

3 Oct 2016

To: Chairman Michael Zierler  
New Paltz Village Planning Board

From: David Shepler, Net-Zero Development LLC

Subject: Response to George Janes Letter Regarding Visual Analysis

We offer the following response to the George Janes letter as a courtesy to the Planning Board even though none of the opinions and resultant criticisms offered has been provided by the Planning Board's engineering firm.

First, the criticisms offered by the George Janes letter focus almost entirely on "process" and do not challenge the core merits of our findings. They do not dispute our viewshed (meaning the visibility of the building from all directions and distances) and even indicate that the building itself "appears to be rendered correctly". It is clear from the analysis that George Janes never actually visited the site but performed the analysis only from the document provided online, without the benefit of understanding the specific requests of the Board, the geography/line of sight involved and the many conversations with the Board regarding the purpose and intent of the analysis with respect to the specifics of each view. Rather, Mr. Janes focuses on the "standard practices" of his profession. To be clear, I took the photos and performed the balloon analysis. David Toder, RA, a licensed architect, later added two close up photos and managed the renderings onto the photos, confirming all proportions and placement.

Our analysis was performed for the following purposes:

1. Establish the viewshed - First and foremost, the study sought to establish from where the building could be seen using worst-case visibility conditions of (leaf off) winter.
2. Provide a sense of mass and height - Please remember that the Board asked us only to provide the outlines of the building for this purpose, but we went a step further because of #3...
3. Begin to get an aesthetic/design sense of the building from different perspectives and within the context of 32N. This part was not a specific request of the viewshed analysis, but we wanted to go a step further. We've since expanded on this by updating the primary image with the new design, but we haven't updated all the perspectives because it isn't necessary to accomplish #1 and #2, and it's very expensive. We believe that the updated image provides the public a sufficient sense of the design changes.

The bottom line is that we stand behind our study and believe it accurately accomplishes the purposes requested by the Planning Board.

**Visibility Analysis and Viewpoint Selection.** Mr. Janes starts by criticizing that we never made an exhaustive list of important nearby sites and systematically accounted for each of them in our viewshed analysis. He never disputes our three key findings: 1. the viewshed map itself; 2. that the building is only visible from two locations on upper Huguenot Street and not visible from the area with historical homes; and 3. that the building will barely be visible from the Moriello Pool parking lot. The specific nearby sites (Historical Huguenot Street, the Huguenot Historical District along Huguenot Street, the Nyquist Sanctuary, Moriello Pool, the Millbrook Preserve, the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail) are well known by the Village Board and their locations obvious to those consuming the viewshed analysis. Important locations even further afield (such as Hasbrouck Park or the SUNY New Paltz campus) are well beyond the viewshed. Just because Mr. Janes does not know where they are or our consideration of these locations, does not mean that those sites have been overlooked. For example, Hasbrouck Park and SUNY New Paltz are both locations of importance to our community, but they are clearly well outside of the viewshed. The building will NOT be visible from those locations. The topography in New Paltz is very straightforward as the land falls off to the Wallkill and rises modestly to the east past Moriello Pool. But no areas in New Paltz rise sufficiently to create visibility beyond the viewshed boundaries we presented in the analysis. The same is true of Historical Huguenot Street, the Millbrook Preserve, and the Nyquist Sanctuary. The visibility analysis demonstrates that the building will be barely visible from the Moriello Pool parking lot, and only visible from Huguenot Street in two locations, between two homes directly west of the building and at the intersection of Mulberry and Huguenot St, all clearly documented in the analysis. Correct renderings have been provided for both of those locations.

Mr. Janes asks if there are other locations at higher elevations that could have been missed in this analysis. The only area of higher elevation that is in any way in the site lines of this building would be in the Mohonk Preserve, and we have already discussed this with the Planning Board, indicating that the best site line from Mohonk Tower is 3.75 mi away, and it is heavily obscured by the large tree growth directly to the west of Zero Place. Moreover, this location is miles away from the project.

This viewshed analysis was performed in Feb using worst-case conditions of winter with its absence of seasonal foliage in order to establish the proper viewshed boundaries. Mr. Janes criticizes the study for not using worst-case conditions with our rendered trees and for removing a telephone pole in the Dubois image. Mr. Janes makes a big point of recognizing that a telephone pole, or an “inconvenient element” as he put it, was photo-shopped out of our Dubois view. It’s true that the rendering company accidentally deleted that telephone pole, which we failed to catch in the one rendering. But we take issue with his

characterization of the pole as being “inconvenient”. He is assuming an intent and purposefulness to this mistake that is simply not true. On the contrary, it is to our advantage to include all obstructions of the building, whether from trees or other buildings or telephone poles, as they help to diminish the mass of the building. Even more importantly, the main intent of this image is to portray the mass and density of the building (objective #2), not to try to portray it in some form of optimal conditions. We went a step further than required and provided an actual rendering (rather than simply a shaded box), but this was done as a courtesy.

**Photography and Photosimulation.** The following camera (Sony DSC-W230) was used for all photos used in the viewshed analysis, establishing the clear boundaries of visibility. I personally testify, as the photographer, that there was no attempt to change the zoom in any way. The only exception to this was the use of a zoom in the photo from Moriello Pool (p. 9) because the red balloon was not visible without it. Using the default lens setting there would have misled the public into believing the building would not be visible from the Pool parking lot. Architect David Toder (using a similar camera, Canon PowerShot A810) later added close-up photos (p. 10 and 11) of the lot in order to present full renderings at great detail. These photos were NOT used to provide the viewshed analysis but rather to communicate the design/aesthetic sense of the building.



As for the rendering on p. 12, the purpose of that was to give a sense of the building’s design on the Rail Trail side, as requested by the Planning Board. It’s

not a photo at all but rather a full rendering. Although the building itself is properly rendered, the image is not intended to give a realistic depiction of the building from that exact vantage point. As the caveat clearly states, if we were to take an actual photo from that position on the Rail Trail, all you would see is a line of evergreens largely blocking the view of the building, obviously not a great way to show the design of the building itself.

As for providing before-after photos for all renderings and photosimulations from all angles, it is not necessary to provide a simulation of every angle. Rather, the study was properly designed to establish the proper viewshed and thus impact to nearby resources of concern and to provide an overall design sense. That is why we did not re-accomplish all renderings after the re-design. Instead, we chose the image that would be most revealing of the comprehensive changes we made (lowering the building height and re-doing the exterior from top to bottom and expanding the streetscape features). (Note: Also, for the many photos that we did provide the before and after, it takes very little effort to re-order the pages in the PDF as one wishes.)

We went to great expense to develop professionally, accurate renderings and simulations, and we believe the Village Planning Board has a complete and visually accurate portrayal of the Zero Place building.

David Shepler