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Emerson Council hears visions for business district

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EMERSON – The borough heard from two developers this week who explained their visions to recast a large portion of Emerson's central business district along Kinderkamack Road.

Representatives from JMF Properties, based in Whippany, and Woodmont Properties of Fairfield addressed the council on Tuesday night. Two other companies will present their proposals to the council later this month.

The representatives gave lengthy presentations on how to rebuild nine parcels on the west side of Kinderkamack Road – roughly from Linwood Avenue to Lincoln Boulevard, excluding two properties that have already been redeveloped by individual owners. The borough earlier this year circulated a request for proposals for what to do with that area.

"The borough is really fortunate because we have four unique and well-thought-out proposals from developers," said Bob Hoffmann, the borough administrator. "The decision the governing body is going to make is going to be difficult."

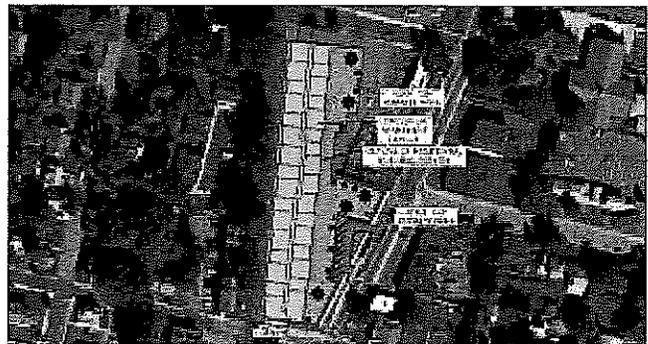
Mayor Lou Lamatina and the council members asked the representatives about the details of their proposals, their ability to meet the borough's affordable housing requirements, their willingness to help pay for other related borough projects, and whether they would accommodate the tenants and businesses currently occupying the buildings in the area proposed for redevelopment.

Kevin Codey, who represented JMF Properties, said the company hoped to build two large structures, one of which would have an attached parking garage. One three-story building near Linwood Avenue would have a mix of retail and residential units and would "act as the gateway to the township's commercial district," according to the company's written proposal. The other building, closer to Lincoln Boulevard, would be 4 stories and all residential. The proposed cost of the project would be \$32 million, Codey said.

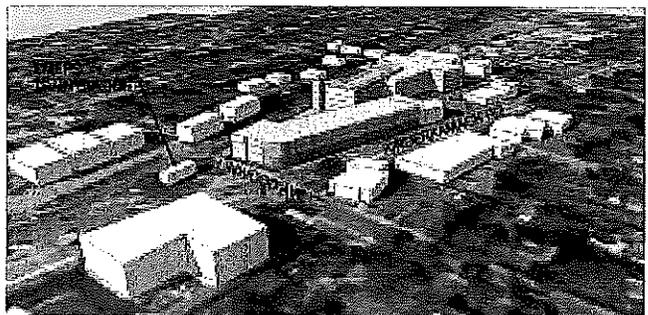
The two buildings, Codey said, would have 114 apartments, including studios and one- and two-bedroom units.

"We think this is a great site," Codey said. "We develop along train stations; it's a great project and great opportunity."

Woodmont Properties proposed one large mixed-use building stretching across the redevelopment area, with three



The plan from Woodmont Properties of Fairfield involves one large mixed-use building.



The proposal from Whippany-based JMF Properties calls for a mix of retail and residential units in one building and all residential in the other.

residential floors above a large, covered parking lot. The \$25 million project would have 8,000 square feet of retail space and a rooftop deck facing Kinderkamack Road for the building's tenants, said Stephen Santola, the representative for Woodmont.

The building would have 93 to 110 units, including a mix of studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. Santola said the building would be designed to complement the rest of Emerson's architecture.

"You're Emerson experts and you have to guide us in what Emerson wants to see," Santola said. "I think we should be taking advantage of Kinderkamack."

Both representatives said some parking would be set aside for commuters.

Council members were particularly concerned with the developers' ability to assist any currently operating businesses during construction.

Codey said he had been in contact with property owners and that JMF would work to help them to relocate during construction. Santola said Woodmont envisioned a mix of new and existing local businesses for the new building.

Members of the council also asked the two representatives about their ability to meet a court-mandated requirement that 20 percent of any building over five units be set aside as affordable housing. Neither developer said his current proposal would be economically feasible with that mandate, but both said they were open to discussing other ideas, such as offsite buildings for affordable units.

Only one resident spoke at the public comment portion of the meeting, and he had mixed feelings about the project - specifically that it could raise the cost of living in the borough.

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