

5/11/06

Village Center isn't what Holland needs

To the Editor:

I attended the April 25th meeting about a proposed village center designation for Holland Township. I was very impressed by the effort of residents to protect their rural township from suburbanization. There was standing-room only turnout, and everyone was justifiably concerned that the village center designation now under consideration would encourage the kind of growth that could destroy the rural character of the township.

Representatives from two state agencies answered questions, as did the town planner, Betsy McKenzie. I learned that:

- The village center is being considered as a way to satisfy NJ state COAH (Council on Affordable Housing) requirements.
- The center plan being considered would include so many non-COAH residences that it would actually create the need for more COAH housing than it provides. (This doesn't sound like very good planning to me.)
- The size of the center can be limited to only the 87-acres of the proposed Huntington Knolls development and amply satisfy state COAH requirements.
- Nevertheless, township officials want to extend the center designation over a wider area.
- Through Center designation, township officials apparently want to change the zoning to allow for higher density, setting a dangerous precedent and inviting more and more development in the township.

When residents were asking questions, Ed Burdzy, Holland Township Committee and agricultural advisory committee member, wrote "NIMBY-Not In My Backyard" on the blackboard.

I guess he wanted to shame people for objecting to affordable housing in their township. But that was not what I and, I believe, others were objecting to. What we are afraid of is the unnecessary and dangerous idea of higher density rezoning, which township officials seem to think will prevent further development. This is bizarre thinking. Indeed, exactly the opposite is needed: lower density, 10-acre zoning.

I have no problem with complying with COAH laws. I do have a problem with developers who create more COAH problems than they solve and a township committee that doesn't prevent them from doing it.

I commend the Holland Township Committee for preserving some farmland. But that should be only the beginning of land preservation efforts in our township. One need only look next door to Pohatcong (where the law requires developers to cover COAH requirements that they create) and across the river to Tinicum and Durham townships for examples of places that are proactive in their preservation efforts. These efforts are not only retaining their townships' rural attributes but also saving their taxpayers money.

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