

Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com

Borough Council Decision Regarding My Fence Replacement

3 messages

Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com

To: malthoff@mendhamnj.org, sandrew@mendhamnj.org, jandrews@mendhamnj.org

Wed, Dec 27, 2023 at 1:12 PM

When I inquired about what transpired at the Dec 15th meeting regarding my application to replace my existing wooden fence and hedge with a stone fence, I was told by the clerk that the "police chief needed to look to see if this would create a public safety issue." When I then asked what type of possible public safety issue it might cause, the clerk told me that she did not have any information about that.

When I more recently inquired about the status of this investigation, I was told by the clerk that my application was rejected on public safety grounds. No explanation of the public safety investigation was provided. I then followed up with the Borough Engineer, who told me that same thing, again without any explanation. He also informed me that this was "unanimously the Council's and Mayor's decision" and that he did not intend to communicate with me any further on this matter. When I then followed up with the Mayor, she also indicated that it was a public safety issue, but could not be more specific. She also corrected what the Borough Engineer had said and indicated that she did not vote on this matter, and that it was the Borough Council that had unanimously voted to reject my application.

So, since you are the three people on the Borough Council with whom I have had a relationship over the past couple of decades, I thought I would reach out to try to find out a few things that no one appears to be able to tell me:

- 1. What issues and factors were discussed at the meeting (I could not attend, since I reside in FL most of the year these days)
- 2. I am still perplexed as to why a simple fend replacement would involve a "road opening permit," but I've submitted all applications as I have been asked to do (I started with a fence replacement application, even though my new fence would conform to all Borough codes). I've simply been told that any new thing placed -- fence, tree, hedge, etc, -- within the roadway right of way requires a road opening permit. Can any of you shed light on this requirement?
- 3. I have now been told that my new fence is viewed by the Borough Council to be a public safety hazard. Do any of you know exactly what type of hazard this is envisioned to be? (Part of the reason for replacing my existing border fences with stone, instead of wood or hedge, is that the road ways abutting our property are a private safety hazard for us. We have had no fewer than 7 times over the past 30 years -- including 3 times within the past 2 years -- motorists drive through our hedge/wood fence (even stone fence) into our front or side yard. While this may not be an issue for many Borough residents, our home predates everything else in this town except Phoenix House, the BlackHorse and one residence still standing on Main Street. It is less than 30' from the road in the front of our home, so it is very prone to motorists hurtling, unimpeded, into our yard. It has cost me tens of thousands of dollars to repair over the years, but, worse yet, we never allowed our children to play in the front or side of our property because of our fears related to these reckless drivers.)

I am frustrated with the Borough's handling of this very simple request, a request that I made in good faith, apparently unlike the 9 other properties along Talmage Road which have stone fences closer to the road than my proposed fence (the Borough staff have indicated that they have no knowledge of these ever being permitted, and I know that at least some of these have been installed since the Borough Code required it. It seems like I'm being penalized for having filed for the permit in the first place.

I would be delighted to share with you the entirety of my experience with the Borough administration on this matter, if you are interested.

I would have hoped that the Council would have shown greater respect for personal property rights. The Borough Engineer assured my that the Borough has no plans -- "couldn't even imagine" were his words -- to actually use (for sidewalks, road widening or underground utilities) the right of way, and he encouraged me to obtain a survey (at thousands of dollars of *my* personal expense) so the *Borough* could determine if my proposed location was within the right of way (I was surprised that the Borough didn't know its own right of ways and needed a surveyor to inform it). I did so, once again in good faith. Never was an issue of a possible "public safety" issue ever discussed -- it was simply a conforming fence, which made it ok, but it might be within the right of way, so I just needed to go through the Borough's bureaucratic process, I was told.

I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have tried to understand my perspective, as the homeowner, but the decision was made without any input from me (again, I was not here to attend the meeting).

I would have hoped that the communication would have been proactive and thorough to me, but I have had to call every time to see if there has been any update to my applications status and I feel like a mushroom -- kept in the dark and having shit piled on top of me.

