

## First inclusionary zoning project comes to Darien

Written by Susan Shultz

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A rendering of the new mixed-use project proposed at 745 Post Road, at the corner of Academy Street, by David Genovese and Penny Glassmeyer, that includes office and apartment space. The proposal is currently before the Planning & Zoning Commission.

A mixed-use project proposal on the Post Road recently presented to the Planning & Zoning Commission is the first to be subjected to the town's inclusionary zoning regulations, put in place in 2009.

The project, put forward by Darien developers David Genovese and Penny Glassmeyer, would include approximately 6,000 square feet of office space and eight apartments at 745 Post Road.

Genovese told The Darien Times the apartments would be larger than the current options available and could cater to empty nesters or just those desiring larger apartments. They would include options like a powder room and a covered garage.

"These would be a walk to shops and the train station and a walk to Goodwives Shopping Center. It is a great location for mixed use development," Genovese said.

The town's inclusionary zoning regulation requires any developer building five or more housing units must make 12% of the project affordable units.

The impetus behind the regulation is to get the town further down the road to compliance with state statute 8-30g.

Last October, the town was granted a four-year moratorium from the statute, which allows developers to possibly overstep local zoning laws in towns that do not have the required 10% affordable housing stock.

Genovese said that any market rate units proposed and built in the town would take Darien further away from the 10% goal without the inclusionary zoning regulation requiring affordable units to be included. Right now, the town is at approximately 2.4% affordable housing stock, according to First Selectman Dave Campbell.

A current project approved before the inclusionary zoning regulation on the former Procaccini property on Hoyt Street and Wakemore Lane, which includes 60 market-rate units, just began construction.

Genovese said the project also has 10 parking spots from the building across the street.

He described the site, at the bottom of Academy Street, as "tricky" because as a corner lot, it has two front yards.

Genovese said they are working with the town to offer more flexibility on setbacks if they offer more concessions on the affordable housing front.

The inclusionary zoning can be satisfied in one of three ways, Genovese said. The developers can build affordable housing on the proposed project site, in a separate place entirely, or they can offer a fee in lieu of building it.

Genovese said they have left it in the town's hands as to what works best. He recently spoke at a Board of Selectmen meeting regarding proposed senior housing on Edgerton Street at the location of the current senior center.

The proposed housing is part of the proposed Shuffle plan that would move the senior center to Town Hall, and the Board of Education to the former library building at 35 Leroy, leaving the Edgerton site available. A non-profit group is putting together a plan to work with a developer to build 20 units of senior affordable housing at that site.

The Board of Selectmen recently voted to approve the Shuffle plan, and at that meeting, Genovese suggested the fee in lieu of building affordable housing at 745 Post Road could go toward start up costs at the Edgerton site.

Genovese said he wants to make sure no one thinks he is trying to "get out of building affordable housing" by offering the fee, but instead feels like working toward building the senior housing at Edgerton would produce a lot more housing in the end.

He also said the developers have been working with neighbors and they have been supportive of the new project.

"I think the issue is this is the right place, with the right density, it's got a lot of positive attributes," Genovese said.

He said given the size of the site and the number of units he's proposing, it works out to be 15 units per acre.

Genovese said his project gave something concrete to compare to some other projects, such as 8-30g projects proposed by potential affordable housing developers Chris and Margaret Stefanoni, which are approximately 30 units per acre.

He pointed out that those are two times the density of his project, and "shows you why 30 units per acre is too much in this kind of environment."

Genovese said making smaller units could get more in, but then "you're creating more parking demand and more traffic."

"Thirty units don't look right, this gives you a data point to compare it to and see why something like that doesn't feel quite right," he said.

The Stefanonis are currently appealing two decisions by P&Z to approve two of their projects in residential neighborhoods with major modifications, including cutting down the number of units. Another Stefanoni project on Leroy and West just began the trial process.

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The town's inclusionary zoning regulation came under scrutiny last year by the U.S. Department of Justice's civil rights division due to a "priority population" section, since removed, that gave the first option for those units to those with a tie to Darien. Last November, the town replaced the section with more generic wording.

The 745 Post Road project returns to P&Z on Tuesday, Oct. 18.

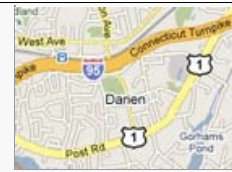
Genovese said because it is the first project to be subject to inclusionary zoning, the commission might take longer to complete its review, given the added need to decide what would be best for the town out of the three options. However, Genovese said he and Glassmeyer are ready to proceed as soon as possible.

Jeremy Ginsberg, director of the town's Planning & Zoning Department, said that most of the feedback he's gotten from neighbors has been positive.

He said that the inclusionary zoning aspect of the project is new to the commission and they plan to continue the discussion of what would work out best for the town on Oct. 18.

P&Z Chairman Fred Conze told The Darien Times he couldn't comment on the merits of the project while it was still under review, but said the commission continues to weigh which of the three inclusionary zoning options would get the "most mileage" for the town.

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