



HISTORIANS IN DEFENSE OF HISTORIC PRINCETON

**We write as citizens as well as historians to express
our deep concern about the preservation of historic Princeton.**

Few if any American towns are as distinguished as Princeton, connected as it is to the breadth of our history. Its landmarks, beloved by tourists as well as townspeople, are many. Within a radius of less than a quarter mile sits a unique historic area that includes The Barracks, dating to ca. 1684 and the temporary residence of both James Madison and Alexander Hamilton a century later when Princeton was the fledgling nation's capital.

Other highlights include Frog Hollow, site of important combat during the battle of Princeton, a turning point in the American Revolution; Morven, the estate of Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; Marquand Park and Arboretum, dating to 1855; and Albert Einstein's residence during his tenure at the Institute for Advanced Study from 1935 until his death in 1955.

We are distressed to learn that this remarkable neighborhood is now threatened by the construction of a massive, privately built luxury housing project, startlingly high in density, with provision for a 200-vehicle underground garage, and with minimal allowance for affordable housing.

For generations, Princetonians, assisted by the state and federal governments, have been wise and vigilant stewards of their town's legacy. The municipality has balanced innovation and responsible growth with preservation of the historical elements that help make Princeton the distinctive place it is, a magnet for visitors from across the globe. Abandoning that stewardship now would be an irreparable blow to the prestige not simply of Princeton but of New Jersey and, ultimately, the nation at large.

The arrival of the 250th anniversary of the Revolution seems an auspicious moment to rededicate ourselves to the trust bestowed on us. In that spirit, we urge not simply Princetonians but all concerned citizens to oppose this destructive and ultimately self-destructive project.

Ken Burns, Independent Filmmaker, Florentine Films
Harold Holzer, Roosevelt House at Hunter College, CUNY
James M. McPherson, Princeton University
Jon Meacham, Vanderbilt University
Sean Wilentz, Princeton University
Brenda Wineapple, Columbia University

Institutional affiliations listed for identification purposes only.

Ad Hoc Committee of Historians in Defense of Historic Princeton,
7 Edgehill Street, Princeton, NJ 08540

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Writing in Support of the Prominent Historians Defending Historic Princeton

To the Editor:

I read with keen interest the statement in the full-page advertisement entitled "Historians in Defense of Historic Princeton" in your April 23 issue. I encourage everyone to read the ad.

Expressing "deep concern about the preservation of historic Princeton," six nationally prominent historians — Ken Burns, Harold Holzer, James M. McPherson, Jon Meacham, Sean Wilentz, and Brenda Wineapple — have singled out a massive luxury high-rise development project in the Mercer Hill neighborhood as "destructive and self-destructive."

The development sits partially within the Mercer Hill Historic District, adjacent to the Barracks at 32 Edgehill Street — the oldest structure in Princeton, dating to 1684 — and close to two National Historic Landmarks, Morven, and Einstein's house.

It is adjacent to Edgehill Street, one of Princeton's oldest streets with residences that date to the 1830s. But all the structures in the area will be degraded by the towering luxury blocks being proposed. Take note: the project calls for a rise of 50 feet above Stockton Street, but as seen from Mercer Street and including rooftop machinery it will reach more than 100 feet high. Nothing in historic residential Princeton comes remotely close to the height of this ill-advised development.

With its whopping 238 units and a 261 vehicle underground garage the project will be by far the highest in density in any residential neighborhood in Princeton. It will be more than twice as dense as The Alice beside Princeton Shopping Center. The looming traffic concerns, meanwhile, are nightmarish.

To be clear, this project is *not* an effort to achieve housing equity. It is an immense profit-driven luxury development

with the absolute minimum set-aside for affordable housing as required by law. Alternative plans for the site with lower density but *more* affordable housing have been presented to municipal authorities for consideration and summarily rejected.

If the project advances, Princetonians in general, not just those who live in the neighborhood, will be the losers. Residents need to know that the municipality has committed a \$40 million tax break giveaway to the developer. This will shift the tax burden for schools and other public necessities away from the developer to ordinary taxpayers. Moreover, as the historians remind us, Princeton is a national treasure, and this heritage is to our collective benefit, especially as we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

Princetonians: please help protect Princeton's unique historic heritage. First, please send a brief note of support to the historians at historicprinceton@gmail.com. Second, please contact members of Princeton Council and of the Princeton Planning Board to make clear your opposition and remind them that they will be held accountable. Third, please attend all public meetings about this project. In all, celebrate Princeton history by protecting it against this unwarranted private development, for today and for the generations to come.

ROB ROBERTSON
Mercer Street

Name Calling Has No Place in Debate Over Proposed Apartment Complex on Stockton Street

To the Editor:

I'm disheartened that the debate over the proposed high-rise luxury apartment complex on Stockton Street has reduced some community members to name-calling, specifically accusing the residents who opposed this development of being NIMBYs. This is a facile and generic epithet, and in this case it is also patently false. Far from opposing affordable housing in our backyard, we want *more* of it. It's the proposed project that will worsen the imbalance.

Our immediate community of neighbors worked with architects to draft a vision for the plot that would entail less density and 100 percent affordable housing units, as opposed to the minimal 20 percent required by law in the proposed luxury project. The neighborhood plan, while including more total affordable units, intended those units as a path to home ownership. The plan included state-of-the-art environmental and green technology to address 21st century climate change.

Municipal authorities summarily dismissed this plan. Instead, we're left with the densest development in any residential neighborhood in Princeton — a development that, with its 200-plus car garage and its felling of 200-year-old trees across the site, will badly exacerbate flooding.

If the municipal Council in a town like Princeton, with its endless intellectual, technological, political, and financial resources, can't take the time to envision what innovative, sustainable long-term housing options might look like, what municipality in this country can? As a town, surely we could explore the private/public partnership that would make this type of housing a reality. To dismiss this out of hand lacks the curiosity and creativity we desperately need at the present time.

Yes, Princeton has become unaffordable. There are myriad reasons for this: a university that subsidizes faculty mortgages, a theological seminary that owns a significant number of homes in and around the Mercer Hill district; and not least, a lack of creative foresight.

I encourage community members to see this proposed development and the rhetoric about addressing the affordability crisis for what it is: a bait-and-switch proposition. We get 238 units with rents of \$6,000/month and a paltry 48 set aside as affordable. It neither affords working families the opportunity for home ownership, nor aids those in need of less expensive options.

As a native Princetonian, a former volunteer for Princeton Community Housing, and having had the great good fortune to have been a resident of PCH for three years, no one cares more about making Princeton affordable than I do.

Finally, as we see daily in our national politics, I'd remind those who disagree that name-calling is always a substitute for reasoned arguments.

CAROLINE CLEAVES
Edgehill Street

Proposed Development Would Degrade Area Well-Known and Beloved for its Historical Value

To the Editor:

We are writing in support of an ad placed in the April 23 issue of Town Topics by six of this nation's leading historians — Ken Burns, Harold Holzer, Jon Meacham, James McPherson, Sean Wilentz, and Brenda Wineapple — an ad expressing opposition to the current development plans for a site on Stockton Street sold several years ago by the Princeton Theological Seminary. We also oppose this proposed development, both from an historic preservation and present-day quality of life perspective.