Mostly, though, I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have cared about the issues that really affect the health of a community.

Personally, I have worked very hard to be a good local member of the community and to preserve the treasure that our home is to so many people here in Mendham. I coached rec league basketball for a decade, I've served as a chaperone on St Joe's weeklong Appalachia Mission Trip for 13 of the 15 years it has done it. I have served -- at the behest of Mayor Henry -- on the Borough Planning Board and the West Morris Regional High School District BOE -- against my personal preferences, only because I felt be called to try to help make a positive difference for our community. And, John and Steve, as you know, I always volunteer for TWO shifts each year at the Pastime Club Carnival, because I want to make up for not have the time to be more of a help at the club the rest of the year :>)

With regard to this home, the 2nd oldest in Mendham, I have worked very hard and spent a great deal more money than necessary, to keep it preserved in excellent condition and in period with its historical roots, despite having no obligation to do so (not in any historic district, for example). In fact, this new fence was designed, in part, to further enhance and protect this historical gem here in Mendham. As you know, there is significant residential development happening just up Hardscrabble Road now, and that will only increase the risk to the people that are on my property. It is only 30" high (6" shorter than my existing fence) and it will be set back 4" (current fence is 3" back) from the road. I would love to have the freedom to move it back out of the right of way, but my front yard is only twice as deep as the right of way. No one would want the stone fence to be SO close to the house. It would look out of proportion. Not want I would think that the community wants for a "local treasure." Does the Borough Council even view our home as a "local treasure?"

This entire process has left me wondering about a lot of conceptions I have had of the Borough for the several decades I have had a home here. I never expected to run into the challenges I have faced in trying to "do the right thing" for the community -- at a cost of over \$100,000 to me personally. I could put up some piece of shit fence, or maybe the Borough would fight me on that, as well, but I just never expected to have people I have known for so long treat my request with such apparent disregard. I'm only trying to do my small part to beautify our lovely town and to protect an irreplaceable historical gem of our community from the increasing threats that are posed by the increased traffic on our local roads.

Please let me know if you would be willing to discuss this matter further, including coming over for a tour of the intended fence replacement. If not, at least please answer the questions I pose at the top of this email.

I'm just hoping that someone actually cares.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

-- Brian Cavanaugh (201) 522-1387

Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com

To: malthoff@mendhamnj.org, sandrew@mendhamnj.org, jandrews@mendhamnj.org

Mon, Jan 1, 2024 at 9:53 AM

Happy New Year!

I just thought I'd check in to see if any of you can shed a little more light on why my fence replacement proposal was rejected. All I've heard so far is that it had something to do with a finding of being a "public safety" issue. I would like to better understand exactly what "public safety" concern the Borough has.

Thank you.

-- Brian

On Wed, Dec 27, 2023 at 1:12 PM Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com wrote:

When I inquired about what transpired at the Dec 15th meeting regarding my application to replace my existing wooden fence and hedge with a stone fence, I was told by the clerk that the "police chief needed to look to see if this would create a public safety issue." When I then asked what type of possible public safety issue it might cause, the clerk told me that she did not have any information about that.

When I more recently inquired about the status of this investigation, I was told by the clerk that my application was rejected on public safety grounds. No explanation of the public safety investigation was provided. I then followed up with the Borough Engineer, who told me that same thing, again without any explanation. He also informed me that this was "unanimously the Council's and Mayor's decision" and that he did not intend to communicate with me any further on this matter. When I then followed up with the Mayor, she also indicated that it was a public safety issue, but could not be more specific. She also corrected what the Borough Engineer had said and indicated that she did not vote on this matter, and that it was the Borough Council that had unanimously voted to reject my application.

