



Hunterdon County Democrat

Developer, Milford clash over plans for former paper-mill tract

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By John Monteith

A flier from developer David Meiskin of Windsor Companies, LLC, mailed to Milford property-taxpayers last week, contends that the Borough Council and Planning Board have refused to accept his application to build 507 houses on the Milford portion of the former Curtis paper mill.

On Monday, Meiskin said he launched a lawsuit two or three weeks ago that could force the municipality to hear his application.

Township officials, in turn, challenged Meiskin's flyer assertions.

"It's right out of the spin zone," said Councilman Don Pursell. The flyers are filled with "half-truths and obfuscations," he said.

Meiskin said that he will send out nine more fliers about his proposed project, one every 10 days or so. At the end of the mailings, he will hold a community meeting about the project.

"Maybe in the second flier he can explain how he came up with the numbers," said Mayor Jim Gallos, referring to Meiskin's contention that the development will "generate over \$2,175,350 in new tax dollars per year," including \$1,232,310 for the elementary school.

"They won't give us a hearing," said Meiskin. "Let's sit down and talk...They won't have the decency of having a hearing...I'm limited to a court intercession to force them to hold a hearing. I'm not asking damages yet."

The next mailer will appear early next week, he said. The mailers will discuss issues such as traffic, taxes, and the types of housing proposed.

"We're being hammered from all sides," said Pursell. "We're a fly in the ointment to these predators, these developers." If Meiskin's plan was accepted, "the population would double or triple overnight," requiring a huge increase in the borough's infrastructure. Residents need to ask themselves if they want to live in a Woodbridge, he said. "We're not planning to acquire the property at this time," said Gallos, challenging Meiskin's statements that the town is trying to obtain some form of ownership of the mill property. He said that Meiskin seems to suggest that he is the owner of the property, instead of just a contracted purchaser. If that's the case, Meiskin might want to pay the \$1,183,601.75 owed to the town in back taxes, interest and penalties on the property, said Gallos.

Meiskin's application is incomplete, said Gallos. "The taxes aren't paid up. Nothing has been paid."

He added, sighing: "We'll all go to court...we'll all give testimony. They're trying to bleed the town, to get us to roll over...I'm sad that his company is doing this."

Meiskin has proposed 332 units restricted to adults 55 and over, 123 family units, and 52 units of age-restricted affordable housing. The project would add 38 students to Milford elementary school and send 14 students to Delaware Valley Regional High School, said Meiskin. He said that his financial figures and the student figures were developed by a professional planner.

"We're not walking in with a wing and a prayer here," he said.

Meiskin has also proposed building 100 houses on the 35 acres of the property extending into Alexandria Township. Alexandria's has developed a redevelopment plan that calls for the property to be used for passive recreation.

Milford's plan, developed by a community Visioning Committee, calls for 31 single-family houses, professional offices, light industry and passive recreation on the 73 acres lying in the borough.

Meiskin attended presentations by former contracted buyer O'Neill Properties, which proposed a similar density, said Gallos. "He knows that 507 is unacceptable." Gallos said that the Department of Environmental Protection has used \$1.3 million in remediation funds deposited by a former owner of the property to remove "a lot" of contaminants on the property. "The majority of dangerous compounds have been removed by DEP," he said.

With lower cleanup costs, a developer could propose lower -density redevelopment, he said. A developer would also be able to recoup more than 75 percent of the cleanup costs from the state, he said.

"We're not trying to make this personal," said Gallos, "but the borough has a plan drafted by residents, business people, the schools."

He said that the borough's redevelopment agency, composed of the council members, would listen to "anybody coming close to the borough's redevelopment plan."

He said that he had another plan, from a different party "in hand right now. A letter of intent from a developer."

The plan would be reviewed at the council meeting on Tuesday, he said, and he would also ask the council to authorize him to request redevelopment proposals from other parties.

"We're in the driver's seat," said Gallos.

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