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Wayside submits building permit application

By Rob Haneisen / News Staff Writer

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FRAMINGHAM -- Wayside Youth and Family Support Network filed its building permit application with the town yesterday to develop a 14-acre Lockland Avenue site -- a plan that has been vigorously opposed by neighbors.

The town Building Department has 30 calendar days to either grant the permit or deny it with cause.

"We will be very deliberate," town Building Inspector Joe Mikielian said about the town's review of the application.

What is expected to be the main item of contention is whether the proposal qualifies for protection under the Dover Amendment. That measure allows developers to build in areas contrary to local zoning laws if the building qualifies as an educational facility. Lockland Avenue is a residential zone.

Wayside wants to build a campus-style residential facility for troubled youth. The campus would consist of one main building with six attached townhouses holding 12 youths per building. Youths staying at Wayside receive counseling and are generally referred there by social workers.

Wayside, headquartered in Framingham, already operates six group homes, four of which are in MetroWest. The three homes in Framingham and one in Marlborough will relocate to the Lockland Avenue site as will some administration services, according to Wayside President Eric Masi.

For more than 18 months Wayside, has been discussing plans for the site it owns on Lockland but is only now filing the building permit after clearing the Conservation Commission and filing documents on how it would clean up the site consisting of woodlands and a swampy pond.

Masi hopes to begin 14 to 16 months of construction in January.

"I think it should be denied," said Steve Whitkin, a local attorney and President of the Sucker Pond Neighborhood Association which has organized to oppose the project. "It's in

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the building commissioner's jurisdiction."

Whitkin also lives next to the property.

Mikielian said he expects the main issue to be whether the project meets the exceptions allowed in the Dover Amendment, a decision he'll rely heavily on interpretation and research from Town Counsel Chris Petrini.

The last operation to open up shop in Framingham under the Dover Amendment is the Spectrum Health Clinic on Howard Street. The clinic provides counseling and methadone treatment to heroin addicts. The clinic opened successfully last year and despite the concerns of some area residents that the clinic would attract crime and other problems, it has not.

"It's a very important issue and we'll do the best we can to treat everybody fairly," said Town Manager George King. "That's what our obligation is."

Whitkin said neighbors are concerned most about increased traffic the project will bring.

"People are genuinely afraid of this project because of the traffic issue, not to mention the infrastructure, and are worried about sewage," Whitkin said.

Having just been informed of the filing, Whitkin said he was unsure how far neighbors would fight the project.

Donna Nelson, vice president of the neighborhood association, said the neighbors are holding together fine.

"People interested have remained interested," she said. "In some ways it has brought the neighborhood closer together."

Nelson said the filing will at least give neighbors and town officials a concrete plan to examine.

"The more people who see the plans, the better," she said. "In many ways it is an opportunity to see what we are opposing."

Whitkin said if the project receives a building permit the decision could be appealed to the town's Zoning Board of Appeals.

Masi said traffic concerns were not part of the building permit process but he planned on opening a dialogue with neighbors about that. A year ago the project was scaled back by eliminating the daytime counseling program which decreased traffic to the site.

Wayside also recently hired former Secretary of Environmental Affairs Robert Durand to coordinate a series of public meetings on the cleanup of the property. A former legislator and Wayside counselor, the Marlborough native served in the state's top environmental job in the Cellucci and Swift administrations before Gov. Mitt Romney replaced him.

Masi said neighborhood meetings have been productive.

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