

## **Holmdel moves to control Alcatel-Lucent redevelopment | ind.gmnews.com | Independent**

### **Holmdel moves to control Alcatel-Lucent redevelopment**

Committee introduces plan for 472-acre site; declares area in need of redevelopment

BYMIKE DAVIS

Staff Writer

HOLMDEL — Officials are taking steps to ensure that the redevelopment of the Alcatel Lucent tract has a positive impact for the township and taxpayers.

Last week the Holmdel Township Committee voted to introduce its redevelopment plan for the 472-acre tract on Crawfords Corner Road.

The vote followed a decision by both the committee and the Holmdel Township Planning Board to designate the tract as an area in need of redevelopment.

Mayor Patrick Impreveduto said the township was introducing the redevelopment plan because the process needs to move forward.

“The purchasers are really anxious. I think they really want to close on this property as quickly as possible,” Impreveduto said on May 3.

“I don’t believe that waiting an additional month will be advantageous to anyone, especially since this plan is broad enough and there are specifics that will still be worked out in pieces as we move forward.”

On May 17 the committee will vote on the adoption of the redevelopment plan.

Committeeman Larry Fink was the only dissenting vote against introducing the plan, citing the committee’s own inability to review the plan before the introduction.

“I really would have liked to have seen the plan before we adopt an ordinance to introduce it and set a public hearing date,” Fink said on May 3.

“I would suggest we postpone the introduction until we all have an opportunity to see the plan and offer comments to the planner so she can include those comments and then present a consensus revision that includes our modifications.

“Then, we can introduce a plan that we’ve all had a chance to see. To me, that seems to be a more logical way to proceed,” he continued.

Impreveduto replied that the redevelopment plan, as introduced, is not very different from the rehabilitation plan introduced in December 2011.

That plan was not adopted after legal representation for Alcatel-Lucent filed a formal protest with the township and it was assumed that the committee could not expect a supermajority of votes in favor of the plan.

In February, Alcatel-Lucent announced that Miami-based Elsie Sterling Oversight LLC was under contract to purchase the property with MBI Project Management to oversee the redevelopment process.

The redevelopment plan permits many of the uses previously outlined in the rehabilitation plan and previous plans for the property.

But unlike the rehabilitation plan, the redevelopment plan directly calls for keeping the 2.1 million-square-foot building, once headquarters of Bell Labs, designed by renowned architect Eero Saarinen.

“The plan requires adaptive reuse of the existing main building, as well as new buildings and structures which will provide additional revenue to foster the rehabilitation of the main building and infrastructure on the site,” the redevelopment plan states.

The plan permits the building to host a variety of uses, including up to 50,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space, a hotel and conference center, an ambulatory surgical center and assisted living facilities.

Township Administrator Andrew Katz said the redevelopment plan would move the process forward, but wouldn’t set any of the crucial details of redevelopment in stone.

“There will be the selection of a redeveloper or redevelopers, and then there are development agreements that are entered into to get into the various specifics of site layout and all the other terms and conditions that will go into the execution of this redevelopment project,” Katz said on May 3.

“There are still a number of discussions and documents that are going to be drawn up which offer greater specificity regarding the execution [of the plan].”

Those decisions would be made by the Township Committee, Katz said.

Deputy Mayor Eric Hinds voted to introduce the redevelopment plan, saying he understood Fink’s concerns but felt confident the township could maintain its position during negotiations.

“If we don’t like something, I feel we’ll be able to defend ourselves and make adjustments,” Hinds said.

“I don’t feel that there’s any downside [to introducing the plan], because if there’s anything that needs to be tweaked, we have the power to tweak it. We’re not entering into a nonrefundable contract in any sense of the word.”

The redevelopment plan came two days after the Holmdel Township Planning Board voted to designate the Alcatel-Lucent tract as an area in need of redevelopment.

The designation gives the township the right to act as the redevelopment authority in all negotiations and plans for the property.

“We’re trying to put every tool we have in our toolbox to proceed with negotiations for this project,” Impreveduto said on May 3.

“And if it’s tax abatements or eminent domain, why not have them there? I’m not saying we’ve had any discussion with them about that, but why not have that tool if we need it?”

Township Planner Jennifer Beahm, of CMEAssociates, recommended the designation to the Planning Board and in a March 2012 report.

The Alcatel-Lucent tract satisfies a number of criteria needed to designate an area in need of redevelopment, Beahm said, including substandard buildings, buildings rendered obsolete and a lack of tax utilization.

“The existing structure on the subject property is obsolete in its design and layout; has remained stagnant and vacant with seemingly no private-sector interest in repurposing the structure for uses permitted in the ... zoning district,” Beahm’s report states.

In 1997 the township collected more than \$4.5 million in property taxes on the property, the report states.

In 2010, it collected just over \$520,000.

“[It] has been experiencing a precipitous decline in ratables generated for Holmdel Township; and finally, offers an opportunity to utilize Smart Growth planning principles to accommodate redevelopment for the growth of Holmdel Township,” Beahm’s report continues.

On May 7, Alcatel-Lucent spokeswoman Mary Ward declined to comment on the introduction of the new redevelopment plan.

The Holmdel Township Committee is next scheduled to meet on May 17.

Contact Mike Davis at [mdavis@gmnews.com](mailto:mdavis@gmnews.com).