This swath of land, which sits partially within the Mercer Hill Historic District, is in Princeton's oldest continuously inhabited, by non-Indigenous persons, neighborhood, and is in one of the most historically important parts of town, an area that, for 300 years, has been characterized by low density, charming and historic dwellings — the kinds of old houses and buildings, of local, regional, and national historical significance, that have drawn people to this renowned university town for decades upon decades. It sits adjacent to the oldest house in Princeton, built around 1684, and is a stone's throw from Morven, built in the 1750s by Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. It is just up the road from the battlefield on Mercer Street, site of the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777, and is just west of Nassau Hall, built in 1756 and damaged by fighting between the British and Continental Army during this engagement. British troops surrendered

Nassau Hall to General Washington, a turning point in the American Revolutionary War. The Hun School was formerly located on this site, and more recently it served as part of the campus of the Princeton Theological Seminary, founded in 1812. Of other historical note, Thomas Mann's brick Georgian house on Stockton Street is a close neighbor, as is Einstein's former house around the corner on Mercer Street.

History, education, and beautiful old buildings are intrinsic parts of Princeton, distinguishing and irreplaceable features that make this town so special, and so desirable. Who wouldn't want to live here? We fear, however, that this new, high density development, so centrally located, will permanently change and damage the historic and architecturally pleasing character of this part of town. It will also add to the already overloaded and busting-at-the-seams infrastructure of Princeton. There are already way too many people living in the area. The roads, etc. cannot take more cars; none of us can tolerate yet more traffic in and around town. We wonder what steps, if any, the developers have taken to protect the historic and architectural integrity of this neighborhood. To disregard hundreds of years of recorded and visible, tangible history, still so remarkably extant here, would deprive future generations of a clear vision of our country in its earliest years. It would degrade an area well-known and beloved for its historical value.

BOBBIE BENNETT
LAURA BENNETT
Cherry Valley Road

Princeton's Old Architecture and Neighborhoods Must be Respected, Protected, and Preserved

To the Editor:

"History, education, and beautiful old buildings are intrinsic parts of Princeton," wrote Bobbie and Laura Bennett in a letter to the Editor of Town Topics ["Proposed Development would Degrade Area Well-Known and Beloved for its Historical Value," Mailbox, May 7]. They continued, "(they are) distinguishing and irreplaceable features that make this town so special, so desirable. Who wouldn't want to live here?" Exactly. But Princeton cannot be home to everyone; the infrastructure is indeed already overloaded. And to build a huge residential project on land partially within the Mercer Hill Historic District would be a travesty.

It has been pointed out often that the 238 apartments and 250+ vehicle garage would only provide the bare minimum of affordable housing units mandated by law. Other plans, more appropriate to the site, offering more lower-income housing were hopefully presented and rejected. The chosen project, to which the municipality has committed a \$40 million tax break for the developer, begs the simple question: "Why?"

"Why this one?" is being asked by many Princetonians, in all of our neighborhoods, who oppose this choice. It is the wrong project in the wrong place at the wrong time or anytime.

Our family arrived in Princeton in 1965, with two toddler daughters, and financially stretched to purchase the most modest home in town. We knew we were investing wisely in a life in a community offering not only enormous academic and cultural resources, but a life to be spent amidst amazing history and beauty. We were eager to become involved and we did ... ultimately living in three houses very close to the proposed project.

Our last home, built around 1700, from stones carried from the "brook" of the same name, had stood for almost a century before witnessing the important nearby battles of the American Revolution. We were thrilled to own a piece of history, to become its most recent stewards.

"We cannot be sentimental about old buildings," one municipal planner remarked not long ago. As stewards in this amazing town, we *all* must be! Princeton's old architecture and neighborhoods must be respected, protected and preserved. Past Princetonians carefully maintained what can never be replaced.

We must slow down and carefully think through before deciding in what ways we may wisely alter forever a whole town, unique in its universally-recognized historical significance and beauty.

"Will you look over there!," my awed Uber driver from Jersey City said, pointing to a row of old houses we were passing. "I bet these places have been around a couple hundred years!" "Actually more," I replied proudly. (He's bringing his wife down for a look around.)

PAMELA POPPE GOOD
Hulfish Street

Writing Rebuttal to Message in Advertisement Placed by Ad Hoc Committee of Historians

To the Editor:

This is a rebuttal to a paid advertisement "Historians In Defense Of Historic Princeton," published in Town Topics on April 23 by the Ad Hoc Committee of Historians in Defense of Historic Princeton.

I write as a citizen and resident of Princeton to express deep concern with the severe decline in housing affordability, an attendant decline in socio-economic diversity, the absence of constructive discourse, and the acutely polarizing politics these have all helped to engender throughout our nation.

Our historians' plea in defending historic Princeton describes the targeted development as "destructive," inciting fear. I believe otherwise: Nothing is to be eliminated or even obscured. Indeed, the project is additive, even palliative, as I describe further below.

Further, the authors divert and agitate with "privately built" and "luxury" descriptives.

Fundamental laws of economics require some balance between supply and demand to ensure probity in pricing. When demand exceeds supply, scarcity drives prices higher. Housing demand across the U.S., New Jersey, Mercer County, and Princeton, have all risen. The requisite supply of housing has not. Affordability has suffered greatly. Our school teachers, police officers, health care workers, store clerks, *inter*

alia, can no longer afford to live in our town.

As a longstanding resident of Princeton, I observe how trends in rents and housing prices have led to a sharp decline in affordability, echoing and augmenting a problem endemic to our nation. The socio-economic diversity that once characterized our community has given way to an increasingly atomized homogeneity. To my mind, this is poisonous to our culture and our democratic heritage.

Preserving history is but one dimension of a problem we must address. The defense of our democratic institutions is another, more pressing, one. I view the current challenges to those institutions as grounded in a backlash against gaping disparities in living standards. Housing is a key element of those imbalances.

What restrains us from providing more, desperately needed, housing along with preserving the better parts of our history? How else, economically, can we incentivize provision of more and affordable housing absent the indirect subsidy provided by market-rate units?

"Few if any American towns are as distinguished as Princeton, connected as it is to the breadth of our history. Its landmarks, beloved by tourists as well as townspeople, are many." I agree. Yet I also note that, as part of that same history, certain cohorts of our citizenry were once restricted to specific parts of town and unwelcome on campus.

While our nation's laws have corrected for these moral transgressions, our economy, misguided policies, and learned behaviors secure their repetition by other means.

I appeal to our community to look beyond parochial, single-issue concerns and reflect more deeply upon our mutual and collective needs as a nation.

DAN CHAMBY
Lake Drive

Responding to Rebuttal of Advertisement Placed by Ad Hoc Committee of Historians

To the Editor:

As Dan Chamby's rebuttal to "Historians in Defense of Historic Princeton," rehashes some of the flimsiest arguments favoring the massive luxury project proposed for the former Tennent-Roberts site ["Writing Rebuttal to Message in Advertisement Placed by Ad Hoc Committee of Historians," Mailbox, May 14"], I'm delighted, as one of the historians he upbraids, to respond.

