

February 3, 2011

Dear Members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

Our names are Stella and Michael Somers. We live in Colebrook, CT, less than half a mile from one of the proposed turbine sites and less than one and a half miles from the other proposed site. We own a bed and breakfast business in Colebrook in an historic landmark residence known as Rock Hall, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

We ask, as Connecticut residents and owners of both a small business and an historic structure, that you vote in favor of House Bill 6249. Siting wind turbine projects that may be as high or even higher than 492-feet tall in the total absence of regulations should not be permitted in our state or in any state. We are especially concerned that the lack of regulation will allow companies to site these massive projects in close proximity to historic structures, which would in effect negate the protection that inclusion on the National Register is supposed to provide.

We fell in love with Rock Hall and the rural beauty of Colebrook at first sight in December 2004 and within a few months, purchased the house and 7 acres for \$930,000. Shortly afterwards, an abutting 15-acre lot came on the market and to protect our investment and our privacy, we purchased it for \$150,000.

Rock Hall was designed by Addison Cairns Mizner (1872–1933), best known for his Spanish Revival mansions in Palm Beach. Our home is the only surviving example of Mizner's work north of the Mason Dixon Line. The exterior is an unusual combination of stucco and native stone, with a tile roof. The renovation took about 18 months and although we weren't attempting to restore Rock Hall to its original grandeur, we did want to be respectful of the architect's intent. We spent hundreds of hours researching wallpapers, fabrics and the period within which Mizner worked. We replaced the old ball and tube electrical system, put in new plumbing, insulated wherever we could, added to the heating system, restored the elaborate woodwork, repaired canvas ceilings, restored windows, repaired the exterior stucco and terracotta tile roof and plastered, painted and wallpapered. With the exception of some of the finish painting, all of the work was done by local contractors, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, masons, etc., who continue to maintain our home. All of these workers have become part of our "Rock Hall Family."

We also restored Rock Hall's extensive grounds, which have been attributed to a collaboration between Mizner (who favored Asian specimen trees) and the firm of Olmsted and Olmsted (who worked on a variety of projects in and around Hartford, including Bushnell Park). We revived one of the 100-year-old apple orchards, clearing areas that had become overgrown with bramble, and found ourselves caring for one of the largest collections of specimen trees in New England.

A member of the Colebrook Land Conservancy introduced us to Glastonbury's Ed Richardson, "The Big Tree Hunter of Connecticut." Ed proudly informed us that the pitiful Fraser Fir we had planned to cut down was the tallest in the State and the new prize winner, so we decided to

save it. That Fraser Fir is thriving now after years of pruning and fertilizing, carefully caring for its apron and amending its soil. We restored the woodland gardens, installed cutting gardens, vegetable gardens, a blueberry patch and formal gardens. The swimming pool and tennis court had fallen into disrepair and were also restored. All the work on all the grounds was also done by local gardeners, arborists, and contractors – all of whom continue to be part of the "Rock Hall Family."

Our original plan in 2005 was to renovate Rock Hall for use as a country house until our daughter was of high school age, and then move to Colebrook full time. Our plan and lives changed following a skiing accident that left Stella wheelchair-bound for almost a year, just as the economic downturn precipitated Michael's leaving the financial sector. It was then that we reinvented ourselves as innkeepers and applied to the Town of Colebrook to turn Rock Hall into a bed and breakfast in order to support ourselves and our young daughter. All of our neighbors were notified and many of the townspeople attended the community meeting to voice their opinions pro or con and ask questions about our application, as well as other applications under consideration that evening. We had to go through this comprehensive proceeding to open a five-room bed and breakfast in a residential neighborhood – but companies proposing to site 40-story turbines in residential neighborhoods are not even required to submit themselves to a public hearing.

In order to ensure that Rock Hall would continue to be maintained regardless of our financial circumstances, we decided to embark on the long and costly process of applying for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. On June 22nd, 2010 after almost two years and a State Historic Preservation Office meeting postponement of 5 months, we were officially listed on the National Register.

For the past two and a half years we have worked virtually 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, during the worst economic climate since the Great Depression, to make Rock Hall a success. Limited by town regulations to a B&B, we have tried to maximize the unique aspects that Rock Hall and its magnificent grounds have to offer as luxury lodging for the high end traveler. We worked with a Connecticut-based consultant who discovered that Colebrook, Norfolk and Winchester are blessed with a surprising number of very accomplished massage therapists, yoga masters, personal trainers, and tennis pros who were eager to expand or supplement their practices in trying economic times and provide their freelance services to growing numbers of Rock Hall guests.

For over 5 years we have opened and shared our historic home with friends, family, neighbors and interested strangers as well as visitors from abroad and all over the U.S. We have donated our home, our time and our resources to help raise money for local causes, such as the United Way, Colebrook's First Responders, and Colebrook's Community Center.

We reached out to and forged relationships with the Mark Twain House in Hartford, whose summer gala we have been asked to host outdoors on our grounds. The Yale School of Music and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Infinity Hall and the Farmer's Market, The Norman Rockwell Museum, The Mount, and Lime Rock Raceway reached out to us to form mutually

beneficial relationships. We are listed as recommended lodging on the web sites of The Hotchkiss School, The Taft School, The Salisbury School, The Berkshire School, The Forman School, and The Westminster School, and have hosted families from all those academic communities. Locally, we are members of and support the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, The Litchfield Hills Northwest CT Visitors Bureau (to which Michael is Colebrook's representative), The Berkshire Visitors Bureau, the Association of Litchfield County B&Bs, The Greater Hartford Metro Alliance and the Professional Association of Innkeepers International.

Our hard work paid off immediately. Editors, writers and guests responded to our personal touch and the level of service the two of us offered at Rock Hall in its serene, rural, setting. In our first year of operation in 2009, we were selected for and awarded Editors' Choice by Yankee Magazine as "Best Far From the Madding Crowd" and featured in Connecticut Magazine in a piece by the Managing Editor, Dale Salm, who cited Rock Hall as one of the State's most romantic and luxurious destinations. In 2010 we were chosen as one of five properties by New England Travel Magazine, a publication of Boston Magazine, as Best of New England and last month Out Magazine cited Rock Hall as one of the most luxurious places to have an intimate wedding ceremony. We have been featured in Berkshire Living, NY1, The Joan Hamburg Show/WOR Radio, Daily Candy, The Litchfield County Times, The Republican American, The Winsted Journal, Westchester Magazine, Westport Magazine, Rural Intelligence, Go New England, Luxist, et al. We are currently being considered by Boston Magazine as a New England destination for the most stress-free vacation or get-away and by Frommer's for a new luxury travel book they are in the process of compiling. None of our acknowledgements are "Pay for Play." We have earned every word and every punctuation mark of those accolades.

At Rock Hall we strive to reduce our energy consumption and reduce our carbon footprint. In season we grow almost all of our own fruits and vegetables for our now legendary breakfasts, which Michael begins to prepare every morning at 6am. We encourage guests to conserve water and reuse linens without sacrificing luxury. We are featured in a YouTube video for our "Green Efforts." We support efforts to explore and use renewable, green forms of energy.

What we do not support and what threatens our livelihood and means of support as well as our and our neighbors' properties, homes, safety and health is the potential siting of utility-scale wind turbines within residential areas and in close proximity to historic sites. We urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 6249, which would put a moratorium on the siting of wind turbines until appropriate regulations for siting such projects are adopted. We also ask that the bill require that the Siting Council consider the potential adverse effect of wind turbine projects on historic resources, as is required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Sincerely,

Michael and Stella Somers
Rock Hall Luxe Lodging