

04/18/2007

Group seeks approval for new fraternity house

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INDIANA BOROUGH

The Zeta Pi Housing Corp. is seeking Indiana council's approval to replace the Delta Tau Delta fraternity house at 296 S. Seventh St. with a new frat house designed as a three-story walk-up apartment building.

It is the first construction project approval requested under the borough's traditional neighborhood development overlay, or TND, adopted last fall.

The TND zone is the horseshoe-shaped area around the Indiana University of Pennsylvania campus that borough officials hope will eventually become a concentration of high-density housing units for university students living off-campus.

The goals of the TND are to have entire blocks near the campus developed into housing units and retail business to better serve students, and to draw students there from rental houses in the borough's residential neighborhoods.

Incentives are offered to developers to encourage them to buy and redevelop substandard properties in the TND.

For example, if a new development includes amenities like wider side-

walks, decorative street lighting and landscaping, the builder may be permitted to cover more of the parcel with structure, have a higher density of tenants or not be required to provide as many parking spaces as now required.

Don Manzo and John Geisler, representatives of the fraternity, told council Tuesday that unlike most fraternity houses, the new Delta Tau Delta house will be divided into five three-bedroom apartments, each with a bathroom and small kitchen.

The common chapter room and gathering room on the first floor will not be accessible directly from any of the apartments, and that will discourage guests from entering the private living spaces.

The new building was designed by InHouse Architects of Indiana and is expected to cost \$750,000.

Under options offered through the TND overlay, the developer will install some of the required parking spaces at the frat house and will put money into an escrow account in place of providing other required parking spaces.

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The borough will use the money in the escrow account to create future public parking facilities elsewhere in the borough.

Geisler said it's hoped that construction of the new frat house can begin this summer, and that it can be ready for occupancy in August 2008.

Before council acts on the construction proposal the plan first must have a public hearing. That will be held before the start of council's May 8 meeting.

The Indiana Borough Planning Commission has strongly recommended approval of the construction plan for the Delta Tau Delta house.

Council at its monthly work session Tuesday also was asked to consider the creation of a business improvement district in downtown Indiana.

Betsy Lauber, the main street manager of Downtown Indiana Inc., told council that a BID is a legal mechanism created under the Pennsylvania Neighborhood Improvement District Act. BIDs allow property owners within a designated area to pool their resources and address common concerns.

Lauber said there are 1,200 BIDs in North American cities and towns. Their services typically include street maintenance and upkeep; planning events and marketing; business retention and recruitment; landscape maintenance; and planning for capital improvements.

Property owners within the designated area are assessed a fee, and the money collected funds the BID's activities and projects.

BIDs provide a predictable revenue stream and management entity, and allows the BID members to speak with one voice, Lauber said.

The proposed BID in Indiana initially would be along Philadelphia Street between Fourth Street and Papermill Avenue, and in later phases may be extended mainly southward along Oakland Avenue, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth streets and Wayne Avenue.

A state representative will meet May 16 with downtown property owners to discuss the feasibility of creating a BID in Indiana.

And two borough residents urged council to act as advocates for all borough residents in opposing a plan by the White Township supervisors to cut timber in White's Woods.

"We're all stakeholders in White's Woods. We live downstream" along White's Run and Stoney Run, said Tom Miller. He raised concerns that cutting timber from the hills in White's Woods could contribute to runoff that might flood basements in the borough. Heavy trucks hauling logs from the timbering site may also damage 12th Street, he said.

"Thousands of borough residents ... walk up the hill to get to that wonderful nature center" in White's Woods, said North Eighth Street resident Andrew Davis. "Any cutting will dramatically change the ability of people to use it for recreation."

"If you could work with us ... the folks who use this on a regular basis ... and try to get a public forum with the township before the cutting starts," he asked of council.

2007/8/30