His letter calls the severe shortage of affordable housing in Princeton a threat to our democratic heritage. Absolutely correct. Yet the project he supports provides the absolute *minimum* of affordable housing, 20 percent of all units.

An alternative plan presented to the Municipality offers 100 percent affordable housing, with less density but more affordable units than the proposed complex. The affordable units in the complex revert to market price in 30 years; the alternative offers affordable unit residents a pathway to home ownership.

The alternative plan attacks the affordability crisis head on and promises to welcome scores of lower-income families into historic Princeton as they deserve, as neighbors and friends. The proposed project with its close to 200 luxury — yes, luxury — units will *worsen* the very inequalities the rebuttal purports to deplore.

Yet the Municipality has summarily rejected the alternative proposal while handing the current developer a \$40 million PILOT, shifting the extra tax burden onto hard-pressed homeowners.

Let's face it: the proposed project is an extremely dense high-end complex being disguised as a noble advance for social justice to win public favor. We're supposed to believe that the surest way to build more affordable housing and combat inequality is to build four times as much luxury housing! And on a massive scale! This double-talk shamelessly exploits the great cause the rebuttal claims to uphold, while it hoodwinks Princetonians of goodwill.

The rebuttal charges us historians with fearmongering about "destructive" effects in historic Princeton. The project, it claims, will be "additive," an enhancement. But one of those additions is a 261-vehicle underground garage that threatens to cause severe flooding to vulnerable historic homes and sites. I'd call that destructive. Another addition is the project's vehicle entrance and exit on hazardous, traffic-heavy Route 206, a federal highway, the potential havoc spilling into an 18th-century street. Still another is a complex built atop a hill that will loom like the Bastille over historic homes and sites at the bottom of the hill, including Albert Einstein's former residence. How is any of this (and much more), in the rebuttal's word, "palliative?"

The rebuttal spares us the ballyhooed "walkable" features of the project, hyped elsewhere as if hundreds of new residents won't need to drive to shop for groceries, see a doctor, purchase hardware and household supplies, and more, exacerbating an already nightmarish traffic problem.

Unfortunately, the rebuttal's conclusion insinuates that we historians, ignoring Princeton's history of residential segregation, may be racially motivated. It's the tired old, discredited NIMBY smear jacked up a bit.

Can't we talk about repudiating and correcting that oppressive racist history in more direct, creative, and even radical ways, using all our Princeton brains and imagination, instead of falling for the cloaked designs of regressive profit-driven luxury development?

SEAN WILENTZ
Edgehill Street

Proposed High Rise Development Project at Stockton Street Needs a Substantial Rethink

To the Editor:

I am a 20+ year resident of Princeton. I am very sympathetic with recent Town Topics letters advocating for the retention and enhancement of the historic character of our lovely town. The economics of this Stockton Street development “deal” suggest long-term problems for *all* town residents which should be equally considered. As I understand it, the Princeton Municipal government has agreed to provide a substantial “gift” to the developer in the form of a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes), which is usually offered to develop challenged or blighted areas offering long-term tax reductions and forgiveness.

There are many ways to calculate the long-term impact on the town, but importantly, according to the town’s numbers, the PILOT offers a *huge* tax break of \$30 million (see the town’s memorandum posted online and dated December 6, 2024). Over the last five years, average rent inflation has significantly exceeded 4 percent. If we use a more modest number averaging the last 10 years of 3.8 percent rent inflation (tradingeconomics.com/united-states/rent-inflation), the value of the tax break is *even higher* at roughly \$40 million.

This massive gift and the PILOT program will lead to two key problems: 1) School Funding: Not one penny of tax revenue appears to be committed to schools in this proposal despite the 238 rental units bringing many new learners into our great but crowded school system; and 2) Over time this “gift” to the developers and the shortfall in tax revenue to the school system will lead to *all* taxpayers making up the difference in this and other areas of municipal spend.

For comparison, Avalon Princeton, the 280-unit development on Witherspoon Street, would appear to demonstrate clearly that no subsidies are needed for a rental development like this. To make things even clearer, the proposed rental rates of the new Stockton project will be 20-30 percent over the current published rates at Avalon! Hardly a ‘blighted’ area — clearly not requiring financial incentives from Princeton. Allocations for school services that *will* be incurred are essential. Funds should not be used as a “plug” to fix recurring poor financial decisions by the Princeton Municipal Government.

Finally, do note that the PILOT is based on a designation of this area as an “Area in Need of Redevelopment” that is “blighted.” Last time I looked, *none* of the areas included in this site could be considered blighted. It is Marquand Park without landscaping. The density of this development is proposed to be over 15 times that of the surrounding neighborhood and will surely create additional traffic havoc.

This project needs a substantial rethink.

STEVE SNYDER
Farrand Road

Mailbox

The views of the letters do not necessarily reflect the views of Town Topics.

Questioning PILOT for Proposed Stockton Street Development Project Based on ANR Designation

To the Editor:

Regarding the controversy over the proposed Stockton Street development:

In his letter raising concerns about the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) that the town has granted the developer of the Stockton Street site ["Proposed High Rise Development Project at Stockton Street Needs a Substantial Rethink," Mailbox, May 21], Steve Snyder notes that this "substantial 'gift'" is based on our Council's designation of the area as an ANR (or "Area in Need of Redevelopment").

The State of New Jersey allows municipalities to designate ANRs "to arrest and reverse conditions of deterioration of housing, commercial and industrial facilities" in areas that meet various conditions, including "substandard, unsafe, unsanitary, dilapidated, or obsolescent" buildings which are deemed "detrimental to the safety, health, morals, or welfare of the community" (Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, NJSA 40A:12A-1 et seq.).

How is this relevant? It certainly came as a surprise to me that the Princeton Theological Seminary, which then as now owns the property in question, was responsible for anything that might conceivably meet such criteria!

After a little digging, I find that in 2018 the town Council, on the recommendation of the Princeton Planning Board, decided (Resolution 18-336) that some poorly maintained buildings belonging to the seminary did so qualify; and then in 2019 subsequently found (Resolution 19-188) that additional properties from the adjoining area also met the (sub) standard. Who knew?

Next, I find that the Seminary demolished the buildings in 2022, effectively rendering obsolete what was a questionable designation in the first place. No matter, apparently. Under redevelopment plans approved last year on the basis of a now obsolete designation, the council awarded a \$40 million PILOT anyway, at the direct expense of Princeton taxpayers.

What is going on here? I can see the virtue of sensible redevelopment. But I can't see the virtue of incentivizing developers to build massive megaliths at the expense of the town. And I don't mean only its character. I mean also our pocketbooks.

PILOTs reduce the property tax burden of and thus the cost to developers for the designated properties. According to the law, they are intended for "areas which would otherwise not attract private investment." The Stockton Street parcel is prime real estate in the middle of historic Princeton, including a portion of the Mercer Hill Historic District. As Snyder points out, there is no reason to suppose that a responsible developer could not be found to build in the area without paying them an additional sweetener to do so.

