

Neighbors are heard, developer reduces footprint



Xerxes Wilson, The News Journal

2:47 p.m. EST December 21, 2015



Buy Photo

(Photo: WILLIAM BRETZGER/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

9

CONNECT

TWEET

LINKEDIN

COMMENT

EMAIL

MORE

Developers planning a subdivision on the Our Lady of Grace Home for Children property near Newark have reduced the footprint of the controversial proposal.

The new plan, submitted for New Castle County review last week, slightly reduces the number of homes planned and reconfigured the layout to protect wetlands on the property. Larry Tarabicos, attorney for developer Joe Setting of Montchanin-based Setting Properties Inc., said the plan was reworked based on suggestions by state environmental officials and input from neighbors.

Developers had previously pitched a 282-unit housing development on the 182-acre property just east of Holy Family Church off Chestnut Hill Road east of Newark. The development would have covered the current orphanage site and stretched across the southern side of the Todd Estates II subdivision.

Hundreds packed Holy Family Church in July to express concerns about traffic and drainage with the development's encroachment on wetland and planned street connections to neighboring subdivisions.

The new plan condenses the development to no longer stretch across the back of Todd Estates. Thirteen fewer homes will be built and the project's overall footprint will be reduced by 5 to 10 percent, Tarabicos said. The new configuration will be good news to Todd Estate's residents, but was largely motivated by the presence of wetlands in the previous proposal's footprint.

Tarabicos said officials from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control suggested protecting those wetlands because they are home to sensitive species of salamanders and other creatures.

"We agree that those areas need protection," Tarabicos said. "There is nothing that requires it. It is being done voluntarily."



Jessica Stewart-Collins speaks against the proposed development of the Our Lady of Grace property near Newark on Thursday. (Photo: Xerxes Wilson/STAFF)

Reorganizing the development to protect those wetlands, largely located on the eastern portion of the property, also led to proposed street connections to the new development on Pearson Road through Todd Estates and Waverly Drive through the Breezewood subdivision being removed from the proposal. At the meeting in July, neighbors expressed concerns those quiet neighborhood streets would be flooded with new traffic.

"By protecting that sensitive area, you also accomplished the other issues that came up as hot topics with the community," Tarabicos said. "Even if it has a slight reduction in the number of homes, the changes make sense for us."

The new plan calls for 39 single family homes, 58 twin-style homes and 112 townhouses.

A 60-unit apartment complex remains part of the proposal. Those apartments will be marketed to those with an annual household income of \$25,000 to \$48,000 by the Felician Sisters, Franciscan sisters organized under a nonprofit based in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The group operates services like nursing homes, schools and pantries. The property has been vacant since last year.



Our Lady of Grace Home on East Chestnut Hill Road near Newark. (Photo: WILLIAM BRETZGER/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

The sisters have had a presence on the property since 1931 operating an orphanage, children's home and kindergarten at different periods. They regularly rented out the large open space beside the orphanage for carnivals, and the property hosted a circus for generations until 2014 when the sisters left the property.

The sisters will be able to raise approximately \$7.8 million of the \$11.8 million needed to build the apartments through a federal low-income housing tax credit program. The developers will be able to build an additional 42 homes because of the presence of the affordable-housing apartments.

The development proposal does not require a rezoning, but it will still take at least several months to go through the county's approval process.

Contact Xerxes Wilson at [\(302\) 324-2787](tel:3023242787) or xwilson@delawareonline.com. Follow [@Ber_Xerxes](https://twitter.com/Ber_Xerxes) on Twitter.