

Committee Recommends Pinnacle Heights Deal

NEW BRITAIN - The Common Council's committee on planning, zoning and housing recommended approval of a \$6 million deal to sell the former Pinnacle Heights public housing project to developer Robert Landino of Centerplan.

The only holdout on the council was alderman Paul Catanzaro, who has been against the plan from the beginning and said he would prefer to see some single-family homes instead.

The full council must still vote on the deal, but most people in attendance favored it.

"The long-awaited Pinnacle Heights Project finally has a developer," said Ann Mikulak, president of the New Britain Property Owners Association. "Only an idiot would reject it at this time. I urge the council to vote for Centerplan. We have to expand our tax base."

Leonard Chaponis, another fiscal conservative and curmudgeon, criticized chairwoman Silvia Cruz and the entire panel, calling them "a bunch of amateurs."

Nevertheless, he went on to say he was in favor of the Pinnacle Heights deal, as did the majority of the people who spoke at the hearing.

The city had requested proposals from developers a year ago.

In May 2007, Centerplan submitted a \$6 million bid and Ceruzzi Holding LLD submitted a \$4.5 million proposal that would have put a big-box retail store, bank and restaurant on about half the site, leaving 29 out of 63 developable acres. It's unknown what was planned for the remaining acres.

Centerplan had initially planned to build two big-box retail stores and restaurants on the entire, triangular parcel, according to plans submitted last year.

The plan would have called for more than 3,100 parking spaces.

The deal with the city assumes the entire 66 acres will be cleared before work starts.

Showing the council and the audience his company's drawings, Landino took citizens through what he called a "worst-case scenario" because it involved a considerable amount of retail - some 300,000 square feet of commercial space.

This was in stark contrast to a presentation he gave last month, in which he said he was leaning toward an office park.

He told the two dozen people in attendance that the plan is likely to change again 18 times.

All he could say for sure was that "We need to make sure the site opens to Slater Road, is visible from Interstate 84 and is insulated from the residential neighborhoods."

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