A sweetener to the developer is in this instance a bitter pill to the rest of us. Aren't we already being PILOTed to death? Why does a city-sized, luxury apartment complex in the heart of historic Princeton require the enormous financial incentives intended for reclaiming neglected urban slums? Or did I just answer my own question?

As a longtime Princeton resident and taxpayer, it seems to me that the Council and the Planning Board have some explaining to do.

MICHAEL MERRILL
Maple Street

Density of Proposed High-Rise Project On Stockton Street is Unprecedented

To the Editor:

As a longtime resident of Princeton and president of the Mercer Hill Historic District Association, I would like to add to the broad-based public outcry over the proposed luxury high-rise development on Stockton Street between Edgehill Street and Hibben Road. The wake-up call came on April 23 when several eminent historians placed a full-page ad in Town Topics entitled, "Historians in Defense of Historic Princeton." The outrage has continued with many thoughtful and informative letters to the editor of the Town Topics.

Meanwhile, alarmed Princeton residents have placed over 150 lawn signs all over town with "Defend Historic Princeton." What do these bright orange signs mean? I have spoken with many residents, and my takeaway is a demand for an end to the "development at all costs" agenda. The proposed development threatens to significantly endanger our historic heritage through construction of an extremely dense high-rise luxury apartment complex the likes of which Princeton has never before seen in any part of town.

The luxury high-rise is mainly composed of a Phase 1 and a Phase 2. The 238 housing units of these phases will sit on 4.4 acres, for a density of 54 units per acre. This density is 40 percent higher than the highest comparable property in Princeton to-date, the Avalon on Witherspoon, which has a density of 38 units per acre. The proposed density will be 18 times higher than the surrounding neighborhood, based on the proximate homes on Edgehill, Hibben, Stockton and Mercer streets. To note, 100 percent of the adjacent area is R1 residential zoning, unlike other similar developments.

Adjacent to the development is The Barracks at 32 Edgehill, a stone residence built for the Stockton family about 1685, and the oldest house in Princeton. This site's historical and architectural significance will be forever degraded by the towering apartments 20 feet from its rear garden.

I hear residents asking, "for what?"

Recent writers to the Town Topics have highlighted other major concerns of this project. First, the height will be over 50 feet on Stockton Street but over 80 feet as seen from Mercer Street. Second, the PILOT tax incentive provides huge tax breaks, \$40 million, to the developer. Third, as a result of the PILOT program, the school system will see a massive shortfall in tax income, estimated at \$39 to \$53 million, versus no PILOT. Fourth, dangerous traffic problems caused by 261 cars and sole entry-exit directly onto 206, a congested two-lane federal highway. And finally, the claim that this project is driven by "affordable housing" when it provides only the legal minimum of 20 percent of units, offers only rental units with no pathway to ownership, and reverts all units to "market pricing" after 30 years.

Please send a note of support to the historians at historicprinceton@gmail.com, contact members of Princeton Council and the Planning Board to make clear your opposition, and ask for Planning Board meetings to return to in-person (with Zoom) meetings.

CAROLYN H. ROBERTSON
Mercer Street

Proposed Herring Development Project Will Bring Some Diversity to Neighborhood

To the Editor:

We are indebted to the historians who remind us of Princeton's unusual legacy of historic landmarks and neighborhoods. I, too, moved to Edgehill Street 20 years ago because of its historic associations and inviting character.

Though I grew up in the country nearby, many of my friends lived in this neighborhood. It was a joy to come to town to ride our bicycles on the side streets and back alleys and play baseball on the Seminary field at the corner of Mercer Street and Hibben Road. That was in the 1950s.

Since then I have watched Princeton grow from town to city. With the University expanding, that was inevitable. And with this growth, the need for affordable housing became an imperative. For too long, elderly, young people, and families have been priced out of Princeton's housing market. Now Princeton's governing body seems dedicated to addressing this critical public issue.

It's curious that to date most affordable housing has been built in the East End of Princeton and virtually none in the more affluent West. Has this been a deliberate public policy or a concerted effort by "West Enders" to assure that little changes in this area mostly of homes for the wealthy?

Now comes a proposal (the Herring Project) to build 238 apartments in a well-designed though admittedly dense configuration on the corner of Stockton Street and Hibben Road. Though I am an abutting neighbor, I am not opposed to this project. Here's why:

This writer has dedicated much of his professional career as a policy planner to the advancement of affordable housing in New Jersey against the intractable opposition of many.

For this reason, it would be hypocritical of me to oppose such a project near my neighborhood. The Herring Project is planned to include 48 below market units (20 percent of the total). The Herring Project inarguably contributes to Princeton's need.

Back to history. As you can see from its map, delineation of the Mercer Hill Historic District deliberately excluded the former Seminary property. And who would have argued that these large drab buildings were little more than an eyesore, with no apparent historic value.

Regarding the present proposal, design issues likely remain. The lack of a financial contribution to the school district is deplorable and one would hope that this would be remedied by the Council.

It's hard to balance legitimate values when looking at a project like the one at hand. Reasonable people can differ in their opinions. But this resident believes that the Herring Project will bring some diversity to the neighborhood and in time blend in and become an asset to the town.

SAM HAMILL
Edgehill Street

In Princeton, Development Should be Seen as An Honor Rather Than a Cry for Incentivization

To the Editor:

There has been much recent public discourse about proposed (and some recently completed) development projects in Princeton. For almost anyone who is paying attention, and especially for those who have chosen to live in this town with an appreciation of its historic significance, atmosphere and quality of life, the sheer number of projects (many of them extremely dense) is concerning. Princeton is a town with a special character, and the runaway development that is occurring, with much more threatened, has great potential to diminish that character and push Princeton towards becoming a "wannabe city." I do not believe that Princeton should be preserved as a museum to the past, but rather that all development here should be *appropriate* to the neighborhood it is proposed for, in character, scale, and quality.

Valuable discussion has been offered about the heavy-handed push through of the recently updated Master Plan, the inappropriateness of allowing payment in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) by developers, and the associated financial burdens to be borne by taxpayers. These are all serious issues and concerns that I share. But the most insidious threat of the unbridled scale of development projects in Princeton is, in my opinion, use of an until-recently-unknown tool called an "Area in Need of Redevelopment" (ANR), a statute that New Jersey has employed to entice developers to enter markets that are blighted or depressed by allowing them to exceed the existing zoning density and relax other standards that would otherwise apply (including building height and setbacks), to help guarantee their extra profitability in those "uncertain markets."

Astonishingly, Princeton officials have entertained proposals by developers (invoking this new ANR statute) that increase density beyond what is mandated by long-established zoning and found in favor of allowing these inappropriately large projects. I know of no property in Princeton that could legitimately be considered "blighted" (though some property owners have been guilty of strategic neglect over the years, while planning to eventually re-develop their property or monetize it by selling to others to develop); however, there is surely much bonus profit to be made by developers whose proposed projects are considered under ANR "no rules" status.

