

Commission backs 'green' subdivision

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Port officials give conceptual approval to proposal for energy-efficient housing development on city's southeast side

The Port Washington Plan Commission last week gave conceptual approval to developer Mike Speas' plan to create a "green" subdivision on the city's southeast side.

"I think it's a great project," Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven, a member of the commission, said. Other members echoed his sentiment.

Although there are a smattering of individual energy-efficient houses being built in the area, City Planner Randy Tetzlaff said this is one of the first subdivisions to be proposed.

"It's a manageable number," Tetzlaff said of the proposed nine zero-energy ready houses to be built on about eight acres of land along South Division Street that's currently owned by We Energies. "The timing is appropriate, and the market, I think, is right."

Speas told the commission he doesn't know how rapidly the houses will sell, but added he's committed to the concept.

The Terraces at Mineral Springs would have two parts, with the eco-friendly portion being built on nine lots created on five acres just south of Western Avenue and east of Modern Equipment.

"The idea is to create homes that can produce as much energy as they consume," Speas said. "It's a unique product."

The lots would be 65 feet wide but deep, he said, and the houses built on them would reflect architectural details used elsewhere in the neighborhood, including gables that face the road, steep roofs, front porches and garages built behind the home.

"The idea is to take what makes Port Washington unique, the Port Washington look, and to create the look in a very energy efficient shell," Speas said. "We want them to blend into the neighborhood. We want to be proud of the way these look."

Stringent design guidelines would ensure that these homes would harmonize with

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others on the street, he said, and restrict such things as planting trees that would block solar panels.

A design review committee would ensure the guidelines are followed, Speas added.

One of the lots would contain an existing house that would be renovated with an eye toward energy efficiency, Speas said.

Each of the new houses would have features such as geothermal heating and cooling, a highly efficient building envelope and large windows and living spaces oriented to the south for passive solar heat.

The roofs would have the conduit and cables needed to support solar panels, but the panels would not be included in the basic house, Speas said.

Without the panels, he said, the houses will be about halfway to zero energy use. But once the panels are added, they will create the energy needed to operate the homes.

The houses would also have walk-out basements and lofts that are unfinished, as well as spaces for detached garages and the potential for carriage houses or apartments above or next to the garages.

The basic house price would be about \$200,000, Speas said.

City Administrator Mark Grams questioned the lack of a garage.

"I imaging many people will prefer to have a garage built initially," Speas said, but it wouldn't be required. The goal is to build an energy-efficient home.

"I'd say don't compromise on the energy efficiency of the house. Build that right, and then build the garage as you can afford it," he said.

The second portion of the project would be a more traditional development on a three-acre portion of the property just north of Western Avenue, Speas said. Three large lots would be created, with houses built on the west end of these lots, tucked into the woods and away from the transmission lines that cross the property, Speas said.

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"I kind of pictured custom homes would be built there," he said.