

WHAT'S THE REAL STORY MS. STERN?

All questions and statements are direct quotes from the following sources:

- *Testimony at Hopewell Township Zoning Board Hearing, DECEMBER 7, 2022*
- *Testimony at Hopewell Township Zoning Board Hearing, JANUARY 4, 2023*
- *Application documents submitted by Ms. Stern to the Hopewell Township Zoning Board*



CONTACT WITH TOWNSHIP AND ZONING BOARD

January hearing:

Questioner: *Between the time you closed on Hollystone and today, have you personally been in contact with any Municipal elected officials?*

Ms. Stern: *I believe I have.*

Ms. Stern: *I've -- I've met with the Mayor and some members of the Township Committee before we applied to the Zoning Board...*

Questioner: *Did you have any communication with anybody on the Zoning Board before any of these public meetings?*

Ms. Stern: *No, at least I don't think so. I don't -- I don't remember any of us having any direct communication.*

PAY TO PLAY?

January hearing:

Questioner: *Between the time you closed on Hollystone and today, have you personally made or promised any donations to any non-governmental organizations such as FoHVOS, D&R Greenway Land Trust, any horticultural, ornithological group, or the like?*

Ms. Stern: *Do I have to answer about personal donations?*

Questioner: *So one of the previous questioners was asking about who you talked to before. You said you had met with the Mayor, you met with the Township Committee, and you had also met with some of the subcommittees. What was discussed at some of those meetings?*

Ms. Stern: *The only thing I feel comfortable sharing without sort of betraying confidences is that I approached the Township.*

Questioner: *Between the time you closed on Hollystone and today, have you personally made or promised any political donations?*

Vice Chair Cane: *Harvey -- Harvey --*

Vice Chair Cane: *Harvey -- Harvey, this -- this line of questioning is inappropriate.*

TICKET-ONLY DINNER EVENT: "Her Place at The Hopewell"

December hearing:

Ms. Stern: *I just did a pop-up dinner on-site inside only, we offered tickets, people had to purchase them at a certain time, they sold out, there was a 250-person waiting list, and the cost per diner was \$250 per head, and we sold out and had a 300-person waiting list.*

January hearing:

Questioner: *You mentioned during last meeting that you had some paying dinner guests at the property, and you thought that the event was successful for your restaurant. How did you have paying guests without proper permits and without commercial zoning?*

Ms. Stern: *I just invited my friends over, and they pitched in and paid a chef to cook.*

Later, in the January hearing:

Questioner: *So I'm wondering, Her Place at The Hopewell at 29 Fiddler's Creek Road, what type of entity is that? Her Place at The Hopewell.*

Ms. Stern: *I don't know what Her Place at The Hopewell is.*

Questioner: *Her Place Supper Club?*

Ms. Stern: *Her Place Supper Club is a restaurant in Philadelphia.*

Questioner: *So what's the one at 29 Fiddler's Creek Road?*

Ms. Stern: *That was one thing that I did, not on December 31st, but months ago with a friend of mine who's a chef, and some other friends of ours.*

Questioner: *And so all the tickets were sold out?*

Ms. Stern: *Um-hum. By her, not by me. I did not sell tickets. I did not make money.*

Questioner: *Somebody -- it looks like somebody, did because there's -- there's a waiting list --*

Ms. Stern: *Okay.*

Questioner: *-- and they're selling tickets.*

Ms. Stern: *Yeah.*

CARE FOR NEIGHBOR RESIDENTS

January Hearing:

Ms. Stern: I actually said, "This is what I'd like to do." I presented the idea, and ironically I said, "I really don't want to do this if this is not something that the Town would welcome. I want to make sure this is something that this community would like."

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: I'm open to neighbors or people from the community coming up with a better way.

Ms. Stern: Ultimately we want to do something really special, and we want to do it in a spirit of partnership.

Ms. Stern: I have met some of you at Township Committee meetings, on the street, neighbors...

January Hearing:

Questioner: My question for you is, you said you were concerned about the community. And I just was wondering how many people in the community have you actually talked to personally?

Ms. Stern: Personally, maybe 50 or 60.

Questioner: In -- on Fiddler's Creek Road?

Ms. Stern: No, in the community.

Questioner: But how about on Fiddler's Creek Road?

Ms. Stern: Well, I'd love to talk to more people on Fiddler's Creek Road.

Questioner: Did you try reaching out to anybody on Fiddler's Creek Road?

Ms. Stern: I sure did.

Questioner: You did? Okay. Alright, I was not one of them, and I'm two doors down.

TRAFFIC

January Hearing:

Ms. Stern: ...because as you'll hear later from the traffic study, it's my understanding that there will be zero increased traffic to your area, so that was my understanding.

Application Excerpt: "For the ultimate site redevelopment, the on-site parking supply will be increased to 97 spaces."

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: Yeah, so I think probably we would be hiring between 10-15 employees to be full-time employees.