The truth is that in the town of Princeton, development should be seen as an honor rather than a cry for incentivization. Structurally-sound existing (and all historic) building stock should be preserved, adaptively reused if possible and added to if appropriate. New construction should be compatible with the scale, massing and materials of existing construction in the

neighborhoods it is proposed for, and most importantly, be governed by the existing Princeton zoning rules.

Going forward with projects that follow such guidelines can be a future path to development that everyone should find to be responsible and reasonable. I believe the public should urge town officials to dispense with the use of ANR to override existing zoning and return to requiring that development proposals be guided by what is appropriate and conforming to Princeton standards.

CHRISTOPHER OLSEN
Alexander Street

“Defending” Historic Princeton? From Whom, and From What?

To the Editor:

In recent weeks, you’ve seen a growing number of signs in one part of town that read: “Defend Historic Princeton.” *Not Save, not Sustain, not Protect, not Preserve, but “Defend?!”*

Pay attention to the language and let that word “defend” settle in.

“Defend” implies attack. It implies there’s something coming to harm you. It evokes protection from an invader. But who, exactly, is attacking? What, and from whom, are we defending against?

The signs are a response to a proposed inclusionary development — a plan that would provide a range of affordable housing options for families, seniors, and working people who contribute to the life and labor of this town

every single day. But rather than have a genuine conversation, the reaction has been letters signed by individuals who don’t even live here, and a campaign fueled by fear, misinformation, and coded language.

These arguments — about PILOT agreements, density, traffic, walkability, stormwater management, and architectural design — are not arguments at all. They are part of the oldest bait-and-switch scheme in America. The surface looks polite and technical; the core is about power, privilege, and a refusal to share space.

This is a plantation mentality in progressive clothing.

The language has evolved — but the intent remains. Keep those who “don’t belong” outside the gate, off the land, away from opportunity. “Defend” Princeton from what? From being equitable? From becoming accessible? From reflecting the true diversity of this country? The history they claim to protect becomes selective memory — sanitized and stripped of the very people who shaped Princeton with their labor, culture, and resilience.

This is how exclusion works now.

Let me be clear: Princeton’s Black population once made up close to 20 percent. Today it is about 6 percent. The Latino population is about 7 percent. If that doesn’t alarm you, you’re not paying attention. The town that claims to be for all has quietly pushed many to the margins — or out entirely.

So, when people say they want to “defend” Princeton’s history, ask them: what version of history? Because “historic” isn’t just colonial architecture and manicured lawns. It’s Witherspoon-Jackson, the Tree Streets, Jugtown, Grover, Moore/Jefferson, Littlebrook, Valley Road, it’s working-class roots. It’s Black churches, Dorothea’s House, immigrant stories, laborers, teachers, cooks, dishwashers, landscapers, and seniors who made this town livable long before it was lucrative.

What’s happening here isn’t unique to Princeton. It’s a national pattern. Exclusion disguised as process. Elitism hiding behind lawsuits. Privilege weaponized as “concern.” And always, always — the assertion that *they* know what’s best.

To the people fighting inclusion under the banner of history: What you’re really defending is a version of Princeton that never had to include anyone but you.

It starts with a sign. A word like “defend.” A zoning appeal. A delay tactic. A lawsuit. A whisper that grows into a wail.

The real threat to Princeton isn’t affordable housing. It’s the fear of sharing. A zero-sum mentality.

It’s the belief that “community” stops at the end of “your” driveway.

Let Princeton be a community of courage, not cowardice. Of welcome, not warnings. Of inclusion — not “defense.”

LEIGHTON NEWLIN
Princeton Councilman
Birch Avenue

Making a Case for Affordable Housing At the Westminster Choir College Site

To the Editor:

The approach of providing affordable units as a percentage of units in development projects is a good approach for maintaining the stock of affordable units in the community. It is not as good for producing the numbers of units required to meet state mandates in the short term. For every 20 affordable units, 80 other units are also constructed; to reach 100 units, 400 additional units will be added. This will leave the community forever chasing the mandate.

Constructing an affordable development at the Westminster Choir College site has many advantages: The site is walkable to the Princeton Shopping Center, for grocery shopping, pharmacy, dining, a hardware store, and some medical providers; it is adjacent to school facilities; it is a site recently used for multi-family housing; it is a relatively flat site which should be easy to develop; it is not adjacent to a historic district; and all units could be applied toward the mandate, not just 20 percent.

I hope the Municipality will consider this use for the site.

ANNE E. WEBER, FAIA
Stockton Street

Elected Officials Owe a Duty to the Electorate To Represent All Residents

To the Editor:

I am very disturbed by Leighton Newlin's letter that appeared in the Wednesday, June 11, issue of Town Topics ["'Defending' Historic Princeton? From Whom, and From What?"]. The substance of the letter is not my principal concern. Almost all of it is something that can be challenged and easily refuted. Rather, my concern is about the ethics of an elected official taking such a biased, public stance on a matter that is still open.

Perhaps I'm prejudiced, because as a member of the legal profession, I'm held to a Code of Professional Responsibility that prohibits even the "appearance of impropriety" — i.e. any action that creates the appearance of bias in order not to destroy the public trust — in any matter in which he or she is involved.

Even if elected officials are not held to a codified standard of conduct, at the very least they owe a duty to the electorate to represent all residents, not only one interest group. Not to do so, raises an issue of unfair influence on a matter that still has an administrative hurdle to clear with the Planning Board and is now before the court for adjudication.

Councilman Newlin's constituents deserve better in order to begin to restore the public trust.

JANE MACLENNAN
Edgehill Street

Those Not in Favor of Housing Project are Concerned Citizens Who are Trying to Be Good Stewards of Town

To The Editor:

Let's be frank, Councilman Newlin's letter to this paper was a plain assertion that citizens of this town who display the "Defend Historic Princeton" signs are closeted racists and bigots whose motivation is to ensure that affordable housing should be available, just as long as it is as far away from their homes as possible. This is ugly, disgusting, and insulting rhetoric that couldn't be further from the truth and holds no place in this discourse.

It is clear to me this proposed housing project has nothing to do with affordable housing – it is just a way for the town to increase its tax base.

If affordable housing is the most crucial reason this project must move forward, why then does it only call for the bare minimum of units to be designated as such? Why does this designation then lapse after 30 years? Why would the town not consider alternate proposals which were calling for the whole complex to be considered affordable housing?

Clearly it is because the affordable housing units in this plan were just a hurdle that must be complied with but at the same time a useful marketing tool to be used against

all those not in favor of putting this new complex right in the middle of a historical neighborhood. As soon as any protest is lodged, they can turn to: "What do you mean you don't want the apartment complex built, this must mean you are anti-affordable housing, diversity, and inclusion." These baseless retorts may silence some, but I am confident most people can see right through them.

Princetonians not in favor of this project are not evil bigots, rather, they are concerned citizens who are trying to be good stewards of this town, their fellow citizens, and the historical elements that make Princeton so unique.

It is disappointing to see that instead of *listening*, as Councilman Newlin is so famous for, and addressing the real concerns regarding this project he would rather just hurl insults at the very citizens he is tasked with looking after all because they don't agree with something he wants.

