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Housing Plan Takes Heat

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT

Residents of the Tuckahoe neighborhood surrounding a parcel where developers and the Southampton Town Housing Authority have proposed a 34-unit affordable housing apartment complex blasted the plan on Tuesday night as an imminent traffic safety hazard, a potential boondoggle and a threat to their property values.

But town officials, including Supervisor Anna Throne-Holst, took impassioned stances in support of the project, saying it may be the town's best and possibly last chance to mount a substantial affordable housing effort.

Homeowners said that the already heavy traffic during rush hour on Sandy Hollow Road near its intersection with County Road 39 would be hopelessly overloaded if the cars from the 34 one-bedroom and studio apartments in the proposed complex are added to the mix. They also objected to the size of the development and the impact it would have on the neighborhoods surrounding it.

"Everyone who bought in this area came for the rural feeling, and I think we could all agree that 34 apartments, studios and one-bedrooms, is not rural," said Noel Bailey, who owns a home directly adjacent to what would be the Sandy Hollow Cove development. "I am not against affordable housing—I'm against putting 34 units on a space that is only zoned for one single-family home."

Other neighbors said that they don't object to the affordable housing development, but that shifting it from 16 units to 34 units was an inappropriate increase in scope, even though the number of bedrooms would remain basically the same.

Attorney David Gilmartin Jr, who represents the developers who own the property, said that the occupancy limit for 16 condos already approved for the site would be 64 people, and would be 68 for the rental apartments. Anticipated sewage flow would be just 30 percent more, he said.

The proposal before the Town Board asks for an amendment to a planned development district approved by the Town Board in 2006 for 16 condominiums, also set to be sold at "affordable" rates with the help of increased density allowances and tax credits. That plan collapsed amid the credit crisis.

If the amendment is approved, they have proposed selling it to the Housing Authority, which would act as the landlord for the property and earn income from rent, which would range from about \$850 to \$950 per month

for the apartments. The cost of construction, which would be undertaken by Georgica Green Ventures, would be subsidized through a federal tax credit program. Mr. Gilmartin said that in order to qualify for the tax credits the project needs to be approved by November. Construction would begin in the spring.

Housing Authority Executive Director Richard Blowes said that the project, the first affordable housing effort in Southampton east of the Shinnecock Canal in more than a decade, is the town's best chance to create housing in that area. It also may be the Housing Authority's last chance to create a self-sustaining housing system in Southampton Town, since it needs rental income to cover its operating costs. Rental housing, Mr. Blowes said, is an important need for people in the community who are not yet ready to purchase a house.

"If we delay, you can say so long to the Housing Authority," he said. "It has struggled for so many years. We have to come up with a happy medium."

Ms. Throne-Holst made a long, passionate plea that the Sandy Hollow project, and the row over it, struck at the heart of town's residency predicament. "It takes courage to create affordable housing ... it takes courage to say we can't just let this go, we have to address it, we have to be able to help our elderly folks and the young people to stay in this community," the supervisor implored. "It is a difficult balancing act that I believe we have the courage to do and to do well. We have a dire need to create affordable housing, and every time, there are roadblocks. It is incumbent on us to find a way to work things out and put a shovel in the ground."