

LETTERS



DANIEL S. BRODY

A duplicate of this letter was sent to us for publication in Sanctuary by Gale Warner, a frequent contributor to the journal. It concerns a Gloucester housing development, which could destroy the last pristine salt marsh and clam flat in the city.

MEPA Unit
Environmental Affairs Office
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
100 Cambridge St.
Boston, MA 02202

Dear MEPA Officers:

I would like to make some comments regarding the proposed Castleview Development in Gloucester that is now under "failsafe" Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) review.

There are numerous detailed, rational, scientific, data-based arguments as to why this project is a bad idea on health and environmental grounds. These houses are likely to cause the closure of nearby clam flats, significantly threaten already pressured wildlife in the salt marshes and uplands, and of course, destroy trees and other natural features on the land itself. A major issue not yet adequately addressed by anyone is the mapped designation of this entire area as habitat for rare and endangered species.

But I will leave those arguments to those who can make them far more ably than I can. I'd like instead to speak of the things that, unfortunately, tend not to be spoken of at hearings. There are those who say these things run the immediate risk of being ridiculed as "emotional," "softhearted," "unrealistic," "irrelevant," "under delusions," and so on. At the site hearing I attended today, all of those words were indeed used by the developer's attorney when a few people dared to mention the issues I'm going to raise.

In our current climate of values and assumptions regarding land use, it's no wonder that those who are motivated by a passionate desire to save the land and its living things often censor themselves from expressing their true feelings for fear that this will mean their rational, data-based arguments won't be taken seriously. For the record, in case what I'm about to say taints the "seriousness" of the opposition to the project, let me state that I'm not speaking on behalf of anyone but myself.

Let me see if I can try to "decode" some of what I see is happening.

Many people who live here are sad and angry because a beautiful piece of wild land will be lost forever. Lawns and

driveways will replace wildflowers and native forest. Cars and skateboards will replace deer and foxes. Noise will replace silence. A little piece of civilization will replace a little piece of wilderness. This change happens no matter what kind of sewage system is used. And the change is permanent, at least within the lifetimes of several generations.

The owner and his entourage of developers acquired the land some time ago in order to make money. They have no connection to the land beyond what dollars it can make for them. Let me be more precise—they have no *emotional* connection to the land. But let's remember that this doesn't mean their emotions are not involved. They want to make this money *very badly*.

Still, it is not considered "softhearted" or "emotional" in our society to want to make money. And so they clearly have the upper hand. Not only do they have all the legal rights and the funds to hire consultants and lawyers, but they are also operating within the existing ethical norms of our culture. They don't have to challenge society's fundamental, institutionalized land attitudes to win. The farther we stay away from discussions of ethics and emotions, the better for them.

Let me now burn all bridges to "credibility" and "realism" and say: I am completely, totally, personally, emotionally, ethically opposed to there being *any* houses built on this land.

I don't care if they put in the greatest drainage and septic systems in the world. It's a crime and a travesty for future generations that an area so beautiful, so unique, so vulnerable, and so irreplaceable be destroyed. And destroyed it will be, whether the house lots are half an acre or three acres, whether the buffer zone is a hundred feet or five hundred feet.

Long after all the environmental studies are shredded as trash in some forgotten office, people will walk through this subdivision, wonder what it used to be like, and wonder how our society could have been so shortsighted, so focused on immediate greed and gain, and so selfish as to have allowed the destruction of this small, in some ways pitiful, little remnant of wild Massachusetts coast.

I have learned in my relatively short life (I'm twenty-eight) that rule number one with what seem to be hopeless environmental battles is: *never* give up. Delay, fight, scream, rant and rave, but never give up, *especially* if the other side tells you to (as they did today in no uncertain terms). Situations can change in the most unexpected of ways. The trees and the flowers and the animals in their burrows are not dead until they are bulldozed and blasted, until the asphalt has been poured, and the wetlands buried under dirt.

GALE WARNER
Gloucester

Sanctuary welcomes comments from its readers.