PRICE KETCHIFF
Quaker Road

Councilman Newlin needs to Quit Race-baiting and Serve Public Honestly

To the Editor:

As an originator of the signs seen across Princeton, I'd like to correct some misinformation. The signs could have read "Defend Historic Princeton from Rapacious Development and a Complicit Town Council" but that wouldn't have fit. No matter the wording, "Protect" or "Conserve," Councilman Newlin would have distorted the facts and hurled ugly accusations.

It's shocking to see an elected official cynically condemn large numbers of his constituency as racists.

Worse, Newlin knows our concerns have *never* been about Black people or Brown people or poor people. From Day One the issue has been greedy overdevelopment, involving two key points: 1) A luxury high rise with eye-watering market rents with the densest development in *all* of Princeton, and with environmental damage and exacerbated traffic that will destroy a quiet, historic neighborhood; 2) minimal and *temporary* community housing, a fig leaf on luxury development, that evades long-term affordability in Princeton. Newlin knows this but chooses to dog-whistle about race.

Newlin doesn't mention that residents presented the Council with an architect-designed plan for a less-dense, environmentally sustainable, 100 percent affordable development, with more total low-income units, attainable with

some vision and creative financing. Instead, our elected officials opt for an easy fix that just happens to award a local developer tens of millions of dollars at Princeton's expense.

I was raised in Princeton by a single mother who, even with an Ivy League degree, could never afford to buy a home. We moved each time the rent increased: from Ewing Street to Greenview Avenue to Moore Street (for six months until we found an apartment on Pine Street) with a brief stint on Littlebrook, until we landed in a duplex on Jefferson Road, where my mother sublet our bedrooms while we were away at college. Even in the 1980s, Princeton was unaffordable for single working parents. After a divorce, I was fortunate to move my own children into a Princeton Community Housing unit at Merwick. No one in Princeton cares more about affordability than I do. I've lived it.

Councilman Newlin needs to quit race-baiting and serve the public honestly.

CAROLINE CLEAVES
Edgehill Street

In any Healthy Democracy, People Deserve to Be Heard

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the recent letter (“Defending Historic Princeton? From Whom, and From *What*?”) by Leighton Newlin, Council member and liaison to Princeton’s Historic Preservation Committee. It’s distressing to see a public official (especially one who describes himself as someone who “listens”) dismiss residents who speak out, and label them unfairly. It’s too easy to paint us as an enemy. We are not.

In 2019, when a two-family duplex rental was proposed in the Witherspoon-Jackson historic neighborhood where Mr. Newlin lives, he publicly opposed granting any variance.

According to Community News: *But others, including members of the board, expressed concern that a variance granted here would open the floodgates to the “condominiumization” of Princeton. Leighton Newlin, a lifelong Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood resident and a key figure in the fight to have it designated as a historic district, warned about the unintended consequences the variances could have, expressing concern that changing the owner-occupancy requirement would open the neighborhood to real estate investors who would buy up properties and turn them into multi-family rentals.*

“What we’re talking about here tonight, quite frankly, is history. Now let’s be clear: The reason that Witherspoon-Jackson was made a historic district was to preserve the streetscape and the integrity of the neighborhood,” he said. “One of the things that will kill a neighborhood and displace a neighborhood quicker than anything is to have a flood of renters in what is now a historic neighborhood where the reason it’s historic and the reason it got the designation is because of the camaraderie of the people and the fact that when people own homes there is more care and concern with the neighborhood.”

Leighton defended his own historic neighborhood when he felt it would be “killed” by the addition of a single duplex rental, and he successfully argued against the variance. He now applauds a 238-unit luxury rental apartment complex (complete with rooftop swimming pool) which will dominate and reshape the streetscape of another historic Princeton neighborhood. He asks why there isn’t a civil conversation. That statement is so depressing. The Mercer Hill / Frog Hollow neighbors (those most affected) have repeatedly asked for a conversation with Council for more than five years and, despite a written commitment from the town’s attorney, Council has repeatedly declined to meet.

If defending historic Princeton and neighborhood integrity mattered in 2019, it still matters now. And, in any healthy democracy, people deserve to be heard.

Let’s have that conversation and work together for the common good.

KAREN O’CONNELL
Hibben Road

Mailbox

The views of the letters do not necessarily reflect the views of Town Topics.

What “Defend Historic Princeton” Means to Me, And Why Those Signs Are in Front of My House

To the Editor:

To me, “Defend Historic Princeton” means that it is the job of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), to defend historic Princeton. As a longtime member of the commission, I take that role seriously as do the other members of the commission. Over the past years, the volunteer commission has made sure that the rebuilding of the National Historic Landmark stone arch bridge over the Stony Brook by NJDOT was done appropriately; we worked with the cell phone companies to make sure that the massive equipment being added to telephone poles, if located in one of Princeton’s 21 historic districts, was placed in the least intrusive location; and we help property owners find the best solutions for repairing or expanding their buildings.

Defending Historic Princeton also means the collaborative work of the HPC with other agencies to address and accommodate stormwater management, to assist owners of historic structures directly affected by recent floods; researching the history of ice harvesting at Mountain Lakes Preserve so that, with State historic preservation funding, sympathetic reinforcement of the dams could be incorporated in an effort which could have drastically changed the atmosphere of that beloved trail system.

The orange signs — regardless of their origination — have become an opportunity to discuss aspects of historic preservation from resource conservation — to taking a gentle approach to the important and irreplaceable — to seeking ways to harmonize the new with the old. The HPC helps ensure buildings representing a wide mix of important and sometimes difficult times can remain standing as tributes to the citizens that survived those times. It works hard to designate districts as diverse as the two newest: Witherspoon-Jackson and the eating clubs on Prospect Avenue.

The HPC stands up and adds its voice to the every-10-year process of updating the master plan to ensure the protection of our historic resources, and provides professional opinion on complicated matters before both the planning and zoning boards.

The HPC also depends on the work of other community organizations such as the Historical Society, Morven, and the Princeton Battlefield Society, who do the research to interpret our history, and provide the volunteers to share those stories.

Defending Historic Princeton means that authentic elements of the built environment tied to our past are available for future generations to experience. Defending Historic Princeton is investing in saving the stories, the artifacts, buildings, landscapes, and battlefields that tell a collective story of Princeton, and not allowing them to be lost.

DAVID SCHURE
Stockton Street

The writer is a long-serving member of the Princeton Historic Preservation commission, lives in a historic house requiring review of physical changes to the exterior, and has spent a career working with individuals, organizations, and municipalities in Historic Preservation efforts.

Historic Princeton is Entire Town, An Injury to One is an Injury to All

To the Editor:

It's become standard practice these days to label one's critics casually as terrorists, antisemites, libtards, white supremacists, and more. Predictably, Councilman Leighton Newlin, has smeared opponents of the high-rise luxury Stockton Street project — a wide swath of his own constituents, from all across town — as elite racists out to exclude Blacks and Hispanics from Princeton.

As the councilman well knows, the townsfolk he misrepresents want *more* low-income units than the plan he backs. Concealing that, he twists the slogan "Defend Historic Princeton," directed against destructive overdevelopers, into a racist battle cry. His blatantly false and purposefully inflammatory accusations discredit him and his office.

