

Development grows in Galloway Township

By MOLLY BILINSKI Staff Writer

GALLOWAY — Several development projects are coming to the township, marking the success of the council and planning board, who have worked to create space ripe for developer's plans as well as quicken the application process.

Mayor Anthony Coppola Jr. explained that bringing more development into the township will help shift some of the burden away from residential tax payers.

"It offsets the tax base," Coppola explained. "The more businesses that come in, the more it offsets taxes for the residents."

Upcoming projects include the expansion of the CVS Pharmacy project on Route 30. That project, developed by Edgewood Properties of Piscataway, was approved by the planning board last year.

Edgewood Properties is operated by CEO Jack Morris, who is a co-developer of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City.

"They just received planning board approval for phase two of their development," Tiffany CuvIELLO, township planner, said. "Outside of the CVS, they are developing four different pad sites and they're fully approved."

Down the pike from the property is Tailgaters Sports Bar & Grille. The owner, Aristotle Frangias of Northfield, said that it was a quiet area that needed some noise.

When asked how he feels about the amount of development coming in, he said "rising tide lifts all boats."

"It will bring more people and more traffic," he said. "To me, that's a positive. I think growing as we are is well overdue and I'm looking forward to it."

Coppola explained that the township's council and planning board have been working in tandem for almost a decade to bring more commercial and residential development into the township.

Feedback from a forum hosted in 2010 started officials on a path to make the township more development-friendly, Coppola explained.

"Some of the advice that we got was that we don't provide incentives," he said. "Not only that, but the boards are obstructive. It was a long, expensive process (for developers)."

Last year, they designated the entire municipality a rehabilitation area. Other parts of the township were designated redevelopment areas, Coppola said, calling the designations "the biggest thing we did."

In a rehabilitation area, townships can award developers or homeowners that increase the value of their property a five-year tax abatement, he explained. In a redevelopment area, the township has the ability to award up to a 30-year tax abatement plan.

These incentives for developers will work to even out the current disproportionate amount of commercial versus residential ratables in the township, 12 percent and 88 percent, respectively, he explained, and lower taxes for residents.

"Eighty-eight percent of the burden of running the municipality falls on the homeowners," he said. "Only 12 percent falls on businesses. Whereas, in other municipalities, that number could be 31 percent, meaning only 69 percent would have to be shouldered by the residents."

In addition to the township offering incentives to developers and homeowners, CuvIELLO said that the planning board has also streamlined the approval process.

"Galloway is pretty proactive in moving development along," CuvIELLO said. "The turnaround time in getting things from conception onto an agenda is rather quick compared to other municipalities. That's a positive for us because it makes it easier for developers to have certainty in what they're doing."

Another project at the intersection of the White Horse Pike and Pomona Road saw a Wawa open last year, with more development planned. Across the street from Wawa, approval has been granted for 100 age-restricted, affordable housing units called Heritage Village, with Community Investment Strategies designated as the redeveloper.

It's the township's first mixed-use project, Coppola explained.

"As part of the mixed-use component, they will have 10,000 square feet of non-residential space on their first floor," CuvIELLO said.

"We really need to have affordable housing units," Coppola said. "We're always looking for ways to address that. Certainly the senior living component really works out well for us. It doesn't add any kids to the school district so they're not adversely impacted either."

At the same intersection is the old Assumption Catholic school and church property. Coppola said it's part of the redevelopment area, owned by the Archdiocese in Camden, but no developer has proposed a use yet.

"We've had several people looking at it, but we want the right project to come in there to really compliment the area," Coppola said. "We don't want to jam something in there that is not the maximum, best use of the property."

Yet another planned project is an urgent care type of facility and a second medical building, CuvIELLO said, across the street from the CVS and the intersection of the White Horse Pike and Jimmie Leeds Road.

"You see more development occurring there," CuvIELLO said. "If you look at the pattern, that area, that corridor between Pomona and Jimmie Leeds on the White Horse Pike, is where our first focus filling in development is going to occur."

It'll be on the planning board's Feb. 1 meeting agenda.

"Our doors are open, 27/7," CuvIELLO said. "We don't just say no to an idea. I find that if we listen to what the developers are interested in and we're open to that, we give a better position in terms of working with people and making things happen."