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DOVER

Day-care plan riles neighbors

The Boston Globe

By Nadia Salomon, Globe Correspondent | October 25, 2007

Some Dover residents, up in arms over a proposed day-care center that one terms a "mega-development" slated for their neighborhood, are trying to get the neighboring town of Walpole to block the project.

Next Generation Children's Centers, which already has eight locations in the western suburbs, wants to build a 26,000-square-foot building in Walpole, on the Dover line near the intersection of Route 109 and Walpole Street.

Walpole Planning Board chairman Jack Conroy said the facility is expected to accommodate more than 300 children, from infants to 3-year-olds.

George Velmahos has been living on County Street in Dover, which runs along the boundary between Dover and Walpole, for three years. His home is directly across the street from the proposed day-care center site in Walpole.

"The street is not made to accommodate such a mega-development," he said. "The street only has two lanes. There are no designated lanes for turns, no pavement for kids to wait, no traffic lights, and there's a sharp turn there - there's no visibility."

Jean Mekkaoui, a resident of Walpole Street in Dover for seven years, described the proposed development as egregious and compared the number of children who would use it to Dover-Sherborn High School's population. As a mother, Mekkaoui said, she understands the difficulty of finding quality day care.

"There's a need for it, but not in this little bit of residential spot," she said.

Mirroring the concerns of Velmahos, she said, "The dangers . . . they're just there. They can't be mitigated."

Conroy said there's no defining law on how big the day-care center can be and he doesn't consider Route 109 to be a residential street. He said he didn't want to come across as insensitive, but argued that some of the complaining Dover residents are hiding behind traffic as an issue.

"They know they can't stop it because it's a day care," he said. "And they say the additional traffic will create a problem? They should have already been talking to their town to do something."

Conroy said the traffic on Route 109 is not new, and whether or not the day-care center is built, the levels will remain the same.

According to Conroy, a traffic survey was done by Next Generation Children's Centers between July and August, and Walpole conducted its own traffic survey through an independent consulting firm. Nitsch Engineering of Boston came up with results similar to Next Generation's - that Route 109 is a heavily traveled road, with the month of August being the busiest time of year.

Velmahos and several other Dover residents met with Dover Selectman David Heinlein, Town Administrator David Ramsay, and Police Chief Joseph Griffin on Oct. 16 to discuss how to get Walpole's Planning Board to address their concerns. The result was a letter written to Conroy's attention.

"I met with neighbors. These are genuine concerns. It would seem to me that if I got a letter like that, I think I would give that letter greater weight," Heinlein said.

Conroy said he understands the complaints coming from over the Dover line, but by law, his board cannot deny the day-care center from coming to Walpole.

"If they, Next Generation, comply with all the rules and regulations set forth by the board, we can not deny them," he said. "If they don't comply or choose not to, the board will vote it down."

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On Oct. 18, Donald Johnson, Walpole's town planner, said the town's Planning Board voted to accept Next Generation's site plan and a definitive subdivision plan for roadway construction. The decisions have to be filed with the town clerk, the plans have to be signed and filed with the Registry of Deeds, and a bond has to be put in place before construction can begin. There's also an appeal period of 20 days.

Calls to Next Generation Children's Center were not returned ■

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