

Apartments approved for nursery land west of Delray

By Andy Reid, Sun Sentinel

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A plant nursery surrounded by neighborhoods can turn into 346 apartments west of Delray Beach, Palm Beach County commissioners decided Thursday.

Redesigning plans to move three-story apartment buildings farther away from neighboring houses and beefing up landscaped buffer areas helped ease concerns of nearby residents worried about what would be moving in next door.

The concessions also made it easier for commissioners to say "yes" Thursday to zoning approvals needed for the proposed Stonybrook on the Lake apartments.

"It is a very good example of how people can work together," said County Commissioner Mary Lou Berger, who represents the area.

Stonybrook would replace Delray Plants Inc., a longtime nursery on 31 acres south of Lake Ida Road between Sims Road and Via Flora.

Stonybrook plans call for two- and three-story buildings surrounding a manmade lake. The 346 apartments would include 83 units with reduced rental rates for "workforce housing."

The county requires large developments to include some price-controlled homes intended for teachers, police officers, young professionals and other middle-income buyers who can end up getting priced out of Palm Beach County's real estate market. Developers also get to build more homes than they would otherwise be allowed if they include workforce housing.

Monthly rental prices for the 83 price-controlled apartments will range from \$735 for a one bedroom to \$2,653 for a four bedroom. Rents for Stonybrook's other apartments won't be limited.

Just a few weeks ago, many neighboring residents were rallying opposition to the development plans and calling for county officials to reject the rental development proposed by Manetto Hill Realty Venture LLC.

Neighborhood concerns included an expected influx of traffic, the prospect of three-story apartment buildings towering over one-story houses next door and objections to toppling oak and pine trees to dig the apartment's proposed lake. Also, some questioned the need for including rent-controlled apartments.

But after developers agreed to rework the design and try to save more trees and after neighbors learned more about how "workforce housing" is aimed at middle-income renters, there was mostly support for the project among those at Thursday's commission meeting.

The Alliance of Delray Residential Associations supported the compromise Stonybrook proposal and resident Glenn Weiss said the community was "very pleased" with the updated plans.

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