Ms. Stern: I think full-time, anywhere between 10-15 employees.

January Hearing:

Ms. Stern: The number given was 15.

Application Excerpt: "Staffing for The Hopewell will begin at 15-20 full-time employees. Phase II could grow to 35-40."

LOCAL SPENDING AS JUSTIFICATION

Application Excerpt: "We can accommodate people...likely spending more money on local services, like transportation, recreation, food, and retail goods."

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: And we're putting (the guests) out into the community to attend your restaurants, and your shops, and, you know, use your resources. And so it's an exciting way to really sponsor tourism dollars in the community.

Questioner: What information do you have that will show that, in fact, you will be pushing people towards spending money in Hopewell Township, which will benefit the Township, which is the whole point of proving that you should have this variance in the first place?

Ms. Stern: So it's not just sending people to businesses in town -- I mean, beyond the towns that exist, I don't necessarily know, you know, where -- like, it -- it sounds like your question is would we send people to one town versus the other town

Ms. Stern: So I don't know what we can control, you know, where people go, but our whole initiative is to work with local partners, and show our support in that way....

LOCAL HIRING AS JUSTIFICATION

Application Excerpt: "We have already almost exclusively hired local talent for the development team and our intention is to provide jobs for hotel staff and service providers."

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: We can support the local economy, not just by hiring employees locally, but by using almost exclusively local businesses... we're going to be able to send a lot of support into the local economy, and that's just during sort of development and operations...

Later, During Cross Examination, December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: I can't say for sure whether everyone that we hire would reside within Hopewell Township.

January Hearing:

Questioner: You indicated that you were introduced to Hopewell and this property by a realtor. Was that a Hopewell Township realtor?

Ms. Stern: I don't think I want to give the name of the realtor right now.

Questioner: I didn't ask you the name. I just asked you if it was a Hopewell Township realtor.

Ms. Stern: I can't answer that question, I'm sorry.

Questioner: How many of the 10-15 jobs will provide a living wage so that those employees can live within the township?

Ms. Stern: That's a great question. I -- I'm not sure.

VAST HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: And then ended up for the past 10 years working launching boutique inns and hotels, mainly in Mexico, and then consulting on boutique inns and hotels, both in Mexico and the U.S. My most recent project was called Avenida Baja, it's a small boutique hybrid inn and co-working space geared towards remote workers.

Ms. Stern: I have entrenched experience in the hospitality world creating places like this.

January Hearing:

Questioner: Okay. So my question relates to, Margot, your testimony from the previous Zoning Board meeting where you spoke to your experience with the hotel and hospitality industry. I believe you testified that you had been in this business for about 10 years, and you spoke specifically about two properties. And I just wanted to ask, first of all, were both those properties in Mexico? Is that where they were located?

Ms. Stern: Uh-huh.

Questioner: Can you tell us how many bedrooms are in each of those properties?

Ms. Stern: One of them has 14 bedrooms. One of them has 32 bedrooms. One of them has five units, six beds total.

Questioner: So you have three different properties that you've started up and -- and manage in Mexico?

Ms. Stern: I'm not a manager of them. I helped launch two of those, and one is my own personal project.

Questioner: And which is the one that's your personal? How many bedrooms in that one?

Ms. Stern: Six.

Questioner: So Hollystone, if this is going to be your personal project -- or I'm sorry, The Hopewell, it's considerably larger than the other one that you've had a personal interest in -- ownership interest in --

Ms. Stern: I've had a personal interest and/or have consulted on a number of other projects, larger and smaller. But, yes, it is larger than five units.

Questioner: And did the one -- what's the name of the one, I'm sorry, that you said is yours, and you have the interest in and managed?

Ms. Stern: It's called Avenida Baja.

Questioner: Does that one have a restaurant?

Ms. Stern: No.

Questioner: So would you say it's fair to say that this enterprise at The Hopewell is considerably larger than your previous experience that you've had an ownership interest and managed personally?

Ms. Stern: Again, I've consulted and worked in this industry for many different sizes of projects, so this is not new to me. But it is bigger than the Mexico project.

CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

January Hearing:

Questioner: *Okay. If you were shown any evidence that your proposed project was going to harm the environment in some way, what would you do?*

Ms. Stern: *I would take that very seriously.*

Questioner: *What was your purpose in being at the Environmental Commission meeting?*

Ms. Stern: *To learn about the Environmental Commission.*

Questioner: *And what did you learn?*

Ms. Stern: *To learn about the -- to learn about the environmental concerns and priorities of this Township so that I could understand them, and develop a program that would address them.*

Hopewell Township Environmental Commission MEMO TO ZONING BOARD:

"We believe that there will be a more intense use of this property if it is converted to a hotel, and that the intensity of activities will have adverse environmental effects and decrease the ecological integrity in the area due to increased lighting, sound, and increased traffic."

RESCUING A PROPERTY VACANT FOR 20 YEARS?

