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AN AGGRESSIVE NEW PLAN AT NASSAU BEARS SCRUTINY AND GOOD
NEWS FOR OPEN SPACE ON PEPPER CREEK

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Ocean Atlantic and company President Preston Schell are among the most aggressive of Sussex County developers. With strong local roots, the people involved have a stake in development that makes sense for their home area. And Schell, one of the founders of the Sussex County Land Trust, has put his money where his mouth is in the leadership role by pledging a fixed percentage of each unit sale in his developments to the trust for open space acquisition. He says The Vineyards at Nassau Valley project will be no exception. In addition, Schell and his group of professionals travel around the country visiting state-of-the-art developments and attending land-use seminars in an attempt to bring the most current and progressive thinking regarding responsible development to Sussex County projects.

That's all said to bring an element of philosophical background to Ocean Atlantic's revised proposal for the 84-acre Vineyards project. The original proposal of 900 plus units on the Nassau Commons tract is as dense as any residential project permitted in Sussex County. The number equates to 12 units per acre, because the tract is zoned commercial and current Sussex zoning allows that level of residential development in commercial zones.

The original plan included 6,000 square feet of commercial space for convenience businesses to serve the residents. Now Ocean Atlantic has proposed revising the plan to retain all the residential while adding 180,000 square feet of commercial. Such space would permit more and larger stores to serve the community with the thought being that having such services would reduce the amount of trips people would need to make in cars, making the Vineyards even more of a livable community.

With little question, this revised plan takes an aggressive and permitted land-use proposal and accelerates it into an even more aggressive and permitted plan. The land is zoned commercial and has been so for 40 years, so it's no surprise that intensive use will be made of the parcel.

The question, as is always the case with large-scale proposals, is what will be the rippling-out effects of such intensive land use?

This proposal, which so far has won the praise of Gov. Minner's Liveable Delaware architects, offers the opportunity to take an in depth look at what constitutes enlightened land use and development in a rapidly developing state. It needs to be looked at very carefully. If the project is, indeed, superior land use, then its attributes can be articulated in such a way that others will understand that enlightenment and it can serve as a standard for other land use proposals. Sussex County's conundrum remains its agriculture/residential (A/R) zoning on the bulk of all the unincorporated and developable

land in the county. That zoning permits, by right, two units per acre in sewerred areas and a unit per three-quarters of an acre in unsewerred areas. While such aggressive developments as proposed for the Nassau land take advantage of the benefits of urban density, the rest of the county can be developed in a suburban sprawl fashion that will destroy our open space and erode our quality of life.

SUSSEX COUNTY recently sold 35 acres of waterfront land on Pepper Creek to the Sussex County Land Trust at a favorable price [See pictures and article on page 20.] The sale means that the land with extensive frontage on navigable water will be saved from almost certain development. That's good news for people of the southeast corner of Sussex in particular all of Sussex and Delaware in general. It will provide an opportunity for public access to this beautiful and wide tributary of Indian River Bay. Such public access increases our quality of life and helps to preserve and enhance property values.

The 35 acres is located along Piney Neck Road east of Dagsboro. At the end of Piney Neck is a large tract of woods and marsh owned by the state and administered as part of the Assawoman Wildlife Refuge for hunting and hiking. That tract and its proximity add further to the value of the most recent public acquisition along Pepper Creek.

Further out the creek is from the 35 acres is Timmons Marian, a ramshackle collection of ice sculpted docks and boathouses, derelict vessels crowed together on chocks on the bank overlooking the creek, and a deteriorating marine railway and boatyard that can't be long from the clutches of developers.