

Plan for Digest property shrinks

Resubmitted proposal includes fewer condos, razes auditorium

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The Journal News

NEW CASTLE — The Connecticut developers that bought the Reader's Digest property at the end of 2004 have submitted a scaled-down plan for condos and townhouses on the property.

An earlier plan for 348 condos for wealthy seniors filling in some of the green hills and parking lots around the landmark office building was rejected by the town late last year after a blizzard of opposition from neighbors. Summit Development and Greenfield Partners of Norwalk, Conn., submitted the revised plans for the 114 acres to the Town Board on Tuesday after months of speculation about when the developers would come back.

The new plans include a smaller number of units — 278 instead of 348 — and other changes to sweeten the deal for the town. The new housing would include 32 affordable condos for families and 24 affordable

Please see DEVELOPMENT, 8A

Developer resubmits Digest property plan

DEVELOPMENT, from 1A

units for senior citizens, and the developers are also offering to donate 2 acres along Roaring Brook Road to the town.

Children would be banned from living in the senior units, an effort to address worries that children would overwhelm local schools.

"We have listened carefully to the many ideas and comments that have come from town officials, the general public and neighbors," said Felix Charney, president of Summit Development, in a statement. The developers argue the new housing would meet demand for senior units, help the town meet its affordable housing goals and increase tax revenue.

At the same time, the new plans call for the demolition of the Bedford Valley House and an auditorium that has been used for community events, including performances by the Chappaqua Orchestra. That would make way for more townhouses east of the office building, which allows for the elimination of buildings along Roaring Brook Road and for the tallest buildings to shrink from five stories to three. The auditorium was earlier touted as an amenity for new office tenants.

Part of the office building would also be razed. Reader's Digest, which has downsized considerably since it filled the buildings a few decades ago, still rents part of the building and the owners want to rent the rest of the space to other businesses.

New Castle Supervisor Janet Wells said yesterday that she hadn't had a chance to look at the new proposal and couldn't give an opinion. But neighbors who opposed the earlier plans said these were not different enough to resolve their concerns about traffic, water runoff, schoolchildren and the loss of open space.

"All the things that we were concerned about still stand," said Laurie Hamburg, who lives nearby and helped organize opposition to the earlier plans through an organization and Web site called NewCastleRD.org.

Hamburg said the developers seemed to have started large and shaved down the plans a bit to test what the town will accept. She was also upset that the town didn't notify neighbors that the new plans

New proposal for Reader's Digest property

- 278 units, including 222 senior-citizen market-rate units, 32 affordable workforce units and 24 affordable senior units
- Eight three-story buildings with parking underneath
- 44 townhouses with garages in clusters of 10 or 12
- Demolition of 180,000 square feet of commercial space, leaving about 520,000 square feet
- Demolition of auditorium and Bedford Valley House

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would be submitted at Tuesday's meeting. The town only had several hours' notice.

Wells said they didn't miss out on anything because there was no presentation.

But John Ehrlich, another neighbor, said the room would have been full if people had known anything would be happening with the Reader's Digest property. Even without that, the news was spreading quickly, he said.

"The board simply has to say we're not going to rezone this," he said.

Summit and Greenfield are asking for a zoning change for 64 acres to a multifamily district already on the books, and for a variance to allow more businesses in the office building alongside Reader's Digest. The current limit is four.

The Town Board's first step is to decide if the application is complete before referring it to the town Planning Board.

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Thompson & Bender

The rendering of the latest development proposal for the former Reader's Digest property in Chappaqua.