

Planning Board Minority Report Belmeade

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Request by Belmeade Farms, LLC and Crescent Resources, LLC for a planned unit development subdivision located west of Pittsboro and immediately south of Highway 64. The project consists of 557 acres and calls for 197 single-family residential lots, a community amenity center, and a fine living center. The residential portion of this project is proposed as a gated community, with the main access on Highway 64, and a “service” card-gated entry off Adolph Taylor Road.

September 5, 2006 Planning Board Action: Voted to Recommend Approval
8 FOR; 2 AGAINST

This minority report is submitted to the Board of Commissioners to express concerns about the potential for the:

- (1) Negative environmental impact of this project;
- (2) Impact on the surrounding community;
- (3) Lack of supporting documentation to determine the market for this type subdivision.

As the minority voting against this project, we recommend that this project not move forward until a full environmental impact assessment and marketing analysis are completed. Furthermore, we ask that the Board of Commissioners request the developer to integrate this development into our community, making this development a true community asset by requesting that the gates be removed from the project.

Negative Environmental Impact

- a. Full Environmental Impact on the Rocky River has not been assessed.
- b. Wetlands have not been properly identified and buffered.
- c. Habitat was acknowledged for the Four-toed Salamander, a species of concern, and for the Carolina Ladle Crayfish, a North Carolina significantly rare species, but the analysis to determine if these two species are on the property was limited.
- d. Developer acknowledges that site vegetation (site work done in October 2005) prevented a full assessment.

Rocky River

The Friends of the Rocky River (FORR) have expressed concerns about the potential impact of this project on the Rocky River. The mission of FORR is to:

.... protect, monitor, maintain, and improve upon the quantity and quality of the waters of the Rocky River, as well as to monitor and minimize the effect of the growth of the Region on the River and its basin.

Harland's Creek flows from north to south through the heart of this project. Although the developer proposes 100 foot buffers on each side of this river, we are concerned that runoff during the long construction schedule (homes are to be completed through 2013) will negatively impact the creek and ultimately the Rocky River. Additionally several stream crossings of this creek are planned. In the section of the report under the tab "Existing site hydrology" the developer states that they will provide ample water quality structures in the areas with significant impervious coverage (fine living center and amenity center). What are these structures? How will this creek be protected? The developer stated numerous times during the Planning Board meeting that the buffers exceed requirements, however we believe it critical to the life of Harland's Creek and to the Rocky River that an independent environmental assessment be conducted before this project moves forward.

We fear that Chatham County, unless we move cautiously, will allow the repeated mistakes that have plagued development along Dry Creek off Highway 87.

Wetlands

At the September 5 Planning Board meeting, biologist Allison Weakley stated that wetlands were not properly identified on the maps and that these unbuffered wetlands provide important habitat for the four-toed salamander.

It is imperative that this issue be addressed before sketch design approval is granted.

Habitat for Four-toed Salamander and Carolina Ladle Crayfish

Soil and Environmental Consultants (S&EC) acknowledged that the habitat for the Four-toed Salamander, a North Carolina species of concern, and for the Carolina Ladle Crayfish, a North Carolina significantly rare species, exists on the property.

No actual survey was conducted by the developer to determine if these two species are found in the area of this project. The Planning Board approved the Planning Department's recommendation that prior to preliminary submittal, the applicant shall evaluate the location of the habitat for the Carolina Ladle Crayfish and the Four-toed Salamander and consider methods for protecting said habitat for the species of concern."

We concur that the developer should identify the location of the habitat and identify how this habitat will be protected. However we recommend to the Board of Commissioners that the recommendations of the Planning staff be implemented prior to sketch design approval.

Heavy Vegetation Prevented Full Assessment

The environmental inventory was performed in October 2005. Those areas that could not be inventoried because of heavy vegetation could perhaps have been revisited during the winter months, when vegetation is less likely to impede this important work.

Under the Chatham County Subdivision Regulation (5.2A) the County can request a full environmental impact statement with a peer review of that assessment:

- 5.2 A. (1) The environmental impact assessment shall address the following areas:
- a. The environmental impact of the proposed action;
 - b. Any significant adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented;
 - c. Mitigation measures proposed to minimize the impact;
 - d. Alternatives to the proposed action;
 - e. The relationship between the short-term uses of the environmental involved in the proposed actions and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity; and
 - f. Any irreversible and irretrievable environmental changes which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented.

We respectfully request that Chatham County be a responsible environmental steward and require an environmental impact statement prior to approval of this project.

Community Impact

We are concerned about the impact of this project on its neighbors. Specifically our concerns are:

1. The community is gated
2. Safety of entrance off Highway 64
3. Lack of community involvement in the planning process

Gated Community

Gates send an unwelcoming message to the rest of us. They tell the community that it cannot be trusted and that the community is not part of the same social network as those behind the gates. Gates break up neighborhoods. We ask that the Board of Commissioners suggest to the developer to remove the gates from this project.

Safety of Main Entrance

Judith Lessler owner of Harland's Creek Farm, located directly across Highway 64, indicated that during an informational meeting, representatives from Belmeade Farms confirmed that they are likely to develop an additional 350 acres west of the proposed subdivision. Ms. Lessler indicated that the main entrance, off Highway 64, is dangerous because of its proximity to the merging of old Highway 64 with the bypass. We feel that the entire scope of the project should be discussed prior to moving forward and that the safety concerns should be addressed.

Lack of Community Involvement

The developer held one informational meeting the week of Labor Day to tell the neighbors what the project entails. There was no community meeting to seek input and perhaps to have an opportunity to suggest improvements to the project. Did the neighbors along Adolph Taylor Road have any input about having the service entrance to this gated community on their

residential street? Did these same neighbors, as well as others, have the opportunity to address concerns about the impact this project will have on their property value? Did the Friends of the Rocky River have an opportunity to suggest improvements that could lessen the harm on Harland's Creek and ultimately the Rocky River?

Although community meetings are not required, we are hopeful that in the future, the Board of Commissioners will appreciate and require more interactive community involvement. This project is a prime example as to why such a requirement is needed.

Marketing Analysis

Before this project moves forward, its viability should be addressed. The average price for homes in Belmeade is \$1.3 million, obviously a limited market.

Section 8.1 (I) of the Chatham County Subdivision regulations state:

A market analysis and financial statement may be requested by the Planning Board to help determine the demand for the development and the probability of its completion.

This is a critical step that should be taken before sketch design approval is granted for this project.

Summary

We requests that the Board of Commissioners require a full environmental assessment of this project and that the Commissioners request a marketing analysis before this project moves forward. Furthermore, we ask that the Board of Commissioners suggest to the developer to integrate this development into our community, making this development a true community asset by requesting that this subdivision not be a restrictive-gated community.