

## Case W-3540 - Vest Mill Apartments Project

**Hello, we are David and Apryl Roland at 1362 and 1380 Westbrook Drive Winston-Salem, NC 27103.**

Thank you Council Representatives for the opportunity to address our concerns about rezoning case **W-3540** for the Vest Mill Apartments project. We apologize for not being here in person, as an out of town work commitment conflicted with this date.

My husband and I recently purchased and rezoned property on Westbrook Drive, one parcel away, from the proposed project and road connection. We built a recording studio (commercial building) and a house next door that was designed to easily convert to office space in the future. When we rezoned our 2 parcels to NO-L, we were told by everyone at the city this area would be slated for commercial based on the Legacy Plan.

We were disappointed in the new direction taken during the first rezoning of this project to multi-family, as we didn't expect or hope for that. Nevertheless, we want to be welcoming neighbors and have expressed appreciation to the developer and his civil engineers (Stimmel) for the changes they have made to the new site plan based on our feedback.

While we are not opposed to the developer's project overall, we have learned details – specifically related to the city – to which we are in opposition. Let me explain:

- This project calls for an extension of Vest Mill Road to connect to Westbrook Drive. The city is claiming this is an elimination of 2 dead ends, but it is not. Westbrook Drive will remain a dead end.
- The city is also requiring the developer to build a public road through his private complex, based on the desire for connectivity within Winston Salem as urged by the UDO.
  - This new, public road does not improve city connectivity at all. This is a pocket of land surrounded by highway and dead end streets that do not improve anyone's travel or convenience to anything else in Winston Salem. It's simply a convenience for the apartment complex while inconveniencing a quiet road, not interconnectivity for Winston- Salem as a whole.
  - Traffic trips per day are proposed to increase from around 10 trips per day on Westbrook Drive to over 1200 total for Westbrook and Vest Mill. That's a major change, especially for Westbrook considering 2 cars can't pass each other safely on the road and the crumbling condition it is in. (more on that later)
  - We feel the city is very uncompromising on this issue about interconnectivity, as it should be considering when and how connectivity really matters for our town. When it comes to residential areas, the exact opposite of connectivity is desired; it's the reason many residential complexes are gated. (which according to studies online, gated communities are 30% safer and it was expressed to us in our initial meeting with the developer that he wanted a private street initially). This is a residential project, surrounded by neighbors who are mostly residential.

That privacy should be considered over any desire to falsely improve connectivity within Winston Salem.

- Not to mention, nobody driving down Westbrook or Vest Mill will think to enter an Apartment complex that has signage with an understanding they can continue through said complex as a shortcut to exit out the other side. It won't be clear that connectivity even exists. Nobody needs to connect on this newly proposed road because it takes them nowhere but the Apartment complex itself. Again, this is a pocket of land surrounded by highway, you can't connect Vest Mill to anything important.
- This connectivity actually encourages the wrong traffic, for everyone involved.
- We were told the city likes multiple access points for fire and other services. There are many complexes around town this size with only one access point and they are also gated. They also have the highest google ratings by the tenants. We do not feel it is appropriate to exaggerate the need for services to access when adequate access is already there. There are disadvantages to excessive access on the flip side which should be considered here – disturbance to surrounding neighborhoods, unwanted traffic by the complex itself and a possible decrease in safety for the area. Why is Arbor Acres gated? Why is Salemtowne gated? Why are other apartment complexes and residential communities in town gated? It is a common assumption gated privacy is desired and helpful, despite any breakdown issues that might occur with the gate itself. Nothing is perfect, and we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. We simply do not agree that we should be building roads to allow garbage trucks extra access to a property. That's giving unnecessary priority to the wrong entity.
- If this were a complex slated for downtown, for example, connectivity makes sense. It's denser with busier streets and the need for different access points would actually offer convenience. Quite the opposite in this case, Westbrook is a quiet road that doesn't connect to anything important. You have to travel several more roads (all of which you ALSO have to travel from the Vest Mill side), to get to major thoroughfares, eliminating any argument for true city connectivity.
- Perhaps most importantly, tax dollars are being wasted for the city to acquire this newly built public road. The city needs the revenue from this complex WITHOUT taking on a new road.
- The condition of Westbrook Drive is an example that the city cannot afford to maintain what it already has (we were told when we built by Keith Huff that our road would not be up for repaving for a very long time despite its condition).
- In its current state, Westbrook Drive does not allow 2 cars to pass safely, is down to gravel in a lot of areas and is only somewhat acceptable for the 10 trips per day it currently sees since cars never really pass each other (however not really acceptable considering we pay almost \$8000 a year in property taxes)
- Commitment from Council Member Mundy and city staff has been made for improvements to Westbrook with this proposed road connection, but there are

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significant issues that need to be addressed regarding this – timing, design, and sewer.

