

Medical Offices Guilderland Issue

By ELLE PANKIN

Along Western Avenue in the Town of Guilderland, the doctors are gaining patients.

Along the same street and access streets of Parkwood and Elmwood Streets, the residents are losing patience.

The residents also claim they are losing parking spaces in front of their own homes by increased medical traffic.

They fear, too, they say, that the spot rezoning which allows office-apartment complexes with accompanying absentee landlordism are about to lower the value on their residential, primarily one-family, properties.

What began in July as opposition to one dentist's purchase and development of a one-man practice facility at 1 Parkwood Street has erupted into a more vehement reaction by residents of the McKownville area who now seek to keep an additional two physicians (in separate practices) and an area developer from having their properties rezoned from residential to commercial.

Two petitions are being circulated and are due to be presented at 8 p.m. Tuesday at Guilderland Town Hall when residents are expected to come forth en masse to protect the modifications to their neighborhood.

One petition, according to Mrs. Melvyn Behn of 27 Parkwood Street East, protests the rezoning of property at 1 Parkwood St. owned by Dr. George Harff, a dentist; a second at 1451 Western Avenue belonging to Dr. J. A. Rissacher, a chiropractor; and a third at 1461 Western Ave. belonging to Dr. Anthony Mastrianni, a pediatrician.

The second petition is being circulated, Mrs. Behn said, against rezoning of two properties at 1245 and 1257 Western Ave. One property is already owned by Armand Quadrini; the second at 1257 reportedly is a possible purchase by Quadrini, contingent upon rezoning from residential to commercial.

increases of spot zoning, they soon will have to combat a huge amount of traffic. The omnipresent fear that a fire truck or ambulance will some day be unable to make an emergency call also preys on some minds.

What seems to have been a recent misunderstanding between McKownville Improvement Association members and town officials is adding its own fuel to the controversy.

According to some residents, Dr. Harff's hearing was to have been postponed until September. It was held in August. But according to Harold Crouse, planning and zoning coordinator, and Carl Walters, town supervisor, by the time the residents requested a postponement, Dr. Harff's hearing already was in the hopper.

The town has tried, Crouse and Walters note, to allow residents plenty of time to get their facts and protests together for the Tuesday night hearing on the Mastrianni, Rissacher, and Quadrini requests.

Walters said, in fact, that in compliance with residents' feelings on the matter, decision by the board on Dr. Harff's zoning request will be postponed beyond the September meeting as originally planned.

Nor does the town deny the spot zoning and the residents' complaints offer an easy solution. Crouse said this week, that far from the town turning a blind eye to the legalities of the zoning laws and subsequent requests, it was he who brought the issue before the public.

"I'm the one who opened this kettle of fish," Crouse said. "We recognize that with so many Western Avenue properties for sale being purchased by professional people, we would be opening the way for a mass of violations. And, somehow, we have to correct it," Crouse said.

The coordinator said he realized, too, that residents feared more than the influx of physicians and medical persons. The concept of "spot zoning" bears with it, Crouse said the threat of a randomly-placed delicatessen or some such neon-lit edifice.

Dr. Mastrianni originally occupied a residence at the site of his practice. He has since moved and his practice now includes two other physicians.

McKownville residents are urging the town to follow the master plan. They also are reminding officials that the original deeds of their various properties include a clause restricting commercial ventures in the area once known as "Country Club Highlands."

Residents who have remorsefully nicknamed the area along Western Avenue "the clinic" because of the rapidly expanding group of medical practices, have even offered such extreme solutions to protect themselves against further medical inroads as prohibition of on-street parking—thus dissuading doctors from considering the area at all.

Of more mundane matter than property devaluation but no less important, residents note school buses have difficulty in entering side streets; they often cannot see to exit from their driveways without hazard; and they often come home to no parking space whatsoever.

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Ideally, Crouse said, zoning regulations should be rewritten so that a special use permit could be applied for by a physician within a residential area. He would not receive his permit unless all stipulations within the law were answered. Those would include, Crouse said, parking, drainage, size of practice, numbers in the practice itself specific building modifications, etc.

As far as residents' objections to violation of the master plan, Crouse maintains, no master plan is designed to go on ad infinitum. "A planner knows that as a town grows, certain changes in plans must come, he said. "Master plans are not for time immemorial," Crouse concluded.

Changes in the zoning laws—new last year—would have to be made through a town-wide referendum.

Adding a bit of irony to the matter is the fact that even residents vocally opposed admit to the joy of having reputable and qualified professionals in the vicinity.

The requests for rezoning have definitely put town officials on the "spot." And into a situation which Crouse is the first to admit is "complex."