

Not so thrilled on Blueberry Hill

By **CHRISTINA KRISTOFIC**

The Intelligencer

Carrollton Development Group has spent more than \$12 million and almost three years rehabilitating the buildings at Blueberry Hill and building new ones.

And now the developers can't find tenants for most of them.

Robert Gundlach, the developers' attorney, said they have lost "a number of tenants" to the new Valley Square Shopping Center in Warrington.

"I have been bending over backward to try to lease these buildings," Carrollton president Tom Deignan said last week.

"To date, I have been successful in signing only two leases — one for Citigroup and one for The Learning Experience."

Citibank has already opened. Carrollton could lose the second lease — the one to The Learning Experience — if township officials don't grant a variance to the township's zoning ordinance.

The 3.6-acre Blueberry Hill site is located at Easton and Almshouse roads, in a commercial district and near the Bucks County Prison complex. The township's zoning ordinance does not allow day-care centers there.

Gundlach asked the Doylestown Township supervisors to amend the township zoning ordinance, or to allow Carrollton to request a variance from the zoning hearing board without fighting it.

The supervisors refused to amend the zoning ordinance.

They told the developer to ask the zoning hearing board for permission, but would not promise not to fight the request. If approved by the zoning hearing board, Carrollton could need additional variances or special exceptions to create a playground on the property.

Supervisor Chairwoman Barbara Lyons pointed out that the township has made several concessions to Carrollton already, allowing the developers to construct an additional building and create more parking spaces than typically allowed.

"I think you're asking for a lot of variances to put a day-care center in place. We can't keep changing our rules because you failed to get a tenant," Lyons said.

Police Chief Stephen White pointed out that the prison's Community Corrections Center, which houses sex offenders and other convicts on work release, is nearby on Almshouse Road. The township has an ordinance that prohibits registered sex offenders from living within 2,500 feet of a school or day-care center. And although the ordinance does not prohibit a new day-care center from being built near the corrections center, White thinks it should.

"If a child is abducted or something happens, and the township had allowed (the day-care center), it could be a liability issue for the township," White said.

Carrollton Development Group, which is based in Delaware County, bought the Blueberry Hill property in August 2004 for \$3.35 million.

Deignan told the supervisors in 2005 that he wanted to restore the historic buildings on the property and add two new buildings to create a "boutique village" similar to Peddler's Village in Buckingham. He said he wanted to open an "upscale" two-floor restaurant in the 6,610-square-foot barn. The 5,000-square-foot manor house, which formerly housed The Inn at Blueberry Hill, would be converted to retail space, as would the 3,581-square-foot carriage house. Deignan told the supervisors then that one of the new buildings would be a bank and the other would be retail space.

By then, plans for the Valley Square Shopping Center had already been presented to Warrington officials, and portions had been approved for construction.

That sex offenders are housed just down the road from the project site seemed to be news to Gundlach, a local attorney, and Deignan. Gundlach said The Learning Experience is a secure facility and children would be safe there.

"I'm surprised that someone wants to put a day-care facility or a school within 2,500 feet of a place where sex offenders live," Supervisor Barb Eisenhardt said to Gundlach. "I would feel more comfortable if you go to the zoning hearing board."

Carrollton will submit a request for a variance in the coming weeks. The date for the zoning hearing will be set after the request is submitted.

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