Neighbor sees red when looking at Fredonia storage condo buildings

Land-use conflicts have become an increasingly common story in Ozaukee County as serene rural landscapes give way to busier people-related functions.

One such case is unfolding along Meadowlark Road, the border between the Town of Saukville and the Village of Fredonia.

Mike and Peter Didier thought they had found the ideal location for their storage condominium business in 2006. The property is on the fringe of the village's industrial park and adjacent to an existing storage rental business.

Town of Saukville resident Mary Bohn wasn't very happy when the Village of Fredonia approved plans for the construction of Port Grandview, a complex of duplex storage condos on land that had previously been open meadow and woods.

Bohn's displeasure has grown more intense recently as an array of clutter — including a rainbow-colored school bus, a junked car, assorted snow-covered trailers and a large yellow earth scraper — has accumulated on the grounds of the business.

Her property backs up to the storage condos, giving her a disturbing view of the operation.

Bohn brought her complaint and a series of photographs to the Fredonia Village Board last week, and officials promised to take quick action.

"It has gotten worse since the last time I was here. The worst part is that junk is the view I have when I am sitting at my kitchen table," Bohn said.

"I can put up with the minor stuff, the guys playing music and working on their cars all summer, but once other people see vehicles being stored outside they are going to want to do it too."

Bohn said an underground lateral near the property line prevents her from doing any major landscaping or tree planting to screen her view of the business.

A development agreement put into place when the condo project was approved prohibits the outside storage of items, but officials concede that provision has not been tightly enforced by the village.

In response to an earlier complaint from Bohn, Public Works Director Roger Strohm wrote a

letter to managing member Mike Didier of Port Grandview explaining that the outside storage of items violates village codes.

Strohm gave Didier until Jan. 14 to clean up the property or face fines from the village.

“We were unaware that outside storage was not allowed — too many years have gone by and I guess my memory is not that good,” Didier wrote in response to the village letter.

“The vehicles that are currently parked outside are there on a temporary basis until the new building is complete. It is not our intention to offer any outside storage. We will make every effort to get the new building constructed as soon as possible so the vehicles are enclosed.”

He said the pieces of equipment on the property are mostly owned by a prospective tenant who is waiting to have a storage building constructed on the site within the next two to three weeks.

“Once that building goes up, everything should be inside. It is all being stored now on the pad where the building is going,” Didier said.

The exception is the large earth scraper, which Didier said was abandoned on the property about five years ago after the landscaper that put in roads on the site went out of business.

“I was over there checking it out, and it has become something of a nature preserve in its own right with raccoons and everything,” Didier said.

“There is a lot of scrap value there, but I don’t know what to do about it because it is not something we own. Getting the earth scraper off the property by the Jan. 14 deadline might be a problem. It will probably cost a couple thousand dollars to haul it out, and I don’t even know if I have any legal right to do that.”

Didier said that when the newest building is erected later this month, there will be 18 storage units on the property.

Ten of those buildings will have individual owners, with the remaining buildings rented from Port Grandview. As a condominium, the company retains ownership of the grounds.

“The original plan was to have all of the buildings be individually owned, but the economy didn’t cooperate. All of our renters would rather own their units because it is more expensive to pay me rent, but they can only get so much money from the bank,” Didier said.

Laura Logan, owner of the neighboring Meadowlark Storage, recently purchased an old auto salvage yard about a half mile west of her property in the Town of Fredonia. Logan said that acquisition was made in reaction to the village’s ban on outdoor storage.

At last week’s Village Board meeting, officials said they intended to issue a citation if the Port Grandview property is not cleaned up by next week.

“If it isn’t any better by Jan. 15, we should enforce the ordinance,” Trustee Mark Edbauer Sr. said.

Trustee Fritz Buchholtz agreed with the firm handling of the issue, saying, “I don’t want to see this drawn out.”

Village Marshal Mike Davel said the village ordinance calls for a forfeiture of $208.50 for violating the outside storage restriction.

Didier said he hopes the village will see he is trying to do what he can to bring the property into compliance, avoiding the prospect of a fine.

As a real-estate agent Re/Max United in Port Washington and a supervisor in the Town of Port Washington, Didier said he is very familiar with land-use conflicts.

“I can understand how people would prefer to look out over an open meadow,, but when we bought the land it was already zoned for industrial use. It could have been a factory that was put up there,” he said.

Image Information: TOWN OF SAUKVILLE resident Mary Bohn doesn’t care for the view from her home on Meadowlark Road. Once a meadow and woods, the land north of her home is now occupied by the Port Grandview storage condominium business on the south fringe of the Village of Fredonia. Bohn’s complaint about the business is the latest example of conflicting land uses coming to a head in the county. Photos by Mark Jaeger