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Officials weigh limits on building plan submissions

Tinicum may allow only one proposal at a time per property.

By Kelly Madsen Special to The Morning Call

GROWING PAINS

Tinicum Township officials are mulling a plan to stop developers from proposing separate building plans for the same property at once.

Proposal then: Construction of 368 houses and condominiums and 328 apartments.

Proposal now: Construction of 145 single-family homes and 50 townhouses.

Location: Route 611 and Tohickon Valley Road.

Tinicum Township supervisors are considering an ordinance that would stop developers from proposing separate building plans for the same property at once.

If passed, however, it would be too late to affect developments proposed by the Main Street Group and the Piper Group, which submitted separate sets of building plans for Route 611 and Tohickon Valley Road in Ottsville.

"The township reviews one plan and spends a whole lot of time and money on it and then the [developer] comes in with another application. It becomes confusing and expensive," Supervisor Boyce Budd said last week.

The Main Street Group and the Piper Group had submitted six separate plans to build 368 houses and condominiums and 328 apartments in Tinicum from 2003 to 2005, some of which are at Route 611 and Tohickon Valley Road.

Tinicum Manager Linda McNeill said the township held at least 14 hearings in 2004 and about six in 2005. There were more reviews in 2006, until the developers tabled their applications to do aquifer testing because water availability was often an issue during the reviews, she said.

Last December, their attorney, Rob Gundlach, submitted alternative, conceptual plans to build 195 houses and turn over nearly 38 acres of open space to Tinicum.

Under these plans, the Main Street Group would build 68 single-family homes and 50 townhouses at Route 611 and Tohickon Valley Road. The builder would donate nearly 20 acres at Durham Road and Route 611, known as the Carr tract, to Tinicum for open space or recreation land.

The Piper Group has proposed Durham Village East and West, a development of 77 single-family homes and townhouses at the southwest corner of Route 611 and Tohickon Valley Road.

The developers originally proposed building a water and sewage treatment plant on the Hallowell farm on Route 611 near Durham Road. The alternative plan has offered to help Tinicum buy the development rights to 18 acres of the farm.

"If [Piper Group and Main Street Group] and the township don't reach an agreement on the alternative plans, we will resume the process of reviewing [the original] plans," Gundlach said in January.

McNeill said the alternative plans are on hold because the developers have not paid fees for professional review.

The proposed ordinance also would limit the time a development, subdivision or zoning application can remain inactive to six months. The township may use inactivity as a basis for rejection, McNeill said.

Tinicum supervisors took their cue from Upper Makefield Township, which is considering the same ordinance.

McNeill will tailor it to fit the township's needs, then have it reviewed by the township and Bucks County planning commissions.

Supervisors also would have to hold a public hearing before they vote on the ordinance.

Kelly Madsen is a freelance writer.

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