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Concerns targeted at 40B plan

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PEPPERELL -- Dozens of residents got their first chance last night to sound off against a major housing project proposed in a remote section of town.

One of those voices belonged to Richard Potts, who believes 62 acres, between Bayberry Road and Ashley Street, where a developer plans to construct 68 duplex units is an ecologically sensitive area.

In fact, an expert he hired to study the area found "a substantial number of endangered species" likely live there, says Potts, who heads the Pepperell Natural Resources Association, a neighborhood group formed in opposition of the affordable-housing project called Bayberry Estates.

About 100 residents voiced their concerns about the project last night as the selectmen held the first public hearing on the revised 40B plan. The selectmen held the hearing so that they can collect public comments that Mass. Housing needs before issuing a site-approval letter for the new 40B application. Once the state agency approves the new plan, the developer will withdraw the existing 40B application.

Mark Boyajian, an abutter of the project, is concerned that the locations of proposed leach fields where 14,960 gallons of waste water would drain each day may not be appropriate for the purpose.

Some people don't like the fact that the high-density development is located in a remote part of the town, preventing future residents of the affordable units from walking to the town's center.

"We need to let Mass. Housing know this project is not really in agreement with the town housing plan," said resident Michael Andreason.

The project originally called for construction of 44 duplex units clustered together close to Bayberry Street, but the developer decided to submit a new plan based on the maximum build-out scenario after finding out that's what the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife will need to be shown.

It has come to Bayberry Enterprise Realty Trust's attention that the site is home to some protected species, like salamanders, according to Robert Griffin, the engineer for the project.

Many residents expressed their concerns about the traffic, saying the neighborhood has had some accidents and is known for treacherous road conditions in winter.

"Trying to get onto Route 119 in the morning to go to work is a nightmare," said resident Amy Blake.

Resident Rick Elmer said he believes the traffic study submitted is insufficient and should include a larger area for the new proposal.

In a letter read by Selectman Lyndon Johnson, Police Chief Alan Davis noted there needs to be more traffic data.

The Conservation Commission also voiced its concern in its letter, which Johnson also read.

"In particular, because of the sensitivity of this site for the Bemis Road municipal well and wildlife habitat (including rare wildlife), the Conservation Commission does not believe that this site is appropriate for the type of dense development proposed," the letter said.

Selectmen will submit the public comments to Mass. Housing by Friday.