

Setting the Record Straight

There has been a wave of posts on social media and elsewhere making claims that misrepresent the actual content of the HROD proposal and distort its possible impact on our community. The true facts will not support these assertions, nor the emotional appeals based on horrifying (and totally false) claims.

We expect you will see communications from Old Lyme residents, who oppose HROD, citing these falsehoods in support of their stance. We urge you to take full account of the source and nature of these errors, and disregard objections that are based on false information. Below is a sample of the assertions of this campaign, compared to actual facts.

First, the number of dwelling units allowed under HROD is wildly exaggerated, ‘supported’ by a misleading calculation that ignores the actual HROD regulations. It multiplies the HRIC estimate of “buildable acreage” in the district (~40 acres) by a maximum of 40 dwelling units per acre pulled out of context from HROD section 5.15.6.3.a., resulting in the claim that HROD would “add 1,600 residential units.” This ignores the fact that not every lot within the district can use HROD.

The regulations include a mix of constraints and requirements — lot coverage, parking requirements, limitations on size, scale, massing, etc.—affecting all projects under HROD. We have done the math to calculate maximum possible residential construction following two different methods. The results agree.

Our best estimate of the actual maximum number of dwelling units that could be built on all lots eligible today is closer to 400-450; and that number assumes there are NO restrictions from non-zoning regulations such as septic, environmental, etc. When those factors are taken into account, the number that could actually be built may be 200-225.

Second, these posts typically ignore the HROD limitations on building massing, height, size, placement, appearance, materials, etc. Citing a few upper limits, they suggest building arrangements and densities that are not possible or are expressly disallowed in the actual HROD regulations. They often describe a “wall of buildings” in places where the HROD regulations themselves say no such massive and unvaried structures can be built.

In addition, the HROD includes a Design Review Committee to aid the Zoning Commission in ensuring that the scale and design of any proposed construction is consistent with the aesthetics and character of Old Lyme. HROD does not allow development beyond the scale and scope appropriate to the town center of a small rural town.

Third, issues about environmental concerns are also misguided. The Halls Road area is already fully developed. Much of that development is many decades old, some of it built before the advent of serious environmental protection legislation. Any new development under HROD must adhere to current standards and be more ecologically sensitive and less detrimental to the environment than the existing construction. This would actually be an improvement over existing conditions rather than the disaster portrayed by some of those opposing HROD.

The Halls Road Improvements Committee strongly protests this effort to flood the public forum with error and misinformation. The scale and scope of development possible under HROD is a small fraction

of what this opposition campaign claims. The likely and expected impact of HROD on Old Lyme bears no resemblance to the nightmare scenarios presented in social media.

Doing nothing is also an action and, in the case of Halls Road, one with negative consequences for Old Lyme. Current C-30S zoning draws significant investor interest in serving the highway, and very little in any other commercial development. Without allowing a more profitable alternative, Halls Road will increasingly serve the highway, while businesses that serve town residents decline.

The HROD proposal is good for Old Lyme. It is a key element of the Halls Road Master Plan.

Like that plan, HROD was developed with significant input from town residents, stakeholders, and key town committees including Planning, Zoning, Economic Development, and the Board of Selectmen in three administrations. It represents years of volunteer and professional work. We believe it is a well-crafted and sound set of regulations.

Together, HROD and the Master Plan address multiple critical needs of Old Lyme: alternatives to single-family homes, retention of retail that serves Old Lyme (not the highway), safe pedestrian and cyclist access to our shopping area, and allowing the creation of a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood and town center appropriate to the small Town that is Old Lyme. Without HROD, the multi-million-dollar sidewalks of the Master Plan will go to half-empty parking lots, and little more.

Please do not be misled by false claims and mistaken assumptions. Get the facts at the Town's web site: <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/343/Halls-Road-Improvements-Committee>.