



Wenham Zoning Board Oks 60 Units of Elderly Housing

Project may be eligible for \$1.8 million in public funding

Posted: Tuesday, June 23, 2015 10:05 pm

By Dustin Luca Staff Writer

WENHAM — The Zoning Board of Appeals has approved a 60-unit elderly affordable housing project on Maple Street, but the project must still work its way through an appeals process and secure funding.

Harborlight Community Partners wants to build an affordable housing project on a 3.5-acre piece of land in West Wenham. Harborlight specializes in assisted living, elderly and family housing on the North Shore. The organization is headquartered in Beverly.

Since the project was first proposed last fall, it has been given the go-ahead from the town's Board of Health and Conservation Commission, according to Andrew DeFranza, executive director of Harborlight.

The Zoning Board of Appeals unanimously approved the project last Thursday, according to DeFranza. The comprehensive permit approved included about 25 pages of requirements the project has to adhere to going forward.

"We've essentially gone through the local process," DeFranza said. "We felt pretty good about getting almost everybody to be excited and supportive."

There is a 20-day appeal period for the ZBA decision, DeFranza said. The project is already facing an appeal on its Board of Health approval.

Attorney Dan Hill, based in Charlestown, is representing a group of residents opposed to the project who are behind the Board of Health appeal.

That appeal is based on the septic system used on the property, which Hill said will be discharging 6,600 gallons of sewage into a 20,000 gallon septic tank and leaching field on the 3.5-acre site.



An artist's rendering shows the affordable housing development planned for the elderly in Wenham.

Courtesy illustration

“The most immediate concern is whether or not this system has been designed properly,” Hill said. “We think the design engineer for the septic system has taken some liberties in how he designed this.”

The group is also concerned about the dollar amount attached to the sale of the property, should Harborlight buy it from its present owner, and the use of public funding to pay for the site’s construction.

Seeking out the funding would be the next step in the process, should the appeal and any future appeals fail, according to DeFranza.

Possible revenue sources include the Community Preservation Commission and Housing Trust. Both groups supported giving a combined \$1.8 million to the project, but the request was pulled off the table by Harborlight to focus on the permitting process first, according to DeFranza.

“We probably won’t come back to the Housing Trust or the CPC until the appeal has run its course,” DeFranza said.

The Board of Selectmen and town residents will also have an opportunity to weigh in on the project at that point, according to DeFranza.

“The Board of Selectmen hasn’t taken any stand on this,” he said. “If it goes through CPC for funding, it’ll go to Town Meeting and the Board of Selectmen will probably be asked for their opinion. And if it goes to the Housing Trust, the Board of Selectmen has to vote on that.”

For more on this story or other story-related inquiries, email reporter Dustin Luca at dluca@salemnews.com, call 978-338-2523 or message @DustinLucaSN on Twitter.

http://www.salemnews.com/news/local_news/wenham-zoning-board-oks-units-of-elderly-housing/article_bdda6409-8fd0-5f73-9217-4b578301131e.html