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Fishers council narrowly OKs rezoning to allow affordable neighborhood

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The Fishers City Council narrowly approved a rezoning request Monday night that will allow the development of 11 affordable, for-rent homes to be built at the southwest corner of 141st Street and Cumberland Road.

Low-income housing provider Hamilton County Area Neighborhood Development Inc., known as HAND, received approval on its request for a 1.8-acre property at 13995 Cumberland Road for its [planned Cumberland Cottages neighborhood](#). The zoning change paves the way for HAND to build houses on the site for tenants making 60% of the area's median income. In Hamilton County, that equates to \$39,000 for a two-person household.

The rezone was approved 5-4 after several council members reiterated concerns from neighbors and members of the

Fishers Plan Commission about the project's perceived impacts to the area's density, traffic, safety and property values.

"Any affordable housing is under a lot of scrutiny in Hamilton County," HAND Executive Director Andrea Davis said. "We try very hard to do everything we can to make sure we're not a problem in any neighborhood. If it's not a place we would live, it's not a place we'd expect others to move into or live next to."

Council members David George, Cecilia Coble, Brad DeReamer, Samantha DeLong and Jocelyn Vare voted in favor of the rezoning. Council members Selina Stoller, Pete Peterson, John Weingardt and Todd Zimmerman voted against it.

Davis provided several examples of HAND's other projects and their impact on neighboring properties' assessed values as a counterpoint to concerns. As an example, she said, the assessed values of properties next to HAND's 9-unit Pebble Brook Gardens neighborhood in Noblesville increased 32.7% between 2014 and 2020.

Davis said HAND's communities are professionally managed by South Bend-based real estate firm Bradley Co., and that the organization would be willing to make sure the covenants dictating Cumberland Cottages' appearance would meet the same standards as the surrounding neighborhood.

Council member Weingardt said he was worried about the traffic generated by the project and its effect on the intersection's roundabout, despite a consultant's determination that the project would not create traffic problems for the area.

“This is a tough one for me,” he said. “I like your vision, I like your project, but I can’t get over the hurdle of that location.”

Davis said HAND was intentional about the site for its proximity to nearby schools, health care facilities, grocery stores, banks, recreation and jobs. To mitigate any traffic concerns, Davis said HAND will consider limiting access to the site to only 141st Street.

“The reality is, any site we choose has neighbors that more-than-likely will oppose it,” Davis said. “And anywhere that doesn’t have neighbors isn’t close to the amenities we need.”

Council member Peterson agreed that there should be more affordable housing, but questioned HAND’s plans for that specific site. He said there may be neighbor backlash for the project’s approval.

“I just don’t think we’ve hit the mark yet,” he said. “I just don’t think this is going to move the needle enough in this area.”

Council member George requested that HAND try to replace the project’s carports with garages, and Davis said it would be her dream to do so—as long as the project can still generate enough revenue from rents to remain self-sustaining.

She estimated rents for the two- and three-bedroom homes might range from \$650 to \$1,150 per month. If everything runs smoothly, Davis said she anticipates construction on the project will be completed by the end of 2022.

“There is a tremendous, tremendous need for affordable housing so you can live here, work here and play here,” Council member DeReamer said. “This is a project that’s needed, and we need many, many more.”

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