

For Immediate Release
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Friends of Historic Flemington's Statement on the Union Hotel Project

In 2016, when developer Jack Cust proposed demolishing nearly an entire Main Street block including four Victorian gems in the heart of Flemington's Historic District, the Friends of Historic Flemington formed and began what would become a more than four-year battle to stop that demolition.

The Friends fought many battles on behalf of both Borough residents and the wider citizenship of Hunterdon County, who take great pride in their quality of life and in Flemington as their county seat.

We encountered opposition on many fronts but can declare today that we have made a vast difference.

As a result of the Friends' advocacy and significant pressure at the local and state levels, instead of a sad replica of the Union Hotel and a series of high rise structures incompatible with the scale and aesthetics of the historic district, the landmark Union Hotel, the Nevius building at 78 Main, and the Hunterdon County National Bank building at 90 Main have been saved. They are slated for adaptive reuse in a revised redevelopment project that has been meaningfully reduced from the massive scale initially proposed.

While we did not achieve all the changes we had hoped for and still have significant concerns, this is a better and more appropriate project than it would have been without the Friends' advocacy. Our continuing presence, dedication and work prevented the character, historical integrity and fabric of Flemington's Main Street from being lost forever.

Friends volunteers held informational rallies, sold t-shirts and mugs, and organized art shows, comedy nights, concerts and flea markets to raise money to wage the legal battle that presented the only means possible to "fight city hall" and save Flemington's history. We took on this mission with no support from Flemington's former or current mayor and the majority of Borough Council. The current and former mayor repeatedly put political expediency and helping their supporters ahead of Flemington residents' and taxpayers' best interests. Friends of Historic Flemington are responsible in large part for a less intrusive, more appropriate redevelopment.

Going forward, oversight for this development will rest squarely with those same elected officials. Borough taxpayers will face the consequences of Mayor Driver's squandered opportunity to renegotiate an overly generous 30-year payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement and the developer's painfully inadequate contributions for water and sewer infrastructure upgrades. We now call on Council and the Planning Board to make additional substantive changes to further improve this project.

Friends of Historic Flemington could not have accomplished this goal without legal counsel and the thousands of steadfast supporters throughout Hunterdon who helped make a difference. We will continue to strive to preserve our historic district, recognized as the second largest in the state of New Jersey. Your continuing support going forward is appreciated. Please visit friendsofhistoricflemington.org.

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