

Carvel developers 'starting from the beginning'

By Erikah Haavie`, Special to the Freeman

PINE PLAINS -- The would-be developers of the Carvel property are working to put "something else on the table" for the town Planning Board to consider.

Exactly what changes will be made to the large-scale development proposal remain to be seen, but project representatives say they're working on significant revisions with conservation as a focus.

Town Attorney Warren Replansky described it as a "fairly major change in the direction of the project."

The goal is to develop a plan that works for developers while addressing the environmental, social and cultural concerns of the community, said Daniel Stone, an engineer with the Chazen Cos.

A total of 951 residences initially were proposed for the 2,200-acre property, split between the towns of Milan and Pine Plains. The Durst Organization and Landmark Land Co. are partners in the planned housing and golfing community.

Numerous local residents opposed the size and scale of the project during recent public hearings.

During a recent meeting of the Pine Plains Planning Board, the developers introduced their newly hired ecologist, Alex Felson, director of ecological design with EDAW, a design firm with offices worldwide.

Felson, who described himself as an active ecologist with a graduate degree in landscape architecture, gave a detailed report on his analysis of the site. He said he looked at vegetation and the watershed on the site and considered how to keep development to a minimum in the watershed. His work could mean reduced development in the lower part of the watershed and more development around Lake Carvel.

A 300-foot buffer around state-designated wetlands was recommended by Felson, and where "species of special concern," such as Jefferson salamanders and other amphibians, exist, buffers are being suggested.

Felson said he considered ecosystems and cultural and rural character along state Route 199 and noted that he identified seven important views along the road, including vistas of bogs, farmland and hills. The next step is to complete the environmental analysis and then develop a plan around it.

"We heard the public," Stone said. "We need some time for this to develop."

Planning Board member Sarah Jones said she was "very encouraged" by the developers' new approach but said she was confused about which direction the project was going.

"Everything is on the table," Stone said. "It's starting from the beginning. We're approaching from a conservation standpoint."

Responding to a question from Planning Board Chairman Don Bartles Jr., Felson said the definition of open space "will be fully addressed."

Nelson Johnson, an attorney with Arnold and Porter in New York City, said regardless of what changes are made, the development {would} still be a golf community.

Johnson said more information will be presented to the Planning Board in July.

"This really is a work in progress," he said.