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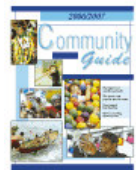
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- Bulletin Board
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Front Page

October 3, 2007



Builder plans 180 units in Aberdeen

Neighbors crowd town hall in opposition; hearing postponed
BY KAREN E. BOWES Staff Writer

A pair of applications for 180 multifamily housing units were scheduled for public hearings last week, but were postponed at the last minute when the Zoning Board of Adjustment realized it did not have a quorum.



Above: The Villages at Aberdeen, a development proposed by Centex Homes, calls for 62 housing units to be built on Route 34 in Aberdeen. At left: Renaissance at Aberdeen, a proposed multifamily housing development, calls for 120 housing units to be built on County Road. A use-variance is needed for the project.

Concerned neighbors packed town hall for the Sept. 26 meeting, hoping to have their opinions heard on the matter. Disappointment and allegations of stonewalling were expressed when the crowd was told the matter must be delayed for a second time this year. The new hearing date is Nov. 28.

The developer, Centex Homes LLC, hopes to build two distinct developments in town. Plans for the Renaissance at Aberdeen call for 120 units, while the Villages

at Aberdeen calls for another 62. The Renaissance development would include a total of five buildings containing approximately 24 units each, to be built on County Road. Twenty of the units would be deemed low-income housing. The Villages would be built along Route 34 with eight of the 62 proposed units deemed low-income housing. Both concepts require a use variance to allow multifamily housing.

Marc Leckstein, attorney for the Zoning Board, explained that although six voting members of the Zoning Board were present, only four were allowed to vote on the variance. Two of the board members were not at a previous meeting and had not listened to the appropriate transcripts, making them ineligible to vote. Five votes are needed to pass a variance, the attorney explained.



PHOTOS BY KAREN BOWES

"It would be fruitless for them to continue," Leckstein said, referring to the developer.

Regardless, several audience members accused Centex Homes of stalling on purpose.

"It's not them," Leckstein told the group. "I cannot emphasize that enough."

Attorney John Giunco, Red Bank, represented Centex Homes at the

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gathering. He answered questions from the crowd regarding the removal of trees on his client's property. Giunco reported that his client was issued a permit from the Department of Environmental Protection to remove the trees.

After the meeting, a large group of residents congregated outside town hall, discussing the proposed developments and questioning Mayor David Sobel about the plans.

Salem Place resident Bill Alexander said there is already a mosquito problem in the area of the proposed developments, and more houses would just exacerbate the problem. Alexander, along with many other residents, expressed concern about the consequences of overcrowding, parking and traffic.

Resident Anthony Garaguso, a Republican candidate for Township Council, said the timing of the postponement was odd.

"It's disappointing that certain board members were not properly prepared to hear the case," Garaguso said. "The Aberdeen Town Council should appoint people to the Zoning Board who will come to the meetings prepared to avoid repeat occurrences like this. This was a major disappointment to the citizens in attendance who took time out of their schedules to attend tonight's meeting."

He continued, "I further question the moving of tonight's topic to Nov. 28. Nov. 28 is not listed as a Zoning Board meeting on the town calendar or town Web site. ... Why wasn't this meeting rescheduled for a day already listed on the calendar as a Zoning Board meeting?"

Garaguso said he looks to the town calendar to see when meetings take place, and questioned how residents would know about the Nov. 28 meeting. At one point, Garaguso said he believed the decision was deliberately being postponed until after the election.

Councilman Owen Drapkin, a Democrat, overheard this comment and responded.

"This is the law - you can't do it," Drapkin said. "If you don't have the votes, you don't have the votes."

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