



## Robbinsville planning board reviews Sharbell's plan to build 150-unit development

Published: Wednesday, February 16, 2011, 10:20 AM Updated: Wednesday, February 16, 2011, 10:20 AM



By **Carmen Cusido/The Times**

**ROBBINSVILLE** -- Sharbell Building Co. will come before the planning board again tonight in hope of converting its previously planned "active adult" housing development on Gordon Road into 150 non age-restricted units.

Sharbell would take advantage of a 2009 state law that made such conversions possible to help developers get around a glut of senior housing in New Jersey. The downside for Robbinsville is that regular housing will likely increase the number of school-age children and the cost of educating them.

David Boyne, a member of the town council who is also a voting member of the planning board, said he thinks he will be voting against the application.

"Our schools are overcrowded as it is, and this is adding more kids to an overcrowded situation, which isn't good," Boyne said.

The planning board heard three hours of testimony on Jan. 19, and were scheduled to meet again and discuss the application on Jan. 26, before inclement weather again moved the application to today's agenda.

Tom Troy, Sharbell's senior vice president, said he knows planning board members have concerns regarding the number of children the proposed development can bring in, but hopes his application is approved.

Experts representing Sharbell, including civil and traffic engineers and an architect, plan to complete their presentation today, Troy said.

At last month's meeting, housing analyst Jeffrey Otteau was one of the experts testifying on behalf of Sharbell. He told the board the traditional link in the state "between new home construction and school enrollment no longer exists."

Boyne said the new plan would be better if no affordable housing were included, as such housing would generate less tax revenue.



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"I'm worried about the tax rate in our town," Boyne said.

Thirty of the 150 units would be designated as affordable housing.

The amended preliminary site plan also proposes 58,525 square feet of retail and 70,050 square feet of office space, according to the application.

The township has experienced a growth spurt in the past 10 years, according to U.S. Census figures. The number of people calling Robbinsville home grew by 32.8 percent from 10,275 to 13,642, between 2000 and 2010.

About 350 additional children could attend the public schools from developments not yet completed in the township, according to a demographic study the school district commissioned back in 2009. That figure does not factor in Sharbell's new proposed plan.

Sharon Elementary School already uses trailers and modular classrooms, and Pond may go in that direction in the 18 months.

Last year township residents defeated a \$39.6 million referendum to build a K-5 school and make repairs to Sharon Elementary and Pond Road Middle School.

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210

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