

Hamilton transit village survives

Planners vote down limiting amendments

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BY NICOLE CASTELLI

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HAMILTON TOWNSHIP -- Township planners on Thursday repelled an attempt to scuttle the proposed transit village at the Hamilton Train Station.

The planning board voted unanimously against ordinance amendments that many say would prevent the development of the transit village. The board's attorney will compile a report for the township council recommending the amendments not be adopted.

The proposed amendments would increase the number of parking spaces per resident from 1.5 to 2, which opponents say would severely limit the amount of open space in the project. The changes also would limit building heights to 36 feet for residential buildings and 45 feet for commercial buildings.

None of the town council members who drafted the amendments -- Shannon Cenci, David Kenny, Dennis Pone or council President Tom Goodwin -- were present to support them.

Brian J. Haney, executive director of the Hamilton Partnership, which supports the transit village, said he found the council's lack of representation at the meeting "offensive, not just to the partnership but to Hamilton residents."

The board's action Thursday was not a surprise. In March, the three Republican councilmen -- Kenny, Pone and Goodwin -- introduced an ordinance repealing the redevelopment zone that governs construction of the transit village. The board voted 8 to 1 against that ordinance as well. Kenny, who is the council's liaison to the board, was the lone vote in favor of the repeal.

The ordinance, passed by the council despite the planning board's vote against it, was eventually vetoed by Mayor Glen Gilmore.

Planning board attorney Michael W. Herbert said the transit village "is an exciting concept (and) the council is trying to limit it just because they don't want to have an urban look."

Supporters of the transit village feel the proposed amendments would defeat the purpose of smart growth and halt the project. In a letter dated June 6, New Jersey Transit said the proposed amendments would actually add traffic to the area and would "only (serve) to increase the percentage of building coverage at the expense of open space."

Hal English, director of the Department of Technology and Economic Development for Hamilton, said, "the township administration stands firm with New Jersey Transit."

In other business, the board also voted to appeal to the New Jersey Supreme Court to stop plans for a new 201,000-square-foot shopping center near Klockner Road and Nottingham Way. An appellate court recently upheld a lower court ruling, which overturned the planning board's denial of the project. Gilmore sent a letter to the board Thursday urging it to continue the appeals process.