- Westbrook Drive does not have city sewer lines and access to sewer at the connecting street is not possible due to the inverts not being buried deep enough – essentially the city’s fault.
  - We built on Westbrook in spite of that, installing septic systems at the risk of our future sellability and property value.
  - We are here to advocate for the entire road of Westbrook, not just our own properties in that sewer should be provided on the new road extension of Vest Mill for Westbrook property owners to tie into if you insist for the road to be built publicly.
  - You can’t ask that a public road be built without requiring the proper infrastructure along that road - sewer.
  - You can’t take the position that this is *private* complex that needs to serve itself regarding sewer if you’re also going to claim it needs a *public* road running through it. Which is it?
  - The city has neglected Westbrook Drive enough on this issue and this is the last opportunity for our properties to connect (with gravity) to a public sewer line.
  - **If sewer is not provided along the Vest Mill extension, we will lose our opportunity completely and become a septic tank island in the middle of Winston Salem – devaluing our land for the future and possibly preventing any future development here. We hear it over and over, developers don’t want to develop on land without access to city sewer.**
  - According to the developer’s engineers, a private pump station would be installed near Westbrook Drive to connect to sewer on Vest Mill. The city should be accommodating in whatever fashion necessary – whether that be a public pump station or a relook and redesign of the lines in the complex. Let’s consider that the civil engineers at Stimmel, while certainly reputable and somewhat trusted, are also working for a private developer with *his* interests prioritized. They shouldn’t be the only resource in determining the design required when it involves public standards. To this point, it should be noted Stimmel missed the need for the pump on the first several plans submitted. After going through the sewer issue ourselves when we built, we know and understand it can be complicated. Second opinions are important.
- Design of the new connection (should you force that to occur) and timing of road improvements for Westbrook Drive must be heavily considered in tandem. How the developer of the complex designs his connection, where that occurs in regards to preserving mature landscaping on adjacent properties, how he diverts water (the road connects right where a ditch feeds runoff for the entire hill of Westbrook up to the connecting street) are important issues that need to be addressed before this is approved.

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- You run the risk of forcing any future improvements to Westbrook Drive to be at the mercy of how the developer built his road connection.
- Will he place/position the connection with room for curb and gutter along Westbrook as has been suggested we get without destroying coveted mature landscaping on adjacent properties?
- Will he do the proper infrastructure to support gutter based on the water rerouting needs at that connection?
- Are we even promised curb and gutter?
- Will we get improvements done by the time the complex is ready to open or are we forced to subject ourselves to head-on traffic as it attempts to pass?
- The residents along Westbrook Drive deserve specifics as to when and how the road improvements will occur.
- If you are going to require the developer build a public road, the city should be requiring the developer to design that connection in conjunction with DOT and in consideration of all improvements (specifically determined ahead of time) to be made to Westbrook Drive. Otherwise, you let a private developer build a road with standard public requirements designed and placed to his liking without consideration of the road you are connecting to and committing to.

Despite the planning board voting in favor of this rezoning case, they spent 19 minutes brainstorming possibilities to address our concerns and ultimately the Chair Chris Leak advised us to present this to you, the City Council, because you have final say. We felt like in that moment, our arguments were fair and we hope you will consider the right solution for everyone involved.

We want to welcome Mr. Carr's apartment complex knowing the city has done the right thing for those around him. We didn't build a multi-million dollar complex (backed by foreign investors as we were told this project is) but we are artists and entrepreneurs who invested on a street without sewer and without decent road conditions paying hefty property taxes. Not many people would have done what we did. We count too. Every neighbor on our road counts, now and in the future.

We ask that you don't connect Vest Mill to Westbrook and leave our road quiet, or provide sewer along the new Vest Mill extension.

Thank you.