

Benderson agrees to modifications for Town Centre proposal

by **JESSICA L. FINCH**
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Standing on more than 60 years of shell casings and pieces of clay pigeons, a representative of Benderson Development said the company would limit the size of retail structures in its proposed Town Centre project.

The announcement was made Thursday on the site of the former Buffalo Shooting Club on Maple Road.

"This newly revised design addresses many of the concerns raised throughout this process," said Eric Recoon, vice president of development and leasing for Benderson. "We have taken this a step further by agreeing to legally binding deed restrictions and conditions of development to ensure that we will not deviate from this plan."

Recoon said GB-General Business is admittedly a broad classification, often connected with "big box" developments.

"We've agreed to safeguard, protect the community," he said. "The

Natureview

(Continued from page one)

coming. The northern portion of the park was acquired in 1989 from the Faculty Student Association at the University at Buffalo, and the southern section in 1996 from the New York State Urban Development Corporation.

In December 1999, a conservation easement agreement was signed with WNY Land Conservancy only to be overturned in 2000 when a new board took office. That launched a long court process.

Following a lawsuit, it was determined that the WNY Land Conservancy was right, and the easement was upheld, Engel said.

Supervisor Satish Mohan signed the easement in February 2006, giving the town two years to complete a management plan, which was adopted Monday.

In its current state, the park is being used, Engel said.

Although the park is "use at own risk," residents are encouraged to explore some of the areas. He warns anyone going to the park to take bug spray as the mosquitos are abundant.

He also noted that volunteer events will be planned in the future for cleanup and trail work.

Lois Shriver, chairman of the Amherst Conservation Advisory Council, said the town is very fortunate to have large parks, and she believes funding needs to be dedicated to maintaining them.

Peter Warn also spoke about moving the project forward, saying it's time to get into the park, get dirty and have fun.

In support of the committee, he said a lot of manpower is going to be needed to carry out the plan and monitor the requirements of the easement.

"There is a lot that needs to be done out there to get started," he said.

Nature View Park is bordered by Tonawanda Creek to the north, Campbell Boulevard to the east, North French to the south and Sweet Home Road to the west.

In the past, board members have encouraged residents to come forward who are interested in joining a committee. Contact information is available at www.amherst.ny.us or at Town Hall, 5583 Main St., or 631-7013.

deed restriction will limit the size, height and use of the buildings. The largest will be 50,000 square feet."

He added that Benderson has agreed to conditions of development, which address architectural design, signage and traffic.

In the updated design, 13 percent of the site would be green space, open to the public for recreational purposes.

While a group of adjacent homeowners are opposing the project, two who are not spoke at the press

conference: Stephen Hunt, of Hunt Commercial Real Estate, and Robert Simmons, a former member of the Planning Board.

Hunt said he is thrilled about the project and believes the added traffic signals will slow down Maple Road traffic, which exceeds 50-60 mph in 40-45-mph zones.

"This is a world class project," he said.

Simmons said he has lived on Maple Road since 1962 and watched it grow from a two-lane country road to a five-lane super

highway.

"It is time to move on; we need something different here," he said about the site. "We need the type of neighborhood where people can walk to (facilities)."

Benderson also released the results of a survey by Barry Zeplowitz and Associates that revealed the majority of town residents support the project — 58 to 26 percent, Recoon said.

He added that when those taking the survey were informed of the 13 percent green space agreement,

that approval increased to 71 percent.

"The bottom line is that if we aren't allowed to build the Town Centre, another project will be constructed that will generate little to no real estate tax benefit but will undoubtedly create many of the impacts that are feared by those opposed to our project."

The vote on the request for rezoning to allow the Town Centre is planned for 7 p.m. Monday, June 2, at Town Hall, 5583 Main St., Williamsville.

Maple Road (Continued from page one)

June 2 so the matter can be fully reviewed and explained.

Todd Benderson's handwritten letter was displayed on the overhead, saying he agreed to the postponement.

Prior to the tabling, Schratz said she was 100 percent in favor of the project, but if forced to vote on Monday, she would vote no.

Bucki also brought to the public's attention a letter from Holly A. Sinnott, commissioner of environment and planning for Erie County, which stated that Sinnott's opinion was that the proposed Town Centre did not fit into the town's Master Plan.

However, Council Member Guy Marlette

said the cover letter from the county clearly states it does not have an opinion on the matter.

"At the end of the day, the bottom is, this is our decision," he said. "When decisions are tough, they (board members) want to go out to every outside source for their opinion. We were the ones elected to make the decisions in the best interest of the town."

He said he supported the motion to table on Monday because he didn't want anyone to feel they were being forced to vote, and he wanted to allow the extension.

But he said he won't agree to another one.

"I am not tabling anymore. It's unfair to the

Fairways Group and the developer," he said. "We are not going to continue this thing of not being able to make a decision."

The Fairways Group is a citizens' organization that was formed in opposition to the proposal.

He said that he wasn't exactly sure as to what conversation took place Monday about the traffic changes on North Forest and Maple Road.

"I don't have a problem waiting, but I am not sure how it relates to a rezoning down the road," he said.

Following Monday's meeting, Schratz said the traffic changes are a recommendation from a study, and she wants to investigate the details that go along with it.



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