

Hempstead names Main Street key developer

Published: February 8, 2012 9:04 PM

By AISHA AL-MUSLIM aisha.al-muslim@newsday.com

After a public hearing that at times dissolved into shouting, Hempstead Village officials designated Renaissance Downtowns Urban America as the master developer for its \$2 billion plan to revitalize the Main Street area.

The village board's 5-0 decision Tuesday night to approve the agreement among the village, its Community Development Agency and the developers came despite objections and skepticism from some residents. It passed only after officials promised to create an agreement that would guarantee jobs for local residents and address other public concerns.

"Before a shovel hits the ground, in writing you will have a community benefits agreement," said Donald Monti, chief executive of Plainview-based Renaissance Downtowns, who is working on the project with UrbanAmerica, a Manhattan real estate investment firm.

Of the more than 200 residents attending the hearing, 31 people spoke, but others in the audience shouted and interrupted to object to project support. At one point, Mayor Wayne J. Hall Sr. banged his gavel and called for order. Of those speaking, 23 expressed their support for the project, three objected and five were uncommitted, officials said.

Reginald Benjamin, executive director of the ABBA Leadership Center, a community support organization, was among those who cautiously embraced the plan. The main concern of Benjamin and other residents was making sure jobs went to residents. The village has a 9.9 percent unemployment rate, according to the [New York State Department of Labor](#).

"We are on board with this as long as the community gets jobs," Benjamin said.

The project is expected to create more than 3,500 permanent jobs and 10,000 construction jobs, developers and village officials have said.

"We are working to make sure there are opportunities for our residents to get hired," Hall said, adding that he's working with Benjamin and the county district attorney's office to train residents for future construction jobs.

The redevelopment is to include a combination of condominiums, co-ops and rental apartments that will accommodate all income levels. It would also include a hotel, shops, open spaces, parking and entertainment. The entire project could take about a decade to complete, developers have said.

Rockville Centre resident Katherine M. Garry, organizer of the Committee to Save Hempstead, called the plan a "sham" and asked the board to find other alternatives.

She warned the project would lead to current apartment buildings being converted into tall luxury condos and minority residents being pushed out.

With the appointment of a master developer, project backers now need to submit a site plan to the village for approval.