

TO: Bristol Selectboard
FR: John Moyers
DT: December 17, 2020

RE: Appointment to the Development Review Board

Bristol has many fine attributes and I'd like to play a part in protecting and building upon them. I have the time, a base of knowledge and experience, and a willingness to contribute in regular meetings.

In 1989, when I was a reporter for the Addison Independent, I first met Ken Weston. He was then a Selectboard or Planning Commission member (or perhaps both at that time). In one of our many conversations, Ken told me how much he believed in Bristol and its future. He talked about its people, place and history, the value of recreational resources and small-town life, and how he thought all those together would make for a bright future if they could be protected, encouraged and enjoyed. He sold me, and I've centered my life in Bristol ever since.

In 2000, I bought the Kilbourn Grist Mill and did a gut renovation in 2002. Since then, I've gut-renovated five more buildings in downtown Bristol, and currently hold and manage them for rents, with a mix of residential, business and creative tenants. I live immediately downtown in the Mill. So, my interest in Bristol and its future is pretty plain: the attractiveness and economic viability of the downtown, and Bristol generally, are of keen importance to me personally and professionally, and I've done what I can to promote those qualities and take a stake in the community.

Having applied for and received permits from the Town on each of these projects, I am well familiar with zoning issues, Bristol's bylaws and Town Plan, and the zoning process. When the Planning Commission revised and updated the Town Plan (a multi-year process culminating in 2010), I was closely involved and believe I played a productive part — many of my suggestions were incorporated into the version that ultimately was approved by Bristol voters.

The current consolidation of duties into a new Development Review Board is something that will benefit both applicants and the Town. It sets us up for the future (which will be busy, judging from the current real estate sales and rental markets) and I'd like to see the transition to the new system go well. As a businessperson going through the old process a half-dozen times, it became clear we could make improvements, though I'd hasten to add that the system worked fine for my projects, and the help of zoning administrators and the Town Office were a big part of that. But this new system promises a more rational, transparent and linear process for applicants and the Town, and that will be good. The adoption of subdivision regulations is a major improvement.

I've applied numerous times for positions on the ZBA and Planning Commission but not been appointed. This might be due to my leadership role in successfully opposing the 73-acre Lathrop gravel pit project proposed for the plateau south of the village, 500

yards from Holley Hall, just across the river. Perhaps this is the elephant in the room, the issue that gives you pause in considering my appointment now. If so, let me deal with that issue directly.

At the inception of the proposal in 2003, many townspeople were concerned. We read the application, we read the Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws, and we raised several issues at the very start. We urged the Zoning Board to follow the advice it had solicited from the Addison County Regional Planning Commission, which recommended that the ZBA decline the application.

Without getting into the details too much, we pointed to the black-letter law in the zoning bylaws that prohibited “the digging of pits or the creation of steep slopes.” The ZBA ignored that language and our citation of it, and approved the project anyway. We filed suit. A lot of controversy followed.

But in the end — 12 years later — those of us in opposition to the gravel pit were proved correct in our reading of Bristol’s rules. The Supreme Court of Vermont wholly endorsed our original interpretation of the zoning bylaws and Town Plan, citing exactly the sections of each that we cited in 2003 and concurring with our interpretation of them, and it ruled decisively in our favor.

Whatever one’s position might have been on the pit — pro or con — this history is important. The ZBA of 2003 ignored the rules to approve a major project that would have fundamentally altered the small-town, small-business character of Bristol. Those of us in opposition read the rules, applied them, and stood by them. Ultimately, our reading of the rules was proven correct by the Supreme Court of Vermont.

If you’re wondering what sort of member of the new DRB I would be, this history offers an idea. I would read the rules and apply them. I’d do my homework. I would keep in mind the values and goals set forth by Planning Commissioners in our Town Plan to protect and enhance Bristol’s many attributes, the things that make life here so good.

With that, I respectfully submit my application for a position on the new Development Review Board.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John Moyers
23 Main Street
802-989-3996