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Letters, Aug. 29, 2019

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Fishy business

Ours is a working-class residential area in the 82,286 inhabitants town of Fredrikstad, Norway.

Our new neighbor across the street is the first land-based fish farm in our country, and promised to be the biggest worldwide. Owned by Nordic Aquafarms, it started production in late May this year.

Initially, we were all generally positive, and felt the dialogue with the company to be good. Now, not so.

First, the building process lasted ages. It was two years late in completion, mainly because of a large Danish contractor that took some geological short cuts, nearly derailing the whole project and ending up in court. During construction, too, a grey haze of clay dust engulfed our homes, gardens and cars time and again — as well as the lungs of the local kindergarten kids. All that is history. Terrible while it lasted. Now comes the future.

This local future of ours held a surprise: a strange and constant humming noise 24/7. Now we happen to be in the front line, literally, but the inhabitants of the row of houses behind us, on the adjacent street there, have started complaining, too, saying that if they sleep with open windows (as must of us do, some in the summertime only, others all year-round), then they hear it all night. Plus the following day. Plus the following night. Et cetera. For ever and ever.

One of us had a talk with a worker at the site. He confirmed not only that this will last indefinitely, but also that it is due to the great fans needed to cool the fish tanks being directed towards us. Asked whether the company could have built these noise machines at the far end of the fish farm from us, he said "sure," "just another mistake," "but it can't be righted now though."

Only the first fan or ventilator machine has started up. At least one more has been readied. One guy attending a meeting in one of our houses had taken home from his job a decibel meter, and sure enough, during our meeting he recorded 60 decibels in an open window. It would have been much more if Nordic Aquafarms had not put up a tall earth wall towards us. Are they doing the same in Belfast? Building an anti-noise wall?

Incidentally, some of us recall Aquafarms Director Erik Heim, also of Belfast fame, promising us flat: "There will be no noise."

Well, thank you then.

Instead, we now get 60 decibels with no respite. What fantastic lack of empathy, caring, decency, and for that matter logic. Why pester us, and for ever? Because someone simply didn't know how to think.

So there we are. And there you are. We are following the "fishy business" development in Belfast with keen interest.

We think you ought to be as skeptical as we unfortunately have learned to be from close-up experience.

Haakon Stang

Fredrikstad, Norway

Bonneville for City Council

I'm running for the office of city councilor (Ward 3) in Belfast for the upcoming November municipal elections.

My family and I have called Belfast home for the past 14 years. In 2015, I opened AMBIANCE, a shop downtown on Main Street, and my husband also runs a marketing agency, Bonneville Consulting, right here in town. Our two daughters attended Belfast public schools and both recently graduated from the University of Maine system. We feel very connected to Belfast, to its interesting history and to the current issues. I would like to serve as city councilor to ensure that our town maintains its unique character while continuing to prosper.

Belfast is facing various issues, some more contentious than others, such as the Nordic Aquafarms proposal, high property taxes, economic development, and urban planning, just to name a few. If elected, I intend to work in harmony with the other councilors, the mayor, city officials and the public to figure out the best way to move forward on these issues.