

# GREENWICH OPENS ZONING HEARINGS

## Concern Voiced Over Plan for Rural Tract in Town

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GREENWICH, Conn., March 1—"Do we have a 'dollar curtain' across Greenwich? Is there an off-limits sign north of the Merritt Parkway?"

These two questions posed in an advertisement in a newspaper here, published before the opening last night of three public hearings by the Greenwich Planning and Zoning Commission that have provoked a sprightly controversy.

The controversy centers on a request to rezone 83 acres of land in what townspeople call "the back country," a rural tract in the town's Banksville section that since 1947 has been zoned on a four-acre-a-family basis. It is generally a luxurious area, housing some of the community's wealthiest residents.

The land in question is the property of Lewis S. Rosenstiel, board chairman of Schenley Industries, Inc. Mr. Rosenstiel is a resident of the "back country" and the town's largest property owner.

Two years ago he gave the 83 acres to the Rosenstiel Foundation, which offered the undeveloped lots for sale as half-acre tracts costing \$965 apiece, stating that when necessary drainage, water and engineering work was done the cost would be about \$5,000 a lot. Similar developed tracts can run as high as \$15,000 in Greenwich, according to one real estate man.

### Home Builders Buy Lots

About 100 would-be home builders have paid \$1 apiece to the Rosenstiel Foundation for contracts for lots, which are contingent on a favorable ruling by the Zoning Commission.

About 34 neighborhood organizations, ranging from taxpayer groups to garden clubs, have opposed the plan as well as more than a dozen of the area's residents.

The opponents of the plan contend that rezoning would set a bad precedent, impede orderly growth, result in overcrowded schools, parks and beaches, increase traffic and be detrimental to property values.

Many of them also feel that Mr. Rosenstiel's motives are less than philanthropic and that he would eventually rezone all his 1,260 acres and create "a Levittown," as one man put it.

At last night's hearing about 500 townspeople attended a meeting that was devoted to listening to the case of the rezoning supporters, who have formed a group called SHARE, the Stanwich Half Acre Rezoning Enterprise. In an advertisement in The Greenwich Time, the local newspaper, the group described itself as being composed of firemen, teachers, nurses, post office employees and civil servants laboring to realize a "dream of owning a moderately priced house in their hometown."

At the meeting Francis X. Lennon, a lawyer representing one of the prospective buyers, Harold G. Fletcher, told the five-man Planning and Zoning Commission that the town was guilty of "indiscriminate large lot zoning."

Prof. Paul Davidoff, a former planner for New Canaan and currently director of the urban research center at Hunter College, said that the Greenwich zoning pattern was "exacerbating the kind of economic segregation that does exist."

### 'Feudal' Conditions Charged

"The township is abnormally rich when compared with the towns surrounding it," Mr. Davidoff said, adding that "almost feudal conditions" existed, with the middle class cast as serfs.

"In the land use plan of this town, one would not know of the problems of the low- and middle-income group — or of the race problem," he declared.

He said that land use control in Greenwich severely limited the supply available for moderate- and low-priced development.

Zoning in Greenwich "operates to vitiate national housing policy of decent housing for every American family," Mr. Davidoff said. He stated that four-acre zoning deserved the name "Ivy-League Socialism" because there was "much too much control to achieve ends for a chosen few."

Salem Shapiro, a planning and zoning consultant, spent more than two hours in technical analysis of the town's population distribution, land development and incomes and concluded that "zoning in Greenwich is arbitrary," and that the town's master plan was defective because it favored the high-income groups although 78 per cent of the town dwelled in areas zoned one-half acre or less.

"There must be a freedom to mingle" in an urban society, Mr. Shapiro said, adding that "this zoning pattern has created an artificial scarcity of smaller lots."

Emphasis on large area zoning resulted in excessive taxes on owners of smaller lots, he declared, since the heavy demand for the smaller sites caused the prices to increase disproportionately to their worth and because the taxes were levied on the market value.

The hearings continued to-night.