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LOWER ALLEN TWP.

Realtors doubt market for condos

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If you build it, they will come.

The philosophy worked for a Hollywood ball field, but some critics of the plan to turn Liberty Forge Golf Course into a neighborhood of condos suggest it might be easier to lure the ghosts of ballplayers to a corn patch than it will be to sell the units for \$650,000.

"It's highly unlikely, improbable, wishful thinking that they would be able to fill that up," said Adriana Klich, an attorney from Lower Allen Twp. with background in real estate.

Klich has studied census data and local real estate market statistics. Her conclusion: "You can't square the numbers. ... This area cannot support 582 units at that price."

But there is a market for such homes, said Luke Grumbine, president of Liberty Forge; it's just not in Harrisburg.

Grumbine said people would come from far away to live in the condos, which would have a base size of 900 to 1,200 square feet, with the ability to combine units for bigger homes.

"The market is the East Coast," Grumbine said. "People like a rural setting. They will come from New Jersey, New York, etc."

He said the company "did not get into this blindly. ... We have done an analysis by checking around and things," he said.

The area where the town homes would go is zoned for single-family homes in one-acre lots. That would limit any development at Liberty Forge to about 75 homes, assuming they are built on all the land used for the golf course.

Liberty Forge is asking the township to allow up to seven units per acre in exchange for preserving most of the rest of the tract as open space.

The homes would be age-restricted for older adults.

During a Sept. 15 public hearing, Dennis Glackin, a Philadelphia-area land-use planner who is part of Liberty Forge's project team, told the township commissioners the change would bring in more than \$5 million annually in tax revenue for the township, Cumberland County and the West Shore School District.

That was based on an average price tag of \$650,000 for units.

"Some people have been skeptical. But I don't care whose numbers you use. The tax base will increase because of the sheer number of homes," township manager Thomas Vernau said.

But the project needs that \$650,000 price point to be feasible. According to Glackin, the cost of extending public water to the site would preclude lower-priced development.

Local real estate experts are not sure there is a market locally for that many units in that price range.

"It seems like it [will be a challenge] based on what I know about central Pennsylvania," said Doris Bossert,

a Realtor with experience selling high-end condominiums.

"I could be wrong," Bossert said. "There may be a market out there that I am not aware of."

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