

## Developer Sends New Application for Controversial Housing Project

By Bob Niedbala, Staff writer [niedbala@observer-reporter.com](mailto:niedbala@observer-reporter.com)

WAYNESBURG – Though the Woda Group has resubmitted an application for a housing development in Franklin Township, the application will not be considered "officially filed" until the company meets with the township and addresses various issues, Franklin Township supervisors said.

At their regular meeting Monday, the supervisors responded to questions regarding the status of the project from a group of residents who oppose it.

Woda has proposed constructing 50 single-family homes on a 17-acre parcel off Powell Lane for low- and moderate-income residents.

Neighboring property owners have opposed the project. Eight residents attended Monday's meeting. About 50 were at the last meeting to express their opposition to the plan.

Woda previously submitted an application for approval of the development's site plan under the township's subdivision and land development ordinance. The township planning commission reviewed the plan and recommended its approval with conditions Jan. 18. The supervisors considered approving the plan at their meeting Jan. 24 but tabled action because of questions raised by residents.

Woda withdrew its application Feb. 10. At the time, Craig Patterson, a Woda vice president, said the company was continuing to work on the project and wanted time to address residents' concerns. The company resubmitted the application Feb. 18.

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Steve Coss, township code enforcement officer, said Monday that before the application is officially considered filed, it must go through the pre-application process, which includes a meeting with the township.

Supervisor Reed Kiger said the company would be asked to meet with the supervisors, Coss and the township solicitor and engineer to discuss the application, probably sometime in March.

During that meeting, the township will address any issues that may be relevant to the project, such as the need for a traffic study as well as concerns regarding infrastructure, Kiger said. "We have a lot of things we want to address with them," he said.

After that meeting and after the application is determined to be complete, only then will it be considered "officially filed," Kiger said.

The application will then be presented to the township planning commission for its review. The planning commission will prepare a recommendation to be acted on by the supervisors.

Kiger also announced the township is considering changes in its subdivision and land development ordinance to address some of the issues raised by residents, such as the size of the lot that must be used for construction of a single-family residence.

Public meetings will be held for residents to provide input on any proposed changes to the ordinances, he said.

Asked if any adopted changes to the ordinance would apply to Woda's project, Kiger said the project would be "grandfathered in" and existing regulations would apply, if the company submits the application properly.

Coss later reminded residents that new floodplain maps have been prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and areas that before may not have been in a floodplain are included in one now.

Those who live in low-lying areas or near flood-prone creeks should review the maps at the township building to determine if their home or property is in a flood plain, he said.

Observer-Reporter, Tuesday, February 24, 2011

## Developer Sends New Application for Controversial Housing Project

By Bob Niedbala, Staff writer [niedbala@observer-reporter.com](mailto:niedbala@observer-reporter.com)

WAYNESBURG – Woda Group LLC of Westerville, Ohio, has resubmitted an application to Franklin Township to construct 50 single-family homes on 17 acres of land off Powell Lane.

Plans to build the homes under a program for low- and moderate-income residents has faced stiff opposition from neighboring property owners concerned about the potential for decreased property values and increased crime.

Woda previously submitted an application for approval of the development's site plan under the township's subdivision and land development ordinance.

The township planning commission reviewed the plan and recommended its approval Jan. 18. The supervisors then considered approving the plan with conditions at their meeting Jan. 24 but tabled action because of questions raised by residents.

Woda withdrew its application Feb. 10. At the time, Craig Patterson, a Woda vice president, said the company was continuing to work on the project.

"We took a step back because we wanted to be sensitive to the needs of the community and better understand their concerns," Patterson said. He added he hoped the project would eventually be accepted by the community. Patterson could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

The company resubmitted its application to the township Friday, said Steve Coss, township code enforcement officer. The plans describe the same project as proposed in the first application, he said.

Coss said the application is being reviewed, and if it is determined to be complete it will be sent to the township planning commission for its review.

"At this point, there's nothing really to comment on," Supervisor Reed Kiger said. "We'll go through the process as stated in the subdivision and land development ordinance."

To develop the project, Woda has applied for federal tax credits under the Section 42 housing program aimed at providing housing to low- and moderate-income people.

A family that moves into one of the houses will have to meet income requirements ranging from \$22,780 to \$40,000, depending on the number of people in the household, and be able to pay \$630 to \$690 a month in rent, which includes utilities, the company said.

Under the program, a resident would lease the house for 15 years and then have the option of purchasing it with credits he receives for each year he lives in the home. Residents also would have to pass a background check that includes credit rating, references from previous landlords and criminal history.

Observer-Reporter, Tuesday, February 15, 2011

## **Woda Group Delays Franklin Township Project**

By Bob Niedbala, Staff writer [niedbala@observer-reporter.com](mailto:niedbala@observer-reporter.com)

WAYNESBURG -- Franklin Township supervisors had moved their meeting to the evening on Monday to accommodate residents concerned about a developer's plan to build 50 single-family homes off Powell Lane for low- and moderate-income residents.

With about 50 people in attendance, one of the first announcements was that the developer, Woda Group LLC of Westerville, Ohio, had withdrawn its application for the project. Township solicitor Linda Chambers read the company's letter, received by the township Friday, which said only that Woda was withdrawing its application for subdivision approval.

The proposed 50-home development is to be built on 17 acres of land off Powell Lane near Park Avenue. As part of the project's financing, Woda is applying for federal tax credits under the Section 42 housing program aimed at providing housing to low- and moderate-income people.

