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October 2012: Morris Township News Update

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## Lost Opportunity in Morris Township

Dear Neighbor,

Two weeks ago the Morris Township Committee took a vote at 1:30 a.m. (Yes, 1:30 a.m.!) on the local ordinance to rezone the Honeywell property to include 235 townhouses. The vote was 4-1 and I was the only dissenting vote. Several people have asked me why I voted against it – "Because we could have done better" I told them -- and I would like to explain why.

With traffic congestion being the #1 concern of residents in the area, I made two suggestions to reduce traffic emanating from the site. One was to place a CCRC (Continuing Care Retirement Community) on the site. A CCRC produces less peak-hour traffic, and the traffic expert agreed with me that there would be less traffic impacts from a CCRC than townhouses. The other suggestion was to use our own open space funds, backed by county open space funds and NJ Green Acres funds, to purchase some of the lands that otherwise would be built on. Neither of these suggestions merited much discussion by Committee members, and I could not get a "second" to make a motion to include either of these ideas in the ordinance.

Below you will find my "open letter" that was published in the newspaper this week. You will see I also made several common-sense suggestions to amend the ordinance language. None of these suggestions were considered because it would have meant that the ordinance would be delayed by having to have an additional hearing to approve it, and this could possibly push the final vote until after the local election – a crucial date for two of my colleagues who are up for reelection.

The complete lack of discussion by the Township Committee of this important ordinance was disheartening. My colleagues were just "going through the motions" in order to complete the hearings as soon as possible. It is clear that they wanted the ordinance approved by the local election in early November – and in so doing showing all that their approval was in the best interest of their own politics, but not necessarily in the best interest of Morris Township residents.

Please take a minute to read my Open Letter to Morris Township Residents as published in both the Morris Newsbee and PATCH. You can find the text at either of these two links, and it has been copied below for your reading convenience.

<http://morris.patch.com/articles/honeywell-vote-lost-opportunity-to-do-better-job>

[http://newjerseyhills.com/morris\\_news\\_bee/opinion/letters\\_to\\_the\\_editor/honeywell-redevelopment-a-rigged-process/article\\_b5ad2d40-17de-11e2-bb5b-](http://newjerseyhills.com/morris_news_bee/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/honeywell-redevelopment-a-rigged-process/article_b5ad2d40-17de-11e2-bb5b-)

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As always, please feel free to write me with any questions or comments about Morris Township at [Jeff@JeffGrayzel.com](mailto:Jeff@JeffGrayzel.com)

Respectfully,  
Jeff Grayzel  
Committeeman, Morris Township Committee

Open Letter to Morris Township Residents from Committeeman Jeff Grayzel

## **Honeywell Redevelopment: A Rigged Process?**

Last week the Honeywell Redevelopment hearings came to an end with a middle-of-the-night vote at **1:30 a.m.** by the Township Committee. The process appeared rigged because the Mayor refused to let anyone go home even though we had another special meeting on the topic tentatively scheduled for two days later. The rushed process was yet another indication of the politically motivated proceedings, given the upcoming local election and pending ethics hearings on a fellow Committeeman (Bruce Sisler).

Since most residents missed what happened in the wee hours of that morning, I am writing this open letter to our residents to share my perspective on what transpired as well as to inform residents of my efforts to improve the ordinance language and offer a compromise plan. At such a late hour, the public was shut out of hearing the deliberations (or lack thereof) of the Committee before the final vote. So much for "Open Government"!

First let me say that I did not dispute, as well as most residents did not dispute, that Honeywell has a right to rebuild their aging offices. As a fortune 50 company they should be in state-of-the-art office space. All along I was hoping they would stay in Morris Township, although there is still no guarantee they will do so even with the approvals they received to rebuild 900,000 square feet of office space and subdivide their property to build an additional 235 townhomes (and they will also be donating some land to Morris Township to build an athletic field).

From the start, I stated that my primary concern about the development was the traffic impacts on the area. Morris Township is already bearing the brunt of over-development in the surrounding communities of Florham Park and Madison. I fear that in five years we will wake up to find that area of town in total gridlock at rush hour, and that the cut-through traffic in the surrounding neighborhoods will increase significantly. I was also opposed to dense townhouse development because I think this type of housing will change the fabric of our community.

The process appeared rigged because I was virtually the only Committee member asking questions. In total, there were five Township Committee hearings on the Honeywell Redevelopment plan. The Committee and the public had the opportunity to hear testimony and question experts in the fields of fiscal analysis, traffic, environmental, and land planning. I would estimate that of all the questions asked by our five-member Township Committee, I personally asked approximately 85% of those questions. On the other hand, Bruce Sisler asked just three questions in total over the course of five hearings. His silence does not

represent the interests of the 8,000+ households in our township.

When a motion was made to vote on the ordinance I offered up several common-sense changes to the ordinance, none of which affected the core approvals of the office space and townhouses. They were:

- Make the upgraded train crossing with quiet zone mandatory at the rear entrance.
- Require that there be unrestricted access to all open spaces, including no restrictions on the number of cars traversing the property to get to the proposed playing field.
- Reduce the unreasonable 20 year development time frame down set in the ordinance to 6 years from time of site plan approval, with the ability to obtain a two year extension.
- Development must be staged, meaning that only a portion of the townhomes can be built before new offices construction can begin, to ensure that the upgraded offices are built and not just the townhouses.
- Require that all roadways comply with "complete streets" parameters and include a dedicated bike lane.
- Reduce total impervious surfaces from 55% to a 50% limit that would be in-line with the existing OL-40 zone (which Honeywell is presently in), thus providing for less asphalt and more soil to help drain rain run-off from the property naturally.

All of the above would improve the quality of the development on this site. However, the Committee was informed by the municipal attorney that any changes to the ordinance would require it to go back to the Planning Board for their approval, prior to an actual final vote being taken by the Township Committee. Given the rigged process and the political agenda, that was a "no-go" for the other four Committeemen. Not a single one of the suggestions was incorporated into the final ordinance. Sounds like a rigged process to me.

Before the final vote, I tried again. I offered a win-win-win compromise plan that would get my vote for approval. It is said that a good compromise happens when all sides feel like they should have gotten more. My compromise was to reduce the number of townhouses to 120 (from 235), increase the buffers around the property, particularly adjacent to adjoining homeowners, and utilize \$10+ million of open space funds (\$5 million from our own open space funds plus matching funds from Green Acres and Morris County) to preserve some of the land that otherwise would have the remaining townhomes built upon it.

Again I got the feeling the process was rigged because the Mayor stated "it is too late in the process to consider alternate proposals". Too late for who??!! To me, this compromise was win-win-win because the Township would still get increased tax revenues, Honeywell could profitably sell off portions of their land at significant profit for townhouse development (although at less profit than they were hoping), and the public would get less traffic impacts (although still more than the present-day situation).

But politics won out, and the ordinance passed with all the approvals that Honeywell wanted – and not a single revision to the ordinance language. While I am pleased that Honeywell is (apparently) staying, I think we lost an opportunity to do a better job for our residents. The price of increased density due to the townhomes and increased traffic was not the right price to pay for changing the

fabric of our beautiful Township.

Jeff Grayzel  
Committeeman, Morris Township

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