— Letters —

To the Editor:

At the February 11th Borough Council meeting, Council member Stu Kaufman encouraged critical members of the public (I certainly count myself in this group) to "trust us" (the members of the Council). Several people felt somewhat offended by Stu's comment. I didn't, mainly because I don't trust the current Council one iota. As I see it, the Council seems hell-bent on "developing" Roosevelt with no regard for either the environmental or the financial repercussions. Make no mistake! At this past Council meeting, members of the Council debated—in all seriousness—whether it might be more "cost-effective" to upgrade the design of the new sewage treatment plant to accommodate up to 300 new units in town. "Cost-effective"? What about the sheer "cost" involved ($500,000—750,000)? Can **your** household afford to drop $4-5,000 **on top of the $140/month we're already paying** in order to make some future developer's life easier?

Why do I say this? What is the basis for these accusations? During the course of the meeting, Council member Lee Allen had been saying that his justification for running a bit loose with the political rules in re-doing the design work of the current sewer project was that "if I'm going to do a job, I'm going to do it the **right** way." I asked Lee what his concept of the **right** was, since it didn't seem to align perfectly with mine. I figured that a significant part of the **right** job would be striving to ease our incredible water/sewer rate. Lee went on to state, however, that he wanted to see "every single piece of sewer pipe in this town replaced." Ye gods! This is an **expensive** proposition, and one that I think far exceeds the current financial resources of our town.

I had to ask myself, what could justify this position? Why plan to spend additional money when we can barely afford to do the minimum job necessary to meet the DEP mandate? What sort of prudent fiscal policy is this? And then it hit me—this Council wants a crackerjack sewer system in order to make further development possible. **And they're gonna make us pay for it!** So I said to the Council: "You guys are trying to set this town up for development." Imagine the outcry! Imagine the protestations and denials! Peter Warren asked my why I was constantly dredging up that "tiresome old argument."

Well, I dredge it up because it's true, I dredge it up because it's going to cost each of us a lot of money, and I dredge it up because I think that development will do far more harm than good to this town. I bring development up because this issue is very much alive: the last item discussed by the Council that night was a report by the newly-hired engineering firm Applied Wastewater Technology about the design of the sewage treatment plant. The very same "why-are-you-always-bringing-up-the-development-issue" Council members spent about 3/4 of the discussion with the AWT engineers asking what modifications should be made to the plant design to provide for future development in the Borough (the current design will support the current population). In the four-page written report by AWT, further development of the Borough is specifically discussed on every page except one (with such "why-are-you-bringing-this-up" lines like "It has been indicated that an additional 75 dwelling units will be built in the near future...and a possible 225 units..."). Perhaps I'm way off-base and development is far from the minds of the Council. Sure seems that way, don't it?

The real kicker is the cost of the modifications to allow these 300 new dwelling units to be added to the plant. AWT estimated that it would be at least $500,000 to $650,000. During the discussion about this upgrade, not once—not **once**—was the idea that the cost should be paid by the developer even mentioned. Mark my words, some rationale will be manufactured justifying the "cost-effectiveness" of this expensive plan, and you and I will be paying money ($20-30 more each month!) now so that some future Hovnanian can show a slight increase on the bottom line.

That's one of the reasons I don't trust you guys, Stu. To even contemplate saddling our over-taxed and financially strapped population with this additional work in order to support future development is reprehensible. Even if you feel that putting condos on every inch of land surrounding our Borough is the One True Way to Glorify Man's Accomplishments, the simple fact is that we cannot now afford it.

I encourage each person reading this to attend the absurd theater that the Council meetings have become. (There's another issue of "trust" for you Stu; why does the Council constantly have to seek out legal loopholes to justify "emergency" meetings held with little or no public advertisement? Why was the very first Council meeting so remarkably orchestrated? Why the preponderance of closed sessions? Why does Kirk Rothfuss feel totally left out of the decision-making process, and he's even a member of the Council? This is "public involvement"?) I should warn you, however, that if your opinion runs counter to the a-priori "we-know-what's-best" decisions made by the Council majority, then your words become meaningless exercises in communication, and soon Mayor Barth will close (without warning) the public portion of the Council meeting (as was done at the past Council meeting—the first time I recall this happening since I've been a Roosevelt resident). But if the words seem meaningless now, then the water bills of the future will provide them with a dismal contextual grounding. Trust you, Stu? **Trust** you??

—Brad Garton