

Chappaqua Crossing would benefit town, school district

Felix Charney

Tonight at 7 p.m. the New Castle Town Board will open a public hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for what is the most significant private development plan to come before the community in the last two decades.

Our plan for Chappaqua Crossing promises to bring numerous benefits to both the town and the Chappaqua Central School District. At the same time, as is true in any community that faces a change in the use of a major property, the plan has raised concerns among residents. We have worked hard over the last four years to answer questions, find solutions and explore alternatives that mitigate concerns. As our review process unfolds, we remain committed to designing a project that will benefit the community as a whole.

Chappaqua Crossing is proposed for the former Reader's Digest property that we purchased in late 2004. As it has for the last 70 years, Reader's Digest con-

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tinues to maintain its world headquarters at the site but is now an office tenant rather than the property owner. A major goal of the sale was to assure that this valued corporate citizen would remain in the town, the county and the state. While this was accomplished, Reader's Digest requires only one-third of the iconic 700,000-square-foot cupola-topped office building that overlooks the Saw Mill River Parkway it once occupied. Our application seeks permission to be able to lease all of the remaining vacant space. Under present zoning, the town limits us to a maximum of four tenants occupying a total of 471,000 square feet. Thus one-third of the building under current regulations must remain empty.

If approved we will lease the unused portion of the office building and create much needed age-restricted housing on other portions of the 120-acre property. Further, we have also proposed

that 20 percent of the 278 new housing units would be affordable for both seniors and the local workforce. Our application will use a special zoning district created by the town years ago for the express purpose of encouraging multi-family and affordable housing in New Castle. We are perhaps the only property that could meet the criteria of this zone.

New Castle's Multi-Family Planned Use Development zone was created after the town lost the landmark Berenson case in which the court ruled that the town had an obligation to provide a range of housing types and prices. Despite this court ruling, very little multi-family housing has been added to the town's housing stock. Our proposal significantly addresses that need.

Our plan also provides many other benefits including:

- The site is the largest single taxpaying property in the town and school district. It currently brings in \$1.5 million annually. When completed Chappaqua Crossing

is projected to generate \$5.2 million. To put this in context, there is no project on the horizon or beyond that holds the promise to generate any new major tax dollars. Considering that the highly rated school district is facing severe budget issues in the near-term and town residents are already shouldering a significant burden, potential new tax revenues of this magnitude should be encouraged.

- Traffic congestion on Bedford Road stemming largely from Horace Greeley High School has been a problem for years. Because we own the frontage on both Bedford and Roaring Brook roads, we can create a south-bound right hand turning lane on Route 117 and make other improvements that will significantly improve traffic flow. By the nature of its uses, our project will not cause rush-hour traffic overloads.

- Local residents who are older and want to sell their single-family houses but remain in the town will finally have that opportunity. We



Summit Development
Artist's rendering of
Chappaqua Crossing.

have received hundreds of letters and e-mails from interested local residents who want to know when they can move in?

- Workforce housing is desperately needed. Large numbers of those who work in New Castle simply cannot afford to live there. We will create 32 units of dedicated affordable workforce housing. We will also provide 24 affordable age-restricted (55 and over) units. New Castle has added only three affordable units townwide in the last several years, far short of the Westchester County guideline of more than 225 for the town.

- No children under 18 can live in the age-restricted housing. The age restriction is legal under federal law and is fully enforceable. The only children who might live at the site would be from the 32 workforce units. We project 11 children from there.

- The plan preserves 50 acres of permanent open space, and the housing is carefully designed to blend with the surrounding neighborhoods and is in keeping with the character of the site and the Chappaqua community.

- We are offering to donate two valuable acres to the town for municipal use.

We urge all New Castle residents to weigh these many benefits. Chappaqua Crossing is a balanced, thoughtful proposal that addresses the present and future needs of the community. We welcome constructive public input.

The writer is managing partner for Summit/Greenfield Partners, the partnership that owns Chappaqua Crossing.