Residents of the area have strongly opposed the project, which was announced last month, citing concerns about lower property values and higher crime rates.

The first question raised Monday was whether the company was giving up on the project or intended to resubmit an application later.

Chambers said the township knew only what was in the letter. The company has the right to re-submit an application, but if it does it would have to start the application process from the beginning, she said.

No one from Woda attended the meeting. Craig Patterson, a Woda vice president reached later, said the company is continuing to work on the project.

"We took a step back because we wanted to be sensitive to the needs of the community and better understand their concerns," Patterson said. "We didn't think moving forward tonight and forcing a decision would be in the best interest of the project."

The company hopes the project will be accepted by the community and believes it represents "a fabulous opportunity for working families" to become homeowners, Patterson said. He said he will be contacting local officials in the next few weeks.

Residents at the meeting had expressed just those concerns, that the project would continue. Resident Rick Shepas said he believed from the start the project was a "done deal." He added, "It's only a matter of time before this thing is going to go through."

Supervisor Reed Kiger said, however, the supervisors had learned much about the project in the last few weeks and had developed a "good game plan" to address it.

"As far as we're concerned it's a done deal, they withdrew," Kiger said. "We're prepared for the next round, if that happens," he added.

Residents raised additional concerns, asking whether more advance notice could be given on projects in the future and whether changes in the ordinances could be made to make sure projects better fit the existing community.

Residents received notice of the project only several days before it came to the supervisors. The township planning commission had reviewed and recommended its approval on Jan. 18, after which letters were sent to nearby property owners.

The supervisors considered approving the plan with conditions the next Monday on Jan. 24. Township code enforcement officer Steve Coss said the township would change the process so there would be more time between planning commission review and the supervisor's approval.

Herb Thompson, a spokesman for residents, told the supervisors residents opposed developments such as Woda's that included rent-to-own leases and suggested the township prioritize development of single-family, owner-occupied homes.

He and other residents also suggested the township review its ordinances to consider restrictions on large scale rental communities and tighter regulations regarding housing density and lot sizes.

The supervisors indicated they intend to review their ordinances and make revisions. "Situations like this bring things like that to the forefront," supervisor Corbly Orndorff said. Kiger added, however, all changes would have to be made in accordance with the law.

Observer-Reporter, Thursday, February 3, 2011

## Residents Criticize Housing Proposal for Franklin Township

By Cara Host, Staff writer [chost@observer-reporter.com](mailto:chost@observer-reporter.com)

WAYNESBURG -- Greene County's dealings with an Ohio company that wants to build a low- to moderate-income housing development in Franklin Township caught the ire of some residents Wednesday.

Woda Group LLC of Westerville plans to build 50 single-family homes on 17 acres off Powell Lane, which is near Park Avenue.

The project has spurred strong opposition from nearby homeowners, who cite concerns about lower property values and higher crime rates. About 20 of those residents complained at the county commissioners' agenda meeting Wednesday.

Commissioner Pam Snyder said she and her fellow commissioners have been aggressively pursuing developers to address housing needs in the county. For several months, county officials worked with representatives from Woda on a housing facility for seniors. Those plans fell through, and Woda started work on a development for lower-income families.

"The only thing we want to do is improve the housing stock and increase the tax base," Snyder said. "You deserve to have all your questions and concerns answered, and if it's still something you don't want in your neighborhood, you have to do what you need to do," Snyder told those who oppose the development.

Residents who move to one of the houses in Woda's development will have to make less than \$22,780 to \$40,000, depending on the number of people in the household, and be able to pay \$630 to \$690 a month in rent, which includes utilities. Some of the rent could be subsidized, depending on a resident's income.

According to the developer, the houses will have a rent-to-own option. Residents will receive up to \$100 in purchase credits for every month they live in the home, and, after 15 years, they can use that money for a down payment to purchase their houses.

Linda Chambers, solicitor for Franklin Township, questioned whether federal law would allow Woda to offer the rent-to-own provision.

The developer will receive federal tax credits under Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code to build the development. But Chambers questioned whether Woda would lose those tax credits if it sold the houses.

"I believe people have been misled by this developer," Chambers said.

Craig Patterson, vice president for Woda, said his company has constructed several other housing developments under Section 42 and the rent-to-own provision is in full compliance with the law.

Resident Ty Bintrim worried about the effect on the housing market if that many houses are put up for sale. "Can you imagine what will happen in 15 years and they put 50 houses on the market at the same time?" he said.

Patterson said such a scenario is nearly impossible because residents won't reach the 15-year qualification at the same time.

The county needs affordable housing, Snyder said, and a development like the one Woda proposed may help address that need. Greene County officials spoke with their counterparts in other counties where Woda has built similar developments.

"They have all said these developments have done nothing but good for their communities," Snyder said. "We tried to find something bad (about Woda's developments), but I have yet to find anyone who says anything negative."

Robbie Matesic, the county's director of economic development, noted that the median household income in Greene County is \$40,589, which isn't much higher than the income limits for Woda's housing development. "Forty-five percent of our households could meet the income criteria of Woda's proposed homes in Franklin Township," Matesic said. "We feel Woda just landed on the bull's-eye (in terms of income guidelines). This is a very good thing for Greene County." Matesic also noted that potential residents would have to pass a background check to include credit rating, references from previous landlords and criminal history.

The project received conditional approval from Franklin Township Planning Commission last month, but Franklin Township supervisors still have to approve the plans. They may act on the matter at a 6 p.m. meeting Feb. 14. Chambers said the township has many unanswered questions, and she hopes the developer will be able to provide answers at that meeting.