

City Council Meeting  
September 8, 2009  
Notes prepared by James Korn  
19 South Brett Street

#### Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Zoning District

There are three things I'd like to talk about: viewsheds, linkage with Main Street, and a sense of style.

#### \* Viewsheds

**Viewsheds must be preserved. This is a priority.** The language in the zoning has been changed from "viewsheds" to "views and view corridors"; "viewsheds" should be retained. Viewsheds are referred to repeatedly in the LWRP and by Scenic Hudson.

**The most important of these viewsheds** is the view I talked about at the August 3, 2009 City Council meeting. It **extends from the corner of Beekman and River Streets south to the bridge over the tracks.** I related my experience of it as one on foot primarily and I presented a picture I had taken. Afterward, a life long resident of Beacon approached me and said he experiences this view from his car driving along Beekman from 9D at the south to 9D at the north. As he rounds the corner at the bridge, he says the view is reminiscent of Cape Cod with the sweep of the boats dotting the harbor. I couldn't agree more this is nothing short of spectacular. But let me say, and I'm sure he'd agree, Cape Cod has nothing on Beacon.

**As to offering alternative vantage points from a deck or other structures, protecting viewsheds is not about offering alternatives, but saving them.** But having said this, even the views from the promenade as proposed in John Clarke's August 3, 2009, presentation are obscured. At the south, by the as yet to be built hotel and conference center, trees today; at its center by the Metro North platform - its roof, steps to the overpass over the tracks (visitor center), structures on the platform itself (for example, booths for commuters to wait for the train in inclement weather) - imagine standing on one of the platforms at Croton-Harmon and looking out across the others to the parking lot or train yard; and north, I have vague recollections that a building for the area north of the sloop club, south of Riverfront Park, and west of the tracks, has been discussed - it would be great if the council could dispel the possibility of this. Elevate the promenade a little? Elevating the promenade to say two or more stories to clear the aforementioned structures would present a view of the waterfront (from Beekman and the TOD itself) further obscured by an elevated horizontal band (even the pencil view corridors) - imagine elevated trains in Queens and Brooklyn and the adjacent buildings and standing on the street.

**The idea of a promenade, although very seductive, is deeply flawed.** To get a good view of the waterfront, you really need to stand back a bit and get a bit of elevation, from Beekman Street we have this today.

But here **we can get into a discussion of whether it's the proposed ordinances themselves or John Clarke's proposal. I would suggest it is primarily the former**, the level of intensity of the proposed zoning. Take building height for instance. **The zoning proposes 7 stories. Yes, seven stories.** It's been mentioned that somehow these will be built into the hillside and this will take care of things. But building height is measured from the grade not from sea level and the roads will slope gently down to the tracks not in a steep step, so it is conceivable that there can be structures of seven stories at the highest point (River and Beekman Streets) with another three stories below grade. More importantly, building height is experienced standing next to them, or from what is now Beekman Street, not from 9D. Seven stories! We have but a handful of buildings in Beacon today that are over three stories, so seven is definitely not in the character of Beacon.

And let me mention at this point, in the recommendations of the Waterfront Committee to the City Council on December 1, 2008, on Beekman Street and Edgewater, "Preserving viewsheds to and from the river should be a primary goal. This may limit structure height in some parts of the development."

As others have done, it is instructive to look to other communities.

From an article entitled "Mayor Kinnally and Good Government" in the Vol. 11, No. 7, Summer 2009 issue of the River Journal ("A monthly news and views publication / reaching every household and business in Irvington, Tarrytown, and Irvington.") Kinnally was mayor of Hastings from 1993 to 2009.

Steiner: Are river towns served by shoreline development?

Kinnally: If done responsibly, there's no question about it. Taking an under-performing resource and turning it around is a positive step. Irvington did a great job in their park down there; it brought people down to the river - where they hadn't been. I think the same thing can happen in Hastings and up and down the river.

Steiner: **What must the river towns be careful of in this process?**

Kinnally: Overbuilding, or building on a scale that's inappropriate. **You don't want to change the character of river towns. So you don't want towers.** You don't want something that is going to dwarf - literally and figuratively - the surrounding community and change or upset the nature of the river town. **You don't want to move the focus residentially and commercially, because you don't want to poach from the downtown area.**

\* Public Transit / Linkage with Main Street

**I would like to challenge the notion that exiting the top of a parking garage will significantly reduce the effort to walk to Main Street or alter the prospect that people will walk instead of drive.** The corner of River and Beekman Street (point of the TOD closest to the Main Street) is roughly only a third of the distance linearly and, more importantly, only a third of the height. **People are no really more likely to climb 90 feet of elevation gain than they are to 135 feet (the elevation of the west end of Main Street).** And, as to the prospect of walking through a parking garage to get to and from the waterfront and Main Street, this is fraught with undesirable aspects.

