that "all development is good." Development must serve the community as a whole, not just the interests of a developer. The board should pause and evaluate whether this project aligns with Cape Vincent's long-term goals before committing further public support.

Let's focus on fostering responsible development that enhances our community's character and prosperity.

Michael J. Comerford

Carleton Island