

Plan for 719 homes irks Hopatcong residents

Concerns arise over project's traffic impact, effects on wildlife

BY MATT MANOCHIO

DAILY RECORD

HOPATCONG — A developer's proposal to build 719 age-restricted housing units on 138 acres along Sparta-Stanhope Road has irked some residents because of its size and possible traffic impact.

The borough planning board is expected to continue a public hearing on a project known as "Village Grande" at its next meeting, scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 7. The application is from Freehold-based developer D.R. Horton, Inc.-New Jersey.

Police Chief John Swanson, a planning board member, said the project calls for a mix of condominiums and houses along Sparta-Stanhope Road. Swanson said the land in question totals 305 acres, and approximately 167 acres would be dedicated as open space.

Mike Nowell, a 30-year borough resident who lives on Brown Trail, said he's concerned about the project's size and potential impact on the borough's sewer lines as well as traf-

fic.

"It's high density," Nowell said. "It's a lot of building, it's a major project."

He described Village Grande as the "biggest, largest project (in Hopatcong) as far as developing the land."

Peter Lijoi, vice president of land acquisition and an attorney with D.R. Horton Inc.-New Jersey, said the project would consist of 719 units, divided into 373 single-family homes, 112 townhouses and 234 garden apartments.

All of the units would be for sale and there would be no rentals, he said. Village Grande is meant for residents 55 and older, and no one under the age of 19 would be permitted to live there, he said.

"We think it's a fine economic investment in Hopatcong," Lijoi said. "It's a beautiful area for active adults to live."

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Borough officials said the project would be located on land next to the county's parking garage.

Age-restricted developments sometimes are welcomed in some municipalities because they don't add children to the school system; therefore, they don't cause expensive school construction.

The size of Village Grande, however, has prompted other concerns among some residents.

Nowell, who has attended previous planning board meetings about the project, estimated there could be as many adults living there as there are units, and "each one of them has a car. Most of the roads in and out of Hopatcong are single-lane roads," he said.

Lijoi said traffic likely would be impacted, but said that experts have testified that because there won't be young families with children living there, traffic won't peak so as to clog up surrounding roads.

"All of the roads that they've studied have operated at the current levels of service," he said, adding he doesn't foresee any "adverse impact."

He said the project would have sewers.

Lijoi said his company is obligated under state law to provide sewer service. It would either come in the form of a

plant built on the site and operated by a private company, or by the borough, whichever the municipality prefers, Lijoi said. The company also has the option of buying sewer service from the municipal utility authority.

"It will not adversely impact existing sewer service. It can't," Lijoi said.

Nowell said he also is worried about the effect the project could have on wildlife and the environment because of its density. He said he also wants more residents to be aware that the project is being discussed.

"Most people that I talk to don't even know about it," Nowell said of the project. "I want to get people to know about it so they can make their own decision."

Swanson said it's difficult to say when the board could come to a decision on the application. He said there still needs to be testimony from engineers, and various economic and environmental impact reports need to be studied.

Lijoi said he expects testimony to last into October, with the planning board deliberating a decision in the fall.

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