

# Zoning board tables Olde Towne East apartment proposal



The proposed apartments don't fit the character of Olde Towne East, critics say.

By [Will Drabold](#)

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An empty lot laced with arsenic and oil has become a sticking point for Olde Towne East residents with competing visions for their neighborhood.

On Tuesday night, the city Board of Zoning Adjustment tabled an application seeking eight variances to build a 40-unit apartment complex at 122 Parsons Ave. after 50 neighborhood residents packed the meeting in opposition.

The abandoned lot, a little less than an acre in size, would cost the developer about \$550,500 and requires \$100,000 more to decontaminate the land, which is legally too polluted to build on, said Michael Woods, CEO of Woods Development Group. His Columbus company has been studying the project for a year and a half.

Opponents, while grateful there is investment interest in their neighborhood, say Woods' project doesn't fit the character of the area. They want ground-floor businesses, fewer apartments and fewer variances from the zoning code.

Opponents also say four stories is too tall — Woods is asking for a maximum height of 70 feet, double what the zoning code designates for the area — and that the complex won't have enough green space.

Residents protested that they weren't consulted enough on the plans. They started a Facebook group and online petition against the current proposal late last week, garnering a few hundred signatures by yesterday.

Ken Wilcox, president of the Olde Towne East Neighborhood Association, said he heard about the proposal in late January, giving him little time to bring it up to the neighborhood for discussion.

"We would like more dialogue with folks who want to invest here ... so we know what to expect," said Wilcox, who is currently neutral on the project.

Backers of the complex say it will bring "young professionals with disposable income." The monthly rents would range from \$960 for the smallest apartment to \$2,100 for the largest two-bedroom town house.

The complex would fill a lot where arson destroyed a carpet factory in 2001.

The project's construction budget is about \$6.3 million, Woods said.

The developer said he tried to find businesses to occupy the first floor of his original design for the complex but couldn't find any takers. He also went through the city's protocols for development.

The Near East Area Commission approved the proposal 6-5 on Feb. 13.

Kathleen Bailey, the commission's chair, said she voted for the plan to bring young professionals into the neighborhood.

City planners said the proposal agrees with the 2005 Near East Area Plan, which recommends three- to four-story buildings with a mix of residences and businesses on that lot.

A 2010 amendment to that plan, approved by the Columbus City Council, says that "purely residential buildings on this site without any retail use are not supported."

And neighborhood residents say they know best what should be developed.

"It's like the politics of being in high school," said Faith Gehring, co-owner of Yellow Brick Pizza, near the proposed complex. "You can't mess up in Olde Towne because everybody knows about it."

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