So, since you are the three people on the Borough Council with whom I have had a relationship over the past couple of decades, I thought I would reach out to try to find out a few things that no one appears to be able to tell me:

- 1. What issues and factors were discussed at the meeting (I could not attend, since I reside in FL most of the year these days)
- 2. I am still perplexed as to why a simple fend replacement would involve a "road opening permit," but I've submitted all applications as I have been asked to do (I started with a fence replacement application, even though my new fence would conform to all Borough codes). I've simply been told that any new thing placed -- fence, tree, hedge, etc, -- within the roadway right of way requires a road opening permit. Can any of you shed light on this requirement?
- 3. I have now been told that my new fence is viewed by the Borough Council to be a public safety hazard. Do any of you know exactly what type of hazard this is envisioned to be? (Part of the reason for replacing my existing border fences with stone, instead of wood or hedge, is that the road ways abutting our property are a private safety hazard for us. We have had no fewer than 7 times over the past 30 years -- including 3 times within the past 2 years -- motorists drive through our hedge/wood fence (even stone fence) into our front or side yard. While this may not be an issue for many Borough residents, our home predates everything else in this town except Phoenix House, the BlackHorse and one residence still standing on Main Street. It is less than 30' from the road in the front of our home, so it is very prone to motorists hurtling, unimpeded, into our yard. It has cost me tens of thousands of dollars to repair over the years, but, worse yet, we never allowed our children to play in the front or side of our property because of our fears related to these reckless drivers.)

I am frustrated with the Borough's handling of this very simple request, a request that I made in good faith, apparently unlike the 9 other properties along Talmage Road which have stone fences closer to the road than my proposed fence (the Borough staff have indicated that they have no knowledge of these ever being permitted, and I know that at least some of these have been installed since the Borough Code required it. It seems like I'm being penalized for having filed for the permit in the first place.

I would be delighted to share with you the entirety of my experience with the Borough administration on this matter, if you are interested.

I would have hoped that the Council would have shown greater respect for personal property rights. The Borough Engineer assured my that the Borough has no plans -- "couldn't even imagine" were his words -- to actually use (for sidewalks, road widening or underground utilities) the right of way, and he encouraged me to obtain a survey (at thousands of dollars of *my* personal expense) so the *Borough* could determine if my proposed location was within the right of way (I was surprised that the Borough didn't know its own right of ways and needed a surveyor to inform it). I did so, once again in good faith. Never was an issue of a possible "public safety" issue ever discussed -- it was simply a conforming fence, which made it ok, but it might be within the right of way, so I just needed to go through the Borough's bureaucratic process, I was told.

I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have tried to understand my perspective, as the homeowner, but the decision was made without any input from me (again, I was not here to attend the meeting).

I would have hoped that the communication would have been proactive and thorough to me, but I have had to call every time to see if there has been any update to my applications status and I feel like a mushroom -- kept in the dark and having shit piled on top of me.

Mostly, though, I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have cared about the issues that really affect the health of a community.

Personally, I have worked very hard to be a good local member of the community and to preserve the treasure that our home is to so many people here in Mendham. I coached rec league basketball for a decade, I've served as a chaperone on St Joe's weeklong Appalachia Mission Trip for 13 of the 15 years it has done it. I have served -- at the behest of Mayor Henry -- on the Borough Planning Board and the West Morris Regional High School District BOE -- against my personal preferences, only because I felt be called to try to help make a positive difference for our

community. And, John and Steve, as you know, I always volunteer for TWO shifts each year at the Pastime Club Carnival, because I want to make up for not have the time to be more of a help at the club the rest of the year :>)

With regard to this home, the 2nd oldest in Mendham, I have worked very hard and spent a great deal more money than necessary, to keep it preserved in excellent condition and in period with its historical roots, despite having no obligation to do so (not in any historic district, for example). In fact, this new fence was designed, in part, to further enhance and protect this historical gem here in Mendham. As you know, there is significant residential development happening just up Hardscrabble Road now, and that will only increase the risk to the people that are on my property. It is only 30" high (6" shorter than my existing fence) and it will be set back 4" (current fence is 3" back) from the road. I would love to have the freedom to move it back out of the right of way, but my front yard is only twice as deep as the right of way. No one would want the stone fence to be SO close to the house. It would look out of proportion. Not want I would think that the community wants for a "local treasure." Does the Borough Council even view our home as a "local treasure?"

