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2006-02-08

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**Developer moves ahead with shopping center
(Update 4:50 p.m.)**

NEW MILFORD — Westrock Development of Yonkers, N.Y. will move forward with plans to build a shopping center on Route 7 near the Cedar Knolls neighborhood following a legal settlement with the town.

In October, the Zoning Commission turned down the developer's proposal with a 3 to 2 vote after several residents in the Cedar Knolls neighborhood said the project was too large. Westbrook answered back with an appeal in November.

The appeal recently was settled, and Westbrook agreed to meet all of the earlier engineering, landscaping and drainage requirements. The size of the project, however, will be reduced by 5,625 feet, and the rear buffer between the center and the neighborhood will increase by 10 feet. With the size reduction, the three-building shopping center will now be about 107,000 square feet. The lot currently is home to an abandoned building and car wash.

"We're pleased with the settlement, and that it was resolved amicably," said Westrock Principal Jason Friedland.

He was uncertain when construction would begin, but in the settlement notice to the zoning office it states the developer hopes to move forward expeditiously.

Friedland also would not reveal what stores are expected in the center.

Friedland said the developer will "make every accommodation that we reasonably can to the neighbors."

At the time of the commission's decision, former Chairman George Doring argued that Westrock had done all of what they were required to do and the denial would force the commission into a lawsuit. He said the land is zoned for commercial use, and the project must be approved as long as the developer meets zoning laws.

But the commission majority, including two members who are no longer on the board, disagreed. They argued that the project was too large for the adjacent neighborhood, and therefore, did not meet requirements to harmonize with the area.

Beyond the Cedar Knolls neighborhood, the Westrock development will be near the Super Stop & Shop and Wal-Mart plaza and several other commercial properties.

"We're excited about our project," Friedland said.

Cedar Knolls resident Ann Stanley said she knew it was going to happen sooner or later but had hoped that more concessions would be reached.

"I'm not happy with it, but there's not much we can do about it at this point," Stanley said.

She said she is disappointed that the town's zoning laws are not able to better protect residential communities from such projects.

"I thought the reason we had zoning laws was to help us, the citizens, property owners, in this kind of situation," Stanley said. "I feel that our town is growing much too fast for the mindset of the government that we have. They think we are a very small town and we have to think on a larger scale because things are just happening too fast."



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