

Mineola board approves Corpus Christi apartment complex

By Noah Manskar | Posted: Thursday, January 14, 2016 5:56 pm

After approving Mineola's fourth commuter apartment complex Wednesday, the Village Board is ready to "take a little breather" on the housing developments that have transformed the village, Mayor Scott Strauss said.

"Let's give it some time to develop and some time to get into and solidify and see what happens," Strauss said.

The unanimously approved \$68 million development by Mill Creek Residential Trust will replace part of the former Corpus Christi Elementary School on Searing Avenue with two buildings holding a total of 192 high-end apartments, down from 197 as presented in November.

They'll also have amenities such as a courtyard, club room and gym.

The project is a partnership between Mill Creek and the Corpus Christi Parish, which sold the property and needs to develop it to pay off a \$400,000 debt to the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre, Monsigneur Robert Batule said.

"This application was family," said former Mineola Mayor John Colbert, who raised questions at Wednesday's hearing. He added, "If it had nothing to do with the church, I would have taken another look at it."

To address traffic and parking concerns residents raised at a November hearing, apartment leases will include one parking spot, said Chris Coschignano, Mill Creek's attorney.

The developer also commissioned a study of traffic at Modera Mineola, its other Mineola development.

Given their location near Mineola's Long Island Rail Road station, the new buildings would create more than 40 percent less traffic than they would elsewhere in the village, according to the VHB Engineering study.

But Trustee Paul Cusato and some residents said the additional cars would exacerbate traffic



Apartments on Searing Avenue

Monsignor Robert Batule of Corpus Christi Parish is seen at Mineola's Village Board meeting Jan. 13.

problems at the Willis Avenue LIRR crossing, which the study did not address.

“I don’t know how people are going to get out of that apartment complex when that grade crossing goes down,” Cusato said.

The Village Board is working to get the traffic light there detached from the railroad crossing so red lights do not hold up cars at the intersection, Strauss said.

The new apartments and people that come with them, Deputy Mayor Paul Pereira said, could add strength to the village’s argument for fixing the stoplight issue.

“When you reach a certain critical mass, you can actually move things like government, at least that we hope,” Pereira said, adding, “If we do nothing, that light does not get changed.”

Some confusion about Mill Creek’s study of the buildings’ impact on water and sewage services led to questions about whether they would use more or less water than the former elementary school.

VHB engineer Ginny Wattrell said the development would not use any more than 50,000 gallons per day beyond the school’s usage at its peak.

That isn’t difficult for village infrastructure to accommodate, Strauss said.

Board approval brings Corpus Christi Parish one step closer to paying off its debt, said Batule, who has worked with Mill Creek on the development for 17 months.

“This way it gives us more confidence about what we can do in the future,” Batule said.

Mill Creek submitted the application for the project in August 2015, Vice President for Development Jamie Stover said.

Its connection to the church may have played a role in making the process less contentious and drawn out than for Mineola’s other transit-oriented developments, Strauss said.

The Corpus Christi project joins three others like it the Village Board has approved as part of its “Master Plan” to revitalize downtown Mineola.

They include the 275-unit Modera at 140 Old Country Road, and New Hyde Park-based Lalezarian Developers’ 315-unit One Third Avenue at 250 Old Country Road and 266-unit Village Green at 199 Second St.

While the Modera traffic study offers a glimpse of their impact, three of the four projects have not yet begun moving in tenants.

Now the village that’s been cited as a leader in transit-oriented development needs to see how that development plays out, Strauss said.

The Village Board changed Mineola’s Development Incentive Bonus Law last month to make review

of development applications optional, which gives the board “a little bit of latitude,” Strauss said.

“We’ll entertain conversation (from developers), we’ll see what they have planned, but we are ready to take a slight breather,” he said

Strauss said the Corpus Christi project could start a trend of development along Willis Avenue north of Mineola’s downtown.

While Mill Creek has no other Mineola projects in the works, said the village has been “tremendous to work with.”

The development now needs subdivision approval from the county and for tax breaks from the county Industrial Development Agency, Stover said.

Modera Mineola has leased 176 apartments so far, Coschignano said Wednesday.