

Wanaque plans more housing for disabled

Bergen United Way will build 8 units

By JEFF GREEN
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The Bergen County United Way is expanding its affordable-housing initiative into Passaic County next year with eight special-needs apartments in Wanaque.

Borough officials this month approved new zoning for the project, which will be at 10 Warren Hagstrom Blvd. Tom Toronto, president of Bergen County United Way, said its design is still being worked out, but the organization hopes to build two structures with four 700-square-foot apartments in each for people with developmental disabilities. If everything goes as planned, they could be fully constructed by late next year.

Toronto said about 8,000 disabled people are on a state waiting list for supportive housing. Many of those people can live independently if they have a residence that is suited to their needs, such as wheelchair accessibility, he said.

Wanaque officials reached out to the United Way after hearing from a concerned parent of a de-

velopmentally disabled child and out of a desire to commit the borough's affordable housing funds, Toronto said. Governor Christie had threatened to seize any unused housing funds from municipalities, a plan that was later blocked by a state appeals court.

May aid construction

Bergen County United Way is the only chapter in the state working on housing development, Toronto said. The group, partnering with another non-profit, the Madeline Corp., has in recent years overseen the construction of affordable and special-needs housing in Allendale, Fairview and Ramsey. A second development in Allendale, designed for 24 residents, is scheduled to open Tuesday.

Wanaque purchased the Warren Hagstrom Boulevard property for the project with \$300,000 from its housing trust fund and will be donating it to United Way. Borough Administrator Tom Carroll said the special-needs units help fulfill the borough's court-mandated obligation to promote housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people.

The borough also has expressed interest in contributing housing funds to the construction costs, which could run from \$1 million to \$1.2 million. The next step for the project is submitting a site plan application to the Planning Board.

Toronto said his organization has had a good working relationship with the borough.

"It wasn't a question of 'Should we do it?' It was a question of 'How do we do it?'" he said.

