

nw 25 Observer

bringing the local news home to northwest Guilford County since November 1996 www.nwobserver.com

Summerfield Planning Board recommends text amendment



Photo by Chris Burritt/NWO

Opponents of landowner David Couch's development plans are putting up signs, including this one across from Couch's Summerfield Farms on Summerfield Road.

The board's 3-2 vote was a victory for landowner David Couch, seeking to amend the town's development rules to allow higher density in the proposed Villages of Summerfield Farms

by **CHRIS BURRITT**

SUMMERFIELD – A year and a half after unveiling plans for developing nearly 1,000 acres, landowner David Couch got a positive recommendation from Summerfield's Planning Board

...continued on p. 10

Town's legal costs rise after paying former mayor \$69,829

The Defendant's refusal to produce to the Plaintiff the public records she requested unless she paid a special service fee was tantamount to a denial of her request and was a violation of the North Carolina Public Records Law.

Judge Laura Cubbage, N.C. Superior Court

The town of Summerfield also gives Gail Dunham about 16,600 emails after she won a legal fight over her public records request

by **CHRIS BURRITT**

SUMMERFIELD – Former Mayor Gail Dunham has collected nearly \$70,000 for legal fees and about 16,600 emails from the town of Summerfield after winning a lawsuit she filed against Town Manager Scott Whitaker a year and a half ago.

The council voted in a special called meeting March 22 to increase the current budget for legal services by \$90,000, including \$69,829 to

cover Dunham's legal expenses. The council set aside the remaining money to fight a lawsuit filed in January by former council member Teresa Perryman and Summerfield resident Danny Nelson related to the removal of councilman Todd Rotruck from office in 2018.

Lawsuits by Rotruck and his supporters related to his ouster from the council have so far been unsuccessful and have cost Summerfield

...continued on p. 16

IN THIS ISSUE

Summerfield seeks feedback on LUP	2
News in brief	3
Your Questions	4
Welcome to our new advertiser.....	6
Rise Against Hunger.....	7
Youth Sync	8
NWO Kids' Korner	9

Not Sonic, but a reasonable facsimile....	12
Suspect apprehended after search	13
Crime/Incident Report	13
Community Calendar	14
Grins and Gripes	17
Letters/Opinions.....	18
Classifieds	19
Index of Advertisers.....	23
NWO On The Go	24

at home
in northwest Guilford County
IN THIS ISSUE

Spring *in the park*
Craft Festival

Saturday, April 2, 10am-4pm
Oak Ridge Town Park
 6231 Lisa Drive, field across from the fire station

Come for a day of fun! Enjoy shopping with handmade craft and specialty vendors, food and live music.

Sponsored by:  Local. Reliable. Accessible.

Need more info? Email purplewagonevents@gmail.com



Summerfield seeks feedback on proposed land use plan



Photo by Chris Burritt/NWO

At center, Piedmont Triad Regional Council planner Carter Spradling discusses Summerfield's proposed land use plan with residents during an open house earlier this week.

Parks and rec, housing options, water, and transportation are among the five topics those developing the plan will make recommendations on

by **CHRIS BURRITT**

SUMMERFIELD – A plan to designate areas in Summerfield for residential and commercial growth is taking shape, based partly upon feedback that town leaders are gathering from residents.

More than 25 people attended an open house this past Tuesday, March 29, in the Summerfield Community Center to view recommendations for five policies that will guide decision-making by town leaders through 2035. The topics covered by the policies are:

- parks and recreation
- housing options and land preservation
- economic development
- water and wastewater
- and transportation.

"This is a guide for the town, not a regulatory document," said Carter Spradling, regional planner for the Piedmont Triad Regional Council, hired by Summerfield last year to prepare a land use plan (LUP) for the town.

The town council has never adopted a LUP. It is moving forward now to

comply with a state law enacted in 2020 mandating that North Carolina municipalities adopt plans as a condition of enforcing zoning regulations.

The LUP will guide long-term land development and preservation, reflecting priorities in Summerfield's comprehensive plan. Development recommended by the land use plan will be regulated by the town's unified development ordinance.

Tuesday's meeting was the second gathering for residents to offer their comments and help shape the LUP. Organizers asked people to complete questionnaires to elaborate on their views.

A third meeting will be scheduled in coming months when the plan is prepared for consideration by the town council.

As part of information gathering earlier this week, organizers identified the various policy goals on big posters placed around the community center. People expressed their views by affixing small adhesive circles of different colors on the boards.

The poster about housing options asked for viewpoints on the prospect of allowing "increased housing density and options in primary growth areas if the Town of Summerfield established a policy on allowing water and wastewater service to key primary growth areas."

In the first hour of the meeting, 16 residents indicated they were against the goal, six favored it and one was undecided.

"I fully understand that the area is growing and there are compromises

READY. SET. MORTGAGE.



The Stephanie Anderson Group of **NFM Lending**® Looking to purchase or refinance a home?

