

Apartment proposal on Rt. 83 draws fire

By Josh Silvia

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ELLINGTON — A well known developer, who has wanted to build multifamily housing complexes off Route 83 for 24 years — and has succeeded more than once — has already caused a stir among residents before Monday's Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

At the meeting, the PZC will consider rezoning more than 36 acres from commercial and residential to a multi-family zone.

The meeting is set for 7 p.m. in the Center School gymnasium.

The property is close to Autumn Chase, a 55-acre apartment complex built in the late 1990s.

Gardner Chapman, who headed the company that built Autumn Chase, is the developer of the new project as well.

Chapman is seeking to build 22 apartment buildings with an estimated total of 130 to 150 housing units.

A neighborhood group, consisting of at least 65 residents, has organized to oppose the zone change.

One member, engineer and town resident Louis Corsino, 34, said the planned complex would require another road to go through the residential area sandwiched between Autumn Chase and the proposed apartment complex, exiting onto Highland Avenue. He said that would add substantially to traffic in the area.

"This is the only place in town that would have two roads going through a residential area for an exit," Corsino said.

Another reason the group opposes the zone change, Corsino said, is that it would eliminate commercial land along Route 83 and the hillside peach orchard.

The orchard, behind the Meadowview Plaza shopping center, is across Route 83 from the 60-unit Johnny Appleseed apartment com-

plex, which Chapman also developed.

"One of the other big things is we looked at the older Planning and Zoning notes and minutes, and they wanted to control population growth," Corsino said.

He also referenced First Selectman Maurice W. Blanchette's comments this week about controlling population growth at a time when the town's grand list of taxable property is shrinking due to a revaluation during a poor real estate market.

Corsino said the town's schools are at capacity.

If the zone change is approved and population increases significantly, Corsino predicted, the town would be hard pressed not to increase taxes.

He said he hopes more people than the 65 members of the neighborhood group will attend the meeting on Monday.

Corsino and other members of the group tried to notify residents by placing a \$495 advertisement in the Journal Inquirer this week. Corsino will present a report on the group's position at the PZC meeting on Monday.

Chapman, who couldn't be reached for comment, has been seeking to build in the area for 24 years.

In January 2007, Chapman withdrew a plan to build apartments on the Ellington Golf Center property on Route 83.

Chapman was asking to divide the 27-acre golf center, at 123 West Road, into two parts, a 16-acre parcel and an 11-acre parcel.

Chapman withdrew that proposal after PZC members gave strong indications that they would reject the zone change. Members expressed the view that there were already enough apartments in town — and too many apartments in the proposal.

In December 1988, the PZC rejected a zone change that would have allowed the construction of an apartment complex in the peach orchard along the east side of Route 83.