

## BRIGHTON: A question of amenities vs. incentives

By Dan Goldman, staff writer

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Brighton, N.Y. — Anthony J. Costello & Son development, The Reserve, took a step forward in the Brighton Town Board's review process — but not without debate.

Council members passed a resolution accepting what's called the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the project on Wednesday, Jan. 28 after some tense exchanges between the board and Costello & Son Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Anthony J. Costello.

Council member Ray Tierney III called The Reserve the "best project proposed in the town in 25 years," but wondered if the developer was providing enough amenities, particularly payments toward an affordable housing program, in light of the incentives the developer is asking for from the town.

"My job is to ask questions and make this good project better," said Tierney. "I'm going to vote for it tonight. I think it's a good project, but I'm not going to sit here and vote for a rezoning if those kinds of things aren't addressed."

The Reserve calls for 327 condominiums, townhomes and houses on a 63-acre parcel on South Clinton Avenue. That includes 168 loft condominiums, 91 townhomes and 68 single-family residences. The site is bordered by the Erie Canal, Meridian Centre Park and I-590. Prices in The Reserve would start in the low \$200,000s.

In order to be realized, the town must vote to change the property's zoning from residential to waterfront development district.

Tierney said he was troubled by what looked like a reduction in amenities that include, among other things, boat launches, a parking lot for canal access, canal trail improvements and a park pavilion. The developer also plans to pay \$5,000 a year for five years to help sponsor a home improvement program for seniors.

The total value of the amenities package offered by the developer is now at \$994,900; it was previously estimated at about \$1.5 million in a draft Environmental Impact Statement. At the meeting, the total was in the middle — at about \$1.2 million.

The developer explained the latest reduction: The company had been including a grant from the state Canal Corp., but was told not to by town officials since that made it appear the money was being provided by the developer.

The developer, in turn, has asked the town to make allowances to its zoning to accommodate the housing. For instance, town code currently bars canalside buildings from topping 40 feet, while the loft buildings are proposed to be 74-foot high.

Tierney suggested the developer beef up its offerings to the town by paying more toward the affordable housing program. Affordable housing is defined by the county affordable housing program as a maximum gross household income of \$35,900 for a family of one or up to \$67,700 for a family of eight.

"We've had an understanding with Town Board from the beginning that it would not be possible to put affordable housing units in The Reserve because of the nature of the project," Tierney said. "It's not a development that lends itself to affordable housing."

Brighton's 2000 comprehensive plan recommends that affordable housing be offered. It has been in projects like Brickstone and St. John's Meadows.

Costello later said, "Councilman Tierney mentions that the amenities are shrinking. Well, the project has been shrinking. We lost the equivalent of two buildings on the canal. We lost about 30 additional units within the project."

Costello was referring to changes made to the original plans at the urging of town officials. Other changes to the project have included: The removal of a gate from the entrance, making the streets dedicated as opposed to private; trimming the six loft buildings to five stories rather than six; and reorienting the loft buildings to reduce a visual walled effect.

"The amenities have to shrink if the project shrinks," he said. "If they were still to give us the additional buildings and the

What's next
Town Commissioner of Public Works Tom Low said the next step for the Town Board is to adopt a findings statement on the development. Citizens will be able to speak on The Reserve when the public hearing is continued, likely on Feb. 25. For the project to advance, the town must vote to rezone the property. The town Planning Board will conduct its own review if the incentive zoning is approved by the Town Board.

'Brickstone' project advances
Also at the board meeting, council members cast another vote — advancing a second, unrelated housing proposal.
The board voted to approve a resolution for incentive zoning and rezoning for the "Brickstone" project pitched by St. John's Senior Communities. The project calls for a 102-unit senior community on a 16-acre site on Elmwood Avenue. The site is mixed-use as it contains a neighborhood center with retail space.
The project now must be reviewed by the town Planning Board. St. John's

gate, we'd be happy to go back to \$1.5 (million). That's just the bottom line."

Supervisor Sandra Frankel reminded the council that the vote was only on the environmental statement — an early step in the review process.

Tierney disagreed, later saying, "Every time something comes in front of me, it should be correct and the best effort at that point. If not you're going to listen to me (you) shouldn't give me the right to vote."

The council also heard from resident Tim Trausch, who favors The Reserve.

"With the few valuable undeveloped acres we have left, a lot of us feel that they should be used to maximize the tax revenue to help alleviate what are already high taxes," he said.

According to Costello & Son, The Reserve would pay \$2.5 million in Brighton school taxes annually, \$539,000 in town taxes annually, \$197,306 to Brighton fire and ambulance, and create 861 new construction jobs.

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Vice President Chief Communication Officer Kit Pollicove said she hopes to start construction in late spring or early summer.

It has been a long road for St. John's, as the first informal meeting with the town regarding Brickstone took place in October 2006.

"This is a milestone for us," said Pollicove. "We're thrilled and we were pleased last night there was an opportunity for St. John's to say 'thank you' to the town. We worked through it, took our time and didn't rush anything. We have a project we're going to be really proud of."