



BOROUGH OF ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS

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RHONDA C. LEGRICE - Mayor

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Letter to Residents:

I want to clear up some misinformation that is circulating on various social media about a Borough owned vacant lot at 21 Leonard Avenue. On the tax map this is Block 136, Lot 1.

A brief history of COAH (N.J. Council on Affordable Housing)

COAH was created in 1985 following the second of many NJ court decisions known as Mt. Laurel, to ensure all municipalities complied with the ruling that required towns to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing units. The complete history of these court cases can be found online at this site:

<http://www.nj.gov/dca/affiliates/coah/resources/decisions.html>

Decades of court battles have ensued involving municipalities, COAH, developers ("builders remedy lawsuits"), and affordable housing advocates such as Fair Share Housing Alliance. At issue for most municipalities was how to determine the actual number of units required for each town to satisfy their obligation now and in the future. Wealthy suburban towns were no longer allowed to use RCA's (Regional Contribution Agreements) to satisfy their obligations. Under the Christie Administration, COAH was underfunded and understaffed leaving municipalities vulnerable to constant legal challenges as efforts to meet the changing numbers continued.

Atlantic Highlands has many multi-family apartments and condos within our Residential zones throughout the Borough. In 2006 an ordinance was adopted by the Atlantic Highlands Council which designated Affordable Housing zones within our residential zones, as land became available, in order to satisfy our future requirements to COAH. Among these were 84 Memorial Parkway, which Habitat for Humanity has recently built, and 21 Leonard Ave which the Borough purchased in 2008, following the New Jersey Natural Gas Company (NJNG) remediation project. The three-combined commercial/residential buildings in the Historic Business District on First Ave/Hennessey Blvd. that were approved by the Planning Board in the last 3 years have set aside the required 20% that must be affordable.

The Borough has maintained the property at 21 Leonard Avenue and up until this year, only one other development was proposed for the site: an 8 unit building, which after discussion with the neighborhood residents was reduced to a four unit home. That project never went any further. The current proposal by the Affordable Housing Alliance wants to build a two-story building with 4 units: (1) 1 bedroom, (2) 2 bedrooms, and (1) 3 bedroom, with an off-street parking lot with 8 spaces.

They are giving preference to wounded veterans and first responders for the handicapped accessible units. This organization received funding for identical buildings in Millstone and Spring Lake, NJ which will begin construction shortly. This proposed building is certainly not massive.

When people hear "Affordable Housing" there seems to be a knee-jerk "NIMBY" response that stigmatizes anyone who is in need of affordable housing. Currently there are Borough employees such as Police, DPW, and teachers whose starting salaries would meet the maximum income level requirements to qualify for affordable housing. Newly hired recent college graduates who are strapped with student loan debts or retired seniors on fixed incomes might also meet the income threshold. Single parent households currently out number "traditional" two parent households. Are they not entitled to live in our town?