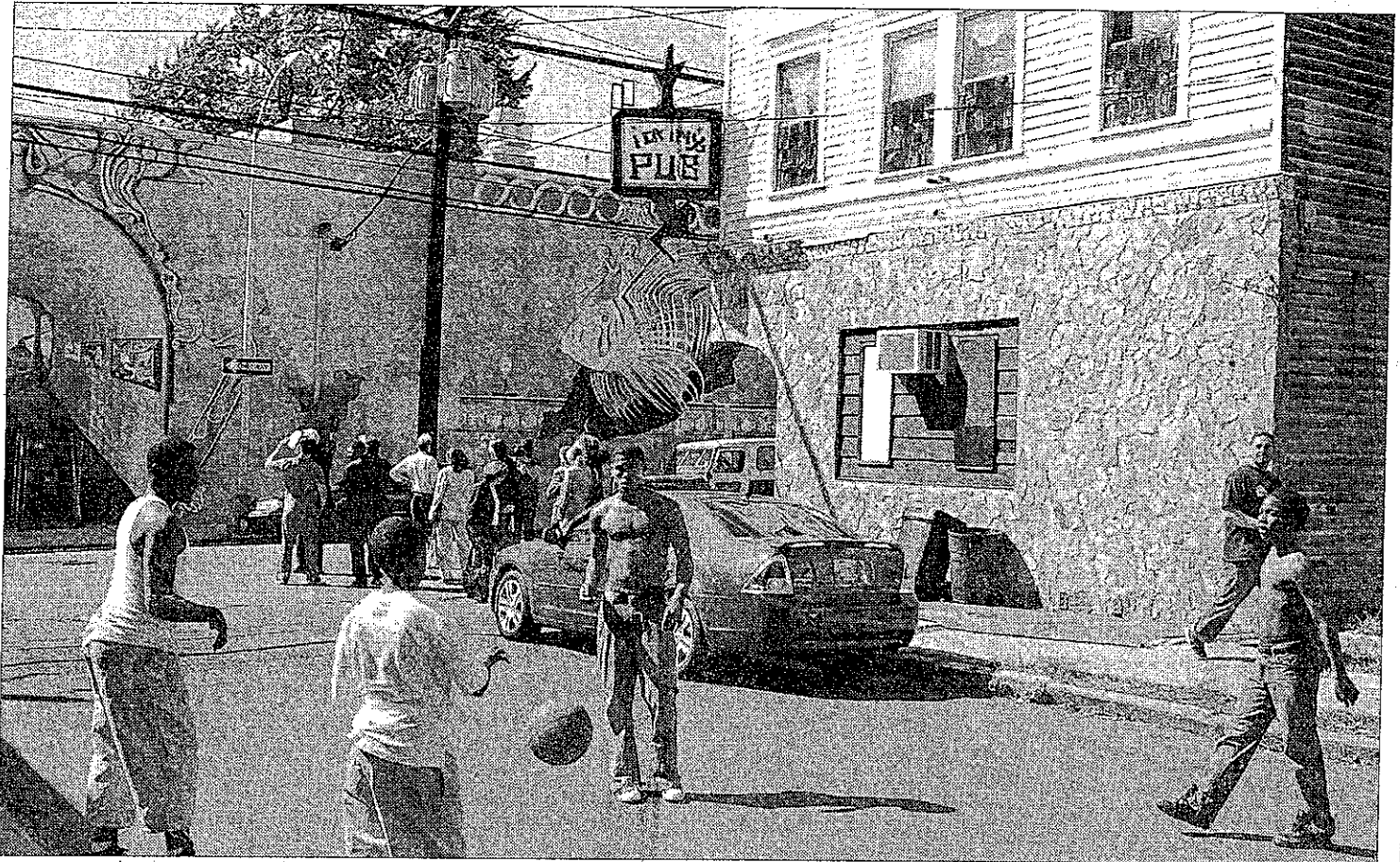


REDEVELOPMENT ON THE LINE



PHOTOS BY JIM PATHE/THE STAR LEDGER

Youths play basketball on South Jefferson Street, in the Valley area of Orange, site of a proposed redevelopment project.

Projects in Orange hinge on passage of water system bond

BY KEVIN C. DILWORTH
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The Orange city council is meeting tonight to vote on whether to approve a \$9 million municipal bond measure to finance state-required construction and improvements to a city well, a water treatment facility and a pumping station.

Without the improvements to the city's drinking water system, several redevelopment projects totaling \$112 million cannot move forward.