This entire process has left me wondering about a lot of conceptions I have had of the Borough for the several decades I have had a home here. I never expected to run into the challenges I have faced in trying to "do the right thing" for the community -- at a cost of over \$100,000 to me personally. I could put up some piece of shit fence, or maybe the Borough would fight me on that, as well, but I just never expected to have people I have known for so long treat my request with such apparent disregard. I'm only trying to do my small part to beautify our lovely town and to protect an irreplaceable historical gem of our community from the increasing threats that are posed by the increased traffic on our local roads.

Please let me know if you would be willing to discuss this matter further, including coming over for a tour of the intended fence replacement. If not, at least please answer the questions I pose at the top of this email.

I'm just hoping that someone actually cares.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

-- Brian Cavanaugh (201) 522-1387

Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com
To: Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com

Sun, Jun 2, 2024 at 6:03 PM

FOR RECORDS...

----- Forwarded message ------

From: Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com

Date: Mon, Jan 1, 2024 at 9:53 AM

Subject: Re: Borough Council Decision Regarding My Fence Replacement

To: <malthoff@mendhamnj.org>, <sandrew@mendhamnj.org>, <jandrews@mendhamnj.org>

Happy New Year!

I just thought I'd check in to see if any of you can shed a little more light on why my fence replacement proposal was rejected. All I've heard so far is that it had something to do with a finding of being a "public safety" issue. I would like to better understand exactly what "public safety" concern the Borough has.

Thank you.

-- Brian

On Wed, Dec 27, 2023 at 1:12 PM Brian Cavanaugh brian@cavanaughpartners.com wrote:

When I inquired about what transpired at the Dec 15th meeting regarding my application to replace my existing wooden fence and hedge with a stone fence, I was told by the clerk that the "police chief needed to look to see if this would create a public safety issue." When I then asked what type of possible public safety issue it might cause, the clerk told me that she did not have any information about that.

When I more recently inquired about the status of this investigation, I was told by the clerk that my application was rejected on public safety grounds. No explanation of the public safety investigation was provided. I then followed up with the Borough Engineer, who told me that same thing, again without any explanation. He also informed me that this

was "unanimously the Council's and Mayor's decision" and that he did not intend to communicate with me any further on this matter. When I then followed up with the Mayor, she also indicated that it was a public safety issue, but could not be more specific. She also corrected what the Borough Engineer had said and indicated that she did not vote on this matter, and that it was the Borough Council that had unanimously voted to reject my application.

So, since you are the three people on the Borough Council with whom I have had a relationship over the past couple of decades, I thought I would reach out to try to find out a few things that no one appears to be able to tell me:

- 1. What issues and factors were discussed at the meeting (I could not attend, since I reside in FL most of the year these days)
- 2. I am still perplexed as to why a simple fend replacement would involve a "road opening permit," but I've submitted all applications as I have been asked to do (I started with a fence replacement application, even though my new fence would conform to all Borough codes). I've simply been told that any new thing placed -- fence, tree, hedge, etc, -- within the roadway right of way requires a road opening permit. Can any of you shed light on this requirement?
- 3. I have now been told that my new fence is viewed by the Borough Council to be a public safety hazard. Do any of you know exactly what type of hazard this is envisioned to be? (Part of the reason for replacing my existing border fences with stone, instead of wood or hedge, is that the road ways abutting our property are a private safety hazard for us. We have had no fewer than 7 times over the past 30 years -- including 3 times within the past 2 years -- motorists drive through our hedge/wood fence (even stone fence) into our front or side yard. While this may not be an issue for many Borough residents, our home predates everything else in this town except Phoenix House, the BlackHorse and one residence still standing on Main Street. It is less than 30' from the road in the front of our home, so it is very prone to motorists hurtling, unimpeded, into our yard. It has cost me tens of thousands of dollars to repair over the years, but, worse yet, we never allowed our children to play in the front or side of our property because of our fears related to these reckless drivers.)

