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Statement on Avalon Bay/Transit Oriented District
By Huntington School Board President Bill Dwyer

On Wednesday, September 14, Huntington Town Councilman Mark Cuthbertson issued a press release announcing his withdrawal of support for the Avalon Bay proposal. In that release, he said his change of opinion was in part motivated by the Huntington Board of Education’s “vote to withdraw its support for the Avalon Bay proposal.”

Mr. Cuthbertson indicated that by the Board signing an agreement to accept a mitigation fee should the Avalon Bay project proceed, it demonstrated sufficient community support for the proposal. Below are the facts surrounding the Board of Education’s interaction with Avalon Bay, the agreement between the two, and the Board’s recent vote to oppose the proposed Transit Oriented District (TOD) zoning.

The Huntington Board of Education began discussions with Avalon Bay in October 2008. These conversations were entered into when the district was informed that Avalon Bay was considering developing a parcel of land owned by Evergreen Homes, which had already been approved to construct 109 single family homes. The Board of Education’s intent was to assess and compare the relative impact on the school district of the two developments.

The Board of Education appointed a subcommittee which worked with Avalon Bay over the next several months, including public presentations by the company to the Board and extensive public discussion. After rigorous analysis and negotiations, the Board was presented with two options on the Avalon/Evergreen parcel:

- A development of 109 single family homes, which would generate a roughly estimated 150 school aged children, and generate less school tax revenue than the cost of educating the students it added to the district.
- The Avalon Bay development with a projection of slightly more than 100 school aged children, generation of school taxes in excess of the cost to educate those children, plus a voluntary enhancement payment by Avalon to the district of as much as $1.5 million.
Given those choices in July 2009 the Board of Education approved an agreement with Avalon Bay, opting for fewer potential students, more tax revenue and an enhancement payment. As stipulated in the agreement, the Huntington School Board took no position regarding the Avalon Bay development. Since that time, the Board has never publicly expressed support for, or opposition to, the proposed Avalon Bay development.

The recent decision by the Board to publicly oppose the proposed TOD zoning was motivated by concerns that the proposal, which allows high density housing to accommodate the Avalon development, covers more than just the Avalon parcel, but instead encompasses much of the greater Huntington Station area, with no guarantees that other high density developments would not be built within the bounds of the school district.

At no point during the discussions with Avalon Bay was the zoning to accommodate the parcel discussed. This fact was echoed by several trustees at the September 13 public meeting of the Huntington School Board. The proposed TOD zoning would effectively turn the original decision by the Board against itself. Instead of trying to limit the impact of the development of the Avalon/Evergreen parcel it would add the possibility of additional high density developments within the district in the future.

While the Board continues to take no position regarding Avalon Bay, it is understood that should Avalon pull out, the land is still open to development of 109 single family homes, but given that it is limited to one parcel of land and the difficult housing market, that is a risk the Board accepted with it’s recent vote.