

Some still unhappy with American Legion property development plan

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CHAPEL HILL — Woodfield Investments has taken the next step toward developing the American Legion property by submitting a concept plan application to the town, and some residents still aren't happy about it.

Leaders at Woodfield Investments said they took residents' comments into consideration when creating the concept plan, which was submitted July 26. But some residents, including members of Chapel Hill Alliance for a Livable Town, say the changes did little to alleviate their concerns.

The submitted plan includes a maximum of 400 apartments, down from the original 600 that Woodfield Investments proposed early this year.

But CHALT says the reduction, which will leave about 400,000 square feet of residential space, isn't good enough.

"CHALT finds that Woodfield's slightly altered proposal to build 200 fewer apartments on the American Legion property is still not a good fit for the town's needs nor does it meet the principles outlined by the Council," a post on the organization's website says.

The organization adds that the town already has more than 6,000 apartments approved or in the development pipeline.

The project drew attention last year when the town council passed up its right to buy the 36-acre property in closed session, opening the door for Woodfield Investments to reach a \$10 million agreement with the leaders of Legion Post 6.

The new council held public meetings earlier this year to discuss potential uses for the site, with many residents expressing concern that the town's last green space is set to be transformed into more apartments.

The council then laid out six guiding principles for a development on the American Legion property.

The council asked that Woodfield Investments explain how the project integrates with the town's vision, conduct a study to assess traffic impacts on Legion Road, contribute to a mix of housing options in town, provide a mixed-use development, help maintain the quality of life in the area and explore potential partnerships with public or private entities.

Veterans at the American Legion Post 6 have expressed frustration with this process, saying that the town passed up the chance to purchase the property and now shouldn't stand in the way of redevelopment.

"These are men and women who have been to battle to protect the nation's way of life and I think they deserve better than to become pawns in Chapel Hill politics," Bill Munsey, commander of the Post, wrote in a letter to the council.

As part of its concept plan application, Woodfield Investments addressed the six principles. Although a traffic study would still have to be conducted, leaders wrote, they hoped to mitigate traffic concerns by offering additional housing and office space, thereby reducing the number of people who commute into Chapel Hill.

The proposal also includes 50,000 to 100,000 square feet of office space and 50,000 square feet of mixed use or civic space. Leaders from Woodfield Investments say the company is in preliminary talks with the YMCA regarding potential uses of the civic space.

The Community Design Commission reviewed the plan and heard comment from the public last last month. The town council is scheduled to review the application Sept. 19.

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