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Sent: Tuesday, December 8, 2020 10:19 AM

To: PublicComment <PublicComment@mynewcastle.org>; TownBoard <townboard@mynewcastle.org>

Subject: Public comment on DGEIS/FBC

Please see attached.

FOURTH PUBLIC COMMENT SUBMISSION

on the DGEIS associated with the Form Based Code (“FBC”)

Dora Straus, Dec. 8, 2020

This is my fourth public comment concerning the DGEIS and associated FBC. This comment raises additional questions and criticisms of the DGEIS. It is in addition to, and does not override, my prior submissions.

On December 6, 2020, the New York Times published the article *“Existential Peril”: Mass Transit Faces Huge Service Cuts Across U.S.*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/06/nyregion/mass-transit-service-cuts-covid.html>

This article explains how as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, ridership on Metro-North Railroad and the New York City subways has fallen so precipitously that commuter rail and subway services will be slashed by 50% and 40%, respectively. Because these transit agencies have been starved of fare revenues as a result of the pandemic, commuter services will be crippled for years to come, even after the pandemic subsides. Even if these transit agencies receive some financial aid from the government, they will still be forced to pare back service while serving riderships that are far below normal levels. Moreover, ridership may never fully return to pre-pandemic levels after effective vaccines become available because if cuts cause service to deteriorate long-term, people may choose to abandon public transit: “Transit experts worry that with more cuts public transportation agencies could plunge into a ‘death spiral,’ where increasingly unreliable service keeps riders away, pushing systems deeper into financial distress.” The chairman of the MTA, which runs Metro-North, is quoted as saying that the effect on ridership is “dramatically worse than even the Great Depression.”

In light of this changed reality, the DGEIS’s assumptions with respect to transit-oriented development are no longer valid. Given the financial distress of Metro-North Railroad and the fact that ridership has plummeted so severely, what justification remains for the Town to now re-zone the train station area in order to encourage “transit-oriented development” of four to five story apartment buildings? Who is going to move to Chappaqua for a commute burdened by infrequent trains, overcrowding and delays due to deteriorated service as a result of lack of funding? Even in pre-pandemic times, there were delays and service issues enough to cause frustration with the Chappaqua commute. This is only going to get much worse for those who choose to continue to commute after the pandemic subsides. And, as the article explains, in our new world, few people will be commuting in any event, because many will continue to work from home. Rents and purchase prices in the City have dropped so significantly that many will choose to just stay in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Who would trade a well-priced apartment in the City for an apartment in a town 35 miles away, next to the train tracks with a dreadful commute? Things have changed dramatically since the DGEIS was drafted and decisions that were made based on its now invalid assumptions must be revisited.

Please consider our changed reality and the current state of MTA transit agencies, including Metro-North and the city subways, before continuing with a rezoning plan justified by a need for “transit oriented development” to the tune of four to five story apartment buildings erected all around our train station.