

The MV IDA meets this AM at 10am.

On the agenda is Qwest, another rental apartment building project for people of limited economic means.

3 new rental apartment buildings are in the works in the city right now, all front running the yet to be completed Comprehensive Plan:

- Library Square, which is seeking to re-zone a large area of the city's downtown into what they are calling a "Downtown Transit Oriented Arts District" (DTOAD). They intend to build 300+ rental units but the DTOAD has the capacity for far more units. There is something Kafkaesque about naming a district with the capacity of roughly 1,300 new rental units for individuals and families of limited economic means an "Arts District" for "makers" and the "creative economy" (whatever that means). Don't get me wrong- people with little to no money are forced to be wildly creative just to get by. For me, the solution is to lift wages, not subsidize corporation profits on the backs of individuals and families a couple of rungs up the economic ladder.
- 115 Macquesten Pkwy. This project entails the construction of 315 rental units.
- Qwest. Designed as 2 apartment buildings with a total of 229 apartments for rent, the bulk of which will be in the 1-2 bedroom range. These apartments are for individuals and families with income in the range of 40-80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) as defined by US dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). You can read about the HUD guidelines for Westchester County here:

<https://homes.westchestergov.com/resources/hud-income-guidelines>

Among the Qwest developers is the Stagg group. Recall that Stagg is the construction company that built their corporate headquarters on a parcel of land adjacent to Willson's Woods Park (One Bradford Rd). One could argue that the parcel of land sits "within" the park because the only way to get to the Stagg property is via the county owned park road. I wrote about the process by which Stagg came to own and occupy One Bradford. (see the Land Use and Housing Section of the website)

It's worth noting that during the decision-making process as to whether the Mount Vernon City Council would approve of a construction company (Stagg) setting up shop adjacent (or within) Willson's Woods, the county's oldest park, Westchester County Executive, George Latimer, wrote a letter to the Council in support of Staff. What's more, a couple months before Latimer wrote that letter of support, Mark Stagg made a \$10k donation to Latimer's re-election campaign. You can read about that here:

<https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/mount-vernon/2021/08/30/westchester-county-executive-george-latimer-supported-project-after-donation-by-stagg-group/5604325001/>

Jump to page 27 of the attached to read about the Qwest project coming before the IDA:

<https://www.cmvny.com/DocumentCenter/View/7272/MVIDA-Board-Packet-August-17-2023-4857-2552-3064-1?bidId=>

Library Square has yet to approach the IDA for tax breaks, but I have little doubt that they will.

115 Macquesten is seeking tax breaks from the IDA, but the details haven't been spelled out yet.

Qwest is seeking a 30-year Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) and relief on sales tax during construction.

So nearly 1,000 new rental units for individuals and families of limited economic means across multiple new buildings are in the works right now. If I were a wagerer, I'd say the odds are very high that these corporate developers will receive tax breaks through the Mount Vernon Industrial Development Agency.

How this furthers the mission of Industrial Development is not clear.

How this furthers the essential need for economic development in the city is not clear.

What is clear is that developers have made generous financial contributions to the campaigns of our elected officials, and I think there is a strong case to be made that money influences the decisions made by elected officials. Given this, it seems reasonable to wonder: to what extent are elected officials in Mount Vernon beholden to the developers who helped finance their political campaigns?

If our elected officials covet transparency as much as they say, it seems reasonable to ask them to disclose if any individuals or corporations with financial interests in these projects (or the land upon which these projects will be built), have contributed money to their political campaigns?

Finally, let me reiterate again that I'm not knocking people of limited means. I'm a strict determinist. I don't blame poverty on the poor, I blame poverty on the greedy.

I'm also a realist and pragmatist. The sad truth is we have set up our political and economic system to cater to the interests of corporations and the superrich. When the IDA gives tax breaks to low-income housing developers, it increases the odds that residential property taxes will go up

for the rest of us. See the analysis I did about real property tax losses due to tax breaks given out by the IDA 2016-2021.

Tax breaks given to housing developers through the IDA are a transfer of wealth from residential property taxpayers to the housing developers. Yet when it happens, the politicians and their corporate friends cut the ribbon and honor themselves.

When housing developers say that the project is not viable to them unless they get tax breaks it means that the project is not profitable for them unless they get tax breaks. *In other words, the IDA is being used as a mechanism to subsidize corporate profits.* One might ask, “well how else will low-income housing get built?”, to which I say, “raise the wages of the ‘workforce’ and we will no longer have the need to build housing for the poor. But of course, raising wages cuts into corporate profits, and we can’t have that, can we.