

One apartment plan OK'd, another panned

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
Wednesday, 25 January 2017 21:43

Port Plan Commission approves complex for adults with autism but not plan for two-story building off Hwy. 33

The Port Washington Plan Commission last week was split in its thinking on a pair of apartment proposals.

Commission members approved a concept plan for a 69-unit apartment building on Port Washington's west side that would include units and services for autistic adults.

The commission also approved a certified survey map and recommended the Common Council rezone the six-acre parcel at the intersection of Highways LL and 33 to accommodate the plan.

But commission members said they did not like a revised plan by Bielinski Homes for a senior apartment building on Highway 33, saying the building is too large for the site.

The commission was enthusiastic about the plan by Cardinal Capital Management to construct the apartment building and a nearby wellness center for autistic adults on the north portion of the former Highway LL ramp land.

Erich Schwenker, president of Cardinal Capital, told the commission that integrating people with disabilities into a complex that's open to everyone is the preferred housing option today.

About 15 of the apartments are expected to be rented to people with autism, while students from Concordia University Wisconsin could rent as many as a quarter of the units, he said.

The area to the west of the apartments would be used for walking paths and other outdoor facilities, while a wellness center that provides services to people with autism is expected to be constructed on the southwest portion of the property.

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The existing woods would be retained, helping screen the apartments from the neighbors to the west and north.

“The design really fits in well,” said Randy Tetzlaff, the city’s director of planning and development. “Everything’s tucked in. They’re preserving the natural areas.”

But commission members were not enthused by revised plans for an apartment complex proposed by Bielinski Homes. Earlier, the developer had submitted plans for a three-story, 27-unit building on the roughly 1-1/2 acre parcel that neighbors opposed, saying it was too large for the land and, since it would be located atop a hill, would loom over their homes.

The Plan Commission had said it would prefer a two-story structure, even if there were more units, and the new plan calls for a two-story, 36-unit building, Tetzlaff said.

The Design Review Board did not like the plan, he said.

“It gobbles up the entire lot with the building and asphalt,” Tetzlaff said.

Based on comments from the Design Review Board, Tetzlaff suggested a compromise that would move the two-story building on the site, downsizing it and adding green space on the north, nearest the neighboring properties.

That, he said, could make the plan more palatable to neighbors and the commission.

The compromise plan would also move the building farther from the gas metering station on the lot just west of the proposed apartments, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven, a commission member, said.

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"It whistles," he said of the station. "You can smell the faint odor of the stuff they put in the gas.

"If I were living there, I'd prefer to be away from that."

Commission member Ron Voigt suggested yet another compromise, saying a stepped design with three, two and one stories would not only break up the facade but also provide a more interesting design.

Commission members agreed that the newest iteration of the plan is too dense for the site, although they said they realize more units are inevitable if the building is two stories instead of three.

"I think the homeowners would definitely want to see them come back with something more along the lines of the (compromise) plan," commission member Dan Becker said.

"It's about the best use of the site," Mayor Tom Mlada added.