

Portage City Council approves rezoning for massive expansion of Greenspire Apartments

By Tom Haroldson | Special to the Kalamazoo...
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Gazette / Scott Harmsen

The Portage City Council on Tuesday approved a rezoning that will allow a massive expansion of the Greenspire Apartments complex, and also allow commercial development on West Centre Avenue in front of the complex.

PORTAGE — The developers of a proposed multi-million-dollar project to expand the Greenspire Apartments and build new offices and retail along West Centre Avenue won approval from the Portage City Council on Tuesday to rezone the land.

Following a nearly two hour public hearing, the council voted unanimously to rezone the entire 95-acre site to “planned development,” clearing the way for an additional 308 apartments and five office and retail buildings.

“I applaud the different parties coming together to make a reasonable compromise,” said Councilwoman Margaret O’Brien. “I think they have met the conditions involving traffic, the environment, having the least amount of impact.”

Nearly 20 people, including six from the development team of American Village Builders and the Hinman Co., appeared to either support or oppose the project.

Some of the objections to the project were taken care of in countless meetings between the developers, area residents and council members. Compromises were made by the developer involving the number apartments (16 fewer than originally proposed), and changes to plans to rezone some property near Hampton Lake.

Council members voted unanimously to approve the rezoning after they said concerns they and residents had were dealt with for the most part, including traffic, dangers to wildlife and protection of area homes.

In addition, a petition signed by 16 area residents concerned with the project was withdrawn and two other petitions were ruled invalid.

Council members said they trusted the promises of the developers who first began developing Greenspire in 1975. In addition, they said the developer could have built more apartments with less green space and environmental protection with the current multiple-family residential zoning.

“We have had countless meetings with people — at least 30 meetings — and we believe we have resolved the issues,” said Joe Gesmundo, co-founder of AVB.



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Courtesy of AVB Construction/Hinman

Russell Mohny, who led the petition drive with concerns for the project and then withdrew it, credited the council for helping to settle the issues.

You solved the problem and thank God you did," Mohny said. "You have earned respect from all us."

The first phase of the plan will involve 36 apartments. The next phase proposes 72 apartments in 2011, "contingent upon solid market acceptance," said Greg Dobson of American Village Builders.

Site plans for the project must still be approved by the Planning Commission and the City Council. The developers indicated they will be submitting those plans soon and hope to start construction on the first phase this summer.

Some of the residents say they don't think it's such a good idea to build so close to the Gourdeck State Game Area. Because of the closeness of the project to the state land, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment has reviewed the project officials indicated they did not have concerns with the project.

A couple of residents indicated that they still had concerns about wildlife and the environment.

"I do appreciate the natural setting we have to us and I ask that you remain sensitive to that," said area resident Barbara Gerber.

A rendering shows what some of the new Greenspire Apartments would look like.



Courtesy of AVB Construction/Hinman

New retail and office space is planned for the frontage along Centre Avenue as part of the proposed expansion of Greenspire Apartments in Portage.