

[The Day - In Old Lyme, the election had consequences - News from southeastern Connecticut](#)

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By **David Collins**

Barely a week after Old Lyme First Selectman Timothy Griswold's squeaker of a [win for reelection](#), he detonated a big bomb, announcing he was withdrawing an application that would have allowed the town Zoning Commission to begin deliberations of a re-zoning plan for the main commercial corridor in town.

Griswold gave flimsy reasons for withdrawing the application, the result of years of work by citizen volunteers, a proposal that he himself had originally submitted for review.

The abrupt withdrawal, made even as the ink on ballots in the recent municipal election had barely dried, occurred hours before the public was scheduled to comment on the proposal before the town Zoning Commission.

He could have made such a dramatic and consequential move a week or two earlier, and given voters a chance to absorb his decision to undermine the years of hard planning work by volunteers.

But no, he waited until the voting was over before he flexed his razor-thin win — by less than 105 votes — to show his hand on a matter so important to voters.

I don't think it takes a political genius to suggest that, had he withdrawn the zoning application before the election, those 105 votes might have gone differently.

Because I am, at the end of the day, a cynical newspaper columnist, I believe the 11th-hour decision on the zoning application was made primarily to accommodate one of the Republican first selectman's most treasured constituents, someone with a financial interest in the issue.

David Kelsey, the former chairman of the Republican Town Committee, who funds the local newspaper the Connecticut Examiner, is also a property owner on Halls Road, the commercial thoroughfare that the zoning proposal addresses.

The first selectman, in his subsequent comments to The Day, even admitted that Kelsey, also a member of the Halls Road Improvements Committee, was one of two individuals who convinced him to withdraw the application, barely a week after voters, unaware of this looming bombshell, narrowly reelected him.

You could almost see Kelsey yanking on the first selectman's leash.

After all, it was the first selectman who submitted the application in the first place, when voters were led to believe the proposal was about to get a fair public hearing before the town's zoning authority.

At issue was a plan, subject to review and changes by the zoning officials, as they could have reviewed it with public input, which would try to remake the central commercial zone from a car-centric series of shopping centers and parking lots to a more walkable village environment, with mixed commercial uses and residential development, condos or apartments.

Town residents were being invited to comment on the ideas, when the first selectman, bowing to pressure from someone with a decided financial interest at stake, snatched that opportunity away.

It's too bad Griswold pulled this stunt so close to the election, so that voters will have to wait almost another two years to have their say on what he did.

In the meantime, I would suggest, he is going to do all he can to accommodate the former chairman of his party's town committee, the person who funds the local newspaper, to make sure that particular constituent's substantial interest in the Hall Road zoning will be protected.

One big lesson for Old Lyme residents, as they must bide their time before the next election, is that they ought to question a newspaper in town that is run by someone pursuing his own substantial political and financial interests.

Even if the newspaper never wrote about the topic at hand — and it did — it has a powerful influence in general over politicians and their decision-making.

Newspapers, as they organize news coverage and moderate community conversations, ought to exercise that powerful authority without prejudice or conflict of interest.

Otherwise, it could be just the propaganda of a rich guy, as he tends to business.

It's sure not journalism.

COMMENTS

Bud Bray

an hour ago

[Report](#)

Yes, The Examiner is competing with The Day and succeeding, Mr. Collins. Remarkably, your cynical view that its "angel investor," to use the term The Examiner's capable and smart editor has selected to reference Mr. Kelsey, is inimical to the self-declared "independent journalism" The Day boasts of every day in every edition, brings to mind the paternalistic journalism by and during Bodewein's days. I believe you now have succeeded in inking darkly The Examiner, a Day first since The Examiner began. The case you make is not without substance, admittedly. But your citing Mr. Kelsey's Examiner ownership broadly asserts in that between-the-line way that crafty writers master to avoid libelous and slanderous intent with malice, that Examiner Editor Greg Stroud and his staff of clearly competent staff writers are but Kelsey puppets. I have been twice asked to consider writing for The Examiner and went so far as to submit an example of what I might provide. In short, that submittal was rejected by Mr. Stroud as "purple prose." What he more likely meant but was kind not to say, was that my submittal was PR copy. Today we get your blue prose? Competition matters, but Kelsey isn't a Murdock

Thomas Gotowka

2 hours ago

[Report](#)

Mr. Prue: could you possibly clarify your comment regarding Collins' "total lack of self-awareness"?

I thought that his column was a fairly accurate "play-by-play" review of events in Old Lyme. Many of us scratched our heads over this "eleventh hour unilateral withdrawal shenanigan"; especially because it came only a week or so after the decision to cancel the election- eve debate.

John Prue

7 hours ago

[Report](#)

An A+ for chutzpah but the total lack of self-awareness brings your overall grade down to a D-.

This is the second column where a local issue has morphed mid-column into a backhanded slap at another media outlet. The Day and this columnist can't be defenders of democracy if they are assailing the constitutionally protected rights of others to print, or speak within FCC rules, whatever they want.

Besides that the rich guy propaganda that is dangerous at the local and national level comes from the big tech oligarchs. Whereas the rich guy locally has hired journalists to interview, write, inform, and persuade, big tech just buys off politicians or creates algorithms that censor. I'll take that local guy any day and trust the Zoning Commission to get it right in the end.