

Honeywell International development plans to be heard Nov. 29 in Morris Twp.

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MORRIS TWP. – Honeywell International will appear before the Planning Board at a special meeting at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 29 at Town Hall to discuss plans to develop its 147-acre property at the corner of Columbia Turnpike and Park Avenue for condominiums, a hotel and other office space.

Township Planner Adrian Humbert, Planning Board Attorney Brian Burns and Township Engineer James Slate appeared before the Township Committee at its regular meeting last Wednesday to explain what the Honeywell plan would need to move forward.

Both Burns and Humbert noted the massive scale of the development, explaining it could take as long as 20 years to fully develop the property but noted Honeywell plans on completing it in 10 years.

The project is possible because in July, Gov. Christopher Christie hammered out a deal to keep Honeywell International headquartered in New Jersey by allowing it to build facilities for other offices, a hotel and residential units.

Burns explained how the development would proceed. First, the master plan would have to be revised to allow the new concept. Next the zoning would have to be changed. Current zoning only allows office construction; the new zone would have to allow residential units.

Next a General Development Plan (GDP) submitted by Honeywell would have to be accepted by the Township Committee. The GDP would give Honeywell a vested right to build the whole development within 20 years but would still allow the Planning Board the right to approve individual aspects of the plan during that time as Honeywell presents individual site plans for subdivisions,

Mayor H. Scott Rosenbush said even though Honeywell has the deal from the governor, the township would look at the plan carefully and would not automatically grant any development.

While the actual Honeywell plan was not discussed, residents spoke of their concerns.

Resident Fred Spohr noted the traffic signal at Columbia Turnpike and Park Avenue already produced traffic headaches. He claimed the addition of the Honeywell project combined with the development of the old Exxon tract farther south on Park Avenue in Florham Park would make traffic “untenable.”

Slate agreed the traffic congestion would only worsen. He said Honeywell and the township would likely work on a bypass system similar to the one ongoing at the Exxon tract.

Resident Lee Goldberg asked that Honeywell consider dedicating ball fields for township use considering the township is always on the lookout for acceptable playing fields for the township’s numerous recreation activities.

Former Democratic Committeeman Jeff Grayzel asked the committee to consider even allowing the scope of the development noting residents enjoy living in the township precisely because there are no large developments.

“Keep density out,” Grayzel said.

On Oct. 18, Honeywell had come before the Planning Board with a preliminary plan to build a 250-room hotel and 313 townhouses and condominium units, plus renovate about 900,000 square-feet of office space on its site.

Two styles of residential units would be constructed and range in approximate price from \$400,000 to \$550,000.

But an alternate proposal also offered to the board calls for fewer condos and town houses, but would contain a 416-unit continuing care retirement community.

The company uses about one-third of the campus, according to Rosenbush, who also sits on the Planning Board.

On site now are several buildings once used for lab work that are now stand vacant and would be razed under the new plan.

The new construction could contribute at least \$3.7 million in yearly tax revenue when completed, according to company consultants who appeared before the board.

Township officials were relieved when Christie worked out the deal with Honeywell, which had said it would have to leave Morris Township in the current economic climate.

Rosenbush had said at the time the township by law could not offer the kind of the deal the governor was able to and said he was grateful the state had a governor who was business friendly. The plan comes at a time of financial uncertainty for the township, which was forced to lay off 17 municipal workers earlier in the year to overcome budget shortfalls.

The company's property value is expected to increase on the tract from \$64 million to \$228 million under the plan, according to economist Jay Biggins, who was hired by Honeywell to conduct a fiscal analysis of the new project.

If the Honeywell is built as planned by 2018, tax revenues would increase to \$5.1 million per year, according to projections. In 2009, the company paid \$1.47 million in property taxes, Biggins said.

Honeywell had planned to leave New Jersey for another state, but decided in July to stay after Christie offered the company a proposal to boost the company's tax credits as an incentive.

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