

To the Editor:

Holland Township is on the verge of applying for official state designation of a Village Center that state guidelines say should have “a minimum gross housing density of three dwelling units per acre.” Citizens of Holland will have a chance to give township officials their views on whether this is the kind of growth they want at a public hearing this coming Monday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Municipal Building at 61 Church Road.

The map of the Village Center shows it beginning at the proposed Huntington Knolls development on the Milford side of the Fox Hill condominiums and running all the way up Route 519 to the top of the hill a bit beyond Hawks Schoolhouse Road. Encompassing 1.5 square miles, the proposed Village Center would be 50 percent larger than the state recommendation of “a land area of less than one square mile.”

Holland is required to seek Plan Endorsement from the state, a process that ensures that our township’s Master Plan is coordinated with the State Plan. The concept of the Village Center will go from being a suggestion in our Master Plan to an official designation by the state if this proposal goes through. Thus, this is a last chance for Holland residents to ask questions and understand why we’re doing this.

Holland resident Kenneth Grisewood wrote a letter to this newspaper last week that included rich details on the Village Center proposal. It was so detailed because plan endorsement and center designation were invented by lawyers, so the processes and language aren’t exactly user-friendly.

Nevertheless, I believe this matter can be reduced to some simple questions to which the public deserves some clear answers. Here are some examples:

- Is there any requirement that Holland have a Village Center? In all of Hunterdon County, there is only one state-designated center, in downtown Flemington.
- Why is the proposed Village Center so large, 50 percent bigger than state guidelines? If we must have a designated center, couldn’t it be smaller?
- Aren’t we exposing Holland to future unwanted growth by asking for a designated Village Center when the state guidelines specify a minimum density of three units per acre? Most of the proposed Village Center now has houses on one-acre lots. But couldn’t developers buy adjoining properties for dense apartment developments, then sue us if we don’t rezone, saying Holland has implicitly agreed to greater density by actively seeking center designation?
- How does having a Village Center help direct growth away from the undeveloped farms and environmentally-sensitive Highlands areas of

Holland? That's how the concept is being positioned. But every proposal for these "Environs" calls for a classic suburban subdivision, with McMansions on cul-de-sacs. From a pure market perspective, how would apartments on Route 519 quell the demand for McMansions?

- Wouldn't the "Environs" be more effectively protected from unwise growth by implementing 10-acre zoning and requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) when a developer applies? These and other responsible changes are mentioned in Holland's Petition for Plan Endorsement. What isn't mentioned is that 10-acre zoning was proposed five years ago in the Master Plan and that lawyers have been reviewing the draft EIA for four years. On Monday, Holland officials can perhaps provide the public with some actual dates when the words of the Petition might become ordinances.

It seems to me that our Township Planner and local officials have an obligation to give clear answers to such questions at Monday's hearing. But it's also true that the public has an obligation to show up at the hearing, to participate, to understand and to give their views on how we should shape our future. A map of the proposed Village Center and the draft of the Petition for Plan Endorsement are available at the Municipal Building.

Democracy can be hard work. But if we don't exercise our right to express our views, then others will decide what they think is best for us. I hope to see lots of concerned Holland citizens at Monday's hearing.

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Holland Township