﻿To the board:

The McQueenys have been Cape Vincent taxpayers for more than 40 years, with multiple properties, including a home that is 200 years old and on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to participating on a local civic board improvement panel, our family remains ardent and enthusiastic supporters of economic development that is comparable with the unique character of the town and village.

The restoration of the Carleton Island Villa has long been envisioned to be one of those improvement developments, like the East End and  Club Street park projects.

And, indeed,  that might one day be the case.

But, there’s increasing doubt the current “developer” is sufficiently qualified to make that vision a reality.

In effect, the town and its taxpayers, by once again cosponsoring a New York state grant, will become a partner in liability as well, again, should the developer fail to prove that he has the financial and experiential wherewithal to complete the massive project, leaving taxpayers in the lurch.

This is all the more reason for the town this time around to more fully probe the applicant’s financial and development wherewithal beforehand.  That’s something still not done to any sufficient level of transparency, and for residents to evaluate as well.

There are troubling signs already.

Since this out-of -state, self-professed “developer” unveiled his media-splashy renovation scheme more than two  years ago, very little work has been witnessed  amidst the crumbling, century-old and long-abandoned structure.

That is, aside from his capricious and foliage-slashing rampage across the neck of the island that even compelled a judge this year to order him to stop

The developer earlier this year saw his prior town co-sponsored request for state funds rejected.

The latest funding request before the board is to the same state agency that ruled he had failed to meet the strict eligibility requirements—one of the most important being financial.

But, which ones exactly?

Residents all summer pressed town officials to get from the state more detailed reasons as to what was behind the grant’s rejection.

However, it remains to be seen whether such a follow up request was ever made as to just what gave state officials such pause on approving the request.

This is very important due diligence protocol when ANY public body joins up with a private developer, especially after this prior state rejection, and with this second attempt being the subject of a public hearing.

The Cape Vincent town and village boards have every right—if not a fiduciary obligation—to demand more background criteria to be submitted to them by the applicant.

It’s also imperative in light of the developer’s unsettling, 11th hour admission that he now needs the relative pittance that could be derived from a new campground by the villa to be able to fund the restoration!

That alone can be a blatant confession that either he does not have the funds to do the restoration as he promised—or that he never intended to do so in the first place for whatever alluvial reasons.

A campground would be wholly inconsistent with the nature of the island.  It would bring little or no financial benefit to Cape Vincent, separated as it is from the core in-town recreational and economic projects underway or envisioned.

Worse yet, a thinly resourced developer  could end up desperately competing in isolation for the same state funds better suited and  deployed within the mainland community, especially along the riverfront.

The meager dollars from overnight camper’s fees to meet the true financial magnitude of the villa restoration are a ludicrous proposition posed by this developer.  It’s highly indicative of his unfamiliarity with the complexities of projects this size.

It also insults the intelligence and integrity of local officials who have been tasked to approve or deny such a “plan.”

The developer himself (and others) estimate the renovation could  cost upwards of $30 million.

That would dwarf any current or future state-funded projects within the town and village that would have a much more direct and profound economic benefit and positive effect on tax bills.

Town officials need to suspend this partnership on the grant application until more responsible due diligence is conducted, and the developer’s response is deemed to be satisfactory by the town—and residents.

Signed:

James McQueeny

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Cape Vincent.