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## EDITORIAL: Change on the horizon in the Somerset Hills

Charlie Zavalick, Editor, Bernardsville News

Hundreds of new homes and apartments are expected to become available in the Somerset Hills towns in the months and years ahead, primarily as the result of state mandates requiring housing that's affordable to lower-income families.

Some of these new developments are also expected to include restaurants, shops, park areas and other public gathering places. The details of the projects have been thoroughly reviewed by local planning board members, volunteers from the communities who've spent countless hours at long meetings over many months to help refine the proposals.

Working with town engineers and other experts, in addition to professionals hired by the applicants, they've often called for revisions to improve the plans and make them a better fit for their communities.

In some cases, the local planners have been criticized by residents who oppose the pending changes to their towns. But their hands have largely been tied by legal

requirements that prevent them from outright rejecting the development applications, even though they may prefer to do just that.

While few are happy with the affordable housing mandates facing New Jersey towns, it seems the best course of action is to work cooperatively with the developers to meet the requirements while minimizing the impact on the towns.

Bedminster officials in particular have demonstrated that ability and helped design plans for a 160-unit apartment project that appears poised to become an attractive and beneficial addition to the Pluckemin Village area.

The application for land off Route 202-206 was approved by the township Land Use Board last Thursday. Despite already having hundreds of affordable homes, mostly at The Hills development, Bedminster was still required to provide additional affordable rentals. This project will help satisfy that mandate, and also provide retail space and other

community gathering areas that may help revitalize that section of town. Traffic improvements are also included.

It seems an example of making the best of what could be a bad situation.

In Bernards Township, a new apartment complex is nearing completion at the site of a former supermarket at the Dewy Meadow mall off King George Road. That project, called The Enclave at Dewy Meadows, will be home to 198 apartments, including 30 income-restricted rentals. The number of market rentals seems high in comparison to the affordable ones, but is unfortunately a standard practice that gives developers a financial incentive to build the less expensive units.

The project includes a swimming pool, clubhouse and playground for the residents. While no public gathering areas or retail space is included, having new residents here should help keep existing businesses at Dewy Meadow viable. *(Con't on next pg.)*

We also like the fact that the affordable units are scattered among the other apartments in the project instead of being isolated in a separate building, which is often the case. It's a more inclusionary concept that hopefully brings residents of various income levels together.

Plans for a 134-unit "inclusionary" development on Route 202 in Far Hills are also

nearing approval but have faced considerable public opposition.

Bernardsville officials have received state approval for several smaller affordable housing projects in the borough, and are looking to include affordable units in the proposed Quimby Village redevelopment project, which is envisioned to include new retail buildings and public spaces.

The changes that will be coming to the quiet Somerset Hills towns may not be to everyone's liking, but if done properly, will hopefully fit well into the established communities and even provide some long-term benefits.

*Editor's note: This article originally appeared in [The Bernardsville News](#).*