

Highland Ridge plan raises village concerns

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Commisson balks at proposal calling for more apartments, senior complex in residential project on former mall property

Village of Grafton officials have voiced concerns about a proposed change in plans for multifamily housing on the Highland Ridge/Pick 'n Save property in the south commercial district.

The project, which was approved by the village in April 2008, calls for E.J. Plesko & Associates to develop a combination of commercial and residential uses on 22 acres west of Wisconsin Avenue and south of Falls Road.

The commercial phase was completed in 2009 with the construction of a shopping center anchored by a 61,000-square-foot Pick 'n Save grocery. However, the Highland Ridge multifamily phase — which calls for construction of 65 townhouses and 71 condominiums in a 17-building complex on 12 acres — has not been started.

Developers have cited the sluggish housing market in delaying the residential phase. They are now planning more units on the property, which is the former site of the Manchester Mall shopping center.

E.J. Plesko & Associates has proposed selling nine of the 12 acres to MSP Development Co., a transaction contingent on the village approving a new plan calling for 192 multifamily units on 9.5 acres south of the Pick 'n Save.

Included in the proposal are 72 apartment units in three buildings, along with a 120-unit senior campus building.

The apartments are proposed for three buildings housing 29, 31 and 12 units, respectively. Each of the two largest buildings would have a community room and business center, and the 29-unit building would also have a fitness center.

The senior campus, proposed for the west side of the property, would have a 36-unit memory-care wing; a 36-unit, assisted-living care wing; and a 48-unit independent-living wing.

MSP Development officials said they are applying for a Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Administration (WHEDA) tax-credit program that would lower the rent on 60 of the 72 apartment units and the 48-unit wing of the senior campus.

However, in an initial review of the new proposal Tuesday, Plan Commission members objected to the housing density and a lack of specific plans for land not included in the sale.

Several commission members also criticized the building layout as lacking the well-integrated, neighborhood-friendly character of the plan approved in 2008.

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In a report to the commission, Village Planning Director Mike Rambousek also voiced concern about the housing.

“The density alone on the 9.5-acre site is approximately 20.2 units per acre, which is almost double the approved project density of 10.5 acre per acre,” he said.

Rambousek said his department is recommending the size of each apartment building be reduced to 24 units.

“The modification will reduce the buildings to a mass and scale that is more appropriate for this area, especially considering the height of the building grade relative to the rest of the south commercial district,” he said.

The changes require commission approval of an amendment to the project as a planned-unit development. A public hearing is required before any action can be taken.

The village’s Community Development Authority was scheduled to discuss the MSP Development proposal at its Wednesday, Feb. 1, meeting.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the new housing plan requires the CDA and Village Board to approve a change in the development agreement.

The agreement currently requires the owners of Highland Ridge to complete the residential phase by Jan. 1, 2016. The owners are also required to cover tax shortfalls in lieu of meeting construction deadlines.