

WAYLAND

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Builder says Town Center plan is dead

By Kristen Green, Globe Correspondent | November 6, 2005

A developer who wanted to build an ambitious mixed-use project in the heart of Wayland says he will abandon his plans and build condominiums instead, after voters last week rejected a zoning change needed for his project.

Dean Stratouly, one of the developers who had proposed the Wayland Town Center project, said he placed a call to his architect at 8:30 the morning after the vote, asking him to begin drawing up plans for condos on the Route 20 site. Stratouly said he also plans to lease the existing office building on the property.

He said he would "absolutely not" bring the Town Center project back to the town in a scaled-down format.

The project would have been the largest in the town's history. The development, which combined retail space, offices, and homes, required a zoning change that needed two-thirds approval to pass at a Special Town Meeting Tuesday. The measure received 55 percent of the vote.

Stratouly said the two-thirds requirement is a difficult threshold to cross.

"I am not sanguine that it could ever be reached and I am not going to spend the time and money trying to come up with alternatives," said Stratouly, president of The Congress Group Inc. of Boston. The company had partnered with Streetscape, a subsidiary of KGI Properties of Boston, to propose the \$90 million project.

Michael Tichnor, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, who said the project would be a windfall for the town, said he would encourage Stratouly and his partners to come back with a new proposal, although he said he has no reason to think they will.

"They made it quite clear that they're moving on," he said. "We have to assume as a town that this was our opportunity for a Town Center proposal, that they're not going to come back.

"The town has lost a tremendous opportunity," he said.

But opponents of the project, who objected to the size of the project and expressed concerns about the traffic problems it would create, were pleased with the outcome.

Alan D. Mandl, a member of Wayland Citizens Against Reckless Development, said residents are "smarter than we were being given credit for."

"It was extremely gratifying that a large number of voters got past the public relations, got past the developers' hype, and looked at the facts," he said.

The developers had circulated DVDs portraying a bustling Town Center project and handed out hundreds of free ice cream bars.

Mandhl said the developers' threat to pull out of the project if the zoning change was not approved was a ploy that backfired.

"I think the town reacted negatively to the scare tactic," he said.

He said he thinks it will be difficult for the developer to rent the office space, once home to Raytheon Co. and later occupied by Polaroid. He predicted that the

developer will come back with a new proposal, and said he hopes the next time around more thought will be given to the strong sentiment for what he called "a real town center" -- a project focused around small shops, rather than anchored by a large supermarket.

The proposal had divided the town. Supporters said the project would be a boon to the town's commercial tax base and would improve quality of life.

Opponents worried about traffic problems it would create at Route 20's intersection with routes 27 and 126, and said it would strain town services.

Town boards were split on whether to support the zoning change.

Four boards voted against recommending approval, including the Planning Board, which said the size of the project conflicted with the town's character and would likely introduce traffic, water, and wastewater problems

Selectmen, however, voted unanimously to support the change and entered into an agreement with the developer that promised at least \$3 million to the town if the project were built.

The zoning change was needed to allow the multiple uses on the site.

The developers' most recent proposal called for 10,000 square feet of office space and 190,000 square feet of retail space, including a 48,000-square-foot grocery store. It allowed for 210,000 square feet of residential space, or up to 120 units, and also set aside land for the town to build a 40,000-square-foot municipal building, possibly a library or a town office.

Becky Regan, vice chairwoman of the Planning Board, said she was pleased with the vote. She said she hopes the developers can come up with a smaller project that would be acceptable to everyone.

"Certainly, there's a possibility they will not come back. There's also a possibility they will come back," she said.

Stratouly said residents had gotten "mired in details" of the project far too early in the process. He said that trying to get the zoning changed had been "a lesson in civics."

He said he was disappointed that a year's worth of work had left him back where he started and said he was still trying to digest the meaning of the vote.

"I don't know what will make this town happy," he said. ■