

TPA offers a response

By **THOMAS T. ALSPACH**
Guest Comment

Last Friday's *Star Democrat* included not one, but two swipes at Talbot Preservation Alliance, offered by commentators who apparently believe we do not have enough residential and commercial development under way here in Talbot County. Those comments need significant clarification.

Mr. Worsnup is irritated that TPA, allegedly on behalf of a "handful of wealthy benefactors," recently spoke against a proposed annexation that would bring 297 more housing units to Easton, at a site on Route 50 known as "Spencer Farm." A few salient facts were omitted from his critique.

Easton's comprehensive plan, adopted after thousands of hours of effort by dozens of citizen volunteers working with town staff and officials, placed the Spencer Farm site within the "Priority 3" annexation area in Easton's long range growth plan. That growth plan's purpose is to ensure that Easton will grow moderately over an extended period through 2030, and those sites within the growth plan designated "Priority 3" are not eligible for annexation until after the year 2016. The Spencer Farm developers knew this when they took a purchase option on the site.

Mr. Worsnup attributes TPA's opposition to the proposed Spencer Farm annexation to our supposed indifference toward affordable/workforce housing. Ironically, Friday's newspaper additionally reported on the Easton Town Council's recent 3-2 approval of Elm Street's planned redevelopment of the Cannery Square apartments.

TPA strenuously (and unsuccessfully) opposed that project at public hearings last year, because Easton will lose some 60 units of workforce housing (renting in the neighborhood of \$700 to \$800 per month) in exchange for upscale townhouses at prices up to \$300,000. If Mr. Worsnup and the rest of his group had joined us at those public hearings perhaps the 3-2 vote would have gone the other way, and some of those affordable Cannery Square units could have been saved.

On the same day that TPA opposed the Spencer Farm project, Mr. Worsnup notes that we spoke in favor of an annexation of new land to be zoned "light industrial" and located next to Warren's Woodworks on Brooks Drive. This annexation was supported by TPA because (1) Easton effectively is out of land zoned light industrial and suitable for small businesses; (2) Warren's Woodworks and several other businesses along Brooks Drive need to and intend to expand; (3) the annexation will create jobs for local residents and generate net tax revenues for the town; and (4) new residential development, such as the proposed Spencer Farm, in contrast does not generate sufficient tax revenue to offset its expense (especially when the Spencer Farm developer proposes that impact fees be waived).

It is a bit more difficult to fathom the motivation for Peter Johnston's guest comment, in which he critiques TPA and unnamed "elected officials" who supposedly want to "make Talbot County an elite estate oasis in the middle of a burgeoning East Coast population."

Mr. Johnston's firm remains a strong advocate for the Miles Point project in St. Michaels, which would increase that small town's housing stock by some 40 percent over just an eight-year period. The Miles Point units will sell for around \$500,000 to more than \$1,000,000 each; an "elite estate oasis" indeed.

In any event, Mr. Johnston's concern that the Talbot County Council might "deny the right" of new residents to live here is misplaced. Wallace, Montgomery & Associates, the professional engineers responsible for Easton's ongoing "east-west connector" feasibility study, last year calculated that more than 5,000 new residential units either have been approved or are under construction in Talbot County at the present time, with virtually all of those units to be located in the incorporated towns.

So contrary to Mr. Johnston's contention, TPA need not engage in what he calls "delusional propaganda" in order to rally support for our "cause." We need only to remind the public, and our elected leaders, of the cumulative effect of past decisions on growth and development, that now are beginning to overtake us (as anyone can see). That should be enough to rally support for the "cause" of managing and controlling our growth as we move into the future.

*Thomas T. Alspach is president of the
Talbot Preservation Alliance Inc.*