

2E) Were Zoning Laws Discriminatory?

Helpful Vocabulary

Zoning- local laws that restrict the way that property can be used. For example, limiting construction in a neighborhood to one family homes.

Housing Laws Are NAACP Target, *Newsday, Feb. 27, 1969*

Oyster Bay -- The director of housing programs of the national office of the NAACP charged yesterday that Oyster Bay's zoning ordinances deprive low-income families of equal opportunity in obtaining housing. William R. Morris of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People said that the civil rights group, in reviewing the town's zoning laws, has found "a very strong pattern of economic discrimination." Morris said that current ordinances "restrict people of low and moderate income (from receiving) the same equal opportunity to gain housing achieved for middle and upper income families." Town officials said the ordinances are consistent with those in other municipalities.

The NAACP official said that the targets of the association's drive are zoning rules which require all housing to be single, detached structures situated on a fixed amount of land. Morris said that the town laws are aimed at discouraging two-family and multi-family dwellings and that "we feel there is a strong constitutional question of denying a complete class of people the same opportunity as is given other people in the town."

NAACP Facing Fight on Zoning, *Newsday, October 24, 1969*

Woodbury -- A local civic group is raising money and mapping strategy to oppose an NAACP plan to force the Oyster Bay Town Board to downzone half the available vacant residential land in the town. Dr. Gerard Bomse, a Woodbury psychoanalyst and president of the Greater Woodbury Civil Association, said yesterday that this group was collecting money for legal help in fighting the plan. Opening a nationwide campaign last week, officials of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People gave the town board a choice of either downzoning the land by Jan. 1 or facing the possibility of becoming the defendants in a test case against what the civil rights organization called "restrictive suburban zoning." Bomse said that at this organization's latest meeting, "We made it clear that this is not a black-vs.-white issue." He said, "It's just a case of trying to knock local zoning ... which should be strenuously maintained." He said that the group was committed to the town's right to control local zoning.

Pickets Ask State Urban Agency to Override L.I. Zoning Laws

New York Times, May 7, 1970

The State Urban Development Corporation encountered its first demonstrators yesterday when 60 welfare mothers and college students from Suffolk County picketed and occupied the agency's Fifth Avenue offices. The protestors are demanding that the agency exercise its authority to override suburban zoning laws and build low income housing in predominantly white Long Island areas. The protest, the demonstrators said, marked the beginning of rising pressure on the two-year-old corporation to use its considerable and controversial powers. But the pressure is likely to be met by counterpressure from property owners' groups, who earlier this year supported 15 bills in the State Legislature that would have diluted the corporation's power. None passed. Many suburban zoning laws have come under increased attack recently by planners and civil rights groups.

About half the protestors quietly occupied a hallway in the corporation's offices. The rest picketed outside the building. They presented petitions, which they said bore 4,000 signatures, asking the corporation to build subsidized housing in Brookhaven-Town.

Questions:

- 1- Why did the NAACP and other civil rights protestors believe that Long Island zoning laws discriminated against low income and Black families?
- 2- In your opinion, were these laws discriminatory? Why?