

Officials say pre-annexation agreement may be finalized soon, paving way for long-awaited housing development

Habitat for Humanity's nine-year quest to build a housing project in Grafton may soon come to fruition.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the village has finalized details of a pre-annexation agreement with Habitat that would allow the project to move into the final stages of an approval process.

"The anticipation is that Habitat will submit an annexation petition to the village to allow a 2014 project to be developed," Hofland said.

The Ozaukee County Chapter of Habitat for Humanity Lakeside has constructed eight residential units for low-income families in the City of Port Washington but none in other county communities.

In Grafton, the organization has been trying for years to build on a vacant, one-acre parcel west of Sendik's Food Market on First Avenue. The wooded parcel is currently in the Town of Cedarburg off the north side of Columbia Road.

Habitat officials first approached the village in 2004 about using the site, but disagreements over housing density, drainage, setbacks and other issues have delayed the project.

In a breakthrough early this year, the Village Board approved a land-use map change to allow medium-density urban residential development on the parcel. The change accommodated Habitat's plan to erect two buildings with three units — a single-family house and a duplex condominium — as a two-phase project.

In recent weeks, Hofland said, village officials have been working with Habitat on a cost-sharing plan to install a sidewalk on the property, as required by municipal code.

Hofland said Habitat must still obtain approvals for annexation, rezoning and building and site plans as part of a planned unit development, but he doesn't foresee any further obstacles with those issues. All approvals could be completed "in a couple months," he added.

"In light of the Plan Commission and Village Board support for amending the land-use map, I do not anticipate any challenges," Hofland said.

Alan Schupp, president of Habitat's Ozaukee chapter, said Tuesday that he was cautiously optimistic after receiving word from Hofland about the pre-annexation agreement. He said the agreement must still be approved by the organization's board of directors, which could happen as early as next week.

Habitat, village near accord on project

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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“I’m encouraged. We’ve made some progress,” Schupp said.

He said Habitat officials are asking the village to clarify “some additional costs and concerns in the agreement.”

A pre-annexation agreement must be finalized before fundraising for the Grafton project can begin, Schupp said.

That effort is expected to be spearheaded by Grafton and Cedarburg churches that support Habitat’s mission. Among them are several parishes that last year publicly asked the village to approve the project.

The first phase of the project — including utility work, the sidewalk, landscaping and construction of the single-family house — could cost as much as \$180,000, Schupp said. How long it takes to raise the money would determine when on-site work would begin, he added.

If project delays continue into next year, construction might not begin until 2015, Schupp said.

Although village officials initially voiced concern about allowing as many as three residential units on the parcel, Habitat officials said at least that many units are needed to keep the housing affordable for low-income families. Families chosen for homes receive an interest-free mortgage but must work alongside volunteers and contribute 500 hours of hands-on labor to the completion of their residence.

Schupp said Habitat officials have not wavered in their commitment to the Grafton project despite a long, often frustrating, wait.

“The Ozaukee County Habitat organization has a mission to provide affordable housing to needy families anywhere in the county,” he said.

“There are families in all communities of the county who need help. We continued to be committed to make this project something that everyone can be proud of.”

Hofland said village officials want to see the project succeed and are trying to help Habitat to achieve that goal.

“Habitat has a very favorable reputation of working with the village and other communities to provide affordable housing,” he said.

“The village looks forward to the successful completion of the project.”