

# Emerson picks firm to remake business district

## Housing, stores on Kinderkamack

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EMERSON — Officials have selected a developer to transform a large portion of the borough's central business district along Kinderkamack Road.

After hearing final pitches from three developers that had responded to a request for proposals, the Borough Council selected JMF Properties of Whippany over Hornrock Properties of Park Ridge and Capodagli Properties of West New York on Tuesday night. A fourth bidder, Woodmont Properties, based in Fairfield, bowed out of consideration last month.

Each of the companies proposed constructing mixed-use buildings on nine tax lots that hug the west side of Kinderkamack Road, roughly from Linwood Avenue to Lincoln Boulevard.

Several businesses currently operate in the area, including a liquor store, a dry cleaner, an electronic cigarette store and the borough's ambulance corps. The updated plans that the companies presented on Tuesday incorporated the existing Rancho Cantina restaurant at the corner of Kinderkamack Road and Lincoln Boulevard, after the owner said he would be open to being added to a plan.

Kevin Codey, who represented JMF Properties, said he was looking forward to working with the borough.

"We're excited to get this started," Codey said after Tuesday's meeting, which lasted nearly four hours. "We believe we have a great project and it will be a great project for the borough of Emerson."

Mayor Lou Lamatina said that while JMF's proposal would be a starting point, the design is not final and the borough will work with the company to fine-tune details before entering into a formal agreement. Once that agreement is in place, the developer could begin negotiating with the property owners in the area. The site plan would need to be approved by Emerson's Land Use

Board and the Borough Council.

Borough officials ranked each developer individually, but most council members said they chose JMF's proposal over Hornrock's and Capodagli's because it included affordable housing on site and the company's willingness to work around an existing building whose owner had recently renovated it.

The plan, which JMF expects to cost more than \$30 million, includes two buildings and a parking garage. One building, near the intersection of Kinderkamack Road and Linwood Avenue, would have retail on the first floor and two stories of apartments above it. The second building, along Lincoln Boulevard, would have three stories near Kinderkamack Road and four stories near the train tracks. It would also include a rooftop terrace for tenants.

The proposal consists of 134 apartments and 13,000 square feet of retail space. Twelve percent of the apartments would be set aside for affordable housing, Codey said. He added that JMF would build additional affordable units at another location to accommodate Emerson's court-mandated requirement that 20 percent of any residential building with more than five units be set aside as affordable housing.

The council spoke briefly before voting unanimously to choose JMF as the developer.

Council President Chris Knoller said he believes the new buildings will be a "catalyst for the future" of Emerson's downtown.

Councilman Vincent Tripodi said it was a "very tough decision" between JMF's vision and Hornrock's. Councilman John Lazar was the only member of the council who preferred Hornrock's proposal over JMF's, but joined his colleagues in voting to approve the JMF plan. Every council member ranked Capodagli's proposal third.

Several residents spoke after the presentations, and while many were in favor of a downtown project, some still had reservations about the height and specifics of the proposals.