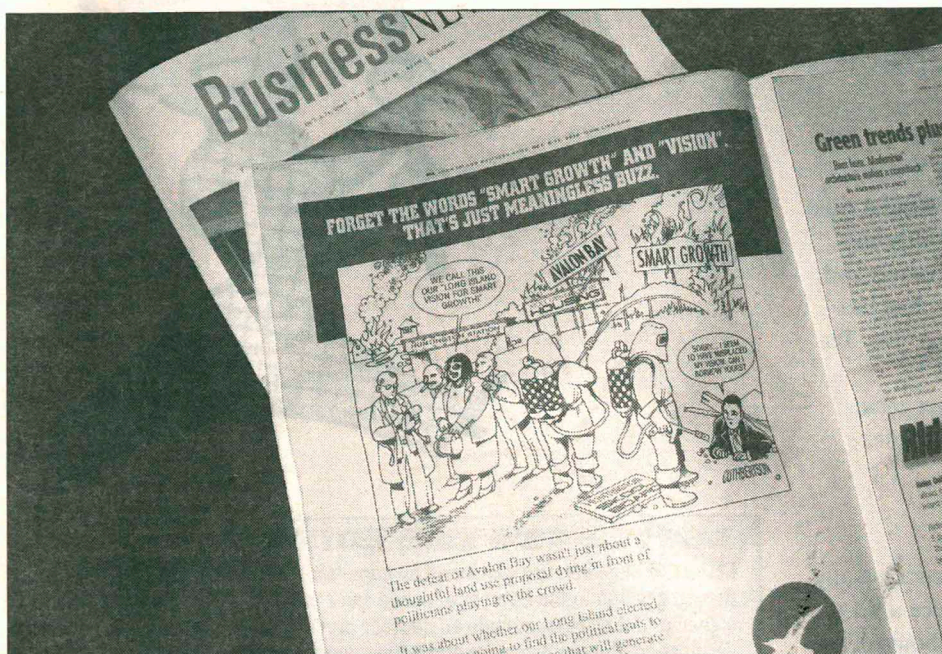


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HUNTINGTON

Avalon Backlash Hits Newsstands

Group's ad trashes town, school board



This ABLI ad in the Long Island Business News accused Huntington Councilman Mark Cuthbertson of cowering to residents and buckling to the Huntington School Board in opposing AvalonBay's Huntington Station development.

By Danny Schrafel

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Empty rhetoric, spineless politicians and fringe residents “torching” Huntington Station - all are evidence of a wider anti-development climate given AvalonBay's failure to gain approval in the hamlet, according to the Alliance for a Better Long Island (ABLI).

ABLI, whose mission statement calls for the protection of orderly growth on Long Island, placed an ad in the Oct. 8-14 issue of *Long Island Business News* that trashed just about everybody involved in the process. A cartoon depicts Huntington Station residents putting up a good front for the media while a man in a hazmat suit wearing chemical tanks “torches” AvalonBay Huntington Station and Smart growth. The “Huntington Skool Board” is trampled underfoot.

Another man in the same garb points the nozzle at a caricature of Councilman Mark Cuthbertson who cowers at their

feet, saying, “Sorry... I seem to have misplaced my vision. Can I borrow yours?” The councilman voted no after the Huntington School Board announced it would not support the creation of a high-density transit oriented district around the Huntington Rail Road station.

The AvalonBay apartment development was defeated Sept. 21 after a proposed transit-oriented district failed to get the required four-vote supermajority from the town board.

The failure of AvalonBay, said ABLI Executive Director Desmond Ryan, reflects “the politics of paralysis” that is pandemic across Long Island.

“We have elected officials who can talk the talk but they can't walk the walk. We talk about these buzzwords that have become absolutely meaningless,” he said. “[AvalonBay] Oyster Bay failed. North Hempstead failed. [AvalonBay's Garden City proposal at] St. Paul's failed. Levyland [in Yaphank] is about to fail. Wolkoff

(Continued on page A28)

Building trade group slams Huntington

(Continued from page A7)

at Pilgrim State is nowhere. Kings Park is a regional disgrace because of the absolute lack of leadership... now this."

He added that Cuthbertson portrayed himself as pro-development, yet still voted no on AvalonBay. It is worthy of particular contempt, Ryan said.

"How do you take a developer who proposed a \$110-million investment [in a place] with the highest crime rate on Long Island and the board says no because of a couple of NIMBYs? It's the same in every goddamn community on Long Island," Ryan fumed.

Cuthbertson said he was "surprised and disappointed" by the ad, adding he has long been a strong supporter of development and affordable housing. He added that he and ABLI worked together last year to campaign against creating councilmanic districts.

"I guess I'm disappointed because if you don't bat 1.000 with the development community, this is the result," he said. "I look at every project on the merits and made my concerns about Avalon a matter of public record. I stand by the position I took."

Eric Alexander, who leads Vision Long Island - a group that supported AvalonBay and backs projects that meet federal smart growth standards - said he was baffled by ABLI's criticism.

"The word 'vision' is used in ABLI's own mission statement, so again, we are confused at that criticism," he said. "We are also unaware as to how the planning principles of Smart Growth contributed to the demise of the project. If anything, the terminology Smart Growth and Transit Oriented Development were used to buoy a high-density housing project advanced behind a zone change process that failed

to address community concerns."

The reaction reflects a breakdown in public discourse that has caused development paralysis that leaves Long Islanders with "limited options" for the future, Alexander said. He stressed that he hopes for "thoughtful, intelligent communication" with ABLI and other stakeholders.

"Attacking Smart Growth, Vision, the desire to learn lessons from failure and the ability to gain community support for planning projects is shortsighted at best and bad business at worst. It was a funny cartoon, though," he added.

Ryan said this is just the first salvo in of a larger campaign. The three board mem-

bers who voted against AvalonBay - Cuthbertson, Councilwoman Susan Berland and Councilman Mark Mayoka - will likely be "serious contenders" for ABLI's Ruptured Duck award, given to the Long Island politico who "does the most to poop on Long Island," Ryan said.

The group may also revive a practice from 20 years ago - targeting those they deem to be anti-development lawmakers and campaigning to remove them from office.

"We're giving more than a little thought," he said. "There is no leadership, which is what the region is desperately crying for."