

Hopatcong residents crowd board meeting, hearing rescheduled

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HOPATCONG — More than 100 residents crowded the borough Planning Board meeting Tuesday to hear about the proposed 730-unit Village Grande senior housing project and were told to come back next week.

The applicant's presentation on the project stopped after about 10 minutes because residents complained the meeting room was not large enough to accommodate them and they could not hear the testimony. The number packed into the meeting room at the municipal building exceeded its 86-person capacity. There were more than 84 residents seated in the meeting room, about 20 standing or sitting on the sidelines and about 20 more in the hallway.

Hearing their objections, the board postponed the hearing. A special meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, at a place to be determined. The board will post the location of the meeting on the borough Web site and print notices in the newspaper.

According to plans drawn up by DR Horton, Inc. of Freehold, the 730 units will be constructed on 294 acres of land, and about 155 acres will remain as open space. The homes would be sold for \$250,000 and up.

The development calls for single-family homes, garden apartments and townhomes and will be located along Stanhope/Sparta Road. The applicant is Hopatcong Adult, L.L.C./D.R. Horton, Inc., - New Jersey.

The proposed tract of land is the last large piece of property that could be developed in the borough, said Professional Planner Duggan Kimball, of Kimball & Kimball. "The other large tracts are in the Highlands area, marked for preservation," he said.

Much of the wooded area, near Sparta-Stanhope Road just to the northeast of Lenape Valley Regional High School, includes rocky terrain and steep slopes, with some freshwater wetlands and a tributary to Lubbers Run.

Plans include private on-site sewer and water supply systems. The area is zoned for multi-purpose use. "This property is not in the preservation area so it's not reasonable to expect that it will not be developed," said Kimball.

Forty-five percent of the existing woodlands would be preserved.

Kimball also explained the value of marketing to individuals age-restricted to 55 years and older. This age group is more active, but their housing needs have changed since their children have left home. "Even though they have more flexibility, most people don't want to move from their roots," he said.

Borough officials have said the estimated 1,400 new residents would add no education costs to the borough, and instead would generate at least \$300,000 in surplus. Residents have objected to the development.

"This has been a bedroom community for years, it will explode the traffic on Durban Avenue," said borough resident George Krausser. "They said it will be a gated community, will they have their own ambulance and fire department? No."

Resident Lisa Parisi was also frustrated that the meeting was held in such a small room, which made it difficult to hear the planner's testimony. "Legally I want people to be aware of what is going on and have a choice in it," she said. Parisi is a member of a grassroots organization called Hopatcong's Organization to Preserve our Environment, or H.O.P.E.

The group has expressed concern about the environmental impact of the project and that the development will increase traffic, noise and air pollution. The size of the proposed development has been reduced from its original 844 units to 730 units. In addition, the development's buffer zones between residential and wetland property have been expanded. More than 130 acres near a stream and the northerly section of the land can not be disturbed.