

Needham Tab

By Jennifer M. Berkley STAFF WRITER

It would have been a tough room for the Board of Appeals Thursday evening had they denied Jeffrey Roche's request for a variance to build a mixed-income apartment building on Chestnut Street. But the strong showing of support from members of the community was enough to win the Board's approval, despite opposition from the Petrini Corp., which owns property that directly abuts the proposed development.

In a unanimous vote, the Board of Appeals approved Roche's request for a variance to build a 28-unit apartment building on the former site of the Hamilton House nursing home. The building will include six units designated for low-and moderate-income occupants that will be managed by the Needham Housing Authority. The other units will be rented at market rates.

Board of Appeals Chairman Bill Tedoldi said he initially questioned the board's authority to grant Roche such a variance for his project, but as he listened to the comments made by members of the community, he became convinced that approving the variance for the project would be the appropriate action.

Richard Dionne, an attorney for the Petrini Corp., said he does not believe the board has the authority to grant Roche a variance.

Dionne said he has concerns about the density and scale of the project, specifically about the availability of parking. Petrini's daughter runs the Chestnut Children's Center day care center on the first floor of the abutting property and is concerned about the impact the housing will have in the area.

There is nothing that distinguishes the piece of property from others in the area, said Dionne, and there is no demonstrated hardship to Roche, both variables that Dionne said the bylaws indicate are required for a variance.

"My client does not oppose housing or affordable housing, but he is concerned about the impact on his property," said Dionne.

Still, Tedoldi and members of the board were swayed by the public's support for Roche's project and voted in favor of it, although there will be restrictions placed on the variance. "

The comments at this meeting have conveyed the notion of the public need [for this project]," said Tedoldi. "We do need the housing."