

Dog day care plan draws fire

Residents near Hillsborough site slam idea

BY MATTHEW J. DOWLING
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A proposed dog day care center on property in Hillsborough Township has alarmed residents of a nearby townhouse complex who fear noisy barking and the odor of dog feces will invade their neighborhood.

But the center's founder, Robin Blair, said the residents' concerns are unfounded. Dog barking will be minimal, the hours of operation would be limited and waste would be cleaned up, she said.

The proposal is scheduled to come before the Hillsborough Township Board of Adjustment at a meeting tonight. The day care center does not fall under the list of approved uses for the property,

which is zoned light commercial.

Residents from the Manors of Hillsborough complex have packed two previous meetings where the day care center has been discussed.

"I understand their concerns," said Blair, who lives near the Amwell Road property. "The fear of the unknown is the biggest problem."

While pet day care facilities have become increasingly common in places like California and Arizona, Blair said she knew of only two other places that offer those services in New Jersey, one in Hunterdon County, the other in Mercer County.

"The concept for a dog day care center is where you leave the dog

for the day in an open environment," Blair said. "In a community like Hillsborough where there's a large concentration of young couples who have pets, these dogs are home alone all day. They're entitled to socialize with other pets."

Blair said a 6-foot solid-wood fence would be constructed around 1.25 acres of the property to give the dogs room to play. The house and garage currently on the site would be renovated to give the dogs an indoor refuge, she said. The facility would be able to host between 30 and 50 dogs each day, Blair said.

"I just think there's a high need for this in the community," she said.

But Mike Kosec, whose deck and back yard face the proposed [See **DOGS**, Page 36]

DOGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

Day care proposal draws opposition

day care center, said he doesn't want to hear dogs socializing all day long when he's home.

"We moved to Hillsborough for the peace and quiet," said Kosec, a four-year resident of the Manors. "There's an issue of noise. It's constant from one dog or another."

Blair, who is certified by the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters, said she thinks many of the residents don't understand the dynamics of dogs in a parklike setting the enclosed play-area would provide.

"If you see dogs together in a dog park playing, they don't bark," Blair said. "They're busy playing."

The proposed hours of operation would run from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day of the week, Blair

said. No dogs would be allowed to remain overnight, she said.

Kosec said he and his fellow residents don't object to the concept of a dog day care center, but they'd like to see it in a more suitable location in the community.

"The general feeling among most of the residents is that this property is too closely situated to the residences," Kosec said. "Ms. Blair has the opportunity to relocate her site, but we can't move."

Blair currently has a contract to buy the 4.25-acre site contingent on receiving the necessary approvals for the dog day care center.

If the zoning board grants Blair the waiver, the proposal would still be subject to approvals by the township board of health. Blair said she is hopeful that the center would be open by this spring.

Matthew J. Dowling can be reached at mdowling@starledger.com or (908) 429-9925.