In trying to dupe a well-intentioned public, Councilman Newlin proves easily duped himself. Profit-hungry developers, compelled by law to provide a minimum of affordable units, routinely silence criticism by posing as champions of social justice. Credulous local officials then hawk their luxury projects as heroic.

My late relative, Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz, crafted the 1983 decision that forced New Jersey developers to expand affordable housing. Betraying his intentions in order to unleash private luxury development is beyond cynical.

Defending this latest betrayal, Councilman Newlin plays the race card in order to line the pockets of local players, lauding a scheme that, with its 4:1 ratio of luxury to affordable, will replicate, not reduce, Princeton's glaring economic and racial inequities.

The councilman claims the project is for "working people who contribute to the life and labor of this town." Projected market rate rentals, including parking and an unspecified "amenity," range from \$45,192 to \$62,664 annually. Try living there on a schoolteacher's salary in the Princeton

public system, let alone the much lower salaries of the other workers in our schools.

Councilman Newlin scorns urgent townwide issues — matters we elected him to address — as racist subterfuges. How, then, will he, a registered real-estate agent, explain to constituents his vote for a sweetheart \$40 million PILOT to develop some of the choicest property imaginable — at direct cost to all Princetonians, Black, Hispanic, and white, well-off and working-class?

How will he explain voting to worsen Princeton's out-of-control traffic mess by adding hundreds of cars right next to Route 206? What about threatened widespread environmental damage by a super-dense project with a massive underground garage?

How, finally, will he and any other Council members explain voting to inflict these harms while awarding a windfall to a private developer who has contributed financially to their own election campaigns? Cui bono?

Councilman Newlin accuses dissenters of demeaning the history of Blacks and working-class immigrants while privileging colonial and early national (read rich white) history. He obviously has not read the writings of the historian critics of the project.

Historic Princeton is the entire town, Jackson-Witherspoon as well as the Western section, The Barracks as well as Dorothea's House. An injury to one is an injury to all, one reason you're seeing "Defend Historic Princeton" signs far and wide. It's called community. Councilman Newlin, the overdevelopers' friend, prefers slander.

SEAN WILENTZ
Edgehill Street

Some Imagination, Tough Bargaining Would Go a Long Way to Making Town a Community of Welcome, Inclusion

To the Editor:

Although I'm a week late, I'd like to take a few minutes to respond to Mr. Newlin's letter of June 11, 2025 about the Defend Historic Princeton lawn signs in front of my house. I see them as a plea to defend Princeton from lack

of imagination; the upcoming discussion over what to do with the WCC property makes this especially important. Far from wanting Princeton to become richer and whiter as Mr. Newlin states, I'd like to see it go the other way, and it seems that the town Council could have given more thought to ways to do that. Instead, they adopted a standardized arrangement that uses our tax dollars to fund projects that apparently don't make financial sense without them.

Here are some ideas that occur to me:

As several letter writers have noted, this project requires 20 percent low-income housing, but only for 30 years. That's the blink of an eye, and when it ends, we'll be in a worse situation than we are now. Since the developer doesn't seem to be able to make the numbers work without the PILOT, why didn't the Council hold him to 40 years or 50? Or 30 percent or 40 percent low-income housing? Or require him to renovate the town-owned public housing on Franklin Street as part of the project?

The buildings that the developer knocked down were in the Princeton Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. Had he renovated the two dormitories for income-producing (i.e. rental) purposes, he would have been eligible for a 20 percent tax credit from the Federal government and an additional 50 percent tax credit from the State of New Jersey for the cost of renovation. It would have been more difficult to get the credit for turning the gymnasium into apartments, but the Council could have made the renovation of the dormitories a requirement for getting the PILOT for the project.

I share Mr. Newlin's concern about the plummeting numbers of Black and brown residents, and would also like to mention the equally undesirable decrease in the number of municipal employees who live in town. (About 80 Borough and Township employees lived in town in 1950.) Instead of giving our tax dollars to this developer as PILOT so he can build high-end apartments, the town could use them to follow the University's lead and co-sign mortgages for municipal employees. That way the cop directing traffic and our kids' teachers could be our neighbors, instead of having to commute here from some other town.

I applaud the town Council members for all of the long, unpaid hours they put into volunteering on our behalf. I just wish they weren't so quick to adopt a standardized arrangement that will make developers richer to the town's detriment. A bit of imagination and tough bargaining would go a long way to making Princeton a community of welcome and inclusion.

ADRIAN TREVISAN
Hamilton Avenue

Council Should Try Defending Town Instead of Ruining It

To the Editor:

People love to complain that Republicans use racist dog whistles. Last week town Council member Leighton Newlin unleashed a marching band of dog whistlers to call anyone who doesn't want a too-big, out-of-scale, historic-neighborhood-destroying apartment complex a racist ["'Defending' Historic Princeton? From Whom, And From What?," Mailbox, June 11].

Bad enough to smear your neighbors, but do you know what's worse? Not having your facts right. I went back and looked at the Census data from 2000. Do you know what percentage of Black Princetonians was 25 years ago? About 6 percent.

What is it today? Nearly 7 percent. So the Black population isn't shrinking. Sorry Mr. Newlin.

You know what else he got wrong? The town is actually more diverse today than it was 25 years ago. Maybe Mr. Newlin's worried that the white population fell from 80 percent to 62 percent, but I doubt it.

In 25 years, not only has the Black population increased, the Hispanic population has increased and the Asian population has almost doubled. Mixed race residents increased by 200 percent.

An inconvenient truth: Princeton is the most diverse today than it ever been.

Go back 50 years and Mr. Newlin's claims look even sillier. Whites were 90 percent of 1975 Princeton. Black Princetonians, 5 percent, Asians 3 percent, and Hispanics less than one percent. See a trend?

Do you know when the Black population was 20 percent? Never.

The Black population in Princeton peak was about 12 percent in the 40s and 50s. Not my facts, but the Census' facts. It seems Mr. Newlin was pulling a Trump with "alternative facts."

Playing the race card is despicable. The project should be considered on its merits. Subtract the racist dog whistles and we are left with no compelling reason for this project and many compelling reasons to consign it to the dust bin of history. I thought those of us who live here in the Athens of New Jersey were better than that. I guess not.

Residents wanting to Defend Princeton against a cultural atrocity isn't racist. It's a rational response to an arrogant Council that seems to want to turn a historic farming village into Queens, New York, all to satisfy some liberal fever dream.

Real affordable housing? I lived in what my parents referred to as North Hall on the site of this planned monstrosity, then married students housing at the Seminary. I played on the lawn that was torn up to make way for apartments we don't need to house people who aren't poor by any stretch of the imagination. Want to find really poor people living in affordable housing? Talk to a divinity student with a wife and kid, circa 1959.

Mr. Newlin, apologize. Town Council, try defending Princeton instead of ruining it.

MARK HERR
Great Road

Let's Find a Development Proposal That Offers a Better Path Forward

To the Editor:

Princeton stands at a critical decision point regarding how it grows and who gets to be part of that future. A revised proposal for a scaled-down residential development that prioritizes affordable housing deserves the full support of the town Council — one that addresses infrastructure constraints and supports the institutions that draw families here.

