

Habitat project moves a step closer

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Village Board approves land-use change that opens the door to affordable housing on First Ave. site

The Ozaukee County Chapter of Habitat for Humanity Lakeside is another step closer to building in Grafton, something it has wanted to do for years.

The Village Board on Monday unanimously approved an amendment to its 2035 land-use plan map which changes the proposed use for one acre of land currently in the Town of Cedarburg and owned by Habitat to medium density urban residential, which allows 2.4 to 4.4 units per acre.

The property is a vacant wooded parcel on the north side of Columbia Road and behind Sendik's Food Market on First Avenue.

Habitat plans to erect two buildings with three units — a single-family home and a duplex condominium.

The village's Plan Commission recommended the map change after a public hearing Dec. 18 despite opposition from neighboring property owners who complained about the density and its likely impact on the value of their homes.

Al Schupp, president of the Habitat chapter, said he hopes to get a petition for annexation and rezoning to the Plan Commission on Jan. 22 so the Village Board can act on it in February.

The building and site plans will then have to be approved by the Plan Commission.

If everything is approved, Schupp said, Habitat will begin construction in spring or summer.

"Any later than that and we will have trouble getting it enclosed for winter," he said.

At the public hearing, several residents objected to the number of units, saying the lot is too narrow.

Schupp said three units were needed to make them affordable for families because the property is appraised at \$60,000.

"We're committed to building decent homes for working families," he told the residents. "We're trying to do something we can be proud of."

Village Planning Director Mike Rambousek said three units are a good transition between nearby condominiums and the single-family homes.

The Plan Commission wants the duplex built first so it has the same setback as the house to the west.

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“They want to be consistent and reinforce the look of the existing neighborhood,” Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said.

Schupp said Habitat must raise \$150,000 to build the duplex condo and needs at least half that amount in cash or pledges before beginning the Grafton structure.

Churches in the Grafton and surrounding areas have voiced support for the project and he’s working with them, Schupp said.

The organization is also seeking families for the two condos. They must be able to show they can pay a no-interest mortgage to Habitat. That money is then used to build the next house, Schupp said.

In December, Habitat foreclosed on a condominium unit on Larabee Street in Port Washington, the first time that’s happened.

“We will fix it up, repaint and find another Habitat family,” Schupp said.

“So we’re seeking three families.”

Habitat is currently working on a single-family home at 170 N. Park St. The owner is expected to move there in March.

The house, the seventh unit to be built in Port Washington, is on a hidden lot between Moore and Park Street. Two additional single-family homes are planned for that parcel, but the next build will be in Grafton.

“Habitat is committed to building in Grafton,” Schupp said.

Applicants for the Grafton and Port Washington condominiums can call 284-6880 or visit www.ozhh.org for an application form.

Opportunities for volunteering are also on the website.

“We’re always looking for people to serve on committees and be on the board,” Schupp said.