

Town council seeking details about Summerfield Farms plan

Summerfield leaders set meeting with developer David Couch, Greensboro and county officials

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SUMMERFIELD - Summerfield Town Council is seeking more information from developer David Couch about his proposal to expand Summerfield Farms with water and sewer services from the city of Greensboro.

The council voted 4-1 during its meeting this past Tuesday, Oct. 13, to authorize Mayor BJ Barnes and Town Manager Scott Whitaker to meet with Couch and city of Greensboro and Guilford County officials. During the meeting scheduled for this Friday, officials of the three municipalities plan to learn more from Couch about his proposed residential and commercial development of 650 acres around Summerfield Farms.

"This is just a meeting to see if this is something that Greensboro, the county and Summerfield are willing to consider," Barnes said. If any of the three municipalities balk at the proposal, it "may fall flat."

Couch, CEO of Blue Ridge Cos., last month presented a general plan to build a range of housing and commercial establishments in Summerfield Farms, his cattle farm and events venue on Pleasant Ridge Road. He proposed that the county establish a special tax district that would require property owners in his development - not Summerfield taxpayers - to pay for water and sewer services.

The exploratory meeting is "a logical next step" for the three municipalities, Whitaker told the council.

Council member Teresa Pegram voted against sending the mayor and the manager to the meeting, saying their attendance may signal that Summerfield is interested in the developer's proposal even though he's not presented specifics.

Barnes and Whitaker would gather details during the meeting and share them with

the council and the public, Mayor Pro Tem Tim Sessoms said.

During his presentation last month, Couch showed a sketch of development currently allowed by Summerfield's zoning regulations - an estimated 450 houses in cul-de-sacs spanning his property that runs west from Pleasant Ridge Road to I-73.

Instead, Couch said he wants to negotiate a development agreement with the Town Council that would allow a variety of housing separated by several large tracts of open space bisected by public trails. He said he'd install fire hydrants to accommodate the Summerfield Fire Department's need for a more convenient, reliable source of water.

"Just saying no isn't an option," said council member Reece Walker, explaining that he poses a series of questions to residents who contact him. "What would you do? Would you negotiate (with Couch) or would you just let it happen?"

"We don't know what's best and what's not best," Walker said. "We hope we can come away with what's best for Summerfield."

The council heard from more than 30 residents who expressed their views about Couch's proposal by email and in person during the Oct. 13 meeting. Expressions of opposition outnumbered support by more than three to one.

"Please don't allow this place to become another overcrowded and overdeveloped asphalt-covered suburb," Summerfield residents Brittany and Taylor Robertson said in an email read out loud by Dee Hall, the town's finance officer. "If this were to happen, it would be akin to strip mining a mountain."

In an interview earlier this week, Couch said the construction of moderately priced houses would accommodate demand by aging empty nesters who want to downsize and stay in Summerfield and young workers and couples who can't afford to live in the town. He said he's backed by Summerfield's comprehensive plan, which recommends less expensive housing to meet such needs.

Summerfield resident Melanie Harless offered a different view, telling the council in an email that elderly and young people who want to live in the town need to be

able to afford housing that's currently available.

"Why should we, the citizens of Summerfield, accommodate these other people that want what Summerfield does not have to offer?" Harless said. "If you want to downsize or can't afford to live in Summerfield, move elsewhere."

Greensboro residents Chris and Kim Uthe said they'd "love to live in this new development."

"Summerfield Farms Village would only serve to enhance the livability of this lovely town to many other different families who are looking for affordable homes in neighborhoods with smaller lots," the couple said in an email.

Mayor Pro Tem Tim Sessoms said assertions by some residents that council members are aligned with Couch are inaccurate.

"Nobody here is carrying water or waving the flag of David Couch," Sessoms said. "Name-calling, suggestions of being in somebody's pocket, or somebody here making money off of what Mr. Couch is doing is absolutely absurd."

"We're going to do our due diligence, and I assure you that you will have the chance to make your feelings heard," Mayor Barnes said. "We'll continue to keep people informed as we go down the road."