**Before ordinance changes can be properly considered mass transportation plans need to be put in place, concrete plans for frequent daily service, early morning to late evening.** We need to get serious about mass transit; it has been a priority since early days of the comprehensive plan (focus groups) likely longer. Speaking of the "Comprehensive" planning process, it is often cited as a reason for why things have progressed the way they have. It's been a while since I read the early focus group documents (they need to be put back up on the website), but I have no recollection of people saying we need high density apartment towers at the waterfront and these needn't be the only way of getting the things they said they do want at the waterfront. It's been mentioned that a Smart Growth grant is being applied for. My understanding, and I could be confusing this with something else, is that the funds overall for this are extremely limited, will be difficult to obtain, and would be limited to 10 to 15 thousand dollars to do a study. A linkage study was performed, "Beacon Transportation Linkages Program Final Report" July 2008, and, although, it contains a lot of information is not particularly useful in implementing a solution. I will say more about this during my comments for Edgewater.

\* Vision and a Sense of Style

Last, yet certainly not least, yet definitely more subjective: vision and a sense of style. I am not talking about color and cornices, although these do matter on some level. I am talking about how **the development's form and function (architecture, roads, amenities, etc.) serves the stated objectives of enhancing the quality of life of Beacon's residents and its visitors and linking Beacon's Main Street with its waterfront, not merely balancing its budget.**

I attended a lecture recently in the Gallery Talk series at Dia:Beacon given by Steven Evans entitled "Building Dia:Beacon". No matter what you may think of the artwork, the place is a cathedral to human ingenuity and spirit. I really can't do justice here to all the things he said nor do I have the time for them, but I can mention a couple of things. The building was built in 1929. Its windows were designed so its workers could work by natural light. Today, you view the art work strictly by natural light. The building fell derelict and was renovated in 2002; this renovation was carefully thought out. On the inside of the building, the walls on the outside are exposed brick, inside walls smooth white; they draw you through the space and give you a sense of place no matter where you are in the building. We may not notice these consciously, but our bodies and minds do. **Dia:Beacon, the building, is an example of how they got it right, first when they built it, and again when they renovated it. We should emulate this.**

**It would be nice if a hundred from now people experience the same joy from the buildings we construct today as those that were built along our Main Street a hundred years ago.** Now's the time to include the visionaries. One friend characterized it as a Frank Lloyd Wright thing - buildings hugging the landscape, architectural sculpture, drawing the visitor as well as gaze along. We are early enough in the process.

**In summary: Viewsheds must be preserved. Public Transportation provided. Waterfront and Main Street linked. And a wondrous vision for Beacon's future realized.**

Thank you: Mayor, members of the City Council Members, and residents of Beacon.

New RD-1.7 Designed Residence Zoning District (Edgewater)

**\* Transit Oriented Development?**

Because of its proximity to the railroad station if not directly designated transit oriented development the innuendo has been there. But **is it really transit oriented development?** The summit is at roughly the same elevation and almost as distant linearly from the train station as the end of Main Street. Therefore, **people living at Edgewater are really no more likely to walk to and from the train station than those living in town:** 600 more cars driving to and from the train station and to and from Main Street. Edgewater might as well be a mile a way.

So what can we do? Limit the number of parking spaces? No, this will probably do more harm than good. **Before ordinance changes can be properly considered mass transportation plans need to be in place, concrete plans for frequent daily service, early morning to late evening.** A Smart Growth Grant for more studies is not enough. Likelihood of getting it is low, funds are limited, and studies to date (e.g. Linkage Study, July 2008) have been of limited usefulness. We need to get serious about mass transit; it has been a priority since early days of the comprehensive plan (focus groups) likely longer.

Thoughts and Questions:

\* Tompkins Terrace: Tompkins Terrace isn't that much further north than Edgewater and the elevation is roughly the same. They share the same access road to 9D. **Have any studies of Tompkins Terrace been done?** Cars per household? Percentage that walk/drive to the station. When they get in their cars do they drive to Main Street to shop or north on 9D to Poughkeepsie?

\* Edgewater challenge: I invite the City Council to climb to the summit of Edgewater with me starting at the train station. **Summit Edgewater with me?**

\* Thinking outside the box: perhaps form a mass transportation corporation into which the developers of Edgewater, TOD and Long Dock are required to buy shares not only to capitalize the purchase of equipment, but to fund the ongoing operation and maintenance? If they say, this is not a financially viable enterprise, isn't this the point - if they can't, can the city? We really need mass transport to make the idea of TOD (Transit Oriented Development) and Edgewater work properly. **Requiring developers to invest in mass transit will mean they have "skin in the game" and give the city something of significance and lasting value in exchange for these important sites to develop.**

**In summary: before zoning can be properly considered a funded mass transit plan must be in place.**

Thank you: Mayor, members of the City Council Members, and residents of Beacon.