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Builders pitch plans to Emerson Council

Three in running to redevelop downtown

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EMERSON – The borough will choose from among three companies to redevelop a large swath of its business district along Kinderkamack Road after hearing from the final two potential developers this week.

The Borough Council heard lengthy presentations from Hornrock Properties, based in Park Ridge, and Capodagli Properties of West New York on Tuesday night. JMF Properties of Whippany presented its plan to the council earlier this month. A fourth bidder, Woodmont Properties, based in Fairfield, bowed out of consideration late last week.

Borough officials said they expect to choose a developer in early April to recast nine parcels along Kinderkamack Road, roughly between Linwood Avenue and Lincoln Boulevard. Several businesses operate in the area, including a liquor store, a dry cleaner, an electronic-cigarette store and the borough's ambulance corps.

'We share your vision'

Hornrock Properties, which had previously responded to a separate request for proposals for a similar area last year, proposed on Tuesday to build three buildings and a parking garage on the site.

One building at Kinderkamack Road and Linwood Avenue would have 16,000 square feet of retail space with two stories of residential units above it. A pedestrian walkway would run through the ground floor to help people access the retail along Kinderkamack Road from the parking garage. Hornrock officials said they envisioned café dining along a new streetscape on Kinderkamack Road.

A second building, closer to Lincoln Boulevard, would be four stories and entirely residential. A

third building would be a three-story residential structure with parking underneath it.

Overall, the project – which Hornrock is calling “Emerson Station” – would consist of 132 residential units – a mix of studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments. It is expected to cost \$34 million, Hornrock officials said.

“The borough of Emerson deserves a downtown area in which residents, store owners, restaurateurs and people using the train can thrive,” said David Hornblass, a managing partner of Hornrock. “This is our county, our backyard, and we want to create a redevelopment that we can all be proud of. We share your vision of Emerson, and we intend to work hand in hand with you ... to make this vision a reality.”

Council members expressed concerns about the amount of parking Hornrock proposed as part of its plan. The 192 spaces in the parking garage and behind the Kinderkamack Road building did not seem sufficient to accommodate commuters, the people living in the apartments and the proposed new retail, council members said. Hornrock officials said it would be willing to work with Emerson to create more spaces.

Seniors, millennials

Capodagli Properties proposed two designs for the property – one that conformed to the RFP the borough sent out earlier this year, and another that incorporates the existing Rancho Cantina restaurant at Kinderkamack Road and Lincoln Boulevard. Capodagli officials said they spoke with the restaurant's owner who expressed interest in being incorporated into the project.

Capodagli officials said they wanted to attract senior citizens and millennials.

One building, on Kinderkamack Road closer to Linwood Av-

enue, would have two stories of apartments above 19,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor. The retail would face Kinderkamack Road and Linwood Avenue, while the 77 apartments would stretch back toward the Pascack Valley rail line in three prongs. The project would have a total of 140 apartments, they said.

The second building, which is the only portion of the project that changed with the addition of the Rancho Cantina property, would have four stories, with retail on the bottom and three stories of residential units on top that would be restricted to senior citizens, Capodagli officials said.

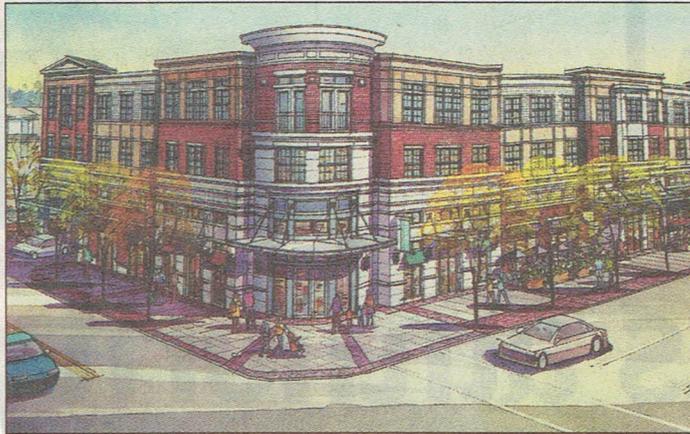
If the Rancho Cantina property were incorporated into the project, Capodagli said, the company would add 5,000 square feet of retail and could have an outdoor dining area and courtyard set back from Kinderkamack Road.

“I think you want people on the streets, you want people to be walking. You don't just want commuters who come to town, park in the garage and then leave,” said George Capodagli, the company's CEO.

“You want people to be here. I don't think you'll just have young people; I think you'll have a lot of seniors who want to rent, too. The biggest feeling we all want in our lives ... is we want to feel like we belong, and that's what we give people.”

Emerson officials asked the developers about their willingness to incorporate into their projects businesses that are operating in the redevelopment area. Both developers said they were willing to help the businesses relocate, and possibly add them to their projects once they are complete.

Debbie Agnello, whose mother owns the building in the redevelopment zone where the Cork & Keg liquor store and Ranch Clean-



A proposal from Hornrock Properties, above, would consist of 132 residential units, while Capodagli Properties envisions ground-floor retail with two stories of apartments on top.



ers operate, said she is happy Emerson is attempting to beautify the town, but she called the redevelopment process “stressful” for property owners. Particularly, she said she has issues with the proposals because they are not ideal for a liquor store and dry cleaner.

“This has been going on for many, many years,” she said. “It’s been extremely stressful. Cork & Keg and Ranch Cleaners are probably your most viable businesses in town. My mom should be able to sell the property when she wants to sell it and to whom she wants to sell it. ... It has been a long haul for us.”

Protecting businesses

Doug Doyle, a special counsel for the borough, said he believes the council is adamant about protecting existing businesses and said he thought that a business like Cork & Keg is a tenant a developer would want in the new project.

The council also insisted that the developers contribute funds to a forthcoming project to reconfig-

ure Kinderkamack Road, and toward the installation of a related stormwater line that would run through the redevelopment area. They also asked the representatives about their ability to meet a court-mandated requirement that 20 percent of any residential building with more than five units be set aside as affordable housing. The companies said they would contribute funds to the construction projects and that they would consider building affordable housing elsewhere in the borough.

Earlier this month, JMF Properties, based in Whippany, proposed building 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 with a curved façade facing the intersection of Kinderkamack Road and Linwood Avenue. The second building would be four stories tall and set back from the busy thoroughfare.

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