



JEFF GRAYZEL

MORRIS TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

EMAIL UPDATE

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IMPORTANT -- PLEASE NOTE:

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Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Supporters,

I hope you found my first E-newsletter interesting. I will publish another right after the Wednesday, October 17 Township Committee meeting at 8:00pm.

An Important Issue on the Agenda: Re-zoning Proposal to Allow Building of 92 Townhouses

I invite you to attend this meeting and hear discussion about an important issue on the Oct. 17 agenda: a re-zoning ordinance to allow the building of 92 townhouses at the former Verizon site at 250 James St. Details can be found in the 9/14/07 article from the Star Ledger, which I have **included below** for your convenience. This proposed townhouse development would not be age restricted.

My personal opinion is that this re-zoning proposal is premature and has been pushed forward without ANY discussion of possible alternatives to re-zoning. My fear is that once a new zone is granted, the alternatives will be limited. I believe that all options for this property should be aired and discussed PRIOR to the vote on re-zoning. However, other members of our Township Committee believe this is an appropriate project for Morris Township and want to move forward on this quickly.

Let's Have Open and Public Discussion of Alternatives

I am not so sure, and I want all the possibilities put on the table before any final decisions are made. I want an open and public discussion of those alternatives along with the implications of each on our municipality. I want to know what is best for the citizens of Morris Township before we make any zoning changes.



Try to Attend: Wednesday, October 17 at 8:00pm

If you can't attend the meeting, then you can read about it in my E-news next week. But I urge you to spend a couple of hours to see for yourself how other members of the public react to this proposal. The Township Committee meeting starts at 8: 00pm on Wednesday October 17 at our municipal building at 50 Woodland Avenue (across from the police station). I hope to see there.

Jeff

The Star-Ledger

Morris Township to debate future of Verizon tract

Sunday, October 14, 2007
BY ROBERT E. WILLIAMS III
Star-Ledger Staff

For nearly two years, Morris Township residents have wrestled over the future of a two-story brick building sitting at the edge of a James Street bridge over Route 287.

The once-vibrant 23-acre property, busy with 850 employees who worked at the customer call and financial service center for Verizon Wireless, now sits vacant, devoid of any signs of life. A "For Lease" poster is mounted on the site.

This Wednesday the township committee is scheduled to debate a planning board recommendation to rezone the property for residential use, a change that could place a Cedar Knolls developer one step closer to converting the land into a neighborhood of 92 townhouses.

The plan has drawn praise and concern from township officials observing the progress of the site's development since Verizon Wireless declined to renew its lease in 2004 in favor of accepting business incentives totaling \$10,000 after taxes to relocate to North Carolina.

The proposal to build townhomes has shifted among the planning board, zoning board and the township committee. Some officials said it would better serve as a residential community than languishing on the commercial real estate market.

"From the perspective of what was there, and what could go there, the owner's request was reasonable," said Morris Township Mayor Robert Nace.

But others have voiced concern about the lack of public discussion about the property.

"The introduction of this new zoning ordinance is premature until other alternatives have been put on the table," said Jeff Grayzel, a township committee member.

The proposal calls for the demolition of the 150,000-square-foot brick structure to make way for the townhouses. Each acre would have roughly four units, making the project less dense than other township developments, said the owner's attorney, Douglas Henshaw of Porzio, Bromberg and Newman of Morris Township. About a dozen units would be earmarked for affordable housing, according to zoning board documents.

Henshaw, representing Larry Paragano, whose family business, Paragano Enterprises, owns the holding company of the property, said the building is outdated.

"The column spacing, the way (the building) is cooled, the way it's heated, the floor plan makes it very difficult for any typical modern-day use," Henshaw said. "It basically needs to come down."

There's no debate that transforming the site into a townhome development would improve the property's environmental conditions, mostly because there would be less stormwater runoff. But debate remains about what stress the new neighbors

would put upon town resources.

Grayzel said the owner's inability to find tenants was not a sufficient reason to approve a townhouse development plan.

"He bought the property knowing the state of the commercial market," Grayzel said. "Now he's trying to turn it around and flip it into something else."

The owner requested a rezoning of the property from office and research laboratory use to residential use, which was approved by the planning board and introduced to the township committee as an ordinance last month.

If the township committee adopts the ordinance, the owners must reapply to the planning board for approval to build the townhouses, said Sonia Santiago, the planning board's secretary.

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