

Leslie Smith  
117 Brookside Avenue  
Chester New York 10918  
August 2, 2021

August 5, 2021

Re: Onnuli Church

Dear Chairman Ramsdell and Planning board members,

In 2005, Mr. and Mrs. Aversa at 20 High Street sold a portion of their double frontage lot, on the Main Street facing portion, a bilevel style house was built and is (now) 54 Main Street. A number of people have since asked how this house could have happened. Comments such as "It doesn't belong there." "It's totally out of place." and "Can't we take it down?" have been made to me.

Yet the bilevel at 54 Main Street was constructed on what was vacant land and complied with its RS zoning, but clearly, it is very much at odds with its surroundings. Projects such as 54 Main Street and the currently proposed Onnuli Evangelical Church project are located in one of the areas proposed as one of four Historic Overlay Districts in the draft Village of Chester Comprehensive Plan.

To avoid inappropriate structures such as a bi level located among historic buildings, our draft comprehensive plan, still waiting approval by the Village Board, has included recommendations that are meant to preserve community character and the remaining structures and sites that are of historic significance in our village. It recommends adopting design guidelines for those designated areas to insure infill structures are compatible; especially in historic districts.

As I recommended in my letter to this board in regard to the Advance Auto project, also proposed for a different historic overlay district; reading the draft comprehensive plan gives the policies and recommendations for the future development of the village. *Any* new project proposed for a historic overlay district needs to consider visual continuity and compatibility with the existing historic structures.

I have asked Mr. Cleverly if the congregation has considered restoration as an alternative to demolishing the 1852 historic church and building a new church and he did not know. I would think this is something that should be considered. At the public hearing on July 27th, architect David Lee's elevations of the proposed new church are so excruciatingly out of sync with a Downtown Historic District that they should be rejected.

Helen Musumeci's eloquent letter (which I wish had been read at the public hearing) expresses perfectly the feelings I would have if my own church was facing demolition. Her words of conclusion "that all involved, including the people and government of Chester, can find a way to work unselfishly together to save this building." also voice my hope for this project.

Sincerely,

