

Grocery store and apartment complex in jeopardy

By DAN HEATH

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PLATTSBURGH -- A proposed downtown grocery store and apartment complex could be in jeopardy due to a lack of parking spaces and other zoning issues.

Drs. Joseph and Carolyn Clauss are working with Burlington-based developer Rick Bove to build Keystone Place, an approximately 8,000-square-foot grocery store topped by 18 units of "working family" apartments near the northeast corner of Margaret and Cornelia streets.

They had planned to seek special-use permits and zoning variances at this week's City of Plattsburgh Zoning Board of Appeals meeting. But the Zoning Board postponed that review because the developers didn't have a complete application that meets zoning requirements.

TOO MANY APARTMENTS?

Zoning Board Chairman Ronald Nolland said the city zoning code calls for 9-by-18-foot parking spaces and 26-foot-wide aisles.

With an aisle-width variance to 24 feet, there would be room for 54 full-size parking spaces.

Using those figures, Nolland said, 10 to 11 apartments would be a better fit on the property.

"I don't think it's a bad idea to have a grocery store downtown. I don't think it's a bad idea to have apartments above it," he said.

Nolland said the issue is density, how many apartments would be built on the property, how many full-size parking spaces could be included and how much green space would be on-site.

Project Architect Greg Rabideau of Rabideau Architects said there was some flexibility about the number of apartments, but reducing that number by half was too extreme.

"We haven't tried everything possible. We'll go back and see if we can meet them somewhere in the middle," he said.

Mr. Clauss said the best use for the property is to build a grocery store, but it wouldn't

be feasible financially with only 10 apartments. There are other possibilities if the grocery store and apartment complex won't work, he said.

PARKING SPACES

The property is the former Sunbrite Laundry site, presently a parking lot. The one-story building next door would be demolished and converted to a parking lot for the grocery store.

Developers proposed 45 spaces of underground parking for tenants of the building and 20 outdoor spaces for the grocery store, two short of the number needed for 18 apartments.

That was based on having 20 percent of the parking spaces sized for sub-compact cars, 20 percent for compact cars and the rest for full-sized cars, which the City Planning Board could allow.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Tentative plans call for 14 two-bedroom apartments and four three-bedroom apartments.

The apartments would be available to families making between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per year. The goal is to allow tenants to spend less than 30 percent of their income on rent as they save to buy their own home.

The project would be financed by the sale of New York State Department of Housing and Community Renewal tax credits to investors.

The commercial portion of the property would pay taxes the same as any other commercial property.

The residential portion's tax assessment would be based on its revenue, rather than its intrinsic value, for 45 years, according to New York state law.

The tax-credit investors would own the residential part of the project during that time. The property would then be transferred to a different entity, which would be taxed just like any other property owner.

Keystone Place is scheduled to go before the City of Plattsburgh Planning Board at 7 p.m. Monday.

If the project receives Planning Board approval and Zoning Board special-use permits and variances or meets zoning requirements, construction would take two to three years.