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern's Attorney: *This property, as most of you probably know, has been vacant for 20 years.*

January Hearing:

Questioner: *It is my understanding that the building was owner-occupied through March, 2020. So did I hear that incorrectly that the building was vacant or -- or were you aware that it was occupied until March, 2020?*

Ms. Stern: *It's my understanding that the building was for sale for 20 years, but that it was owner-occupied until a couple of years before I purchased it.*

PARKING/DRIVEWAYS

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: *We want to make the space more green, we want to remove the asphalt. And our goal is to really reduce traffic on the site...*

Application Excerpt: *"For the ultimate site redevelopment, the on-site parking supply will be increased to 97 spaces."*

January Hearing:

Questioner: *I don't know if it was clear, but is there more than one driveway entrance and exit from the property?*

Ms. Stern: *It feels like this was asked and answered. There's also a site plan, and the traffic engineer can speak to any traffic questions.*

Questioner: *Well, I'm asking you, you know your site. This is not -- this is not an expert question. Are you proposing two entrances?*

Ms. Stern: *No.*

Application Excerpt: *"Two full-movement driveways are proposed along Fiddlers Creek Road..."*

LIVE MUSIC

Application Excerpt: *"Will offer open-air setting as well as small acoustic sets and fireside chats."*

December Hearing:

Ms. Stern: *But the types of events aren't -- I don't think we've proposed events. So I think it's more that these are programs, not necessarily events...I don't know, maybe like, an acoustic musician playing for 20 people.*

January Hearing:

Vice Chair Cane: *...the answer was there's not going to be live music outside.*

Ms. Stern: *(no response from Ms. Stern correcting the record)*

Questioner: *Okay. Is there going to be live music inside?*

Vice Chair Cane: *...From what I remember, the answer was "no" to that also.*

Ms. Stern: *(no response from Ms. Stern correcting the record)*

RESIDENTIAL INTENT?

January Hearing:

Questioner: *When you set your sights on buying Hollystone, were you aware the property was zoned residential?*

Ms. Stern: *No.*

Questioner: *You were not aware it was zoned residential?*

Ms. Stern: *No.*

Questioner: *Did you since find out it was zoned residential?*

Ms. Stern: *No.*

Questioner: *You don't know at this moment in time, seeking variances before the Planning Board, that the property is zoned residential?*

Ms. Stern: *My understanding is that it's zoned Mountain Resource Conservation.*

Questioner: *And that is a residential zoning, correct?*

Ms. Stern: *Sorry; what was the question?*

Questioner: *Could you answer my question?*

Ms. Stern: *Whether or not you were correct?*

Questioner: *Before you made your offer on the property, did you, yourself, go to examine the property?*

Ms. Stern: *Yes, I think. I'm not sure what examine means but, yes.*

Questioner: *Did you notice the type of structures that were on Fiddler's Creek Road?*

Ms. Stern: *Yes.*

Questioner: *Were those structures consistent with being residences, homes, places where people live?*

Ms. Stern: *Some of them, yes.*

Questioner: *And what were the rest of them that were not homes, residences, places where people live?*

Ms. Stern: *I don't know; I don't think I'm an expert on this topic.*

COMMERCIAL INTENT OR PRIMARY RESIDENCE?

December Hearing:

Chairman Hatke: *If you were not given this variance to change this property into a hotel facility, what would happen to the property? Would you have any impetus to improve the property for the current state of affairs that it is being used for?*

Ms. Stern: *I don't know that I could.*

January Hearing:

Questioner: *When you set your sights on buying Hollystone, was it your intention to live there as your primary residence?*

Ms. Stern: *I wasn't really sure at the time, but I knew that I wanted to do a project like this.*

Questioner: *Now you used the term "project." My question was if it was in your intention to live there as your primary residence. First you said you're not sure, and then you said something about a project.*

Ms. Stern: *Yeah, I still haven't decided where I'm living next year.*

Questioner: *All right. So is it possible you are going to be living in Hollystone next year.*

Ms. Stern: *I could be. It -- it's -- I'm not sure, it really depends what happens.*

Questioner: *What happens with what?*

Ms. Stern: *Well, we're -- with this proceeding; with the project; with the world; with funding; with a lot of different things.*

Questioner: *All right. So are you saying if you don't get your zoning variances, you -- you will be moving into Hollystone?*

Ms. Stern: *I can't know right now.*

January Hearing:

Questioner: *It seems to me it'd be a little risky to buy a hotel that's not approved for commercial. So what would be your backup plan if you don't get the zoning approval?*

Ms. Stern: *I really can't speak to that right now.*



Please join our opposition to this absurd intrusion into a rural and sensitive area of Hopewell Township.

Write to tell the Mayor and Township Committee an emphatic NO to a use variance allowing commercial hotel use in a residential zone. Say no to overdevelopment and the reversal of conservation protections!

Visit <https://hollystonemanor.com> for more details.

