

Quarry battle heats up as residents speak out

“Don’t pee on my leg and tell me its raining.”

Resident concerned about proposed mining operation

Story, photos by Matt Schepeler

A field adjacent to Killarney Highway in Cambridge Township holds a mountain of gravel and sand, which property owner Timothy Warvel wants to mine before turning the property into a housing development.

The proposed site is located at 9337 W. U.S. 12, between Allen, Kelly, and Meadow lakes. Formerly known as “The Brighton Farm,” Warvel’s company, SSP Leasing, has requested a conditional use permit that would allow gravel mining and, eventually, a dozen houses to be constructed on the 50-acre lot.

If all went according to plans, the housing development would be located on a new lake created from the mining once the sand and gravel are removed.

Warvel discussed his plans before the Cambridge Township Planning Commission and a packed room full of residents on November 30. The hall was filled, and officials had to lock the doors to prevent it from becoming over capacity, raising concerns from one resident that the hearing was in violation of the Open Meetings Act.



Timothy Warvel makes a point regarding a gravel mining operation he hopes to undertake on land near Killarney Highway on U.S. 12. The plan below shows where Warvel wants to place houses once a hole in the earth is dug and filled with water.

Planning Commission Chairman Tom Kissell pushed forward with the meeting. The meeting was also on Zoom, and Kissell reminded the audience that the commission is a recommending body and that any final decision on the proposal would be made by the township board.

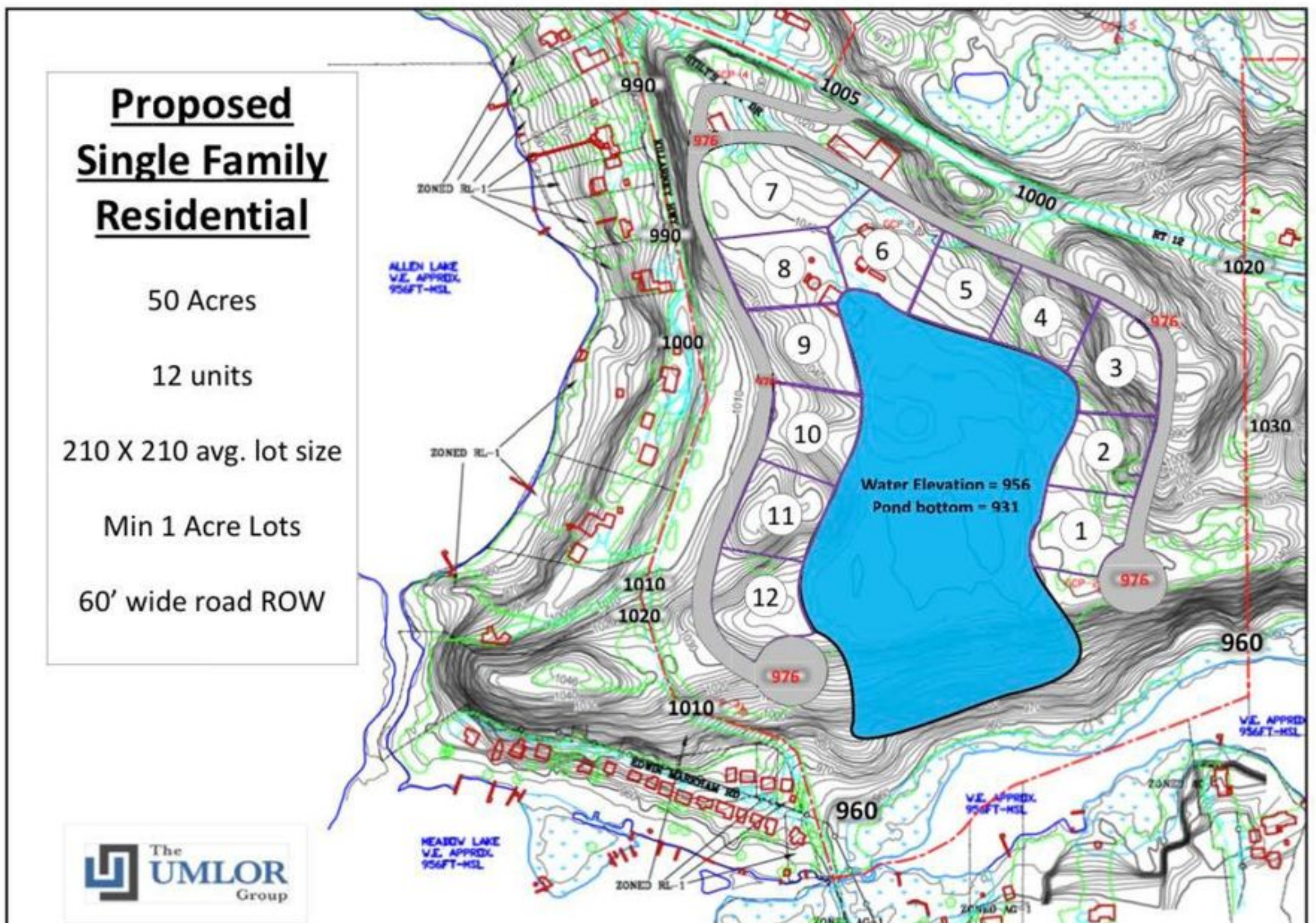
Warvel and his team took about an hour and a half to explain the proposed project.

Warvel began by saying that he has been in the mining and devel-

opment industry for more than 20 years. He said that some planning commission members as well as residents have visited both existing operations as well as the proposed site, and said he appreciated their concerns and maintains an open-door policy.