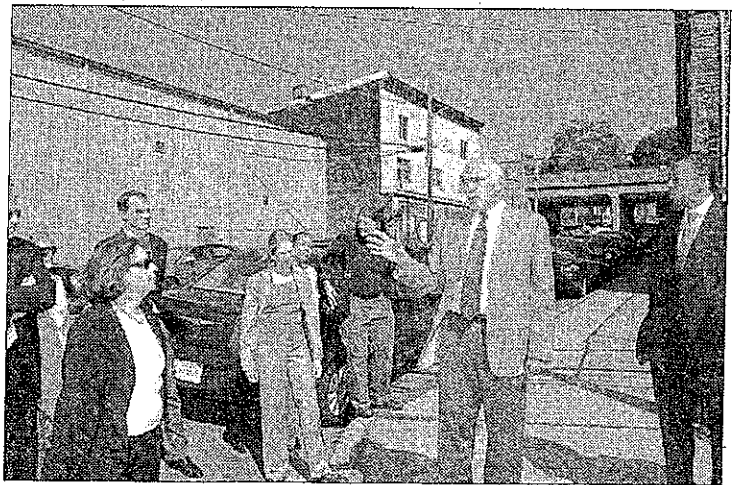
A vote scheduled for May 20 never took place because only four of the seven council members showed up for that public meeting. The law requires that financial

matters, such as a municipal bonding ordinance, get at least five affirmative votes.

The long-delayed redevelopment proposals — a market-rate one for the old Hospital Center at

Orange, and combination market-rate and affordable housing ones for the city's Valley neighborhood, near the West Orange border — can't move forward without the water system improvements.

"The water issue is the biggest issue in the city," said Marty Mayes, the city's planning director, explaining that the state Department of Environmental Protection will not give any of the redevelopment projects a go-ahead until the municipality's water issues get re-



Patrick Morrissy, second from right, director of HANDS Inc., a Valley Revitalization Initiative, tours proposed redevelopment sites

solved. "Those unresolved issues are stalling the redevelopment projects."

The proposed \$9 million bond ordinance, Mayes explained, is needed to finance improvements to the Orange Mountain Wells, in Orange's West Orange-based water reserve property off North-

field Avenue and Cherry Lane, and both the Chestnut Street water treatment facility, and the High Pump Station, next to Orange's Metcalf Park, off Chestnut and Beech streets.

Council members Vivian Gaunt, Donald Page and Coram [See **BOND**, Page 22]

BOND

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Rimes were absent from the last council meeting, where frustrations ran high and several investors sitting in the audience looked visibly upset when the matter could not get addressed.

"The community wants to see these redevelopment projects happen," Mayes said. "In order for these things to happen, however, we need the appropriate legislation."

Unfortunately, the controversial and unresolved water issue should have been addressed five to 10 years ago, Mayes said.

"That issue is not related to the planning department," he explained. "The finance and public works departments never pushed it. It should have been resolved years ago."

Just Friday, state Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria, along with a number of banking and corporate investors, school district officials, and Ruthi Byrne, the wife of former Gov. Brendan Byrne, visited the Valley area to meet, chat and hail the redevelopment potential in the neighborhood.

Proposals by the nonprofit Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS) non-profit organization in Orange, for the adjoining city and West Orange Valley section, are worthy of praise, said William E. Best, a senior vice president for PNC Bank in East Brunswick.

"We didn't look at this as a risk," Best said of his bank's investment in redevelopment proposals that would support reusing former landmark Valley properties in that one-time hat manufacturing capital of the world, support the adaptive reuse of obsolete industrial buildings, and clean up Brownfield industrial sites. "We looked at it as an investment."

Doria had nothing but praise for the redevelopment proposals.

"This is a great example of what can be done when people come together to revitalize communities, especially urban communities," Doria told a crowd of about two dozen people who gathered at the Arts Unbound

Gallery at Freeman and South Jefferson streets.

The biggest redevelopment proposal on hold is by Metrovest: for the \$100 million transformation of the Hospital Center at Orange into the Avenue at Orange residential and retail complex.

Following a projected year-long asbestos removal effort that has yet to start, every building on the 8.8-acre, long-closed hospital site — off Henry Street, South Essex Avenue and Central Avenue — will be demolished.

That will pave the way for the construction of a mid-rise building complex called the Avenue at Orange. It will consist of 375 luxury one- and two-bedroom condominiums, 18,995 square feet of retail space, and a 12,000-square-foot community center with a pool and gymnasium.

A second major development involves transforming the former F. Berg Hat Factory into what developers are calling the Valley Renaissance Center.

Berg Development Urban Renewal Associates — a consortium consisting of the nonprofit Housing and Neighborhood Development Services agency in Orange, the Alpert Group of Fort Lee and Ironstate Holdings LLC, a division of the Applied Development Co. of Hoboken — is behind the plan to convert the giant factory complex into a \$10 million residential and commercial locale.

The new structure off Nassau and Jefferson streets will feature 29 condominiums on the upper floors and artist's studios and artist-related retail spaces on the ground level.

The last remaining building of the Stetson family's No Name Hat Factory is on the drawing boards to get transformed into a \$1.4 million artist's loft residence.

Harvard Development Associates LLC, a co-developer with the Housing and Neighborhood Development Services Inc. agency in Orange, plans to convert the three-story, century-old building at Mitchell and Jefferson streets into 16 lofts where artists will both live and work.

Tonight's Orange city council meeting takes place in City Hall, 29 North Day St., beginning at 7 p.m.