I am frustrated with the Borough's handling of this very simple request, a request that I made in good faith, apparently unlike the 9 other properties along Talmage Road which have stone fences closer to the road than my proposed fence (the Borough staff have indicated that they have no knowledge of these ever being permitted, and I know that at least some of these have been installed since the Borough Code required it. It seems like I'm being penalized for having filed for the permit in the first place.

I would be delighted to share with you the entirety of my experience with the Borough administration on this matter, if you are interested.

I would have hoped that the Council would have shown greater respect for personal property rights. The Borough Engineer assured my that the Borough has no plans -- "couldn't even imagine" were his words -- to actually use (for sidewalks, road widening or underground utilities) the right of way, and he encouraged me to obtain a survey (at thousands of dollars of *my* personal expense) so the *Borough* could determine if my proposed location was within the right of way (I was surprised that the Borough didn't know its own right of ways and needed a surveyor to inform it). I did so, once again in good faith. Never was an issue of a possible "public safety" issue ever discussed -- it was simply a conforming fence, which made it ok, but it might be within the right of way, so I just needed to go through the Borough's bureaucratic process, I was told.

I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have tried to understand my perspective, as the homeowner, but the decision was made without any input from me (again, I was not here to attend the meeting).

I would have hoped that the communication would have been proactive and thorough to me, but I have had to call every time to see if there has been any update to my applications status and I feel like a mushroom -- kept in the dark and having shit piled on top of me.

Mostly, though, I would have hoped that the Borough Council would have cared about the issues that really affect the health of a community.

Personally, I have worked very hard to be a good local member of the community and to preserve the treasure that our home is to so many people here in Mendham. I coached rec league basketball for a decade, I've served as a chaperone on St Joe's weeklong Appalachia Mission Trip for 13 of the 15 years it has done it. I have served -- at the behest of Mayor Henry -- on the Borough Planning Board and the West Morris Regional High School District BOE -- against my personal preferences, only because I felt be called to try to help make a positive difference for our community. And, John and Steve, as you know, I always volunteer for TWO shifts each year at the Pastime Club Carnival, because I want to make up for not have the time to be more of a help at the club the rest of the year :>)

With regard to this home, the 2nd oldest in Mendham, I have worked very hard and spent a great deal more money than necessary, to keep it preserved in excellent condition and in period with its historical roots, despite having no

obligation to do so (not in any historic district, for example). In fact, this new fence was designed, in part, to further enhance and protect this historical gem here in Mendham. As you know, there is significant residential development happening just up Hardscrabble Road now, and that will only increase the risk to the people that are on my property. It is only 30" high (6" shorter than my existing fence) and it will be set back 4" (current fence is 3" back) from the road. I would love to have the freedom to move it back out of the right of way, but my front yard is only twice as deep as the right of way. No one would want the stone fence to be SO close to the house. It would look out of proportion. Not want I would think that the community wants for a "local treasure." Does the Borough Council even view our home as a "local treasure?"

This entire process has left me wondering about a lot of conceptions I have had of the Borough for the several decades I have had a home here. I never expected to run into the challenges I have faced in trying to "do the right thing" for the community -- at a cost of over \$100,000 to me personally. I could put up some piece of shit fence, or maybe the Borough would fight me on that, as well, but I just never expected to have people I have known for so long treat my request with such apparent disregard. I'm only trying to do my small part to beautify our lovely town and to protect an irreplaceable historical gem of our community from the increasing threats that are posed by the increased traffic on our local roads.

Please let me know if you would be willing to discuss this matter further, including coming over for a tour of the intended fence replacement. If not, at least please answer the questions I pose at the top of this email.

I'm just hoping that someone actually cares.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

-- Brian Cavanaugh (201) 522-1387