



## Major development on Rensch Road tabled

by JESSICA L. FINCH  
Associate Editor

With \$50 million at stake, the Amherst Town Board decided Monday that it was lacking the information needed to vote on a proposed 858-bed student housing project on Rensch Road.

(See editorial on page four)

For two hours the board listened to comments for and against the project before deciding to table the proposal. The discussion involved whether or not to rezone 13 properties on Rensch Road from RD-Research and Development to MFR-6-Multi-Family Residential District-6.

The project, which is proposed by GMH Communities, is represented by the law firm Hopkins, Garas & Sorgi, PLLC. GMH Communities has managed housing complexes for

college students and at military bases for more than 22 years and currently owns and manages 95 facilities in 32 states.

This would be the company's first project in Western New York.

Attorney Sean Hopkins said the student housing community would be a \$50 million project and would not receive any tax breaks. The estimated revenue increase to the town would be \$500,000.

"The Town Board heard a lot of testimony and evidence last night. It was a good decision to close the hearing and review the information before voting. That is what they should do," Hopkins said.

Ron Nestor, vice president of development at GMH Communities, said the company had looked long and hard in the area before settling on the Rensch Road sites.

"The acreage it provided was perfect for the

project," he said. "And its close proximity to UB."

Approximately 50 percent of the site would be green space.

Sweet Home Road has signalized lights that would benefit students walking to class, he said. GMH would also provide a shuttle for students.

A group of 11 residents have agreed to sell their parcels at a price of approximately \$200,000-\$300,000 per parcel to the developer, according to information released during the meeting. For many the possibility comes as a relief.

Hopkins said he hopes the Town Board keeps the residents in mind when making its decision because they are in a predicament.

Several residents went on the record stating that for years they had been unsuccessful in selling their homes because residential

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## Citigroup to expand at CrossPoint

The Empire State Development Corp. announced Feb. 21 that a leading financial services firm has committed to creating as many as 700 new jobs in Amherst.

Citigroup was joined at the announcement by Gov. Eliot Spitzer; Daniel Gundersen, Upstate Empire State Development Corporation chair; and Kenneth Schoetz, Upstate chief operating officer.

Citi will expand its operations by constructing a 150,000-square-foot office building adjacent to its new facilities in CrossPoint Business Park.

CrossPoint Parkway is off North French Road just west of Millersport Highway.

"Investments like Citi's speaks to the strengthening economic conditions in Western New York," said Spitzer. "Not only are they staying in New York, but they are building their operations because they recognize the value of our highly skilled workforce."

In committing to the new job development, Citi accepted a \$1.75 million economic development package from ESDC from its Jobs NOW program. Specifically, Citi will receive \$1.5 million for the construction of the new facility and the creation of 500 jobs and will be eligible for an additional \$250,000 if it adds another 150 jobs by January 2012.

Citi's Markets and Banking Division will add a variety of new jobs in Amherst, including positions in finance, capital markets and banking operations, risk and compliance and global transaction services. The positions will range from entry-level to senior management.



Gov. Eliot Spitzer announced an Empire State Development Corp. incentive package last week that will add as many as 700 new jobs at a new Citigroup

(Citi) facility in Amherst. It was Spitzer's first visit to Amherst since being elected governor in November.

Photo by Joe Eberle

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## Board looks to follow neighboring towns' condo law

by JESSICA L. FINCH  
Associate Editor

According to Amherst Town Board Member Shelly Schratz, there is a growing problem within the town involving developers changing town houses to condominiums for the assessment tax breaks.

Schratz proposed a resolution on Monday asking Town Attorney Tom Jones to draft a local law to exclude converted condominiums from reduced assessments.

"There is an increasing number of converted condos," Schratz said. "The state allows towns to make a local law to disallow this."

She wants Amherst to follow the lead of Clarence, Elma, Cheektowaga and Grand Island, towns that have previously passed such local laws.

The Cheektowaga Town Board approved its local law on Feb. 5, preventing property owners from taking advantage of the "loophole" in the state's

taxation assessments.

Under Cheektowaga's law, patio homes and other dwellings will no longer be allowed to be converted into condominiums for tax reductions.

Cheektowaga's assessor, Brian Hess, said in The Cheektowaga Bee, "This would curb the practice of converting units into condominium ownership solely for the purpose of receiving the tax benefits that would be obtained."

Hess said the town followed the

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Supervisor discusses property assessments — see page five

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Austin Oprean will accompany the Amherst Symphony Orchestra this Sunday. See page 34

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