

Planned property investments mark new chapter in River Road's renewal

By Chris Neidenberg, for the River Road Improvement Corporation

Builders aimed at bringing new commercial and residential development to the River Road area, are sending a clear signal that River Road and Fair Lawn offer a strong climate for new investment.

Five builders and those long associated with the district believe the climate, in great part, is due to the partnership that exists between the River Road Improvement Corporation (RRIC) and Fair Lawn's municipal government.

The projects, in various stages of development, will either rehabilitate existing structures or replace older buildings.

Five projects seem to offer a mix of residential and commercial uses, in line with the borough's zoning ordinance. Arthur Levine, a founding member of the RRIC, credits his group and Fair Lawn's elected governing body for creating the right climate that has helped lure these proposed new investments to the area. Most, but not all of the projects, appear likely to be completed before the end of 2004.

Levine noted, earlier this year, the elected governing body acted on an RRIC recommendation - to make redevelopment even more viable - by allowing residences on both the second and third floors in new construction. And, it seems that investors are responding to these recommendations.

If approved, not only will these developments spur new economic activity, they will provide living quarters for people, such as young professionals and others, who can contribute to the life and vitality of the River Road area. After all, these tenants will comprise a potential pool of new shoppers and clients for the different businesses and professional services that dot the district's landscape.

Levine said there is a firm and documented basis for municipality to move in this direction.

Mayor David L. Ganz, who serves on the RRIC board as the municipality's representative, said the approach the borough and corporation are taking, in trying enhance the area with these combined commercial/residential uses, has been well-thought out.

"We are always happy to see responsible development in Fair Lawn," the mayor said. "The council is delighted with the progress, which may seem slow to some, but is about on par for this kind of development."

The five projects on the drawing board are:

The Lamring Dairy site, 16-23 River Road is opposite the new building being constructed for Commerce Bank. The site, formerly occupied by one of Fair Lawn's older dairy farms, and its current owner, Gene Platt, are currently before the Zoning Board. The development, adjacent to near-by Shop-Rite, will build a three-story commercial/residential building with off-street parking. The building will have three commercial ground floor units and the second and third floors will have eight apartments (six two-bedroom, and two one-bedroom, units).

Fronting on Lamring Drive, the development will include two new single-family, houses. Platt hopes the hearings will conclude sometime in December.

The Rotella Property, 14-08 River Road

This site has been under development for some time, and unfortunately for all parties involved and the community in general, the direction of development has not yet been agreed upon. Owner Eugene Rotella of Franklin Lakes has received property maintenance summonses for the property and will appear in Municipal Court in November to answer the summonses.

Rotella's initial application called for building a combined residential/commercial structure by adding a second story containing eight offices and providing eight off-street parking spaces.

In 2001, the Planning Board rejected Rotella's initial proposal citing, among other issues, insufficient parking.

Rotella appealed the Planning Board's decision to the Bergen County Superior Court. The Court referred the case back to the Planning Board in late 2002. The Planning Board is awaiting the applicant's return before the Board but no application has been filed by Rotella.

The property, boarded up for the last two years is an unfortunate and highly visible reminder to all who travel River Road of the cost to all in not coming to agreement on the future of this property.

The former Fair Lawn Arts Center site on River Road and The Neidani Property, 3-06 Fair Lawn Avenue

The ownership of these two properties are completely unrelated to each other, However, because each property shares a common attorney and



Interstate Glass, 10-16 River Road, is under development

design architect, both can draw upon shared skills and local experience. Each property will be represented before the Planning Board by resident and attorney Jeffrey Kantowitz, along with architect Raphael Danon.

Both plans call for putting commercial uses in new buildings on the first floor and apartments on second and third floors. This is consistent with the Borough Council's recent modification of the zoning ordinance, based on a prior RRIC recommendation. Kantowitz and Danon are representing M&R Development Corp. of Ft. Lee in a pending application for the former Arts Center site. The facility closed last May, after M&R bought it from the municipality for \$975,000.

The proposal calls for 10 upper story apartments and ground floor commercial development with 20 off-street parking spaces. The group anticipates presenting a detailed application later this year.

In the Neidani matter, Danon and Kantowitz are representing David Neidani, the owner.

The application calls for commercial uses on the first floor with residential units on the second floor. Hearings on this project are ongoing before the Planning Board.

Kantowitz noted that his clients "have responded with applications that are in full accordance with borough ordinances," the lawyer said. "If approved, these developments will help in the revitalization of the River Road area."

Improvements to the former Interstate Glass property, 10-16 River Road

Steve Wadsworth, an attorney for the Ives Group of Fair Lawn, will be developing architectural plans for the owner, D.Kanon of Fair Lawn, a local realtor.

"Most likely, there will be a renovation of the existing property that also features additional permitted residential and office uses," Wadsworth explained. "We hope to have something more concrete in the very near future."

This is the fourth in a five-part series examining various initiatives that have been made to improve the River Road corridor, through the efforts of the River Road Improvement Corporation.

Articles deal with:

- Financial institutions "banking" on River Roads future
- Grants program brings "signs of improvement" to River Road
- Traffic flow improvements
- New property investment
- End of year report