

Camphill elder care initiative picking up pace

By Bob Green

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With an application now in the hands of the Ghent Planning Board, the pace is picking up for Camphill Ghent's Elder Care Initiative, a planned community for senior citizens to be located on 109 acres off Route 66. The project aims to provide a "continuum of care" to elders of all abilities and income levels, who frequently lack alternatives to a nursing home, even when they could be at least partially self-sufficient.

The developers are associated with Camphill Village USA, an innovative community in Copake where more than 100 disabled adults live and work in an integrated setting that also includes non-disabled residents and their families. All share in household and community responsibilities. But as residents of the village have aged, they face the same limited options as everyone else.

Now the village is drawing on its principles and experience to create a new aging-in-place alternative, both for its own and for other Columbia County residents, especially those of low and moderate income.

"We've been struggling with questions of aging for 20 years" said Jeff Sexton, a member of the Camphill Ghent Executive Committee, composed mostly of officials of Camphill Copake. They intend to "extend the social-therapeutic model" from Camphill Copake in order to "address the needs of the frail" in an "integrated mutually supportive" setting, he said.

Three housing options are described in the documents submitted to the town last month. "Adult Care" includes a mix of assisted living and adult home units. "Co-housing" is collaborative housing in which residents "operate their own neighborhoods" and provide support services to each other. There will also be "independent cottages", as well as a community center and medical offices that will be accessible to the wider community.

While both programs share the Camphill mission to "enhance the lives of people in need of services and supports for daily living", there will be a number of differences between the existing site for disabled adults in Copake and that which is now planned in Ghent for senior citizens.

In Copake, much care is provided by what are known as coworkers, individuals who volunteer for varying stints, including 58 long-term volunteers, some veterans of 20 years or more, and 34 short-term volunteers, who may come through Americorps, or from countries like Germany where mandated national service can be fulfilled by volunteering abroad. Twenty-seven employees in Copake make up around one quarter of staff, but in Ghent, more like two thirds of the staff will be hired from the surrounding community, Sexton said.

The new facility will also benefit from a more diverse funding stream. Less than half of Camphill Copake's revenue comes from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), according to Sexton. The rest must come from grants and private fundraising. But the new facility, by serving a wider population, can integrate funding from the different agencies that fund different populations.

"It's a joint conversation with both departments, we are trying to interconnect what are usually separate silos," he said, referring to OMRDD's role in funding the disabled, while the Department of Health (DOH) funds nursing home and assisted living programs.

In addition, funding will also come from Medicare, Medicaid, and "Private Pay" residents. This model can "create efficiencies for the state and deliver a high quality of care" at the same time, according to Sexton.

The construction will be financed by a Health Care Efficiency and Affordability grant of \$9,624,788 from DOH,

from a "capital campaign", and from borrowing, now estimated at \$4.8 million for 30 years at 6 percent, according to the project narrative.

With the cost of phase one estimated at around \$20 million in the Autumn 2009 edition of the village newsletter, that leaves \$5 million to be raised for the Ghent initiative. The same newsletter said that Camphill Copake had raised \$1.5 million of its \$1.75 million goal for the fiscal year.

Sexton says this approach to elder care could result in "wider cultural change". Along with its programmatic and financial innovations, the project will employ "environmentally sustainable construction and green technologies, producing much of its own organic food supply and serving as responsible stewards of the land", according to documents.

As a Planned Residential District, in which clusters of homes are surrounded by offsetting open space, the application first required review by the Town Board, which last month voted to refer it to the Planning Board, where it will be discussed at several upcoming meetings. Sexton says the overall density is around 7 percent, which he said is "low".

Michael K. Sullivan PE of Crawford Associates is handling the application for Camphill, and he is already working with the Planning Board. "They asked for elevations to get a better idea of what the buildings looked like", he said, and he thinks they will like what they see. "Our landscape architects have been very sensitive," he said. If this application is successful, then a site plan review by the town will follow. Like the Price Chopper project currently under discussion in Chatham and Ghent, water and sewer could both be issues.

The developers have numerous organizational partners including health care and housing consulting firm Chi Partners, architectural and design firm Perkins Eastman, legal advisors Manatt, Phelps and Phillips, and design consultants Camphill Architects. General contractor Lecesse Construction is based near Rochester, and landscape architects Dirtworks have offices in New York City.

The picturesque agricultural site is behind the former Borden milk factory off Route 66 in Buckleyville, and includes an enormous old red dairy barn. Pub-goers in Chatham Village on a recent afternoon expressed hopes it could be saved, but no one was giving odds.

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