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## City & Region

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AMHERST

### **30 years of tax breaks sought for senior citizen apartment complexes in Amherst**

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Owners of two low-income senior citizen apartment complexes are seeking tax breaks from the Town of Amherst for the next 30 years.

M.J. Peterson Corp. and the Related Companies want to spend several million dollars updating the Brewster Mews and Pepper Tree Heights apartments, which the companies developed in the early 1980s.

But as part of that, the partners want to renew the payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement that it has with the town to help keep rents low and make the financing for the project work.

“The reason why we are requesting this PILOT from the town is to make the projects better and ensure their affordability,” said Allison H. Kunis, a senior vice president for Related.

But town officials aren’t quite ready to hand out more tax breaks, which the two senior citizen apartment complexes have enjoyed for years.

Town officials have been going back and forth on the issue with company executives for a number of weeks, and continued peppering representatives Kunis and Dennis M. Penman during a public hearing at Monday’s Town Board meeting.

The board held off making any decision.

“We have our lawyers working on it,” Supervisor Barry A. Weinstein said. “We’re going to consider it in the next few weeks.”

“There’s a lot more questions,” said Council Member Steven D. Sanders, “and they haven’t given us a reason to approve it yet.”

Brewster Mews consists of 19 two-story buildings containing 216 units at 925 Robin Road. Pepper Tree Heights includes one six-story building with 101 units at 285 Pepper Tree Drive.

Related and M.J. Peterson want to do major updates to the properties – at a cost of \$20,000 per unit – by taking advantage of a federal low-income housing tax credit program, Kunis explained. But in order to obtain the necessary financing for the project, she said, it would be essential to maintain the existing tax-abatement agreement.

Both properties were granted tax abatements when built and annually pay \$550 per unit in taxes shared by the town, Erie County and the school district. That means about \$119,000 in PILOT payments from Brewster Mews and about \$55,000 from Pepper Tree Heights. Under the new agreement, the property owners would pay \$550 per unit in the first year, with annual increases of 2.5 percent over the next 29 years. Payments in the final year would top out at \$248,000 for Brewster Mews and \$115,000 for Pepper Tree Heights.

A one-time \$37,500 tax payment also would be paid to the town.

“The net increase in PILOT payments to the town is \$2.6 million,” said Paul T. Nesper, an attorney representing the companies.

Officials aren’t sure whether the companies are deserving of the deal.

At one point during the hearing, Weinstein asked about the chairman and founder of the Related Companies, Stephen M. Ross.

“Would the owner be the same Stephen Ross who owns the Miami Dolphins?” Weinstein asked, referring

to the National Football League team.

"It would be one in the same," Penman said.

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