



Purpose of this Newsletter: to monitor and report events and developments vital to the future of Rehoboth Beach; to communicate to our members information bearing on the values and enjoyment of their properties and their community.

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TOWN FORUM. The large attendance at the Town Forum held on January 27 at the Convention Hall proved the deep concern with which our residents regard the further expansion of high-rises at and near the beach. Their strong opposition to the City government's zoning policy was evident from the many questions raised and from the response given to the main spokesman against high-rises. Maurice Hartnett, himself a long-time home owner here, made a most impressive presentation; his strong opposition to high density zoning was extremely well documented. Had a vote been taken that night, it would have come out against high-rises overwhelmingly. Mayor Johnson and the City Commissioners were obviously surprised by the heavy turnout. It was made clear to them what the feelings of the great majority of the attending citizens were.

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"UNDER EXISTING REGULATIONS, AS MANY AS 64,000 PEOPLE COULD BE PUT INTO THE AREAS NOW ZONED FOR HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS."

"UNRESTRICTED HIGH-RISE DEVELOPMENT WILL DESTROY REHOBOTH BEACH." (Maurice Hartnett)

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HIGH-RISES ELSEWHERE.

San Francisco: A group of 30 citizens, including economists, architects and planners, have found out and documented in their book THE ULTIMATE HIGH-RISE that the high-rise constructions in their city are ruining the economy. Tax revenues from high-rises are not sufficient to pay for the additional services they require. And the congestion and the destruction of the city's character is wrecking the tourist industry, a major source of revenue.

Arlington, Virginia: "The Arlington County Board has denied the rezoning for a \$30 million, 16 story hotel and apartment complex near a residential center - a key decision in Board efforts to confine high-rise buildings to commercial areas... Together with the benefits of greatly increased tax revenues, the (high density) areas have brought parking and traffic congestion, sewerage problems, and, some critics say, erosion of the county's identity as a residential community. These concerns, combined with new questions from residents about the county's future character and environment, have been major factors in shaping the new go-slow policy toward high-rises". (Jay Matthews, THE WASHINGTON POST, February 3, 1972)

COUNTY ZONING AMENDMENT SUPPORTS HIGH-RISES.

High-rises on our beaches, up to 165 feet (16 stories!), will be encouraged by a proposed amendment to the Sussex County Zoning Ordinance. At the public hearing held by the County Planning and Zoning Commission, February 17, several speakers, representing homeowners and organizations in Rehoboth Beach, Middlesex, Bethany Beach, Atlantic Watergates and Sussex Shores, vigorously criticized the proposal. Wilbur Martin, presenting the position of the Association, objected strongly to the amendment. The hearing before the County Council on February 29 attracted many opponents from various parts of the County who testified against the proposal. Col Reed Booth reiterated our Association's objections to high density planning and zoning. County Attorney William Swain Lee who ably chaired the meeting, mentioned the many letters and telegrams received and admitted that the anti-high-rise feelings of the audience were abundantly clear to the County Council. He stated that

the County Planning and Zoning Commission had not yet made its recommendations to the Council.

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COMMISSIONERS CONCERNED OVER WATER SOURCES. (Headline in DELAWARE COAST PRESS, February 17, 1972)

Last fall, our Association had warned that unrestricted high-rise construction would severely strain existing water resources, along with other facilities and services of the City. The administration denied that and stated that resources were ample. But on February 11, Commissioner Simpler warned his fellow Commissioners that a recent engineering survey concluded that no more than two million gallons of water should be drawn out of the ground in the area now supplying the water needs of the Rehoboth Beach-Lewes area. Rehoboth Beach and Lewes are now set up to use all of this capacity, he said. The City Commissioners then requested the State Water and Air Resources Commission to declare a moratorium on issuance of further permits for wells and septic tanks within a five mile radius of Rehoboth Beach, until completion of a proposed study on the area water supply. Charles Mills, County Planning and Zoning Chairman, and Council President Richard Timmons both took the position that Rehoboth Beach ought to be willing to place a moratorium on building permits within the municipality if it wants new construction banned in adjacent areas. Chairman Mills, at his public hearing, criticized the Rehoboth government for its request for a state moratorium; referring to a DELAWARE COAST PRESS article on a building boom in Rehoboth Beach, he stated that "just in simple decency" the city should impose its own moratorium.

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REFERENDUM RIDDLE.

"Mayor Lester F. Johnson on Friday evening said he would favor the banning of construction of additional condominiums in Rehoboth Beach 'if a majority of the citizens so desired'...Johnson, seeking election to a fourth term as mayor, made the statements near the end of a two-hour long candidates' forum...In speaking to an obviously anti-condominium audience of about 130 persons, Johnson stated that while he didn't feel that the existing high-rise structures have unfavorably affected Rehoboth Beach's image as a family resort, he felt that elected officials should respond to the expressed wishes of a majority of their constituents." (David S. Hugg, DELAWARE COAST PRESS, August 12, 1971).

"The controversy about "high-rises" is still with us...It will apparently continue to be an issue...until after the referendum. The latter is now tentatively scheduled for next summer...recommendations from the (City's) Zoning Board...were received last week in a letter over the signature of William Swain Lee, Chairman...Lee recommended that a referendum be held on the issue...Lee noted that while a referendum on the issue would not be binding on the Board of Commissioners, it would let the governing body know the wishes of a majority of those voting in such election...the Commissioners indicated that consideration would be given to holding a referendum. This, Mayor Johnson said, "should be held in the summer when most property owners would be available." (David S. Hugg, DELAWARE COAST PRESS, November 1971).

Excerpt from the Zoning Commission report: "We feel that amending the present ordinance to lower maximum height limitations may preserve the existing physical character of the district and that this would promote the general welfare of the community."

At the Town Forum of January 27, 1972, Charles W. Cole, (former City Commissioner and present member of the Zoning Commission, reminded the City government and the residents that the Zoning Commission had recommended against high-rises twice during the last two years.

"AROUSSED BEACH RESIDENTS ASK HIGH-RISE REFERENDUM" (headline in WILMINGTON MORNING NEWS, January 28, 1972, report by Erich Smith): "Aroused Rehoboth Beach citizens last night demanded a development study and a referendum on high-rise buildings in the resort community. Mayor Lester F. Johnson stopped short of promising to hold a referendum, but told the citizens at the special meeting that if a referendum is held, his vote on the issue will be decided by the referendum. Johnson's promise was greeted with applause."

MARCH 1972: THE CITIZENS ARE STILL IN THE DARK WHETHER A REFERENDUM WILL ACTUALLY BE HELD!

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ACHIEVEMENTS:

1. Since its foundation on July 6, 1971, our Association has been able to draw the attention of residents and the administration to critical issues confronting Rehoboth Beach such as the dangers of increased high-density and related aspects of traffic and parking congestion, water and sewer problems, and the threatening destruction of the unique beauty of our beach resort.

2. It has succeeded to get the citizens interested in the general affairs of their city: - whereas previous public meetings of the City Commissioners were poorly attended, the attendance at those meetings has risen sharply since the Association became active. This increase in citizens' interest in community affairs, sparked by the Association, contributed to the establishment last January of the Council of Civic Organizations for Community Affairs which is sponsoring the Town Forums.

3. Our membership families has grown from 22 on July 6, 1971 to 300 on March 1, 1972.

BUT: Much more needs to be done; we are far from success. To give our cause a chance to succeed, to help Rehoboth Beach to survive with its unique character, we need to strengthen our Association through increased membership. If each member enlists only one NEW MEMBER, we can double our strength and WE WILL be able to influence the actions of the City government one way or another!