

Hamden mayor takes heat on housing project

By Ann DeMatteo
Assistant Metro Editor

HAMDEN — Members of the Dunbar Hill Civic Association are putting the mayor's feet to the fire, even though there isn't much of a burn to be had.

Mayor Craig B. Henrici on Monday night was included in a lively debate at the association's meeting at the Dunbar Hill Volunteer Firehouse.

The issue first on the minds of the 60 residents in the room was Baker Residential's plan to build 72 houses off rural Gilbert Avenue and Dunbar Hill Road.

"I told you I wouldn't have good news for you tonight," Henrici repeated several times.

Even though a Superior Court judge ordered the town to approve the project, residents still oppose the houses on

the Maselli farm and are worried how their quiet neighborhood, with narrow, winding streets, will be able to handle increased traffic, dust from the construction and more.

At the request of neighbors, Henrici promised the gathering that he would continue to get the property appraised and see if it is a candidate for eminent domain.

He said he would look into whether the Legislative Council would have to vote to extend the sewer main for the subdivision, based on how the developer has characterized a Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Authority regulation; to see if a building moratorium on other projects is possible, though it would not apply to the approved project; and to consult with Assistant Town Attorney Timothy Lee again to find out whether the town can do

anything to appeal the ruling.

"I would hate to find out after they put a backhoe in the ground that we missed the opportunity to fight. You're going to have to do some digging," said John Kristoff of Gilbert Avenue.

"I will do exactly what you ask, but for the Supreme Court and the Appellate Court to overturn a land-use decision, you have to have a legal issue of good size," said Henrici, who practiced law before becoming mayor.

On Tuesday, Henrici said he learned that appealing the court case is not possible because town land-use commissions already have abided by the court order, which said they must approve the subdivision.

Another resident asked why Baker Residential had to build so many houses, and whether there was anything that could be

done to reduce the number of houses to be built.

Henrici recently wrote to John Horton, Baker's director of project development, to ask for a meeting to discuss the concerns of residents. Horton wrote back to say he would discuss anything but density.

"I can't believe the people of Hamden and the town government has lost its ability to have a voice in the governing of the town," said Jim Sakelarakis of Gilbert Avenue.

"The town is ruled by Superior Court. We're puppets. This is a done deal. We've apparently lost our grip on town growth."

Henrici said that control could return to the town when its zoning regulations are revised within the next year.