

January 10, 2018

Dear Charlotte Selectboard, Planning Commission, and Zoning Board,

We wholeheartedly support the revitalization of the corner of Church Hill Road and Route 7, but we have a number of concerns about the 5,000 GSF proposed Maplefields gas station/convenience store complex. We have specific requests for modifications, described in full below and itemized in a list toward the end of this letter. We also appeal to you generally to undertake your deliberations on the Maplefields proposal—one whose outcome would dramatically change the landscape of our town—slowly and cautiously, because we have discovered that many Charlotte residents are not even aware that it is under consideration.

First, we are deeply concerned about the traffic safety implications of this proposal. VTrans has designated this intersection a “high crash location.” Increasing the volume of turning traffic, including tractor trailer trucks, onto both Church Hill Road and Route 7, would exacerbate the existing problem and be potentially hazardous to Charlotters, particularly at school commuting times. Imagine westbound traffic waiting at the light on Church Hill Road and an 18-wheeler turning from Root Road onto Church Hill Road, blocking the eastbound side of the road while turning, and then crossing traffic again through the “high crash” intersection to turn south onto Route 7—perhaps while another southbound tractor trailer is backed up waiting to cross northbound traffic into the station. Equally uncomfortable to imagine is southbound trucks and cars on Route 7 turning across traffic to the facility. Does traffic get backed up through the intersection? Is the westbound turning lane forfeited for a turning lane into the facility? Is the road widened? Any “solution” yields an exponentially more dangerous intersection and would require, at the very least, signalized pedestrian and bicycle crossing. While the Maplefields group funded its own traffic study, we encourage the Town to consider this important issue independently. (Please see also the December 2014 CCPRC Rt 7/Ferry Road Pedestrian Crossing Feasibility Study, and the June 2016 Park and Ride Feasibility Study prepared by DuBois & King, which describes the high crash site, wetlands and hazardous waste issues on this site, and limiting development to stay within the scale and existing character of the town.)

Second, according to the Town’s Code Compliance Review, the main purpose of Charlotte’s commercial district is to offer “services primarily for residents of Charlotte.” An imposing, 24-hour, brightly-lit, canopied facility that caters to highway through-traffic by providing services to tractor trailer trucks, including night parking, does not, by definition, serve primarily Charlotters. Bright lights from the proposed truck-height fueling canopies attract highway traffic to the facility; they do not serve the local community. The light, in fact, would disturb the historic character of the town center, the rural character of Church Hill Road, and residents as far away

as Greenbush Road. The two nearby gas stations in Shelburne village, by contrast, have thoughtful and modest lamppost-like lighting that fits better into the character of the village. Two locally-owned and -operated businesses within a quarter-mile of the proposed location (Old Brick Store and Little Garden Market) currently cater to Charlotte residents without any of these adverse characteristics, as does Spears Corner Store and gas station, which is just three miles to the east.

Third, under Town code, the site on the east side of Route 7 in West Charlotte Village could potentially receive a permit to host a gas station, snack bar, and parking. Retail beyond 30 SF, however, is not allowed even conditionally on this site, and a fast food restaurant is explicitly forbidden. (The vendors at Maplefields restaurants, such as Amato's and Dunkin Donuts, fall under the definition of fast food.) The application claims it is replacing the snack bar that previously existed on the site. A 36-seat fast food style restaurant, however, is not a replacement for a seasonally-open snack bar that served take-out through a window. To genuinely serve Charlotte, the proposed "snack bar," which is actually a sit-down "restaurant," should be sized to fit Charlotte. The Old Brick Store seats six, which should be considered a good measure for a small town like ours.

Next, the proposal's indoor "commercial farmstand" is out of keeping with the spirit of the permitted use of an outdoor market with multiple vendors. A true outdoor market boosts the local economy, while it could be argued that the "commercial farmstand" as conceived in this proposal is an excuse to expand indoor retail space under a label that is related to—but isn't—a permitted use.

