

Morning Sentinel

Claims against housing project signs of NIMBY

KENNEBEC JOURNAL Morning Sentinel

09/05/2008

For weeks, the fur has been flying in Waterville over the proposed \$10 million conversion of the historic Gilman Street School into 33 units of affordable housing.

Many residents of the neighborhood of mostly single-family homes, have rallied to protest the development of the old school. They say that renting that many apartments to lower-income tenants will diminish their property values, raise noise levels and bring too much traffic and possibly crime into the neighborhood. One neighbor told the city planning board that the proposed development would be "a wolf in sheep's clothing."

Couldn't the building be turned into offices for retired Colby professors, asked one local homeowner?

While some local residents publicly supported the development, the naysayers marshaled an impressive number of people to attend the various city planning and council meetings, and, while no one said it quite so explicitly, their message was clear: Not in my backyard.

To his credit, Waterville Mayor Paul LePage called the residents on the exclusivity that their protests betrayed. He told residents that units destined for those making \$20,000 (for a single-member family) to \$36,000 (for a family of four) don't constitute what they called "low-income housing," and that the majority of Waterville residents likely would qualify to live in the proposed apartments.

"It was very disturbing," said LePage. "It really, really disappoints me to continually hear 'No' to low-income housing, and it's not low-income housing, it's median income."

On Tuesday, the city council gave the first major vote of confidence in the project. Currently, city regulations would allow conversion of the school to 28 apartments, but that number wouldn't be profitable for the project's developers. They need to raise the number of units to 33, and required a zoning change to do that.

Under intense pressure by school neighbors who packed the chamber to urge rejection of the change, councilors nevertheless moved boldly and voted unanimously to approve the conversion of the school to the proposed 33 apartments. It was the first of three votes that would be required to allow the project to move forward.

There's a biological principle that says that a diverse ecosystem is the healthiest kind of system. So, too, that principal holds for cities, whose very nature is that they are home to many different kinds of people.

The Gilman Street School was at one time filled with children and teachers and traffic of all kinds, so the complaint that the new development would bring noise to a previously quiet neighborhood isn't the full story. With the proposed conversion into apartments, the opportunity exists for the building to come to life again, and for it to contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of the neighborhood -- as well as the city's tax base.

That said, it's also true that there are low-income housing developments in Waterville that are home to disruptive and sometimes illegal activities. The management of the Gilman Street School as an apartment complex would need to be professional and rigorous (as should management of all apartment complexes). That's why it's a good sign that neighbors, city officials and the developer all got together after the council vote to discuss doing a neighborhood impact study on the project.

We hope that study will look at the potential effects of the development, but also at how to productively manage those effects. And we trust that the pursuit of the study is not a delaying tactic by neighbors who intend to fight an endless war of attrition over the project, but rather a genuine attempt to understand the development's ramifications and find ways to make it work for those who already live in the neighborhood, as well as those who, similarly, deserve to live in a lovely corner of Waterville, Maine.

Brook Hill Apartment Home Luxury Apartment & Townhome Living in Westmont, Illinois www.villagegreen.com	Apartments Sale Search Local Apartment Listings Our Service is Free. No Obligations ApartmentsForSale.Reply.com	Norris Lozano Urban Development & Finance, LLC Tax credits, affordable development UrbanDF.com	Apartments Sale Compare All Apartments For Sale A Free Service With No Obligations! ApartmentSales.ConnectWithLife.cc
--	---	---	--

Ads by Google