

## Fort Lee planners OK special-needs housing

### 58 units in high-rise designated for disabled

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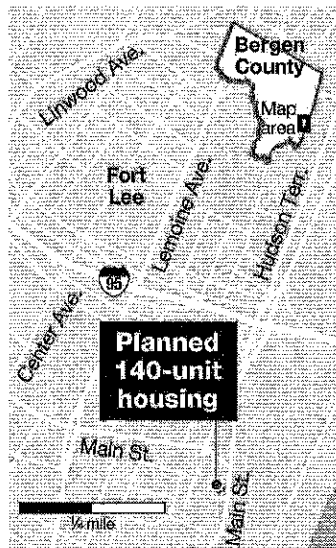
FORT LEE — The borough's first special-needs housing project was approved this week by the Planning Board, adding Fort Lee's name to a growing trend among Bergen County municipalities to provide residences for tenants with disabilities.

Half of the 140 units in the 15-story high-rise will be rented at below-market rate to low-income tenants. That includes 58 units designated for special-needs individuals. The units will range from studios to three bedrooms.

"Special-need and affordable housing — these are two things that are wonderful," Planning Board Chairman Herbert Greenberg said. "We have a social responsibility. ... I think the town is fulfilling our responsibility to the community."

As a condition of the approval, developer Fred Daibes must ask county officials if a traffic light should be installed in the area. Though more than 40 percent of the units would be inhabited by special-needs tenants who aren't expected to drive, Greenberg said that at least one member of the public has expressed concerns about increased traffic congestion as a result of the development.

The building at 69 Main St. — in a redevelopment zone and on the site of Prestige Auto Body — would sit at the eastern end of the street, where it merges with River Road, one of the main arteries connecting residents in



R.L. REBACH/STAFF ARTIST

Edgewater and North Bergen to the George Washington Bridge.

Two other large developments under way in the same section of town, which include two 47-story residential towers and a shopping center, are expected to put more than 1,000 additional vehicles onto the roadways.

But public feedback for the project has also been positive, with advocates for special-needs individuals praising the borough for doing its part in meeting the needs of such adults.

That includes the developer, whose teenage son is autistic. Daibes could not be reached Tuesday, but he said previously that he hopes to help the tenants with job placements, including possibly busing them to their work places.

Borough officials plan to approve a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement with Daibes — a tax break that municipalities use to entice developers to build projects they might otherwise not take on. The borough's attorney could not be reached for comment, but his law partner, Frank Regan, said that the exact terms of the PILOT agreement still need to be negotiated. However, under a previously approved developer's agreement, Daibes' payment would be up to 20 percent of the project's gross revenues each year.

Providing housing for a growing population of special-needs individuals is a challenge that municipalities will face in the future. One in 49 children in New Jersey are diagnosed with autism.

Several Bergen County municipalities, including Fort Lee, have adopted Access for All committees to address barriers in their towns for special-needs individuals, county officials have said.

Fort Lee officials have also been in talks with Bergen County's United Way to build a smaller special-needs housing complex in town. The United Way already has a project built in Allendale and one approved in Wanaque.

"Every municipality that has the wherewithal should provide for all of its residents," Mayor Mark Sokolich said. "Through smart development, you can incorporate for people with special needs."

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