Fifth, our Town Plan emphasizes that Route 7 "shall be protected as a scenic travel corridor" (and preferably a safe one.) The articulated idea always has been to keep traffic moving *through*, and simultaneously to build businesses off of Route 7 that serve the community of Charlotte. The Town Codes allow retail on the west side of Route 7 but not on the east side. To protect this scenic and nonstop corridor, the Town has long defined its development differently than neighboring towns, stating in the Town Plan that "Charlotte's commercial and industrial needs are primarily met by services provided in adjacent communities," such as Burlington, South Burlington, and Vergennes. The businesses that we do have are intended primarily for Charlotters.

Further, the Town Plan repeatedly champions a "historic" town with "charm," "livability," and "rural character." Through-the-night traffic, bright lighting, potentially dangerous traffic patterns, an imposing two-story structure, and an increased volume of tractor trailer trucks frequenting and stopping in Charlotte are characteristics that risk tarnishing the scenic corridor and violating the historic characteristics of the town. Additionally, the glaring light from the two proposed canopies would make Charlotte look like a run-of-the-mill highway town

indistinguishable from any other. We should be cautious about following the example of previously charming Shoreham, which started with a Maplefields as its first chain store, and has a Dollar General Store currently in the works.

Seventh, Charlotte's west village has a network of complex wetlands and its limited wastewater capacity is well known. For a busy commercial complex, the proposed plan of drilling under the highway to the north end of the Patrick property—near or through Class II Wetlands, VSWI (Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory) Advisory Layers, and hydric soils—seems problematic, at best. It would be improper for the town to grant a permit for the complex (which includes features subject to and beyond conditional use per the town's Land Use Regulations) without first determining if the proposal meets the State wastewater and wetlands protection requirements, while fully considering future contingencies. Should the proposed wastewater plans be approved and yet at some further point fail, the applicant should explicitly not be permitted to use Town wastewater resources before currently existing businesses and facilities.

Finally, regarding the proposed electric vehicle charging stations and rooftop solar panels, we are concerned about the ability of the Town to hold the developer to such promises. At the Planning Commission sketch review meeting September 21, 2017, the applicant offered the opinion, based on his experience at his station in St. Albans, that electric vehicle charging stations are not profitable. What can be done to ensure that the charging stations and solar panels are actually installed per the application and remain installed and serviced in such a way that they continue to be utilized per intent into the future?

We believe it is possible to create an enterprise at this location consistent with Charlotte's longstanding and clearly articulated values. For the reasons explained above and to properly fit into Charlotte, we request the following specific modifications of the proposal:

- Do not permit light canopies (use modest lamppost-like poles, such as at the Shelburne Village gas stations).
- Do not permit truck parking or space for it, which would enable trucks to linger.
- Do not allow trucks to turn onto Church Hill Road from Root Road or the business.
- Require signalized pedestrian and bicycle crossing on Route 7.
- In keeping with the village character do not permit the business to be open 24 hours, no later than 8 PM (the latest closing time for Spear's Corner Store).
- Do not permit a two-story building (the building should be unobtrusive and in aesthetic keeping with the Library and Town Hall; further, the application says that the second floor will not be used).
- Do not permit bright lighting of signs when the business is closed.
- Do not permit a fast food restaurant.
- Permit a Charlotte-scale snack bar, not a restaurant, with no more than six seats.

- Do not permit retail more than 30 SF total/cumulative/inclusive.
- Do not permit additional retail in the form of an indoor “commercial farmstand.”
- Confirm that this business will not be permitted to use Town wastewater resources should its proposed wastewater plans fail.
- Require electric vehicle charging stations (with proof of minimum 10-year contract or other assurance that the requirement is met in earnest) and photovoltaic solar panels on the roof.

We are hopeful that you, as our town representatives, will consult openly with a broad spectrum of Town residents, particularly its committee volunteers, representatives of other institutions and groups, and residents, such as those signing this letter, with specific concerns about the proposal. We implore you to protect and honor the documents that articulate the town’s values; they were cultivated over many years, written specifically to inform appropriate development in our town, and represent Charlotters’ interests.

