

# Letter: Why I voted 'no' on rezoning plan

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Last Wednesday, the village Board of Trustees voted to approve a major rezoning plan for the village which will bring thousands of new residents to Port Chester and shape its future for years to come. Most of the development that will come from the new plan is focused on the downtown area. As a trustee, I cast my vote against the rezoning for a number of reasons. While I support development in general, the need to revamp our zoning code and increase revenue, I believe that this proposal was inadequate on a number of fronts. It did not contain enough affordable housing at a level to ensure that Port Chester's working-class residents will be able to stay here, it did not offer protections for workers in the wave of new construction that the rezoning will bring, and it did not do enough to protect our small businesses, which risk being evicted to make way for new construction in the midst of a tremendously difficult economic crisis. These are matters of policy. I commend the years of work and effort that were put into the plan by the village staff and planning department and I said as much in my remarks.

The rezoning process has been a long one, and throughout this process, community activists have stood up and made their voices heard. I count myself among them. Our engagement with the rezoning brought about some significant improvements, which includes a map created by the NAACP Working Group showing many of the small businesses that exist along Main Street and Westchester Avenue that would be affected by development—a majority owned by people of color. This puts into stark relief who loses—the very people who helped revitalize this community by taking a leap of faith to open storefront businesses in the downtown area. Nonetheless, in my view the final product in terms of policy prioritizes the needs of developers over those of the community and does too little to ensure that developers are responsible to the communities in which they build. I am disappointed by the result and continue to believe that village residents were not fully engaged in a decision which will affect their homes, jobs and livelihoods in the coming years, particularly when our attention was turned away in the midst of a pandemic.

This fight is not over, though. The need to ensure that Port Chester remains an affordable, diverse and thriving community has never been clearer. Thanks to our activism, the village is now committed to studying the impact of the rezoning on small businesses and developing a mitigation plan, and I will be deeply engaged with that process. I and many others will continue to work to make sure that new development improves rather than erases our village's character by leaving us with plaques and no charm and that tax breaks and other benefits for developers are tied to real benefits for the whole community.

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Port Chester

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