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Traffic concerns surround housing plan in busy area

By Jason Tait
Staff Writer

METHUEN -- A developer plans to build 98 homes off Tyler Street, raising concerns it will add to an already dangerous traffic problem at the Interstate 93 rotary.

And there may be nothing anybody can do about it.

Of the 98 homes in the proposed \$25.4 million Tyler Village subdivision, 24 are labeled affordable under the state's Chapter 40B law.

The law allows developers to sidestep zoning regulations if 25 percent of the units are sold below the market rate to lower-income people. In Methuen, that means someone who earns \$60,000 or less a year.

The 40B law applies only if less than 10 percent of a city's housing stock is classified as affordable. Methuen's current rate is 7.67 percent, said Curt T. Bellavance, the city's community development director.

Tewksbury developer Robert Ahern plans to build Tyler Village on 54 acres of forest and wetlands in the city's West District. It will sit near the recently built 89-home Stone Castle Development on the same roadway.

Traffic studies filed by the developer with the city's Community Development office show that Tyler Village would add 1,050 daily vehicle trips to Tyler Street. Currently, there are about 1,300 trips on the street.

Tyler will also be located about three-quarters of a mile from Route 113, a major throughway for commuters and commercial trucks using the I-93 rotary.

City Councilor Kenneth R. Willette Jr., who lives in the West District, said he opposes the project because it would add too much traffic to an area already reeling from new housing and commercial developments.

He said the 40B project can be rejected by the city if it can be proven Tyler Village poses a danger to public safety.

"To me, it's in the wrong location," Willette said. "How do you deal with that additional traffic in that area? It is a public safety and quality of life issue."

Willette lists commercial truck traffic on Route 113 coming from Dracut, commuter gridlock around the rotary, and possible difficulty for emergency vehicles to traverse those neighborhoods.

"It's a recipe for disaster," he said. "I will focus like a laser beam on the public safety issue."

Bellavance said the city's department heads will review the project in the coming weeks to determine how the subdivision will impact the area.

A public hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals for the project is scheduled for Sept. 22 at 7 p.m. at City Hall.

Ahern could not be reached for comment. His previous developments include Forest Street Meadows in Haverhill, 31 homes; New Boston Estates in Dracut, 17 homes; Attitash Estates in Merrimac, 7 homes; and Merrimack Meadows in Tewksbury, 225 units.

According to construction plans filed with MassHousing, the state agency that approves Chapter 40B projects, the single-family homes will sell for about \$344,472. The discounted houses for lower-income people will sell for about \$135,500. The subdivision will include a tennis court, swimming pool and workout areas.



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