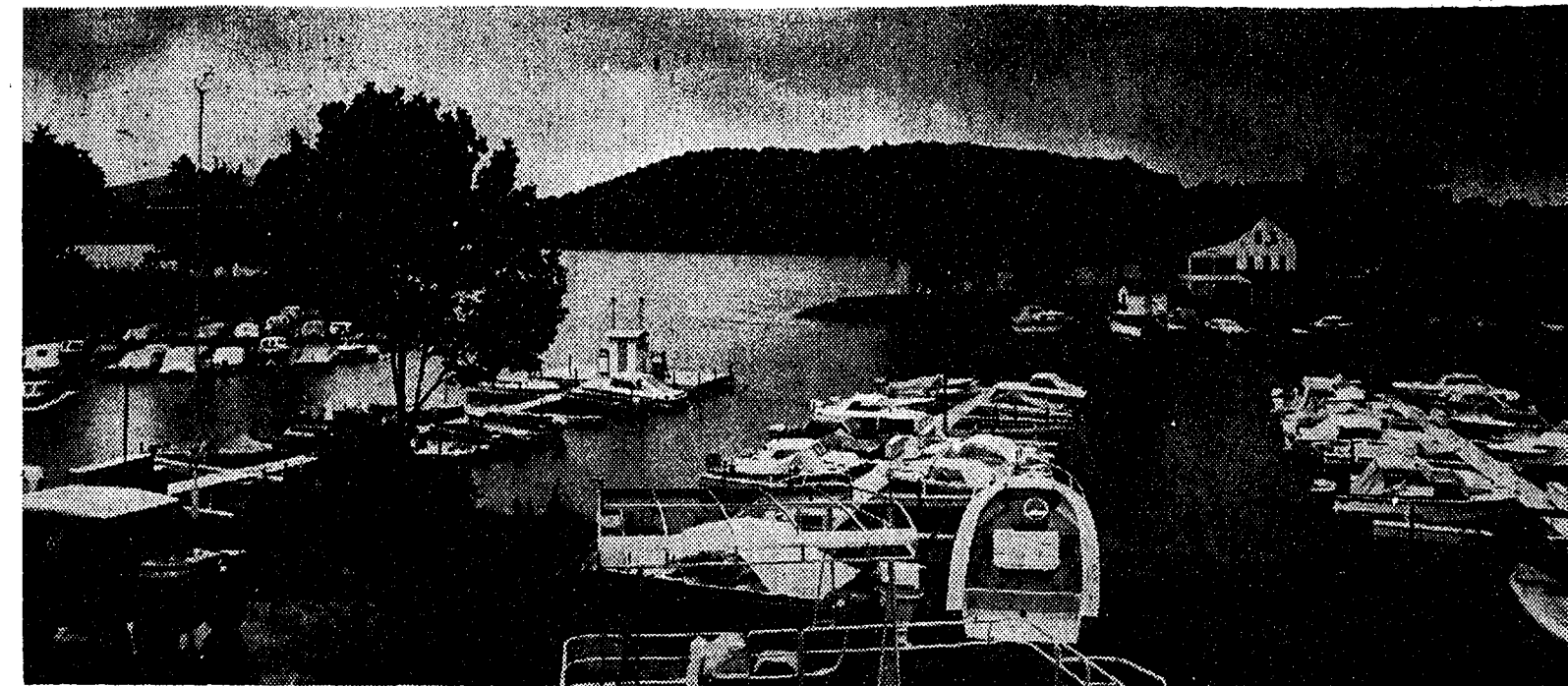


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By MICHAEL KNIGHT Special to The New York Times

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A section of Candlewood Lake, in Fairfield County, Conn., as seen from Anchor Marina. Plans for a development have raised a furor among residents. The New York Times/Edward Hauser

Plan for Candlewood Lake 'City' Stirs Fear of Urbanized Suburb

By MICHAEL KNIGHT

Special to The New York Times

NEW FAIRFIELD, Conn., Aug. 20—Is the "new city" of homes, stores and community services that will open up the American suburban dream to 8,000 residents of varied racial and economic backgrounds a utopia?

Or is the WatersEdge development proposed for a 253-acre wooded and rocky site on Candlewood Lake here a badly planned developer's scheme that will pollute the lake and destroy the quality of life in the rural northwest corner of Fairfield County?

Or will the proposal for the \$50-million innovative community simply provoke a lawsuit that can be used to strike down zoning laws nationwide?

Plans for the development here by the nonprofit Garden Cities Development Corporation have raised a furor among residents, who, for the most part, fled the urban ills of New York and now see themselves as pawns in a plot to urbanize the suburbs.

