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Largest-ever EHT housing project going before planners

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EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP - The largest housing proposal in the history of Egg Harbor Township will go up for final subdivision approval before the Planning Board on Monday night.

Pulte Homes proposes to develop a 273-acre site on Wescoat Road by transforming the wooded land into 667 lots and building Ocean Club, a 657-home community. The site is in the north section of the township and is close to the Atlantic City International Airport, the Garden State Parkway and the Atlantic County Utilities Authority landfill and recycling center.

The company plans to build the Ocean Club in six phases. It is to include 140 single-family attached townhouses, 258 age-restricted homes for adults over 55, and 259 single-family detached homes. Other amenities proposed for the remaining lots include two clubhouses with recreation fields, a pool, tennis courts, playground and putting area. The development will have two pump stations, a section preserved for open space and water basins for drainage.

Pulte Homes, based in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., is a residential building company that operates in 26 states, according to the business' Web site. Representatives for Pulte Homes did not return phone calls for an interview Tuesday and Wednesday.

The township housing project has been in the works since 2004, and the company initially proposed building about 900 homes. The project got preliminary approval in January 2007 with the condition that the developer conduct a study for threatened and endangered species on the property. Other approval conditions included the creation of a tree-management plan to preserve the older and larger tree specimens on the land.

Last spring, Trident Environmental Consultants did field surveys for barred owls and the Cooper's hawk. The barred owl study found that while it is conceivable they could be in the area, there was no evidence of the birds living on the site. The Cooper's hawk study recorded one bird sighting on the property and five other bird sightings flying over or near the property but found no evidence of hawk nests. The study also referred to articles by the Journal of the Massachusetts Audubon Society that noted the Cooper's hawk has modified its habitat preferences around human beings and even shown up in urban areas. The environmental consultants also identified several other trees on the property that could be salvaged.

Pulte Homes also proposes to give \$350,000 and a 2-acre parcel of land to the Farmington Volunteer Fire Department to build a firehouse substation, and contribute \$800,000 to the township's recreation fund.

To e-mail Michelle Lee:

MLee@pressofac.com

MONDAY MEETING

The Egg Harbor Township Planning Board will meet at 6:30 p.m. Monday in the township Municipal Building, 3515 Bargaintown Road. For information about the agenda, visit the township Web site at

www.ehtgov.org

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