

The Capital

Pastors oppose bill to change definition of nursing homes

By DAVID ABRAMS Staff Writer

A group of Episcopal rectors has warned the County Council that it would be guilty of an "act of grave injustice" if it passes new rules on nursing homes that would stymie a proposed facility in Churchton.

In an e-mail organized by the Rev. Carl Rehling and sent to council members, 15 rectors from parishes across Anne Arundel County urged the council to reject or amend a bill by Councilmen Barbara D. Samorajczyk, D-Annapolis Roads, and Ed Reilly, R-Crofton.

The bill would force Crandell Cove, an apartment community for senior citizens, to restart the zoning approval process.

"If this bill is passed as written without retroactive provisions for those projects already approved by county agencies, it will be reported as such in our written communications with our congregations," the e-mail said.

The Rev. Rehling, president of the nonprofit Crandell Cove Inc. set up to build the facility, confirmed this morning that he sent the e-mail.

The project has gone through the process as a nursing home under antiquated rules, even though it would not have a medical staff.

Councilman Cathleen M. Vitale, R-Severna Park, said the bill should not reverse a process that has already passed several phases.

"Once again, we're in a situation where a group of individuals don't want a project so they're trying to kill it by having the law changed," she said.

The legislation aims to change the definition of nursing homes in the zoning

code.

"What this bill does is it makes the definition of nursing homes consistent with the state definition of nursing

homes," Ms. Samorajczyk said before a public hearing this week in Annapolis.

"The purpose of it is to ensure that a fraud is not perpetrated on our seniors."

Before the hearing, the Rev. Rehling spoke with Ms. Samorajczyk. He said he was insulted that she used the word "fraud."

"At times there was disagreement and there were lots of arguments, but never have I felt so insulted as I do today," he said. "Fraud is a very serious charge."

Crandell Cove representatives insist they never called the facility a nursing home, but were counseled by county officials to designate the project as such.

The development would be on Franklin Manor Road east of Deale-Churchton Road. It's planned for a 24-acre property that's mostly protected wetlands.

The development would include 32 apartments for up to 64 residents, an administration building, a maintenance building, an activity center and a chapel. It would be built on about 4.5 acres on higher ground.

The land for the senior community was placed in trust when Churchton resident Jewell B. Crandell's husband, John, died four years ago.

"I have helped elderly people," Mrs. Crandell said. "I have seen elderly people who have broken their hips, and helped them to get well and walk - which is unusual."

While supporters of Crandell Cove generally supported the change in the law, they said the project should go forward rather than being blocked by after-the-fact legislation.

Mrs. Samorajczyk this morning said the statement from the Rev. Rehling raises questions about the Episcopal Church's involvement in Crandell Cove. The statement said the project is sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.

Bishop Robert W. Ihloff, head of diocese, has said the church will not own or run the facility, but has taken an active role in sponsoring such projects.

Mrs. Samorajczyk said it was her understanding that a private interest was developing Crandell Cove with no legal or financial interest from the church.

Amanda Spake, president of South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Development, urged the council to pass the bill as written.

"I understand the site is being donated by the Crandells, and I think that's a wonderful thing," she said. "Whether that's the ideal spot for senior housing I think is very debatable."

Staff Writer Jeff Horseman contributed to this story.

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