

88/7A

January 6, 2014

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the City of Stamford Zoning Board:

My wife, Susan Cullman, and I wish to apologize for our inability to attend this continued hearing to upzone the area at the end of Saddle Rock Road.

We are away with my 94 year old mother in law who has temporarily left her home on High Ridge Road in North Stamford to spend time in Jamaica as she has done for the last 50 years. Given her age, the family tries to have one of her children with her during her stay. It is our privilege to be doing so now, but it does cost us the opportunity to be here tonight. I have asked Mr. Redniss to read this letter into the record.

This application was filed on behalf of a group of Saddle Rock Road owners. Our neighbors, the Silvermans (123), the Chrusts (107), and the Shanleys (89) are in full support.

The Murphys (68) were told of the neighborhood plan on the weekend of October 5 and enthusiastically endorsed it. As you know, they later changed their position. We certainly hope that their more considered reflection will cause them to rejoin.

David Lu and Nancy Tom (102) ,as represented by Dan Benjamin, requested additional time to study the matter before committing either way.

We live in a flood zone. Sandy created a great deal of property damage on Saddle Rock Rd. Our present home at 88 Saddle Rock sits between 74 and 102, both of which were substantial homes built in the early part of the 20th century. Both homes did not survive Sandy. 74, owned by the Rich Estate, had a sale in contract prior to Sandy, but the new potential owners walked away after seeing the damage. 102 appears to be abandoned. It is boarded up and no post storm repairs have even been attempted after over a year.

Our home at 88, which was built in 1992 to the then required elevation, survived and no water entered our home directly from the storm surge. However, for the first time, we had interior damage from sea water rising through the crawl space. We also

had extensive damage done to our pool and landscaping as shown in the pictures submitted at the prior hearing.

After their pre Sandy sale fell through, the Rich estate asked if we were interested in buying the property. We consulted with Redniss&Mead (R&M) and Roberge Associates Coastal Engineers, LLC (RACE) and concluded that it would be possible to build a home in place of the destroyed Rich home which would be safe. It would require careful design to raise the grade of the property to provide height, good drainage, and aesthetics for the house and the neighborhood. The Murphy house next door suffered no damage so we thought we should emulate what they had done. Our house would also have to be built higher than the minimum required by the new FEMA/Stamford elevations. We decided to purchase the property with the intention of erecting a beautiful New England shingle house for our family, specifically situated and designed to survive future storms.

Prior to designing our home or making any zoning application we had talked to a number of people with knowledge of the neighborhood and shared experiences in past storms. We concluded that there might be some general cooperative measures that all of us might agree upon to protect our homes and property.

We invited our neighbors to listen to R&M and RACE and to consider retaining them to advise all of us on projects which might be beyond any individual property owner's capabilities. Most notably was the utility of the desolate jetty at the end of Stamford Avenue, which old timers said had served a very useful dispersion purpose in decades past. Prior to Sandy, we personally rebuilt the jetty by our home at 88, which had fallen into disrepair, we realized that rebuilding the jetty off of Stamford Avenue would be a more costly proposition and wanted to learn of that would be a good protective measure for the larger neighborhood.

Some dozen neighbors attended the meeting and several were interested in the study and agreed to help defray the preliminary study costs. (The Murphy sisters and Nancy Tom attended the neighborhood meeting but refused to contribute.) My wife and I have paid the bills to date, others will contribute as well. This project is an effort to study and make recommendations on both the harbor and the sound side and it is ongoing. This is by its nature a community plan and stands apart from our own property improvement.

We also retained R&M, RACE, architect John Fifield and landscape architects DeVore and Associates to assist us in designing our home at 74. All have extensive experience in coastal building and flood environments on the Sound. Their assignment was straightforward: design a home and property that will be safe and beautiful in these challenging conditions. Everyone knew there would be an extensive analysis of the proposed construction by the City as part of the Coastal Area Management approval process. This analysis is welcomed and embraced.

Our intention is to sell our present 88 home. The new owners will be our neighbors. Our other immediate neighbor is the Murphy home. We want all three properties to benefit from our plan. The furthest thing from our minds is any action to increase the risk for anyone. We have been advised that a combination of drainage devices and other features in the design will produce a safe result which Stamford will approve and endorse. We do not want any harm to come to other area properties as the result of our building a home where one stood for so many decades.

The RA-1 zoning application itself is designed to achieve two major objectives: allow sufficient height to have a safe attractive home and ensure that no increase in density would be allowed via subdivision of any of the oversized R20 lots. All experts tell us that the one indispensable feature of any new flood zone construction is to raise the elevation. Raising the level of the first floor requires a combination of land and hardscaping to bring the first habitable floor to an acceptable level above the new FEMA/Stamford minimums. This in turn requires the height of the home to be higher than before. One acre zoning addresses both objectives for the end of Shippan Point. The destroyed home at 102 will also benefit when it gets rebuilt. Other homes could be raised out of harms way as well, should they choose to do so.

The Murphy home was safe in Sandy because it was built high. Indeed it is already higher both on the first floor and overall than anything else in the neighborhood.

The Murphys' were smart to figure out a way to achieve that result in the restrictive half acre zoning. In fact, following Sandy they gave my wife a tour of their basement and talked extensively about how they had planned their home to be safe from storms.

How that was done by the Murphy's and the great height achieved under the R-20 zoning is not the subject of this re zoning application. Suffice it to say that if the one acre zoning application is granted, the Murphy construction will be more in compliance with the new zoning.

It would be utterly foolish to increase the density in this coastal flood prone area. I am astounded that the owners of the derelict 102 property would even suggest it given their intimate knowledge of the effects of the storms.

I would hope that the Murphys' would welcome other homes in the area to take advantage of height that their own home so concretely demonstrates. We hope that all of our neighbors will take steps to ensure their and the neighborhood's future safety. We also hope that our home will enhance the value of all other properties in the area both in financial and aesthetic terms. We look forward to submitting our CAM application to the Zoning Board in the near future.

We have been told that the Zoning Board has previously up zoned lots at the ends of the other two southerly peninsulas in Stamford and we respectfully request that you now do the same for Shippan.

Thank you.

Susan Cullman and John Kirby