

nw 25 Observer

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Happy 99th, Payne Stafford!



Photos by Patti Stokes/NWO

Lifetime resident Payne Stafford comes out the front door of his home on N.C. 68 in Oak Ridge on Feb. 15 to surprise visitors and a procession of fire engines parading by. One of the fire engines nearest to Stafford's heart was one he helped build in 1953 (above, center photo), stored in his service station until the fire department later expanded, and maintained for 21 years afterward.

by PATTI STOKES

Payne Stafford got lots of surprises on Feb. 15, which marked his 99th birthday. The lifetime Oak Ridge resident, veteran and longtime volunteer with Oak Ridge Fire Department enjoyed visits with friends and family members, received over 160 birthday cards – including some handmade by children in Oak Ridge United Methodist's Weekday School (shown in photo, above right) – and was treated to a procession of fire engines parading past his

home on N.C. 68 with horns honking and lights flashing. Among the more modern fire engines that rolled by was one very near and dear to Stafford – a model he helped build in 1953 and maintained for 21 years afterward.

"We've been working on it pretty steady, trying to get it back up and running 100%," said Jesse Hopper, an engineer with Oak Ridge Fire Department, when he circled back from the parade to meet Stafford in person for the

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Summerfield council advances exploration of water lines

Engineering firm Freese and Nichols hired by the town to determine feasibility of running water lines from outside of Summerfield

by CHRIS BURRITT

SUMMERFIELD – Summerfield Town Council is moving ahead to determine the feasibility of bringing water from outside of town, initially for fire protection and eventually for residential and business use.

The council voted unanimously during its Feb. 8 meeting to hire Freese and Nichols, the town's engineering firm, to evaluate bringing water to Summerfield from the city of Greensboro and Rockingham County. During the council's strategic planning retreat last month, Mayor Tim Sessoms and some other council members said the town should prepare for running water lines for drinking, not just for fighting fires.

Councilman John O'Day reiterated the point during last week's council meeting.

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A field trip to South Carolina

Summerfield leaders accompany Summerfield Farms owner David Couch to two planned communities for a look at design and building techniques the developer wants to emulate on his 973 acres in Summerfield

by CHRIS BURRITT

BEAUFORT COUNTY, S.C. – One morning last week, Mayor Tim Sessoms and other Summerfield leaders walked along narrow streets under a canopy of Spanish moss in Newpoint, a planned development in coastal South Carolina.

The Summerfield contingent, led by developer David Couch, paused at a broad lawn overlooking the marshes of the Intracoastal Waterway. It's one of several green spaces in the neighborhood of houses on both sides of \$1 million.

Chatting over his white picket fence, homeowner Larry White explained what he likes most about the Ladys Island community of Newpoint.

“We are impressed that they developed this property with a scalpel, not a bulldozer,” White said.

That's the message Couch is trying to convey to Summerfield council members and town staff who are preparing to evaluate the latest version of the developer's plans for the residential and commercial expansion of Summerfield Farms and several other tracts from Summerfield Road to Interstate 73.

Couch, CEO of Blue Ridge Cos., said he wants to break from the pattern of cul-de-sac neighborhoods with houses on one-acre lots that dominate Summerfield's residential landscape. Instead, he envisions a range of options – big and small houses, townhomes and apartments – in 11 villages, dotted by a mix of small businesses such as restaurants and coffee houses.

Planning for residential and commercial development follows the rolling contours of the property, resulting in the preservation of fields, woods and other green spaces, according to Couch's proposal. A network of trails



Photo by Chris Burritt/NWO

Summerfield town council and staff members walk under a canopy of live oaks in Port Royal, South Carolina, an example of preservation of natural surroundings that developer David Couch said he wants to mimic in his proposed expansion of Summerfield Farms. Accompanied by Couch, Victor Dover of design firm Dover, Kohl and Partners, and developer Vince Graham, the Summerfield council and staff members were touring two planned developments in coastal South Carolina on Feb. 9 to look at examples of design and building features Couch envisions incorporating into the nearly 1,000-acre development he is proposing in Summerfield.

would run from village to village and connect to public greenways outside of the development.

The trade-off – higher residential density in exchange for less expensive housing options and more green space for homeowners and the public – has been the focus of presentations and artistic renderings by Couch and his designer, Victor Dover, over the past year.

Couch recently invited Summerfield leaders to fly on his plane from Greensboro to South Carolina to visit two planned developments that already put into place what he and Dover are proposing in Summerfield.

“We have consulted with our attorney and our town manager and there's no problem with that,” Sessoms said during the council's Feb. 8 meeting,

referring to the trips. “We're going to go and take pictures... and share those with everyone.”

For the mayor, the trip shed light on the pros and cons of Couch's proposal.

“There were many things we saw that a growing number of our citizens would likely enjoy and appreciate, such as neighborhood shops, quaint, locally owned restaurants, live music venues, community parks and lots of trails that provide connectivity,” Sessoms said earlier this week.

On the other hand, he said,

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Photo by Chris Burritt/NWO

Summerfield leaders pass in front of a small house in Habersham, a planned development in Beaufort County, South Carolina, with a range of houses from estate homes to apartments.

