

Lucent redevelopment plan generates concerns | ind.gmnews.com | Independent



Lucent redevelopment plan generates concerns

Township schedules public hearing at 1 p.m. Dec. 20

BYMIKE DAVIS

Staff Writer

Holmdel residents are registering concerns about the scope of the redevelopment plan for the 472-acre Alcatel-Lucent property.

At two recent forums, many criticized zoning changes proposed in the plan and faulted the 19-day time period from the plan's Dec. 1 introduction to its Dec. 20 public hearing and presumed adoption. "This whole redevelopment plan got sprung on us on short notice, and I still don't understand what the big hurry is," said Jenni Blumenthal at the Dec. 12 meeting of Citizens for Informed Land Use (CILU).

Blumenthal, CILU vice president, said the plan is being introduced and scheduled to be adopted much too quickly and without proper input from the public. "If we all show up, the township may get the message that we are really concerned about this issue," she said,

Friends of Holmdel Open Space member Janet Jackel said at the CILU meeting, held in the Holmdel Community Center, that the plan remains vague in its language about what can go on the property.

"It seems to be full of escapes from imposing anything. In many places, it's saying, 'this use' or 'this development is permitted.' It doesn't say it is required. There's a lot of escape hatches here," she said.

Ralph Blumenthal repeated his previous assertion that the document is not consistent with the township's master plan.

“[The master plan states] Lucent should be primarily office and research facilities,” Blumenthal said at the Dec. 6 Planning Board meeting, noting that the board’s goal was to determine if the plan is consistent with the township’s master plan.

“To me, it appears that this proposed zoning changes those uses to significantly more uses than what the master plan discusses for the property,” Blumenthal said.

“To me, that is an inconsistency.”



At the CILU forum, Blumenthal reiterated that point.

“The current zoning is for office-laboratory. It’s intended to be office-laboratory. This plan permits dramatically more than the ones described for the property in the master plan. And yet, they are calling it consistent.”

The long-anticipated Alcatel-Lucent redevelopment plan calls for mixed use of the 2 million-square-foot building, including retail, restaurant, office, medical, hotel and limited residential space.

On the site, the plan permits athletic fields, a wellness center, a golf course, a 350,000-square-foot athletic field house, an amphitheater and as many as 30 single-family homes.

Township Planner Jennifer Beahm, of CMEAssociates, acknowledged in a Dec. 2 interview that the plan boils down to a zoning change from office and laboratory to mixed use.

“There are a number of goals identified [in the master plan regarding] economic development, which are to achieve tax stability, utilize high-quality ratables that also reflect favorably on the image or identity of the township,” Beahm said in the Dec. 2 interview.

“When we [declared the property in need of rehabilitation in May], the promotion of economic development was significant, and furthering this is consistent with the township’s master plan.”

On Dec. 6, Jim McCorkel told the Planning Board that the various structures permitted on the site would bring more roads, driveways and parking lots, jeopardizing the goal of keeping open space on the property.

“The scope of possibilities, if realized, could be developed in such a way that it would present both a visual and practical violation of the intent of the last many years of planning in Holmdel,” McCorkel said.

He added that the redevelopment could have an effect on residents outside the property, such as farmers who grow corn on the land.

“I don’t think people are thinking in those terms here, and I think you should be,” McCorkel said.

He also expressed concern that the plan does not mention the site’s formal preservation.

“There’s no mention of the fact that it has been approved by the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection [DEP]’s Historical Preservation Office as a monument,” McCorkel said at the Dec. 6 meeting.

“Not only for the Bell Labs building, which was designed by Eero Saarinen, and the inventions that were made on the site,” he continued, “but also for the landscape architecture by SasakiWalker.”

CILU members expressed concern about the haste and manner leading up to the introduction and possible adoption of the redevelopment plan.

“Every so often there’s a big show where the developer puts on a presentation in a large forum. But there’s not a lot of ongoing small sessions where some dialogue with the community takes place,” CILU President Anthony Cooper said.

On Dec. 6, Cooper said the redevelopment plan could assist Holmdel in preventing the DEP from extending sewer service to the property as part of its proposed regional Wastewater Management Plan (WMP).

“I hope that, with this in hand, the township will be able to strongly defend this plan in any fallout with respect to the WMP,” Cooper said.

“When you make a move of this nature, litigation is probably inevitable.”

Holmdel officials and many residents have vehemently opposed installing sewers on the property on the basis that it would facilitate large-scale housing development.

Clinton Andrews, a professor at Rutgers University’s Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, told the CILU forum that the adoption of a redevelopment plan is a milestone in the process of redeveloping the Alcatel-Lucent property, but that it should incorporate as much input from the public as possible.

There is no rush, Andrews said, because the timeframe for the redevelopment could take another 10 years to come to fruition.

“Creating a redevelopment plan does not create redevelopment,” he said.

“It still needs the wherewithal, finances and expertise that’s going to come from a private

developer. If no one is developing anything, nobody will develop that property either.”

The Township Committee will hold its public hearing on the Alcatel-Lucent redevelopment plan at 1 p.m. Dec. 20, prior to the start of Hanukkah that evening.

The plan can be downloaded at holmdeltownship.nj.com.

Contact Mike Davis at mdavis@gmnews.com.