

THE VILLAGE OF
OKEMOS

MINOR AMENDMENT TO MUPUD
Public Hearing Information and FAQ

Meridian Township is holding a public hearing via Zoom for Thurs., Jan. 7 at 6 p.m. to receive public comments on the application for a minor amendment to the Mixed Use Planned Unit Development, or MUPUD.

Details of the meeting can be found here, including how to log in via Zoom:
<https://www.meridian.mi.us/Home/ShowDocument?id=22263>.

Per the meeting notice: "The developer is proposing to reduce the amount of commercial space in the project by 19,790 square feet, add 81 residential units, and substitute surface parking for the parking garages. Overall, 286 total residential units and approximately 32,860 square feet of commercial space is proposed."

We've had a number of questions and want people with concerns to know that we hear you! The development team thought it would be helpful to address the three biggest concern areas we've received questions about:

1. Concerns about eliminating the "village" feel envisioned as a result of decreasing the commercial space.

It's really important to our team that the community understands our vision for a walkable Hamilton Road corridor with shops and restaurants remains the same. The proposed minor amendment being considered still provides the same amount of retail and restaurant space for the project. The commercial space we're proposing converting to residential was originally designed as office space along Okemos Road. Commercial office space as a whole is expected to be in much lower demand following the pandemic, and thus, we are proposing converting that space along Okemos Road into multi-story townhomes. We're building out those spaces in such a way that if market demands do dramatically shift, we could consider commercial again in the future. We know agility will be required in such uncertain times, but right now market trends project those office spaces would simply sit empty as the way (and place) people work changes. We remain optimistic retail and restaurant will rebound. The proposed retail and restaurant space along Hamilton Road remains the same as originally designed, with the same goal of lining Hamilton with shops and places to eat, which will include the Douglas J Salon and Barber Shop. The plan for this retail and restaurant space along Hamilton has not changed.

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2. Concerns about changes to the underground parking.

As the assessment of the level of contamination in the soil makes it more difficult and expensive to create underground parking, and the current economic conditions put additional strain on project funding and the need to reduce costs, we are having to adapt the original plans from one level of underground parking and a surface lot, to a one-level above grade parking ramp -- described another way, surface parking and one story above it -- on each block. These ramps will be behind the buildings and not obviously visible from Okemos Road and Hamilton, though they will be visible from side streets and thus care will be taken to ensure they're visually appealing and fit in with the aesthetics and architecture of the buildings.

3. Fears that this is a bait and switch on the intent of the project.

We hear you. Many members of the development team live in this community and have seen some of the bait and switch changes to other projects, most notably those billed as housing for long-term residents and then once built marketed directly to students for student housing. The changes being requested through the minor amendment do not change the project's target residential market. We believe in fair housing and cannot and will not discriminate in housing. To be blunt, we cannot say no if a student chooses the village as their home, but the additional residential housing proposed include multi-story townhomes meant as ideal options for retirees and for those looking to downsize from single family homes, or unique options for professionals and families looking to live in a dense, vibrant environment. These residential options will be bolstered by the storefronts and eateries along Hamilton Road.

Our decisions were not driven by a financial need for more residential housing, but rather driven by the market and the use of space to meet the demand. There is not demand for office, but there is demand for residential. We are exploring convertible spaces that could be used as hybrid live-work spaces if the market evolves into that direction. We're doing our best to adapt to not just short-term changes in our world, but the long-term implications of those and how it will affect the use of spaces and Downtown Okemos specifically in the future.

Thank you for your questions, feedback and messages. As always, we're happy to answer any additional questions you may have as well as continue to receive feedback. Feel free to reach out directly to Will Randle at True North Development at 517-580-2550 or will@truenorthdevco.com.

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