

Area landscape transfer station draws concern

By Don Grigas

Staff writer

The village of Woodridge and some Woodridge residents living near a Bolingbrook business that recycles construction and landscaping materials are urging Bolingbrook officials to re-examine the business's request for variances that would allow it to continue operating under pre-1995 code amendments.

At a Sept. 13 Bolingbrook Village Board meeting, more than 20 Woodridge residents living near E.C. Rizzi & Associates Inc., a business at Murphy Road and Woodward Avenue just east of the North-South Tollway, attended the meeting to voice their displeasure over the business's ongoing operation.

More than 30 Woodridge residents attended a Sept. 7 Bolingbrook Plan Commission meeting, at which time several residents said the site could have a negative impact on residential property values, and the site may be unsafe because of a citation issued by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency within the last six months for using manure in its processing of materials.

The business, which is in a I-1 Limited Industrial Zone, has been operating since 1985, 10 years before Bolingbrook amended

its codes. Some of the business practices at the site do not conform to current village code, but are grandfathered in because the business operated prior to the changes.

"The way it is structured, it really is a very dangerous place. We're extremely concerned about that development," said Tom Freske, a Woodridge resident who spoke at the Village Board meeting.

He said he recently rode his bicycle to the site, which maintains several mounds of materials such as wood, rock, dirt and other construction materials. The site does not have a fence surrounding its perimeter.

"Anyone could get into it," he said.

During the Sept. 13 Village Board meeting, Bolingbrook staff took names and addresses of Woodridge residents in attendance, and will set up an informational meeting in the near future between residents, staff and representatives from E.C. Rizzi & Associates Inc.

"There are a lot of questions raised, and a lot of questions still unanswered," said Mayor Roger Claar.

He said the issue would be reviewed carefully, and it could appear on the Tuesday, Sept. 27, Village Board agenda, although he also said it could be tabled at that time.

"We are very open on this whole project, and we have no interest in pushing this through; that's why it is not on the agenda tonight," Claar said.

Some of the concerns expressed by Woodridge residents include odor emanating from the site, the lack of fencing and the possibility the site is being used as a solid waste dump.

"Our initial understanding, and our concern, is that our research indicates it is licensed as a solid waste transfer station, and that they want to add to the site," said Michael Mays, director of planning and development for Woodridge.

Mays spoke at a public hearing as part of the Sept. 7 Plan Commission meeting, at which time commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Steve Quigley voting present, to approve staff recommendations to grant eight variances to the Steve Tramel Estate, owners of the 17.25-acre parcel in question.

The applicant seeks four variances related to subdividing the property, and four variances related to operations of a business in an area zoned I-1 Limited Industrial.

There was no opposition to subdividing a fraction of the site -- about one-third of an acre -- that houses a communications tower and equipment.

But the public hearing, continued from an Aug. 17 public hearing, initiated a public outcry over the request that also sought four variances relating to the recycling business and the conditions under which it has legally operated for the past 20 years.

A staff report submitted to the commission outlined four variances being sought related to the business: to allow processing and storage of construction and demolition materials outside; to allow open storage of recycled construction and demolition materials without screening or a solid wall or fence; to waive Article 7 of the Zoning Ordinance in its entirety; and to allow parking, loading and vehicular use areas to be located in a required transitional yard, and to allow parking and loading spaces in the required front yard.

Under current village code production, servicing and processing must take place in a completely closed building; enclosed buildings, as well as walls and fencing are required if the business is within 150 feet of a residential zone; landscaping is required; and vehicular use in required transitional areas and required front yards is prohibited.

Plan Commissioner Ron Elliott, the commission's lone dissenter, argued that approving the request would set a poor precedent.

"It seems like we are giving away an awful lot for nothing here. ... We are allowing them to continue the way it is without cleaning up their act," Elliott said.

"This is to get a rubber stamp on deviations that are very significant. Times have changed, and I don't want to do it," he said.

There also was some discussion over the necessity of the recommendation procedure, and whether or not the applicant needed to seek variances on conditions under which the businesses has legally operated before the village adopted code amendments.

All new businesses must meet those codes, although it is common for

businesses and residents to seek variances to codes when planning to build.

"But if they already have it grandfathered in, why do we need to validate it?" Elliott asked.

Dennis Kowalczyk, director of planning and development for Bolingbrook, said "we are recognizing the existing conditions, and doing some housekeeping to bring it under compliance."

Elliott, whose comments drew a reaction from Woodridge residents in the audience, said, "But we're not bringing it under compliance, we are waiving everything."

In a telephone interview Sept. 14, J.R. Rizzi, the owner of the business, said he welcomes an opportunity to meet with residents and representatives from both villages.

"We are not a solid waste site; we recycle materials so they aren't placed in landfills," Rizzi said.

Rizzi said the site is routinely inspected by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and its agents, and recently was cited for storing horse manure "in the wrong place."

"It was a correct-and-maintain letter. We had a small portion of horse manure, which is mixed with different organic compounds in some of our soil, that was in the wrong place," Rizzi said.

Rizzi said information distributed by the village of Woodridge to area residents was incorrect in calling the site a solid waste dump, and he may seek a retraction from the village.

"Mr. Mays thought he had something, but we are a landscape transfer station, not a solid waste dump. There is no food or vermin here. I think there is some confusion because the permit we operate under is from the Waste Department, but it is not for solid waste storage," Rizzi said.

Rizzi said the business is considering implementing some type of fencing or landscape screening to block the view of the site.

Building structures to house each pile of material is "not in our budget at this time," Rizzi said.

"We've been a good neighbor here for 20 years. I feel a little blind-sided by all this," Rizzi said.

Don Grigas's e-mail address is:
dgrigas@libertysuburban.com