

OPINION

The Newport Daily News

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"Our view" represents the opinion of the editorial board, above

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READERS' LETTERS

Visitors center will be boost to our No. 1 industry

The controversy about the proposed visitors center at The Breakers is beginning to border on personal character attacks, which is unfortunate. Historic preservation and landscape experts have differing opinions about the aesthetic impact of the proposed facility. Many letters of support or opposition have been printed. Emotions run high — very reminiscent of the Queen Anne Square controversy of last year.

In addition to the aesthetic issues, the more practical issue of how a world-class museum welcomes its visitors should not get lost in the controversy. Annually, more than 400,000 visitors to The Breakers are greeted by a tented ticketing facility, port-a-potties and vending machine food selections. Anyone who has visited a notable museum in virtually any country receives a more gracious reception.

Having spent a career in Newport's visitor/tourism economy, I am concerned that virtually all of the opponents of this proposed amenity who have identified themselves are either not local residents or are individuals who do not depend on the local economy for their family's economic livelihood.

We need to support the legitimate efforts of this very important organization to service their patrons appropriately.

The Preservation Society of Newport County is the single most important attraction of Newport's primary economic engine, the visitor/tourism industry. Without the Preservation Society, there would be a very different Newport, probably a "party town" without the cultural and historical tourism we enjoy today. Many local families depend on this tourism economy to support themselves and applaud the efforts of the Preservation Society to attract quality tourists to our community. We need to support the legitimate efforts of this very important organization to service their patrons appropriately. We should not overlook the concerns of those who make their living from the local visitor economy.

As to the red herring that local restaurateurs fear the "competition" from box lunches at the Breakers visitors center, it is simply not true. There have been box

lunches available at The Elms and the Chinese Tea House for the past few years, and no restaurateurs have objected. As to the suggestion that the Gateway Center on America's Cup Avenue should suffice, there is a clear misunderstanding of the purpose of these two very different facilities. The Gateway Center cannot greet the patrons of The Breakers appropriately, or offer restrooms or a box lunch at an attraction that can take two hours or more to visit.

Let the Preservation Society implement a very thoughtful plan that has been vetted by nationally and locally recognized historical preservation authorities. Newport needs this facility to continue to present the restored properties of the Preservation Society at a level of sophistication comparable to the manner in which the pre-eminent museums of this country, and the world, are presented to the public.

The Historic District Commission and the city of Newport's leadership should support the Preservation Society on this issue, one that is vital to its future well being.

J. Timothy O'Reilly,
chairman, Newport Harbor Corp.