

LEADER TIMES

Kittanning Cottages get council approval

By Renatta Signorini

LEADER TIMES

Tuesday, October 5, 2010

KITTANNING — Kittanning Cottages will soon be reality as borough council approved the senior-citizen development during last night's meeting.

It took fewer than nine months from when the venture was introduced to the public in late January to a final vote approving the project planned for a vacant lot along North McKean Street.

"This is direct tax money coming into our borough which we haven't had coming (from that property) for a long time," said Councilwoman Lisa McCanna.

Seven council members voted in favor of the project, with Councilman Richard Reedy abstaining after his absence from recent meetings on the subject.

Based on plans presented at past public meetings by Trek Development, Kittanning Cottages would consist of 24 units in 13 buildings and a community center to fill the now-vacant lot where the Armstrong Campus of Indiana University of Pennsylvania once stood. The one- and two-bedroom units would have off-street parking, front porches and yards and blend into the neighborhood.

Prospective low- to middle-income residents must be 55 or older.

The borough held four hearings to get public input on the proposal.

"The general public was well-informed about what has transpired," said council President Gerald Shuster.

Councilman Ange Turco approved the project despite "mixed feelings," and Councilman Andrew Peters said he has had some questions about the type of residents who will live there.

Councilman Chris Schiano cast a positive vote, adding, "I think we're fortunate to have a developer in this economy today develop a piece of property in Kittanning, Pennsylvania."

Rebecca Street resident Reed Titus praised the project, saying it's a good way for older residents who have lived in the community all their lives to stay in town and have few upkeep responsibilities.

"These cottages are built for people like my parents," he said. "I don't think

that ... these cottages are designed for your Section 8 personnel."

After the vote, Shuster added, "We recommend that you hurry quickly to turn over earth" to Trek Development project manager Trey Barbour, who said the group is "looking forward to getting started here real soon."

Borough council tabled an ordinance that would change the direction of traffic on Rebecca Street to better accommodate residents of the Kittanning Cottages after requests from two residents who live on the one-way street. Tony Ucciardo and Titus cited concerns with safety, speeding and parking that would arise if traffic were to change direction.

They presented a petition signed by residents of Rebecca Street and North Water Street who live in the area of the intersection.

"You're going to lose at least one parking space on Water Street, at least one on Rebecca Street because of the tight turn," Ucciardo said.

Titus said many children ride bikes on the street and speeding could be a concern.

"There's not a doubt in my mind that traffic is going to increase and safety is going to decrease," he said. "We're not doing this to oppose the cottages."

Shuster said the police chief and codes officer have reported that no parking spaces would be lost if the direction was changed.

The change would have motorists enter from North Water Street instead of entering from North McKean Street and exiting on North Water Street.

An informal thumbs-up on the Kittanning Cottages was given by council during a Jan. 20 meeting in which the venture was presented to the public for the first time. Public meetings were held in February, August and September to gain resident input on the plans.

Developers were awarded \$1.8 million in funding in July for the project: \$1.3 million from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and \$505,000 in annual tax credits. Sen. Don White assisted with funding to demolish the IUP buildings in January 2009.

The borough zoning hearing board granted developers permission last month for several ordinance variances to accommodate shorter distances between units and the surrounding roads. The property is owned by the county's Industrial Development Council. A sales agreement is in place and the IDC had been awaiting action by borough council.

Two abandoned homes on the property will be removed in the coming weeks.

In other business, borough council recommended to its Town and Country Transit board representative, Tom Close, that the authority go after unpaid funds from Ford City and Ford Cliff. Shuster made a motion that the authority

charge the two boroughs a 1 percent assessment for delinquent payments until the bills are paid.

According to financial documents provided at past Town and Country meetings, Ford City had owed \$3,400 from the 2008-09 fiscal year, which is half of the borough's contribution for that year. Those same documents showed that Ford Cliff had owed \$900 from the 2008-09 fiscal year and \$945 from 2009-10.

The Town and Country board decided to take the figures off the books for the 2010-11 fiscal year, but has not forgiven the debts. The boroughs can pay the amounts in the future if funds are available.

"If that's not debt forgiveness, I don't know what it is," Shuster said. "The people in Kittanning Borough had to pay their fair share."

Close said the board did not forgive the debts in an effort to keep Ford City involved with the authority and making current payments. Each municipality that receives service from Town and Country must contribute to the authority's operating budget.

Ford Cliff has not had bus service since March 2009.

"It's really pushing the issue to make (Ford City) pay and they don't pay," Close said, which would be detrimental to the company and could result in a loss of state funding.

The motion was approved by six votes, including Close. McCanna abstained. Reedy had left the meeting early.

"Why can't you borrow the money and pay it off?" Close said after the vote.

Renatta Signorini can be reached at rsignorini@tribweb.com or 724-543-1303, ext. 219.

Images and text copyright © 2011 by Trib Total Media, Inc.
Reproduction or reuse prohibited without written consent.