

Township to expand Affordable Housing site,
will lower building height, improve location

The Township Committee will purchase property adjacent to the Affordable Housing site on River Road, significantly reducing the height of the proposed building.

“The purchase of the adjacent property expanding the site to nearly 10 acres will be a major improvement,” said Mayor Michael Kelly. “Not only will it reduce the height of the proposed Affordable Housing building from five stories to three stories, the topography of the adjacent property will reduce the height and expense of retaining walls.”

The original Township-owned property on River Road is 5.7-acres. An agreement has been reached to purchase the adjacent house and 4-acre property at 490 River Road for \$650,000. A bond ordinance to support the acquisition will be introduced at a virtual meeting of the Township Committee at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 14, 2020.

The Township was able to reduce the size of the planned Affordable Housing building on River Road from 74 units to 62 units when Superior Court Judge Michael Gaus and the Fair Share Housing Center agreed that up to 15 one-bedroom affordable apartments could be replaced by group home beds at other locations. Group Homes typically have four beds each in a one-story ranch-style home for residents with physical or intellectual disabilities who require full-time care.

“This group home amendment to the Township's Affordable Housing agreement was a significant benefit,” said Mayor Kelly. “It will reduce the size of our proposed Affordable Housing building, and it will meet an important local need since I am certain the majority of Township residents know someone who would benefit from living in a group home environment.”

The Township Committee is pursuing plans for three such group homes with a total of 12 beds. Properties at 76 Southern Boulevard and 587 Fairmount Avenue have been on the market for some time and are under contingent contract for \$530,000 and \$515,000 respectively. A third group home could be located at 344 Hillside Avenue where Sterling-Sun Homes has asked the Township to rezone property to create five lots across Hillside Avenue from the developer's Dixiedale Townhomes. One of those five lots could become available for a group home as part of Sterling-Sun's contribution to Affordable

Housing.

In other Affordable Housing business at its Thursday, May 14, meeting, the Township Committee will open public hearings on:

- Bond ordinance 2020-07 to purchase property at 76 Southern Boulevard to construct a group home.
- Bond ordinance 2020-08 to purchase an existing house at 587 Fairmount Avenue to replace with a group home.
- Ordinance 2020-04 which reduces the size of the property provided by the Township for the Arbor Green Affordable Housing adjacent to the Skate Park.

No final action on any of the three ordinances is scheduled for Thursday night. The public hearings, which were advertised for this date when the ordinances were introduced, will be opened and then will be continued to the Township Committee's next meeting on May 28, 2020 when presentations are tentatively scheduled on the conceptual plans for the group homes and the River Road Affordable Housing. After public comments that night the public hearings on the three bond ordinances – to purchase 76 Southern Boulevard, 587 Fairmount Avenue and 490 River Road – will again be continued to a third night at the Township Committee's next scheduled meeting on Thursday, June 11, 2020.

“This schedule is being followed to maximize the opportunities for public input,” Mayor Kelly said. Action by the Township Committee on the three bond ordinances could take place at the June 11 meeting, following the third opportunity for public comment. The separate ordinance to reduce the size of the Arbor Green site could move forward on May 28, 2020.

Chatham Township has been operating under extensions to its December, 2018, Affordable Housing agreement for nearly 18 months. The most recent extension, granted by Judge Gaus on April 23, 2020 gives the Township a delay until June 15, 2020, when the Planning Board must review the Township Master Plan's Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. The final deadline set by Judge Gaus is a Joint Fairness and Compliance Hearing still to be scheduled in late July or early August, 2020.

The Township Committee and Planning Board have been instructed by Judge Gaus to take the preliminary actions necessary to prepare for the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan and the Compliance Hearing.

Two of those issues to be tackled by the Planning Board are on the Township

Committee's agenda Thursday night. One is a resolution referring the Hillside Avenue rezoning request to the Planning Board for its consideration. A separate resolution would include 490 River Road in a previous request to the Planning Board to consider the River Road site as an area in need of redevelopment.

A Township-owned property on Gibbons Place has been considered as an additional group home site if needed. An ordinance allocating money for site improvements to the Gibbons Place property is on the agenda Thursday night. However, the Township Committee is expected to discuss whether that plan is viable.

The Township Committee meeting Thursday night will be held remotely as a virtual meeting. The meeting will be televised on Comcast Channel 29 and Fios Channel 26. Residents watching the meeting on cable TV can participate in the public hearings by dialing any of the phone numbers listed on the agenda and dialing *9.

In addition, the meeting will be carried live on Zoom under the Webinar ID number listed on the agenda. The agenda is posted on the Township website: ChathamTownship-nj.gov. To receive emails of the agendas and all new information posted on the website, click the red "Community Alerts" button at the bottom of the website's home page.