

Middletown rezones property despite residents' opposition

By [Kevin Penton](#) • Asbury Park Press, KEYPORT BUREAU • July 21, 2009

MIDDLETOWN — Dozens of Lincroft residents crowded into township hall on Monday to voice concern over the rezoning of the Avaya property.

After more than two hours of listening to residents urge them not to rezone the property out of concern their neighborhood would be overrun by hundreds of new homes, Middletown Township Committee voted 5-0 to switch the allowable use from office to multifamily residential.

"I'm reminded of a movie where a judge promised a criminal a fair trial and a fine hanging," said resident Arthur Lavelle to Township Committee members. "I know you're not willing to get the job done."

Middletown rezoned the Avaya property on Middletown-Lincroft Road, the Meadowview property on Main Street and the Mountain Hill property on Route 35 so it could comply with state Council on Affordable Housing regulations, township officials said.

"This is about as voluntary as taking a Breathalyzer if you get pulled over for (driving while intoxicated)," said Brian Nelson, Middletown's attorney, as he detailed the various ways developers could squeeze more homes into sites if the state does not ratify the township's affordable housing plan.

Deputy Mayor Gerard Scharfenberger said he understood residents' concerns, noting that he lives between two properties that could end up being part of Middletown's affordable-housing plan.

"I'm the salami between the two slices of rye bread," said Scharfenberger, who urged residents to appeal to state officials to amend the regulations.

Middletown's plan lists 375 residential units for the Avaya property, of which 75 would qualify as affordable, according to township documents.

Just because Middletown rezoned the Avaya property does not necessarily mean that its owners will go through with the residential development, said Anthony Mercantante, the township's administrator.

Resident Jeffrey Blumengold criticized Middletown for not doing enough to fight the COAH regulations, saying that officials should be "ashamed" for "rolling over."

"We're eroding the commercial tax base and shifting it to the residential," Blumengold said. "That is fundamentally wrong."

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Despite resident protests, the Township Committee voted to change the zoning on the Avaya property (above), located on Middletown-Lincroft road, from office to multifamily residential. (PRESS FILE PHOTO)