

Morning Sentinel

Gilman Street School project facing board

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WATERVILLE -- Neighbors of the old Gilman Street School are expected to turn out at tonight's Planning Board meeting, where a project to transform the facility into affordable housing will be discussed.

The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at The Center.

Developers Collaborative of Portland wants to turn the 1913 building into 33 affordable apartments and restore the building to historic standards.

Developers Kevin Bunker, Richard Berman and Jim Hatch say they hope to let the city use the restored gymnasium for an affordable price.

They are targeting tenants who earn \$20,000 to \$36,000 a year, and the rent for the heated apartments would be \$450 to \$750 a month.

They want to build seven three-bedroom, 16 two-bedroom and 9 or 10 one-bedroom apartments in the 41,000-square-foot facility.

The former school is owned by Brunswick businessman Peter Arena, but Developers Collaborative has a purchase and sale agreement to buy the building and plans to close on the deal in August 2009.

The developers say they are seeking historic tax credits to restore the building, as they have done with other buildings in Maine.

Hatch, Bunker and Berman told neighbors of the Gilman Street School at a public meeting Aug. 12 that they try to develop existing buildings as opposed to building new ones.

As part of their projects, they garner community input and work with local, state and federal governments to rehabilitate buildings while maintaining their historic nature and character.

Several residents Aug. 12 said they opposed the plan to turn the building into affordable housing. They said it would devalue their properties, draw the wrong people, create noise and cause other problems.

At least one resident said the building ought to be torn down.

But others said they welcomed historic restoration of the building, which will deteriorate if left vacant.

The current zoning of the property allows for 28 apartments in the building, as well as office space; the Planning Board is being asked to consider allowing 33 apartments, and no office space.

The board would make a recommendation to the City Council, which makes the ultimate decision on a zoning amendment.

In other matters at tonight's meeting, planners will consider a final plan by Anthony and Susan Civitello for Hideaway at Ridgewood Heights, a development of seven condominiums off Evergreen Drive.

The board also will consider a request by the city's Public Works Department to build a 6,000-square-foot fleet maintenance garage at its site on Wentworth Court.

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