“We want to ease people’s minds. We are looking to be a contributing part of the community.” He noted that once people’s fears were alleviated and they were able to see that

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the operation isn't going to be as bad as they thought, he believes that "five years down the road, we could sit and have a beer together."

Warvel came across the property, which was up for sale when driving through the Irish Hills last January. "I went back and did a little research, and found it was a large enough parcel for what I was looking to develop."

"I went through the township ordinances and looked up all the current ordinances pertaining to development and mining and put an offer in for the farm."

Once he determined the ordinances lined up with his plans, Warvel applied for the conditional use permit and said that he believes he has met every requirement in the ordinances for the conditional use permit to be approved.

The first concern Warvel said he heard about the project was ingress and egress into the site. The proposed location is on a curvy, hilly portion of U.S. 12 with limited sight lines and high-density traffic, especially in the summertime.

Warvel said that the operation



Above, people stand in line to offer their opinion regarding the conditional use permit. Below, the Cambridge Township hall filled to capacity for the public hearing.

could bring about 100 gravel-hauling trucks to the site a day when it hits its peak but added that having so many slow-moving vehicles might actually make U.S. 12 safer by slowing traffic down, a theory that the audience scoffed at. The mining operations would utilize Stilt's Nest Drive as access to U.S. 12, which he said they would pave to minimize dust and clear site lines for safer access to the highway.

Warvel said that the site has already been mined, and over time that caused a natural wooded barrier that would knock down the noise. He said that no pollution from the site, including dust, would be able to get beyond barriers and the fence line. Everything on the ground would funnel back into the site, he said, reducing any risk of draining into surrounding wetlands.

"It would be like creating a bowl, and any rainwater would funnel into the bowl, so there would be zero disturbance on the neighboring sides leading to Kelly Lake or any of the surrounding waterways," he said.

"Our intent is to create a natural-looking subdivision that is nestled within this great lake atmosphere you have here in Cambridge Township. I think it will be complementary."

He said one question he has received from residents is "Why



do we need more lakes?"

"Well, it sure looks like everybody enjoys them," he said. "I would love to build another one and maybe give 12 more residents the joy you have been receiving."

Warvel said that none of the lots would be visible from neighbors, as a berm would block the site lines.

Concerning the timeline, he said that the project "would certainly be more than five years. I hope to be done in ten. That depends on the economy. My real projection is eight." He noted that this would require a five-year renewal of the conditional use permit, but once neighbors and officials see the operation in action, that shouldn't be a problem.

The hours of operation would be from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Fridays and 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays, though he said, "most of the operation is going to be conducted between 7 to 5."

He said they would have a water truck on site to mediate any dust. "In Michigan, it [dust] really isn't an issue."

Ultimately, Warvel said he wants to be a good neighbor and create a development that he would be proud of. "Granted, my forefathers and some of our competitors have not been that concerned [about the land] and are not projecting what I am proposing. That is why I am not proposing this as a quarry, but I am proposing this as a housing development first."

He said there would be no blasting and that no odors, smoke or fumes would be generated that are not already regulated. "We would be running state-of-the-art equipment," he said.

He said that noise would be knocked down by the natural barriers.

After Warvel was finished with his presentation and public discussion was opened, he and the commissioners were peppered with concerns, questions, and refutes from residents who do not want a large mining operation to come to the property.

Harold Popov from Cambridge Lake expressed concerns over how filling a 30-acre lake would affect nearby waterways, noting that officials from municipalities up and down the watershed should have a say in the decision. "These lake levels are guaranteed by the court," he said. "When this gravel pit goes in, one of the concerns from my perspective is what it will do to the water table?"

"This is a resort area. People move into this area, and they want to enjoy the lakes."

Another resident of Shawnee Shores said that the pit would hurt "each and every homeowner" on area lakes. She expressed concerns over truck traffic, noise, and what will be left behind.

"Once the majority of gravel pits have been fully extracted of the sand and the gravel and whatever else they want to extract, they are closed. Normally these pits are depleted and closed within five years. Most of these gravel pits are never restored . . . they just remain."

"Who benefits? Certainly not the Irish Hills residents. Who will want to stay here or buy here? Who will want to visit here? We won't. The only winner will be the gravel pit beneficiaries. And when you are done destroying

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and scouring our area, you will go home.

"This is our home, and we love it."

Several residents expressed concerns over how the water levels of area lakes would be affected by creating another one, especially once they begin mining below water levels.

"If this company comes in and ruins our wells and our waterways, who will make us whole," one resident asked.

Cambridge Township simply doesn't need a mining company. We need our Irish Hills to remain a great place to live and for recreation. Please hear us and stop this now."

Resident Dawn Parsons, president of the Sand Lake Property Owners Association said that she is concerned about how the project would affect that lake. She noted that the association's board adopted a resolution opposing the project. "We feel strongly that a gravel pit in this location puts our natural resources at risk," she said, adding that she has looked over the township master plan and that it includes protecting the

township's natural resources.

She said the mining operation would come into "total misalignment" with the township's master plan.

One Kelly Lake resident said that she moved to the area from Toledo "for peace and quiet."

"Quite frankly I am offended. . . that this company is coming in and trying to pretend to be our 'friend' and our good neighbor. I have great neighbors, and, quite frankly, if they ran their lawn mower or lawn equipment from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day, I would not call them my good neighbor.

"And I am not going to have a beer with someone who is making noise from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. And as Judge Judy says, don't pee on my leg and tell me it's raining."

After several residents spoke, it became clear that their primary concerns are noise and dust pollution, concerns over lake levels and water quality, increasing truck traffic on the busy U.S. 12, hurting tourism, and the possibility of plummeting property values.

No action was taken by the planning commission.

We will continue to update the story in the coming weeks.



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