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Meadow Crossing sees movement

(by Michael Lamendola - March 18, 2009)



Plans for the proposed 374-unit Meadow Crossing development in Lyndhurst have officially been filed with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission. Current applications will first assess site suitability recommendations and fill requirements. Town officials and many residents are skeptical the proposal won't have heavy impacts on the town.

suitability and fill requirements must be approved first before a zoning application is considered.

The proposal for a 374-unit apartment complex slated for the site that formerly housed the controversial Bedroc Contracting business on Orient Way has taken its next step. Plans have been filed with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC). The current application looks for fill approvals and site suitability recommendations, a review the NJMC land use engineers proceed with to first deem if the site is acceptable to contain affordable housing. The NJMC, not Lyndhurst, is the zoning authority over the land, as it falls in the state regulatory body's jurisdiction, and will have ultimate say if the property can be eventually rezoned from industrial to residential use. The application has yet to be reviewed by engineers, however, and according to Brian Aberback, a spokesman for the NJMC, the current application for site

The plans have met with resistance in Lyndhurst upon its unofficial proposal presented to the governing body by Russo Development. Ed Russo, president of the company, hopes to transform the rundown 8.8-acre industrial piece of land into what he says is a sensible residential development. He said remediation work to move toward cleaning the property up for NJDEP residential standards is already underway. By fall, he predicts approvals could be in place to allow construction to start.

"We would decide then based on the strength of the market whether to proceed immediately with building construction. As of right now, we plan on starting as soon as we can and developing the project using a phased approach," Russo said.

The plans also detail the frustrations of Russo as it pertains to the township's adamant objections to the project as a whole, particularly the township's decision to not include Meadow Crossing in the township's affordable housing plan despite being told that the development would have inclusionary affordable housing.

On Feb. 6, Russo's general counsel Richard Berger sent a letter to Lucy Vanderberg, executive director at the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH), filing an objection to the township's COAH plan. Russo intends on including 75 on-site affordable rental units.

"Rather than to promote the Meadow Crossing affordable housing development, which will satisfy over 60 percent of the township's future growth share obligation, the township has vigorously opposed that development and has promised to act to frustrate development," wrote Berger. "The Fair Share Plan, which has been submitted reflects an effort to evade, delay and frustrate the development of affordable housing in compliance with the township's constitutional obligations."

The plans project 561 residents with 15 schoolchildren to come out of the development. Using 2008-09 costs per student of \$11,999, it would cost \$180,000 for the school district to educate the children, but the tax benefits to the town would sufficiently cover that and more, the application claims. At full build-out, the plans say the development would generate over \$1 million, of which the town would get nearly \$751,000 annually after county

taxes and Meadowlands tax sharing. The application claims no rise on municipal services as utilities are already hooked into the property and garbage disposal will be offered privately.

The application states Russo would perform \$545,000 in intersection upgrades to help alleviate the problems, including signal upgrades at Valley Brook Avenue and Orient Way. In addition, the application calls for a new signal, intersection upgrades and curbing at Page Avenue and Orient Way. Officials, however, said a direct route connecting Orient and Schuyler avenues at that crossing would be the only feasible option for any further development down there, and the town has pursued that for years with no avail, having to deal with right of ways and county approvals. At peak morning hours, the development expects to see 187 cars entering and exiting while during the p.m. peak, it expects 223.

Meadow Crossing

Apartments: 374 units of one, two and three bedrooms. Seventy-five will be affordable.

Assessment: \$64,784,885

Taxes: Annual gross of \$1,061,823 for township, \$750,856 after county and tax sharing

Parking: 464 spaces, mixture of covered and outdoor

Despite the plan's filing and promise of high tax revenues, traffic upgrades and a rehabilitation of the site, the governing body remains steadfast that 374 units is just too much and the area is better off suited as commercial or retail space. The board of commissioners opposed high-density development as a platform when running for office in 2005. When told of the plan's filing and some of its caveats, Mayor Richard DiLascio held his objective stance. DiLascio's major concerns remain that any boost in school population would exasperate the district, which is at capacity and the location is right at the intersection of one of the worst traffic patterns in the township. He said Russo's planned traffic upgrades would not come close to addressing the needs of any new traffic to the area.

Buildings: Four residential including detached clubhouse

Population: 561 residents, 15 that will be school-aged

Rents: \$1,700 for one-bedroom to \$2,600 for three-bedroom

Trip generation (A.M.) peak: 37 cars entering and 150 exiting

Trip generation (P.M.) peak: 145 cars entering and 78 exiting

"We have not received any specific feedback to date in response to our traffic report," said Russo. "There does not appear to be a technical basis for the determination by certain town officials that the improvements aren't sufficient."

Traffic upgrades: \$545,000 to upgrade signal and intersections modifications at Valley Brook Avenue and Orient Way and new traffic signal at Page Avenue and Orient Way with curbing and right of way improvements.

Although pleased there is a chance that the dilapidated property has someone willing to rejuvenate it, many residents in the neighborhood around the property remain skeptical the sheer numbers of units won't produce massive impacts to the area.

**All figures are based on projections provided by Russo Development through plans filed with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission.*

"A housing development would be an improvement over Bedroc, but it sounds like a lot to squeeze in there," said Newark Avenue resident Mary Catherine Allan. "There will be people going in and out and we already get a lot of traffic around here. These are things they will have to take into consideration and maybe they can drop the numbers a little bit."

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