

Editorial  
Paying heed  
06/26/2008

Riffing on a well-known song, what a difference a year makes. Late last year, the Dover Knolls developer pulled from review by the former town board its proposal to construct a 1,376-unit residential community with approximately 245,000 square feet of commercial space.

The project will be built on the site of the former Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center in Wingdale, which was closed by the state in 1994.

Yanking the project stunned the board, but did not surprise the community. In a calculated maneuver, the Benjamin Companies waited out the year until after the November elections. The fact that former Supervisor Jill Way chose not to run again was a bonus.

Under the previous administration, the project languished for close to four years due to a paralyzed board that was fearful of being sued, as we have said before, either by the developer or residents.

This time, movement is measured, but progressing. Residents are hopeful that a long-standing community eyesore will bring revenue, business and more residents who will spend money to their community.

The Dover Town Board held a special meeting earlier this month to review the draft of the final scoping document for the project.

The scoping document defines the issues within a project to be evaluated and analyzed within the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) required by the state.

Public scoping sessions were held on May 7 and 10 to give residents the opportunity to provide comment. A period for written comment remained open until May 14. The draft final scoping document was made available to the public at the May 23 town board meeting.

The May 23 document was a significant departure from what had been submitted by the applicant, according to planner Graham Trelstad of AKRF environmental consulting firm. He noted that the narrative format was a major change from the list format that was submitted, giving the board and residents a total picture of what is planned.

Trelstad said the revised scope was also more consistent with the town's Master Plan.

The board has additional changes it wants the developer to add to the document, but new Supervisor Ryan Courtien said he was pleased with the way that Trelstad had incorporated all relevant public comment.

Councilman Richard Hawthorne asked the developer to review disposal of hazardous materials with reference to town code, which states specifically that construction and demolition debris cannot be disposed on site.

Councilwoman Katherine Palmer-House asked that the document be more specific in discussing age-restricted and age-targeted housing. She particularly asked that those parameters be defined and their effect on social services be studied.

Both are more than reasonable. It's encouraging that Kathleen Schibanoff, local representative of the Dover Knolls Development Company, said the changes to the scope were within reason for the Benjamin Companies to add.

In the practical department, the developer will submit the final document to the board on CD, so it can readily be posted to the town's Web site. A CD submission will save the cost of printing hundreds of pages and makes it accessible to a computer savvy population.

None of these baby steps in a giant leap forward for Dover is difficult; the town board was expected to adopt the scoping document last night. Compared to the prior town board, it seems as if this administration is moving at the speed of light.

However, we are assured it is moving deliberately, but surely, in the direction the residents of Dover have made clear they want. In meeting after meeting, residents have said they want their community to thrive and Dover Knolls is the engine that will drive their future.

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