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 controversial project on Carleton Island. This project includes the development of a campground tied to the restoration of the Carleton Villa.

These two projects are inseparable, as they are jointly proposed under a Special Use Permit and a rezoning application. Supporting one effectively means supporting both. The Town Board’s decision to back a taxpayer-funded grant for this proposal raises serious questions about its commitment to responsible development.

Equally troubling are statements from some town officials claiming that “all development is good” and pledging support for anyone bringing investment to the town. While fostering economic growth is important, not all development is beneficial. Blindly endorsing projects without thorough scrutiny can lead to long-term negative consequences. Responsible governance requires completing a comprehensive “due diligence” process before granting support for any project, especially when public funds are involved.

The proposed campground conflicts with Cape Vincent’s long-term interests. Carleton Island is a pristine, ecologically sensitive area protected by longstanding conservation easements. These easements were knowingly violated when significant land clearing was conducted to prepare for the campground, without the necessary permits.

A court-imposed restraining order is now in effect, halting further work until the legal case is resolved. Despite these unresolved legal and regulatory issues, the Town Board continues to support a taxpayer-funded grant application.

Many believe the promise to restore the Carleton Villa is being used as leverage to secure zoning changes for the campground. It is deeply concerning that it has been suggested that income from the campground will fund the Villa’s restoration. Realistically, revenue from overnight campers will never come close to the tens of millions of dollars required to complete such a massive renovation.

Moreover, little is known about the qualifications or ability of those behind this project to successfully execute such an ambitious proposal. Supporting a taxpayer-funded grant based solely on unverified promises, and without a thorough vetting of the experience and financial capacity to do so, risks public resources and erodes trust in local governance.

Prioritizing development for its own sake can have profound consequences, including:

* **Straining Local Resources**: Increases costs for emergency services that will burden local taxpayers.
* **Disrupting Community Character**: Projects that conflict with Cape Vincent’s Comprehensive Plan and conservation goals undermine the town’s unique identity.
* **Introducing Financial Risks**: Supporting unvetted projects with public funds exposes the community to potential losses if the project fails.

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

* Fully vet developments, ensuring a proven track record of success.
* Require strict adherence to zoning laws, conservation easements, and the town’s Comprehensive Plan.
* Prioritize projects that promote sustainable growth while protecting natural resources.

I urge the Town Board to reconsider its stance that “all development is good.” Development should serve the entire community, not just the interests of a specific project. The board should pause and carefully 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 the character and prosperity of our community.

Michael J. Comerford

Friends of Carleton Island