Lawsuits Filed

The residents point to the dozen or so towns throughout the metropolitan region where the Suburban Action Institute has already challenged local zoning as unconstitutional. The institute, a foundation-supported organization that created the Garden Cities Development Corporation in 1971, is devoted to fighting what it considers exclusionary and racially discriminatory zoning laws.

The residents cite specifically Mahwah, N. J., and Lewisboro in nearby Westchester County, N. Y., where the Garden Cities Development Corporation is already involved in similar lawsuits after zoning boards there turned down applications for similar "new cities."

The announcement last spring of plans to build the Connecticut project on a peninsula in the lake on the New

Fairfield - Sherman town line broke like a storm over the two communities, but found them united and well organized. Last year they successfully beat back a Federal plan to convert the 48-year-old man-made lake into a high-use recreational facility.

Two-thirds of the 7,900 residents here have already signed the petition against the housing project. When the developers presented their case at a three-day preliminary hearing last week they were faced with stony silence. Hearings among Sherman's 1,500 residents have not yet been scheduled.

Tension was increased today with the disclosure that Stephen Weil, a local land speculator who owns the 253-acre site, had signed a \$1.8-million contract to buy an additional 128-acre lake-side site on the New Fairfield-Danbury town line from Skorpis Properties, Ltd., a company owned by Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate. Skorpis bought the property last spring for \$400,000.

Mr. Weil, who has threatened a libel suit against those who signed the petition, and has said that a lawsuit over the Waters Edge development would cost New Fairfield \$300,000, declined to discuss the purchase or say what he planned to do with the land.

View of Opponents

Paul Davidoff, a former urban planner who is a co-director of both the Suburban Action Institute and the Garden Cities Development Corporation, which occupies the same office in Tarrytown, N. Y., said that the corporation hoped that the zoning commission here will approve the project. He said that the corporation had no plans at present for a lawsuit.

The feeling of many residents was summed up by Malcolm Cowley, the critic and literary historian who is a resident of Sherman.

"The Suburban Action Insti-

tute is embarked on a campaign to upset the zoning laws nationally," he said. "And the technique so far is to bring in various proposals for housing and have them rejected by the zoning boards and then carry the case to the courts. They're hoping to get the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

"They claim to be acting on behalf of the black people in the inner cities, but actually they're using them as pawns to get foundation grants. The real purpose is to upset the zoning laws, which they call exclusionary.

"They [The housing proposals] are probably the worst threat to the environment next to strip mining. The taxes would triple here, making it impossible for the last remaining farms to survive, and that would be putting a bulldozer to the countryside. If it ever goes through, it will make these towns unlivable."

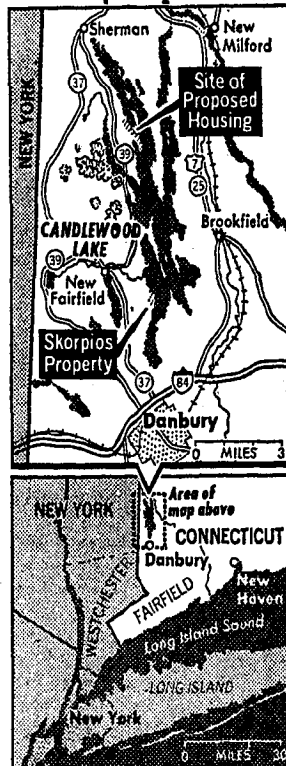
Other residents, like John Goetz, vice president of the Candlewood Lake Defense Associates, prefer to discuss the project on its merits, saying that remarks about the motivation of the developers would only hurt their chances later in the courts.

Low Income Cited

He contended in interviews and in broadsides to the community that the project was not needed and would double the population of the town, pollute the lake because of waste disposal problems, and strain the town's finances.

"The proposed development is for low- and middle-income people," he said. "But New Fairfield is precisely that type of town. The median income is only \$11,700, one of the lowest in the region. What we're saying is that the middle- and low-income people already do live here and so do not require massive developments to help them."

In a point-by-point critique



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of the project sent to the foundations that support the Suburban Action Institute, Mr. Goetz's organization called it a "malicious assault on our ecology, our environment, and our tranquility."

Mr. Davidoff denied that the project was intended as a test case.

"We have every expectation that the zoning commission will deliberate fairly, and we feel confident that the town will approve the plan," he said.

Speaking as co-director of the Development Corporation, he said that the project "will be created for a very wide economic group, instead of the very select group that can afford housing on the lake."

Speaking as co-director of the Suburban Action Institute, Mr. Davidoff argued that many of the nation's zoning laws were illegal.

"The suburbs are where we are building America, an America we can be proud of, rather than the segregated America we have been putting up" he said.