

Do neighborhoods really need saving.... from developers? Most of us think that developer generally do good things for our neighborhoods. They build us our homes and apartments: they give us more and better places to shop; they put bright new office buildings that bring more jobs and revenues to our cities and give us modern, convenient places to work. So how can anything be wrong with this?

It has taken some time for most of us to begin to see the truth: There can be too much of a good thing. The jobs and tax revenues provided by the new building are no consolation to the neighborhoods that had all of their sunlight cut off by their new neighbor. While, I am not saying that development is bad, but that a particular development may have bad consequences for a particular neighborhood. People generally know bad development when they see it and that is after it's built. When faced with unwanted development in the neighborhoods, the first natural reaction is often a shrug "I just live here. " I am proud to say that attitude does not exist in Malden. I have personally witness two separate but very similar Malden neighborhoods, each one involved in the battle to limit the amount of development being proposed in their backyard.

While we like passion in our lives, we do not in our neighborhoods. Like most, these neighborhoods want their neighborhoods quiet, stable, tidy and above all safe. Neighborhood quality is not gong to measurably improve as a result of reducing the dust from a near by construction site or any other condition placed on a developer. The neighborhoods quality is something that is hard to measure but easy to understand when there is no quality.

The neighborhoods were both realistic enough to realize that the things that are going to make a difference in the City of Malden are the little things that are done, rather than the big things. It is how people are strengthened, how people begin to become involved in the community, and ultimately how changed come about. However both neighborhoods are face with the same dilemma, improve a blighted area or live with more neighbors, noise, and traffic. While both of these projects are bringing needed tax revenues, there is usually no guarantee that the "ripple effects" of the projects will benefit those residents who need them most, the neighborhood. In addition, both developers of these projects have a particular social responsibility, not only because they are moving into existing neighborhoods but ultimately they are altering how people will live. Developers can't simply ignore residents' concerns. They need to listen and then try to find a common solution. Often residents pointed out something that a developer hadn't considered. Working together, the two groups made a development better than it would have been otherwise.

Likewise, the residents simply did not try to block every new development that's proposed. Both realized growth will be a part of our future. Malden and the surrounding areas are desirable places to live -- it's why we all choose to live here. As long as this community is desirable, we will continue to grow. While growth isn't always bad, it also isn't always good. So, the goal of residents interested in land use was to foster positive, healthy growth. In both neighborhoods they developed a good working relationship with developers. They both shared information about the development trends. Both developers had concerns about the economic feasibility of a new style, but helped in finding a solution. Both neighborhoods used the mistakes of previous bad developments being repeated, and expressed their concerns and helped look for alternatives.

I hope more residents and members of the development community will commit themselves to working together in the future. With so much mistrust and animosity between the two groups, I realize this won't be an easy task.

I realize that, even if a strong partnership is created, there will still be occasions where residents choose to fight new growth and developers can't concede to residents' wishes. That's to be expected. In general, however, the future for development use in our community will be brighter if we start working together.

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