

Mr. Chairman, members of the board. I speak tonight regarding an important piece of real estate being considered for development in an expanding growth corridor. This development will significantly impact Northfield's northern conservation boundary. This land has value either way. Does the town choose conservation use or commercial use? This will certainly be an important choice for the voters.

My comments are predicated on the privilege of 25 years service at Spaulding Youth Center. Working on the ground level had allowed me to observe its operations and processes in every detail, very little had escaped my eyes.

I also predicate my comments having been a participant of the detailed 2003 Northfield Master Plan update.

This Master Plan update established the creation of the conservation districts and the permitted uses within these districts. This consensus was a direct result of the community gathering and community survey directing the planning board to implement the voters' wishes. 13 separate zoning articles were placed on ballot for town vote. The vote was in the affirmative on all articles.

There are three legs to the master plan that have been voiced by the community. The Protection of groundwater purity. The Preservation of open space. The integrity and control of taxes.

The surrendering of a conservation district to an expanding non-taxpaying business would take away one leg, if not two, of the master plan's intent. This would be in contradiction to the goals of the Master plan.

Spaulding Youth Center is primarily in the special education business. Education is the second largest business in this country, second only to health care. The education business is a business, accounts payable, accounts receivable. Some businesses fail, some thrive, some are accountable some are not. All have a bottom line.

The spirit and intent of our special education laws directs that each student has a right to an education that fits their individual needs regardless of their challenges; hopefully their education should complement their challenges. The intent is that a student receives an education that will allow them to be independent and successful into their adult life. Hopefully they can be taught useful life skills.

Spaulding Youth Center, in a manner, distorts this ideal. The often repeated phrases like "leverage our educational excellence" is clever spin. Smoke and mirrors we called it. I do think the only thing they leverage is the students' educational capital value.

Each student assessed with special educational needs inherently has an educational capital value. Unfortunately, for the student, this educational capital value instantly disappears upon reaching the age of 21 years. One high maintenance individual can cost taxpayers in the excess of three million dollars. It is no wonder actuaries frown on this. I have always hoped that the transition from student to adult for those that have lived at Spaulding until adulthood could be understood in a holistic manner. A responsibility for life ahead, for those that found Spaulding their home, could be continued. Certainly all the components are there, farm land, timber, an endowment, and the opportunity to provide a productive and fulfilling life

Yes the idea has been mentioned, adult services, but the answer is that there is no money in that.

Community and town services must be paid for in the most equitable manner possible. Just as each citizen has the right to utilize town services without prejudice each property owner pays their taxes without prejudice

Non profits have an extreme advantage in their exemption from property taxes that residents and businesses do not. A balance needs to be drawn in these taxing times.

Should the town consider removing a conservation district without adequate taxation the residence and business will have to foot the bill for increases in town services. Remember that undeveloped land and conservation lands do not require town services.

Should Spaulding Youth Center wish to rescind its non property tax paying exemption and become a full member of the community such discussions may merit consistencies with the master plan.

Spaulding's current 12 million plus dollar assessed valuation that is property tax exempt does represent a considerable portion of our total town assessed valuation. The draw on services, although at times large, is not supposed to be part of the equation yet it has to be.

I see no other choice but to not allow this change in the districts zoning status so as to be abide to Northfields master plan and the towns' peoples declared desires.

Should Spaulding wish to sell off its 40 to 50 acres of prime developable land and the town expands the commercial /industrial district, this is one option the board could take that into consideration while adhering to the master plan, this option would put the land into the free market where it would allow a maximum return towards the town's valuation.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, board members, Spaulding representatives, nothing in my heart wishes more than for substantial change in the treatment, educational life goals, and the rise of student housing out of the dark ages. Perhaps even a consideration for a life after graduation, for some of the most challenged and unique individuals we have the opportunity to serve. This proposal is focused on the bottom line. The town also needs to focus on their bottom line, their tax base, while respecting the citizens' stated choices, and the guidance of the master plan.

I submit this to the official record. Christopher Hunt Northfield