Large-scale development without meaningful infrastructure upgrades poses serious risks. Hundreds of new residents and vehicles will overwhelm local roads, utilities, schools, and parking. Princeton's streets already experience traffic congestion during peak hours, and the downtown parking is consistently strained. Without corresponding investment in transportation and utilities, additional population growth will compound these issues, eroding quality of life for both newcomers and longtime residents.

By reducing the project's size, this allows growth to proceed in a way that Princeton can accommodate. It reflects a commitment to smart planning, ensuring development works with, rather than against, the town's infrastructure and environmental goals. Fewer housing units mean less vehicle traffic, reduced demand on public services, and more manageable change.

Equally important is the emphasis on affordable housing. As prices continue to climb, many essential workers — teachers, fire fighters, nurses, municipal employees — find themselves priced out of the community they serve. Affordable housing is not only a social good; it is a practical investment in Princeton's long-term health and sustainability. Creating space for people across income levels enhances economic diversity and keeps the town vibrant, inclusive, and equitable.

The revised proposal also creates an opportunity to revisit the terms of the developer's Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement. PILOT arrangements often leave public schools underfunded, even as student populations increase due to new housing. This is particularly concerning in Princeton, where excellent public education is a key reason families choose to move here. While the town council rightfully received praise for recently earmarking a portion of AvalonBay Thanet PILOT to our schools, there is no permanent requirement or incentive to do so in the future and certainly is not guaranteed for this current development plan. The town Council should vote to require a portion of *all* PILOT funds received in the future to be directly allocated to the school district as was done in the AvalonBay Thanet project. This would ease many concerns in Princeton and would help preserve the high standards and resources that make Princeton's schools a cornerstone of the community.

In sum, let's find a development proposal that offers a better path forward: growth with guardrails, equity with intention, and progress without compromising what makes Princeton special.

The town Council now has a chance to demonstrate vision and accountability. Supporting a revised plan and permanently enshrining the use of PILOT funds for schools sends a clear message — that Princeton will grow on its own terms, with thoughtful attention to housing, infrastructure, and education. This is not only a practical choice, but a principled one, aligned with the values that define the town.

COLLEEN POTTS
Poe Road

It is incumbent on All of Us to Protect Our Common Heritage for Future Generations

To the Editor:

After a lifetime on Manhattan's Upper West Side, we moved to Princeton five years ago, to take care of my aging mother and her historic home on Mercer Street. In the years since, we have watched with shock and dismay as this lovely, historic town is overrun with development, construction, and traffic.

West 110th Street (our former home) was not nearly as congested as Mercer Street. We write today in support of the "Defend Historic Princeton" campaign, but our alarm extends far beyond the absurdly out-of-scale, proposed development on Stockton. It seems that both the University and the town are hell-bent on expanding no matter what the cost. All concerns for proportion, architectural beauty, and our natural environment have been wantonly jettisoned in favor of more, more, more.

America has precious few towns like Princeton. Once lost, they are gone forever. What a tragedy that would be for our own community, and for the nation. It is incumbent on all of us to protect our common heritage for future generations.

KARI JENSON GOLD AND LUCKY GOLD
Mercer Street

Urging Town Planners to Consider Concerns Of Their Constituents and Deliberate Cautiously

To the Editor:

I am deeply concerned about the potential impact of the proposed 243-unit apartment complex on the vacant Stockton Street site. When we relocated to Princeton several years ago, the appearance and character of this special community remained largely unchanged compared to the 1960s when I spent the summer here with my family. However, we were struck by the significant increase in traffic through town, primarily due to the rapid growth in the surrounding townships and the Route 1 corridor.

I fear that town planners here are repeating the mistake made in my previous home in North Carolina, where over-development damaged several historic neighborhoods. The sheer scale of the proposed complex is excessive and would cause irreparable damage to this delicate and historic site. Our two-lane roads are already congested, leading to more frequent accidents, and the town's infrastructure cannot handle much more traffic.

I urge town planners to consider the concerns of their constituents and deliberate cautiously. While growth can be beneficial, once a beautiful and special area is compromised, there is no turning back.

JOHN ALEXANDER
Mercer Street

Mailbox

The views of the letters do not necessarily reflect the views of Town Topics.

Preservation New Jersey Summary on Balancing Preservation and Progress

To the Editor:

Preservation New Jersey expresses strong support for investment in protecting Princeton's historic districts amid ongoing redevelopment pressures. Two notable areas of concern are the Joseph Hornor House in the Jugtown Historic District and the proposed redevelopment near the Mercer Hill Historic District.

The Joseph Hornor House, built in the 1760s by the grandson of one of Princeton's Quaker founders, is located at 344 Nassau Street. It is a key contributing structure in the Local, State, and National Register-listed Jugtown Historic District. The house stands at the historic intersection of Nassau and Harrison Streets, alongside other significant pre-Revolutionary and early-19th-century buildings. In 2024, it was listed on Preservation New Jersey's *10 Most Endangered Historic Places* due to a proposed redevelopment plan. That plan would add a large four-story structure to the rear of the historic home, effectively surrounding it and compromising its historic integrity.

More recently, attention has turned to the proposed redevelopment of the Princeton Theological Seminary's Tennent-Roberts-Whiteley (TRW) and 92 Stockton Street sites. This project poses potential threats to the Mercer Hill Historic District. The scale, height, and massing of the proposed buildings are not compatible with the surrounding historic context, which includes modestly scaled 18th- and 19th-century homes like the Joseph Olden House and The Barracks at 32 Edgehill Street — Princeton's oldest standing residence. The project could also impact the visual and contextual integrity of nationally significant landmarks nearby, such as the Einstein House and Historic Morven.

Preservation New Jersey acknowledges and supports the critical need for affordable housing. However, the organization emphasizes that such development must be approached with care, especially when located in or adjacent to historic districts. There is growing concern statewide about redevelopment that leads to demolition or insensitive alterations to historically significant buildings. With the rise of tax credit and affordable housing incentives, it is more important than ever to ensure compliance with established preservation guidelines at all levels.

Thoughtful redevelopment can activate and revitalize historic places. Preservation New Jersey supports projects that respect and preserve the architectural and cultural context of their surroundings. Integrating new construction within historic districts — rather than overwhelming them — is essential for sustainable, community-centered planning. Projects like the revitalization of the Joseph Hornor House should serve as models for how preservation and development can coexist.

As America approaches its 250th anniversary, Princeton has an opportunity to lead by example. By preserving its historic assets, developing educational resources, and engaging the community, the town can showcase its important role in the nation's history. Preservation New Jersey encourages the municipality to prioritize practices that honor its unique heritage while meeting present-day needs.

Ultimately, the goal is to collaborate with local officials, property owners, and developers to find creative, preservation-minded solutions. We stand ready to offer technical guidance and support to help balance development goals with the protection of Princeton's historic fabric.

KELLY C. RUFFEL
Executive Director
Preservation New Jersey
West State Street, Trenton