

# Plan Makes Sense for Huntington

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Photo credit: | Rendering shows the type of multifamily housing proposed by AvalonBay Communities for Huntington Station

The last time AvalonBay Communities proposed housing in Huntington Station, it asked for 490 units. The town board listened to the angry reaction and rejected it. Now, the proposal is more modest. There's still opposition, like a group outside Town Hall yesterday. But the Station -- and the region -- must have this housing.

The new proposal for this property, strategically located near the Long Island Rail Road station, calls for 379 units, of which 303 would be rental apartments. The Station desperately needs revitalization, and a project of this size could help get it started, with the additional customers it would bring to stores in the area. It would also provide something the Island requires in greater numbers: rental housing. Some of these apartments have monthly rents in the \$800 range.

It's a good deal for the Huntington School District, too. The units would send an estimated 65 to 78 students to the district -- compared to roughly twice as many from the 109 single-family homes that could be built under current zoning.

In fact, the earlier version, at 490 units, would have been even better for the district. Like the current proposal, it would have brought in more tax revenue than increased costs. Beyond that, it would have included a \$1.5 million one-time payment from AvalonBay.

But the school district ultimately chose to oppose it, citing its distaste for the way the town had planned to approve it: by creating a new transit-oriented development zoning district around the railroad station. Even though a lot more transit-oriented housing near railroad stations is vital to the Island, the new zone scared people. They incorrectly feared it would encourage dense development in inappropriate places. Using social media to send their message, opponents got the town board to reject the proposal in September.

Supervisor Frank Petrone and Councilwoman Glenda Jackson, who voted for the plan last year -- and Councilman Mark Cuthbertson, who voted against -- invited AvalonBay to submit a less dense version. So the developer went back to the current property owners, the Bonavita family of Evergreen Homes, and negotiated a lower price. That enabled AvalonBay to downsize it, but still project a profit.

The revised proposal fits within existing multifamily zoning, and the town and developer have scrapped the transit-oriented zoning district. Since the school board president has been quoted as saying that he won't oppose the project as long as it fits within the current zoning codes, it should be a slam-dunk, right? Well, given what happened last year, even this more modest proposal isn't guaranteed to prevail.

The positive reception that the original development drew at a public hearing in March 2010 didn't take long to morph into noisy rejection in September. A public hearing on the revised proposal is scheduled for Monday, and yesterday's demonstration outside Town Hall shows that objections have not disappeared. But the town board has to weigh that noise against the need for some positive momentum for Huntington Station. Rejection of the new plan would be a serious setback. So the board should finally vote yea and get it moving.