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LOWER ALLEN TWP.

Commissioners block luxury apartment plan

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Liberty Forge Golf Course's plans to build about 600 luxury apartments surrounding its golf course in Lower Allen Twp. appear blocked.

By a unanimous vote Monday night, the township's five-member Board of Commissioners directed its solicitor to prepare a decision rejecting Liberty Forge's application for a zoning amendment that would have allowed the project in an area currently zoned for single-family homes on one-acre lots.

The decision affirmed the recommendations by the county and township planning commissions to deny the request.

The vote, taken with no debate, followed more than 15 months of discussion and deliberation that included two public hearings.

Public sentiment during the hearings overwhelmingly opposed letting Liberty Forge build 75-foot-tall condominium buildings in exchange for preserving at least 35 percent of the site as open space.

Under provisions that would have allowed bonus density for preserving additional open space, Liberty Forge would have been allowed to build 582 units on the 77-acre site off Lisburn Road, near the township's community park.

Liberty Forge president and CEO Luke A.V. Grumbine left the meeting Monday night immediately after the vote. He declined to comment.

The company had promoted the concept as a "smart growth" alternative to urban sprawl, and claimed it would generate about \$5 million in tax revenue for the township, county and the West Shore School District.

Those figures were based on an average price of \$650,000 per unit. Opponents argued there is not a market locally for such housing at that price. Many also warned the project would have a negative impact on the area's rural nature and on Lisburn Road traffic.

"Clearly we are delighted our commissioners have done the prudent thing for the residents of Lower Allen Twp.," said Janey Gunn, a Liberty Forge neighbor and one of the leaders of the opposition to the project.

Township manager Thomas Vernau said there is no appeal process of the decision that he is aware of, but Liberty Forge could come back with a revised application. The company had asked the township to postpone a decision to allow for revisions, but such changes would have forced the process to begin anew, Vernau said.

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