

ALLENDALE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

COAH plan approved amid small opposition

BY MATT JACKSON

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Allendale officials are awaiting state certification of the municipality's affordable housing plan after the Planning Board and Borough Council approved the document last week.

But before the boards voted 7-1 and 5-0, respectively, to give their approval, some questioned the plan. Planning Board member James Thomas, who voted against the plan, said the document should be amended to move two units that had been designated for construction on a former farm near the Ramsey border to industrial grounds on West Crescent Avenue, which is currently slated for 19 units.

Thomas said the former farm site was not a good place to build the units since they would be in a single-family home area and located far from public transportation and services. The site previously was slated for 32 market-rate units and eight affordable units, but was recently changed to eight market-rate units and two affordable units at the request of the property owner's attorney, according to the borough's affordable housing plan. The owner also has the option to make a payment to construct two affordable units at another location in the borough in lieu of his or her obligation.

Thomas, who said he wasn't speaking for the owner, said he wanted long-time borough resi-

dents to get a fair monetary return on their property, but he said the site's inclusion in the borough's previous affordable housing plans had decreased the property's value by taking it off the market and said the trend would continue by keeping it in the plan.

Thomas then pushed for a vote to amend the plan, which was defeated 7-1. Opponents of the amendment cast their vote after the borough's Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) planner Mary Beth Lonergan said it would be a major change and did not think there was time to amend the document before the Dec. 31 submission deadline to COAH, a state agency.

Meanwhile, resident Michael D'Antonio, who said he had been trying for five years to get his East Allendale Avenue property designated as an affordable housing site, also questioned the plan, claiming there was toxic waste on the West Crescent Avenue property. But Lonergan said an environmental review would be conducted on the site. If any potential contamination issues could not be fixed, she said another site could be substituted.

The West Crescent Avenue property will fulfill 19 of the required 20 units under the borough's "third round" affordable housing obligation. The borough plans to build seven single-family homes, special needs housing and

rental units for families and seniors on the site, which it will purchase for \$2 million.

Money will come from several sources, including the borough's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Bergen County United Way and the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund, Mayor Vince Barra said in an interview. He said taxpayer money would not be used. Construction is expected to start in July 2011, and the housing would be ready to be occupied that September. The borough will meet its remaining obligation with an additional rental unit at Allendale Senior Housing on Cebak Court.

The 20-unit obligation comes from a formula based on COAH's projections for residential development and new jobs in the borough between 2004 and 2018. COAH projects 268 housing units will be constructed and 341 jobs will be lost in the borough during the period.

COAH was created in 1985 after the New Jersey Legislature passed the Fair Housing Act. The legislation was in response to a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling stating that municipalities have a constitutional obligation to provide a realistic opportunity for the construction of low- and moderate-income housing.

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