Couch's "very large, mixed-use development" would require the extension of water and sewer services to his project. Construction of apartments is "something many of our residents have said they do not want. These are all things we will have to carefully consider as we try to balance the desire for more diverse housing options against the impact of such a large-scale development on our community."

Opposition to Couch's proposal resurfaced earlier this month after he provided more details. Over the next 25 years or more, he envisions 3,796 homes – big and small houses, townhomes and apartments – being built on the 973 acres, resulting in a density of 3.9 units per acre. By contrast, Summerfield's zoning regulations require an overall gross density of one unit per acre for single-family houses on lots with minimums of 30,000 and 40,000 square feet.

"New plans for the Villages of Summerfield Farms show just how massive and life-changing this proposal would be for Summerfield," according to a Feb. 6 post on the Facebook page of Stand Up For Summerfield. "Apartments likely lower home values and certainly impact all current residents of Summerfield, making us more urban than rural."

A Feb. 6 post on the Facebook page of Keep Summerfield Rural asked, "How will our small, limited services town handle this rapid growth? We aren't equipped to handle something on this massive scale."

Citing Couch's plans, Town Attorney Bob Hornik said construction would occur over two decades.

"In the end if there is approval, it's not like this development is going to spring up like a mushroom tomorrow," Hornik said during the council's meeting last week. "If this is approved at all, it is going to be a long-term development. It's not going to be 3,000 homes that show up in the next year."

Over the past week and a half, three field trips to Beaufort County, South Carolina, have given Summerfield council members and town staff a first-hand view of what Couch is proposing for nearly 1,000 acres in Summerfield.

"If you build the houses a little bit closer together, you can be more generous with the public spaces,"

Dover said last week on the Summerfield group's walk through Newport. He pointed out several green spaces, including a play yard called the Ramble and the wide grassy area overlooking the marshes of the Intracoastal Waterway.

Developers preserved the green space instead of building houses abutting the marshland, a nod to greater public access. People walking on the grass can look across the water and see church steeples in historic Beaufort.

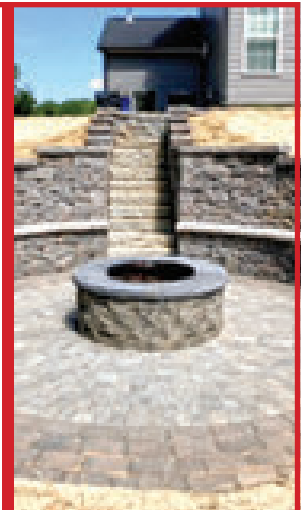
Narrow streets meander around trees and other natural areas in a layout intended to slow traffic. Garages

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FIELD TRIP TO S.C. ...continued from p. 21

are at the back of houses, reducing the number of drives cutting across sidewalks and vehicles parked in front of houses.

"If you come through, you need to come through on our terms – slow, safe streets are the norm," said Dover, a founding principal of design firm Dover, Kohl and Partners of Coral Gables, Florida.

Vince Graham, one of Newpoint's developers, accompanied the Summerfield group and suggested a different way to think about the layout of Newpoint, far denser than the typical Summerfield subdivision.

"It is a form of interior design gone outside," said Graham, describing houses facing one another as the walls of an "outdoor room." The street and sidewalks between the houses represent the floor and the canopy of live oak trees serves as the roof.

Houses are pulled toward the front of quarter-acre lots, putting front porches within talking distance of sidewalks.

"It encourages community," said Couch, an idea he wants to emulate in his Summerfield development.

Later in the day, the group visited Habersham, with a blend of estate houses, smaller houses, cottages, townhomes, condominiums, apartments and two-level buildings with businesses downstairs and living quarters upstairs.

At noon, the commercial district was busy, patronized by homeowners walking and driving golf carts to eat lunch in restaurants. Few vehicles were parked on the neighborhood streets, partly because residents park behind their homes.

Parking in the rear of apartments enabled developers to put stairs to the second level on the side of the buildings, running from the back toward the front. The design eliminated the clutter of stairways in the front of some traditional apartment buildings.

The width of condominiums varies in an effort to avoid cookie-cutter design of buildings, which feature different colors for shutters and varied styles of entry ways.

"It gives you a much better view than a drawing," said John O'Day, a Summerfield council member who visited the South Carolina communities earlier this week.

So far, all council members except for Lynne Williams DeVaney have gone on the trips. Town Manager Scott Whitaker, Town Attorney Hornik and Brad Rentz, town planner and enforcement officer, have also traveled to Beaufort County.

The town's Planning Board plans to consider Couch's latest request during its March 28 meeting, followed by the council's consideration April 12. Residents will be able to offer their views during public hearings at both meetings.

Though not legally required, the town plans to schedule a community meeting for Couch to share his plans with Summerfield residents and answer questions, according to Sessoms.

Last week, Couch submitted an application seeking a text amendment to Summerfield's development rules that would create a new zoning district for his project. If the council approves the amendment and approves the rezoning of Couch's property, the town would negotiate a development agreement with Couch to regulate design and construction of the project.

If the council approves his development plans, Couch told reporters earlier this month he'd resume discussions with Guilford County and the city of Greensboro about extending water and sewer lines to his project. If the parties reach an agreement, Couch said laying water and sewer lines would take two or three years.

After that, construction of the first houses in the Villages of Summerfield Farms could begin, he said.