



Mary Alex <malex@washingtonny.org>

Letter re FOTOW

1 message

Jesse Derris <jd@derris.com>

Mon, Jan 30, 2023 at 3:32 PM

To: malex@washingtonny.org, CCBriggs@washingtonny.org

January 30, 2023

Town of Washington Town Board
Via Email to Mary Alex, Town Clerk at malex@washingtonny.org
Via Email to Christine Briggs, Deputy Town Clerk at
CCBriggs@washingtonny.org

CC: Mary Alex, Town Clerk
Town of Washington Zoning Appeals Board
Town of Washington Planning Board
Town of Washington Conservation Advisory Board
Town of Washington Comprehensive Review Committee

Dear Town Supervisor Ciferri and Town Board Members Heaney, Rochfort, Murphy and Audia,

I write today in response to the FOTOW letter to the board dated January 18, 2023, and as a resident of the Town of Washington.

I was saddened to see my name in FOTOW's letter, but not surprised. The mention of me as a "hired gun" is not only false and meant to mislead, it is also part of a pattern of false and/or misleading comments that FOTOW has perpetrated throughout this process. Their defamatory letter gives me no choice but to respond and set the record straight on behalf of myself and the many people who feel pressured and even threatened by this small group of vocal and powerful people.

To be clear, I am Will Guidara's close friend and have said as much repeatedly. But I am not involved with the Migdale project as an investor or a consultant, and never have been.

This fact is not a surprise to FOTOW, as I have said it directly to Andrew Heaney. The fact that he continues to repeat this lie in writing is, as I said before, both defamatory and beneath contempt. It is also consistent with Heaney's and FOTOW's continued pattern of behavior since the start of this dialogue.

Let's be clear: FOTOW has attempted at each turn to use its power, influence and money to intimidate and try to cow the town and any resident who doesn't agree with its position, me included. Many in the town – including business owners I've spoken to – have been bullied after expressing support for Migdale.

After the first time I spoke in favor of Migdale at an August 2021 town meeting, my company received an email from Andrew Heaney that same evening (attached herein). Heaney and I had never met, but we know people in common. Instead of finding a warm introduction, he sent the following email at 11:54 PM to our generic "info" email address, with the subject line "Your boss":

"Just saw him on a town Zoom tonight in Millbrook pretending to be just a local Dad with no connection to Will Guidara. Don't you guys work for Will Guidara?"

"Please tell him to call me- would love to chat with him about his perspective on young families in the area."

This is a fascinating approach to neighborly interaction, but one that appears representative of Mr. Heaney's attempts to intimidate throughout this process.

In our subsequent conversation in August 2021, I was absolutely clear that I have zero financial involvement in Migdale and do not work for Will in any capacity – these are facts Heaney knew before repeating this lie once again in his recent letter, 1.5 years later.

Over time, I've become less and less certain about FOTOW's motives in opposing further development in the community, including Migdale and The Cottonwood Motel. At the last town meeting, FOTOW supporters repeatedly spoke out against "commercial activities in rural areas." But their proposed prohibition seems selective, at best.

In its letter to the board, FOTOW accused me of "insulting" the Millbrook Winery by pointing out that it was also a commercial endeavor in a rural environment. I'm not sure what is insulting about pointing out the obvious (and I'll note that I followed this point by saying that we love having the Winery as a neighbor), but I do think the comparison is apt. I also think it's worth pointing out that the owners of the winery are among the signatories and supporters of FOTOW, which begs the question of how they can be both for and against commercial activities in the rural areas of our town?

Each summer weekend, the winery welcomes hundreds of cars and what I can only estimate is thousands of guests. The parking overflows in front of and in back of the winery building. On Friday nights, they host several food trucks and live amplified music in the evening. They do the same on Saturdays. We can hear this music from our home on Bangall Road after our children are asleep. They've hosted ticketed concerts and other large scale events, like Tough Mudder-style races. This is the very essence of a commercial business in a rural area.

More than that, FOTOW continues to talk about water usage in the town, and about how (rightly) precious our water is to the community. I struggle with squaring that message with the water waste we see at the Millbrook Winery. We walk with our family past the winery on Wing Road nearly every weekend in the spring, summer and fall. The winery's vines are planted on a sloped hill and a large amount of water runs down that hill and collects at the bottom in large pools adjacent to the road.

I do not know where the winery gets its water, but I assume that it has taken the right remedial steps to protect its – and our – water supply. I trust that they have done the right thing. Why don't they extend that trust (with verification, of course) to new projects like Migdale and The Cottonwood Motel? Is it disrespectful to the Dysons or anyone else to simply ask these questions in a public forum? And if so, why?

I won't pretend to know the Winery's licenses or permits, and to be clear, I'm not asking the town to reconsider them or to stop them from conducting their business. We do not want that. As I said, we like the winery and visit it often as a family. My point isn't to impugn the Millbrook Winery or anyone associated with it, it's to point out what appears to be a double standard.

I've often asked myself why FOTOW is trying so hard to get this addendum added to a master plan that took nearly a decade to complete (and even then was completed nearly a decade ago, before an entire generation of residents moved to town)? To me, it appears there are two reasons: First, they believe the addendum will have the force of law and will effectively block new hospitality in town. And second, they see and understand that the more people in the community have learned about these projects, the more support the projects have earned. FOTOW wants the process over and done before that support becomes overwhelming. I do not.

I hope this back and forth leads to increased dialogue and room for more people to gather information and become more informed about these projects. I sincerely hope that the board doesn't give in to FOTOW before this process has taken its full course.

Kindest regards,
Jesse Derris



8.26.21 Andrew Heaney Email.pdf

84K