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By RONALD SULLIVAN

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The Suburban Action Institute announced plans here yesterday for what it described as the largest racially and economically mixed housing development ever proposed for a suburb in the United States—a \$160-million community in Mahwah in northern New Jersey.

The development would include 6,000 housing units for nearly 20,000 people, thus doubling the population of the rural Bergen County community, where local zoning ordinances are under legal attack for allegedly excluding blacks and other low-income minority groups.

The institute, a nonprofit organization that is seeking to open the suburbs to housing and jobs for poor people, said it would go to court and to the New Jersey Legislature if the township rejected its proposals.

Mahwah has been a center of controversy ever since the United Auto Workers and the National Committee against discrimination in Housing filed a complaint with the State Di-

vision on Civil Rights in January, 1971, charging that the community's zoning laws made it impossible for U.A.W. members, many of them low-income blacks and Puerto Ricans, to live near their jobs at the Ford Motor Company assembly plant there.

The complaint, which is now in the New Jersey courts to resolve a jurisdictional dispute, and yesterday's housing proposal have combined to make this northwestern Bergen community a major battleground in the growing attack across the country against zoning practices in the suburbs that are considered exclusionary.

In a special message to the Legislature last month, the New Jersey Governor, William T. Cahill, warned that the state's communities must end their "systematic exclusion" of poor people from the suburbs or the courts and the Legislature would do it for them.

Governor Cahill did not mention any community by name. However, Denison Ray, a Suburban Action co-director, said the Governor had Mahwah in

mind because its "notorious" zoning laws were the "epitome" of exclusionary devices designed to keep blacks and other poor people from moving in.

However, Mayor Lawrence Nyland of Mahwah attempted to minimize the problem yesterday afternoon. He said that the community, which got its start in the 19th century as a company town in the Ramapo foothills for the old American Brakeshoe Company, was not racist.

"Some of my best friends here are of black extraction," the Mayor said.

Thousands Now Commute

According to the complaint last year, and also today's proposal, Mahwah's prohibition against new apartment construction and its minimum one- and two-acre housing restrictions bar most of the 5,000 Ford workers from living here.

As a result, the complaint said, the workers are forced to commute by car from distances more than one hour away in Newark and New York City at an annual cost of from \$1,000 to \$1,500 a family.

A meeting of the Mahwah Planning Board last night was scheduled to consider a zoning change for a 1,200-unit development that would include an industrial park. However, Suburban Action contended at a news conference at the New York Hilton Hotel that the proposal in question "in no way" satisfied the housing needs of Ford workers, since it would only provide several hundred low-income and moderate-income units.

Suburban Action said its proposal would develop more than a square mile of foothills just west of the new Ramapo State College into a balanced community that would include a complete school system, a library, shopping centers and neighborhood day-care centers. The community would be one and a half miles from the Ford plant, and it would take seven years to complete.

The institute proposed a similar but smaller 2,000-unit development for the Hunterdon County community of Readington earlier this month.