

The Exeter News-Letter

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Full house for Szanton building plan

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EXETER — Vocal proponents and opponents of a proposed mixed-use building downtown packed the Planning Board meeting last Thursday night to have a say about the controversial plan.

Key among the detractors' concerns was insufficient parking for the retail/residential building proposed for between Town Hall and Citizens Bank on Water Street. Supporters, meanwhile, said they saw a beautiful building that would add to downtown's allure.

Nathan Szanton of Portland, Maine, the developer, was there to

explain his intentions, answer questions and listen to the citizen's comments.

The building would be four floors with the ground floor designated to retail.

The other three floors would be one- and two-bedroom apartments. About half of the apartments would be work-force housing and the rest would be rented at market value.

The biggest discussion of the

night concerned the town's parking and traffic problems.

According to the plan there would be two levels of parking and a total of 110 spaces. The lower level would contain 49 spaces for the bank, Rockingham Planning Commission and Rockingham Economic Development Corp., which all have spaces allotted in their lease.

An additional 10 spaces would be used for the new retail businesses, and 14 would be for the public's use.

On the upper level, there would be 37 spaces for the 37 units proposed for the apartment building.

The town's zoning ordinance requires a total of 165 spaces for the building — 2½ spaces for each rental apartment, and a space for each 200 square feet of retail space.

Szanton said the town of Exeter will benefit from the building by multiplying the "property tax revenue on the parking lot twenty-fold, from \$3,900 now to approximately \$78,000," Szanton said.

Elliot Berkowitz, building owner downtown, said he is very happy with the design of the building but his biggest concern is its size, compounded by the parking problem in town.

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TALKING HEADS

Plain Talk this week gauges people's reaction to Szanton's proposal.

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Building plan debated

SZANTON, from Page A1

Berkowitz said that he hasn't seen a picture of the proposed building that would show its real scale. He said he thinks the building looks too big for the spot.

He said he also concerned that the building would worsen existing problems with retail deliveries in town. There is no place for a truck to park and unload to retail establishments now, he said. More stores downtown means more trucks, and with more people living downtown, it means more people on the road, causing more problems.

"I just don't see how it is going to work," he said.

Resident Steve Cole said that he is not opposed to the building but is opposed to the additional problems it will create downtown. He, too, said that more people bring more parking and traffic, saying it will "add to our problem."

Cole said he hopes that the parking problem is addressed before it is decided that more people and retail businesses will move in downtown.

He also said that people will not want to come downtown if there is no place to park.

Resident Chris Moutis said that he is in favor of the building.

"I am baffled by this," he said of

the opposition. "We don't need to take the (town's parking problem) out on someone who wants to build a beautiful" structure.

"I view this as a restoration to town," he added.

Resident Peter Smith agreed with Moutis. He said that parking in downtown has been an issue for decades, and people have been complaining about it for that long, too.

"Something like this will bring the (parking problem) to a head," he said.

Smith said that maybe adding this building to Exeter will prompt the town to do something about the parking and traffic issue.

After the Planning Board heard all of the comments and had seen the plan, members voiced their own opinions. Town Planner Sylvia Von Aulock reminded residents that there are two warrant articles on the ballot that would, if passed, begin to solve the parking problems in Exeter. One creates a transportation fund, and the other seeks money for a "pay and display" machines for the Water Street lot.

Von Aulock said she was impressed with how much time Szanton has spent on this project. He

The Szanton proposal

- 37 apartment units, about half work-force housing — 28 one-bedroom, nine two-bedroom.

- Salaries for those who qualify for work-force housing are as follows: for one person, \$29,000; for two, \$33,400; three, \$37,600; and for four, \$41,800.

- Proposed rents are: work force, \$650 for a one-bedroom, (heat and water included), \$1,100, market rate; \$800, two-bedroom, \$1,500, market rate.

- Substantial background screening includes credit checks and interviews with past landlords.

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has talked with the Planning Board, the Historic District Commission and residents about the project, making sure it goes along with the style and look of historic Exeter.

She added that, "this is an awesome project for downtown."

Board member Kathy Corson was very excited about the plan, especially the work-force housing aspect.

"I qualify to live there," she said.