With respect and appreciation for the time and effort you give to our town, we are,

Sincerely,

[alphabetically]

Harold Abilock  
Jeff Albertson  
Ryan Albertson  
Amos Baehr  
Gill Barlow  
Matt Bastress  
Lily Belisle  
Rick Benson  
Nancy Benson  
Meg Berlin  
John Bethune  
Charles Blackmore  
Susan Blood  
Kathryn Blume  
Catherine Bock  
Timothy Boesenberg  
Roel Boumans  
Wendy Bratt  
Mischul Brownstone

Kevin Burget  
Matt Burke  
Trevor Burke  
Laura Cahners-Ford  
Jan Cannon  
Jordan Cannon  
Rik Carlson  
Nate Carr  
Jennifer Chiodo  
Carol Clay  
Owen Clay  
Jaina Clough  
Dora Coates  
Elizabeth Comolli  
Louis Cox  
John Creech  
Annemie Curlin  
Rick Cusick  
Raven Davis  
Cami Davis  
Terrence Dinnan  
Mariana DuBrul  
Peter DuBrul  
Jacob Edgar  
Jenny Eisenman  
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Louise B. Fairbank  
Jonathan T. Fairbank  
Kim Findlay  
Erich Finley  
Whitney Finley  
Marvin Fishman  
Rebecca Foster  
Abby Foulk  
Stacy Fraser  
Edorah Frazer  
Ken French  
Jane Garbose  
Zechariah S. Gardner  
Christie Garrett

MaryAnne Gatos  
Jamey Gerlaugh  
Bill Gerson  
Kristine Gerson  
Kevin E.M. Goldenbogen  
Bev Goodwin  
Valerie Graham  
Anna Gravina  
Andrea Grayson  
Linda Hamilton  
Myra Handy  
Per Hansen  
Amanda Herzberger  
Suzy Hodgson  
Krista Hoffsis  
Barbara Hoke  
Deirdre Holmes  
Simone Edgar Holmes  
Irene Horbar  
Jeffrey Horbar  
Melrose Huff  
Beth Humstone  
Cathy Hunter  
Valerie Hurley  
Brian Just  
Erin Just  
Bill Kallock  
Emily Kallock  
Tanya Kanigan  
Jane Ann Kantor  
Julie Kaplan  
Woody Keppel  
John Kern  
Stephen Kiernan  
Emily Laird  
Barbara Lawrence  
Tessa Lawrence  
Ed LeClair  
Kim Locke  
Suzanne Lourie

Megan Mahoney  
Nan Mason  
Ben Mason  
Molly McClaskey  
David McColgin  
Glynda Mckinnon  
Melissa Mendelsohn  
Uwe Mester  
Ted Montgomery  
Annick Murat  
Bethany Myrick  
Mark Nash  
Dorothy Naylor  
Benjamin Naylor  
Tom Powell  
Polly Price  
John Quinney  
Susan Raber  
Lori Racha  
Katherine Snead Ranallo  
Sharon Richards-Weaver  
Marc Richter  
Annie Richter  
Pat Rodar  
Kris Root  
Michael Rubin  
Ellie Russell  
Garrett Sadler  
Wolfger Schneider  
Julia Scott  
Nancy Severance  
Warren Severance  
Bud Shriner  
Tiny Sikkes  
Lisa Simon  
Vera Simon-Nobes  
Lindsay Smith  
Sam Smith  
Susan Smith  
Ken Spencer

Rachel Stein  
Jason Stockwell  
Kelly Stockwell  
Larilee Suiter  
Ruah Swennerfelt  
Mark Taylor  
April Thanhauser  
Alice Trageser  
Greg Veltkamp  
Jess Veltkamp  
Marcia Vogler  
Jay Vogler  
Mike Walker  
Richard Wasserman  
Doug Weaver  
Jennifer Whalen  
Joan White-Hansen  
Maria Wicker  
Steven Wisbaum  
Mike Yantachka