

Housing proposal is hitting opposition Some on council voice concern about plan for apartments

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WALKERTOWN

Town officials say they are unhappy with plans to build apartments near the Walkertown Commons Shopping Center for people who earn low to moderate incomes.

Shopping-center developer Patrick Hennigan disputes the "low-income housing" label that some officials are applying to the plan. He said that the apartments would look nice and that the builder has a good national reputation.

Walkertown Mayor Doc Davis has learned that the apartments would target families with annual incomes between \$13,450 to \$39,060. The median family income in Forsyth County is about \$55,000, according the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Council Member Wallace Larrimore said that the town spent a lot of effort convincing neighbors that the apartments would be top quality. Now he fears that the apartments will not be what was promised.

"When we went through all this with Hennigan, all of this stuff was supposed to be first-class stuff," Larrimore said. "We had to sell it to some of those neighbors back in there. I wanted everybody to be pleased. We didn't go along from the start to have something like that right in their back door."

Council members said they are not against low-income residents but think that the area behind Walkertown Commons is the wrong spot for such an apartment complex.

During a recent council meeting, Council Member Dot Duggins said that the area is Walkertown's "gateway."

Glenwood Development Co. of Mooresville built the Walkertown Commons Shopping Center, which opened in the spring of 2004. Hennigan is the president of the development company.

Although Glenwood bought the land behind the shopping center, another company, MV Communities of Durham, is proposing to develop an 80-unit apartment complex on the tract.

The proposal will come before the town council for review before it is started, but it would be difficult for the town to reject it outright. A zoning change allowing apartments had been approved earlier.

Town officials learned in an e-mail from MV Communities that the complex would be called Pinecrest Apartment and would have 10 two-story buildings with eight apartments in each building.

There would be 56 two-bedroom units with 969 square feet each, and 24 three-

bedroom units with 1,149 square feet each, according to the e-mail.

The two-bedroom units would be marketed to families with annual incomes between \$13,450 to \$33,660. The three-bedroom units would be targeted to people with annual incomes between \$15,150 to \$39,060.

Brandy Angus of MV Communities, who wrote the e-mail, said that there are 1,400 people in the primary market area for Walkertown that fall in the targeted income ranges. Angus declined to give details about the project.

Her e-mail said that the apartment complex would have on-site management, a laundry room and recreational amenities, including horseshoe pits, a volleyball court, a playground, reading and game rooms, and a picnic area.

The units would have dishwashers, air conditioning, walk-in closets and ceiling fans.

Hennigan said that his company would not damage the prospects of Walkertown Commons by allowing the development of substandard apartments.

"It is not going to be low-income housing," Hennigan said.

He said he did not know whether the rent would be subsidized.

Council Member Horace Warner said he is worried about the development's effect.

"We want affordable housing, but we don't want to take someone else's responsibility," Warner said.

"I don't want everybody else to send us their low income to live."

He said that the town still is developing a land-use plan and should "continue our philosophy of controlled growth."

MV Communities is applying for a federal tax credit that is administered by the N.C. Housing Finance Agency, a public agency created in 1973 to help create affordable housing for people whose needs are not met by the market.

Typically, developers who get the credits sell them to investors and use the proceeds to drive down the cost of developing the property. That in turn allows the developer to charge lower rents.

According to the agency, the program has financed 41,500 privately-owned apartments across the state.

"We won't know which projects will get funded until early August," said Scott Farmer, the agency's manager of rental underwriting.

"It is designed for the development of affordable housing. They have to target a percentage of their units at different median-income levels."

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