

# Fells development delayed on height

CHRISTOPHER PETERSON, cpeterson@pioneerlocal.com

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The new owners of the Fell Company property will have to wait a little longer for preliminary approval for their development plans.

Because lengthy discussions pushed a Winnetka Plan Commission meeting close to 11 p.m., officials postponed the decision of whether to allow the plans for the site to survive to the next round.

The commission's next meeting is July 23, at which point it will continue its questioning and make a decision.

Before plans can receive final approval, they must first get preliminary approval from the Plan Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Village Council.

The DRB gave the nod June 5, and the ZBA will review the plans July 14.

At the June 25 meeting, the Plan Commission heard from New Trier Partners, a development firm which plans to build four floors of retail and condos and underground parking at the 1-acre site. The property includes the former Fell Company location at 511 Lincoln Ave., and commercial storefronts from 716 to 713 Elm St. It also includes 515 Lincoln Ave.

The toughest case the firm had to make was for the full four stories and nearly 50 feet of height. The village currently has a 45-foot cap for buildings, but the developers argued that an attractive four-story building would require a little more room.

"Four stories is what we need at a minimum to make this happen," said Michael Klein, a managing partner of the firm.

Other developers, Klein said, wouldn't consider a similar project with fewer than four floors because they would not make enough money.

He also argued that the building directly south of the site is four stories high.

The commission asked if New Trier Partners could provide a model of the structure, but it is not required. The firm said providing a model before the final approval phase could be an expensive risk.

Resident Bob Dearborn said it would not be too much to ask for a model.

"To say that you can't have a model, that it's too expensive, is to me, at worst a dodge," he said. "You have to have it."

Former Village Trustee Jessica Tucker agreed.

She added that once a project makes it to the final round, it's tough to back up and make major changes to the plans.

Residents at the meeting were split on the firm's plans. Some praised the concept of increased retail east of the railroad tracks, and others objected to the proposed height of 49.5 feet.

Tucker said if the plans are approved, the new structure would not fit in with the smaller buildings nearby.

"You're going to have this 50-foot-plus building plopped right there in the middle," she said. Klein urged the commission to allow the extra feet for building, noting both economics and aesthetics.

"What we own isn't pretty, and we're trying to change that," he said.

He said it would be tough to please everyone and still see an outcome that's worth the cost. "You want it to look like it fell out of the 1930s, but you also want it developed," Klein said. "At the end of the day, something has to give."

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