

UMRC takes next step

By Sean Dalton, Staff Writer

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The Cedars of Dexter appears to be poised to take another step this year.

Village officials and United Methodist Retirement Community representatives have been discussing over the past several months how best to handle tree replacement.

A village tree ordinance stipulates that a developer can contribute to a replacement fund, in case there is not enough room onsite to plant enough trees.

Previous funding scenarios called for contributions of \$232,287 or \$240,486.57 that would be used to plant 1,940 trees over a 20-year period starting from the contribution date.

In both cases, the tree-planting rate would be 97 trees per year.

The plan discussed during a special meeting Tuesday changed the plan from 20 to 40 years and reduced the contribution to \$210,318.45.

The slower planting rate would keep the interest bearing of the account above \$10,000 until 2027, whereas the other plans would have seen the interest fall by 2013 or 2014.

Although the tone of the meeting was one of cooperation and consensus, the matter is still up for a vote at the next Village Council meeting.

"We just would like to get the development agreement finalized, and I hope that we can do that at the next council meeting," said Village President Shawn Keough.

"We've been able to have good, solid discussions with them and now we just need council's decision on the draft agreement."

Some were completely satisfied.

"I felt it was a good legacy to leave our residents," said Trustee Donna Fisher. "It accomplishes what we can't at \$210,000."

Others bristled a bit, but felt like compromising.

"I am not happy with that number, but I will support it," Trustee Paul Cousins said. "I think it's time to move on. You can't go on moving forward forever marching in place."

Cousins was originally the one who took UMRC to task on the tree replacement fund.

The Cedars of Dexter site plan was approved in September, after being tabled due to residents of the nearby Island Hills Estates complaining of the quality of trees and shrubbery used to replace larger, more established trees and other foliage to make way for construction.

Other problems, such as soil erosion, were hashed out in talks between the village and the developer.

Execution of the development agreement has been the one of the final conditions to be met before construction could begin in earnest.

According to UMRC's liaison to the village, Kate Collins, her employer and construction Peters Building Company are "ready to go."

"We have sold 26 units, so we're close to that 'magic number' of 30," she said, referring to the economic threshold of the 60 proposed units that would allow construction to commence.

"The checks are on my desk, ready to go," Collins added.

Peters Building Co. President James Haeussler and he is ready to "put limestone in the ground and lay foundations."

"We can put 100 to 200 people to work for six months," he said.

He was also eager to accept all financial liability for placing infrastructure, such as piping into the ground on the Gordon Hall property to get connections ready for the retirement housing units, although he said that he realizes the village has obligations to "the bigger picture."

"They have a set of criteria and statutory regulations," Haeussler said. "We're all set and ready to go, but the question lies with the issue of plant capacities during storm events."

According to engineering consultant Rhett Gronevelt of OHM, the state Department of Environmental Quality has to analyze data from the Dexter wastewater treatment plant to see if wet-weather flows have been sufficiently reduced.

A full-term solution of a two-year equalization basin is also a factor.

If the matter isn't settled, the MDEQ could deny the village permits for additional capacity necessary for the Cedars of Dexter. The outcome will not be clear until February, according to Gronevelt.

The problem for the developer is that buyers like to see the actual unit they're buying before making a commitment, according to Collins.

Gronevelt warned that the pipes could go into the ground but the danger is that the village could possibly not get additional capacity for two years, a risk Haeussler said he is willing to take.

Keough tempered the discussion by saying the permit process must be followed.

"The choices are, if you have the permit you can construct (it), and if you don't, you can't.

"We hope in two months we'll have resolutions so the MDEQ will issue the permit," he added.

"At the end of January the village is hoping to show the MDEQ that the rehabilitation projects that we put in place in the winter of 2006 were effective."