NMLS # 114933 • (C) 336-456-9374 • 2204 Oak Ridge Road, Oak Ridge
nfmlending.com/stephanie-anderson • sanderson@nfmlending.com

Make sure you understand the features associated with the loan program you choose, and that it meets your unique financial needs. Subject to Debt-to-Income and Underwriting requirements. This is not a credit decision or a commitment to lend. Eligibility is subject to completion of an application and verification of home ownership, occupancy, title, income, employment, credit, home value, collateral, and underwriting requirements. Refinancing an existing loan may result in the total finance charges being higher over the life of the loan. Not all programs are available in all areas. Offers may vary and are subject to change at any time without notice. MLO licensing information: NC1-200485. NFM, Inc. d/b/a NFM Lending. NFM, Inc. is licensed by: NC # L-135884. For NFM, Inc.'s full agency and state licensing information, please visit www.nfmlending.com/licensing. NFM, Inc.'s NMLS #2893 (www.nmlsconsumeraccess.org). NFM, Inc. is not affiliated with, or an agent or division of, a governmental agency or a depository institution. Copyright © 2021.



they've got to make," said Matt Hugger, who moved to Summerfield last year with his wife, Michelle. "But I'm very cautious about high density."

The couple attended the meeting as part of their effort to understand the debate over development in Summerfield, including landowner David Couch's plans for his 973 acres reaching from Summerfield Road to Interstate 73.

"I love Summerfield," said Matt, explaining the couple likes the rural setting of their home with easy access to Greensboro for shopping and dining. For that reason, they're concerned about how Couch's proposal to build apartments, as part of a range of housing,

would impact the town.

Matt said he's "leaning against apartments" while Michelle said she's opposed to them.

want to learn more?

Visit www.summerfieldnc.gov, go to News & Notices on the right-hand side of the homepage, then select "Land Use Plan Development." There, you'll find maps, documentation, minutes from Land Use Plan Steering Committee meetings, survey responses from citizens and more.

A third meeting is planned, probably in late April, as PTRC completes the LUP for consideration by the town council. The date for the meeting hasn't been set.

NEWS in brief

Candidate urges audit of county schools

Councilman, candidate for county commissioner says 'it's all about accountability'

by CHRIS BURRITT

OAK RIDGE – George McClellan, an Oak Ridge town councilman and candidate for the Guilford County Board of Commissioners, has called for a state financial audit of Guilford County Schools (GCS).

"It's all about accountability," McClellan said in an interview earlier this week, echoing views he expressed in a news release in mid-March. He said the upcoming departure of GCS Superintendent Sharon Contreras makes it appropriate for the Office of the State Auditor to conduct "a financial review of where our county schools stand financially and to ensure money isn't being wasted."

McClellan is running in the May 18 Republican primary for the District 3 commission seat against Pat Tillman, a school board member, and Summerfield's Dan Suter.

In the interview earlier this week, McClellan said he's not heard from GCS or the state auditor's office. Unless

he's elected to the county commissioners' board in the Nov. 8 election, he said he wouldn't expect any action on his request.



George McClellan

McClellan issued his news release a week after Stokesdale Mayor Pro Tem Derek Foy addressed the school board with concerns about per-pupil spending in northwestern Guilford County schools. Citing the district's expenses per pupil report for fiscal 2020 (the most recent year for which data has been provided), Foy said spending in northwestern Guilford elementary, middle and high schools trails countywide averages.

Even if a state audit found no problems with GCS' finances, McClellan said the examination would be worthwhile because it would provide transparency into the district's finances. It would also help GCS rebuild its credibility among critics, he said.

If elected, McClellan said he'd scrutinize the district's finances and urge other commissioners to do the same. The board "needs to ask better questions" when considering approval of GCS' annual budget, he said.






Make the right move...

Call an experienced agent to help you navigate through the buying and selling market!

Nicole E. Gillespie, SPS
REALTOR®/Broker
RE/MAX Realty Consultants
336.210.3895 cell
1.800.965.1893 efax
www.NicoleGillespieRealty.com






ISA Certified Arborists

Remote Control Tree Removal, Tree Trimming & Stump Grinding


24 Hr. Emergency Service

Commercial • Residential

Licensed • Insured

Family-owned by Northwest Guilford alumni



www.dillontreeservice.com | 336.996.6156

Hardwood
Waterproof
Laminate
Vinyl



CARPETS
By DIRECT

Carpet
LVT/LVP
Area Rugs
336.288.6643

336.288.6643

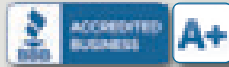
LOWEST PRICES PERIOD

Area's largest selection of
PET-PERFECT FLOORING

STAND UP TO LIFE'S LITTLE MESSES



Shaw
FLOORS



4 YEARS*
INTEREST-FREE FINANCING

**On select products with approved credit.
Cannot be combined with any other offer. See store for details.*



**Call today and
we're on our way!**

Serving North & South Carolina since 1960

Greensboro • Wilmington • Myrtle Beach **336.288.6643**



2837 Battleground Avenue, Greensboro
Mon - Fri 8am - 6pm • Sat 10am - 4pm
carpetsbydirect.com

TEXT AMENDMENT ...continued from p. 1

despite opposition from some residents to his plan to build apartments.

The Planning Board voted 3-2 this past Monday, March 28, to recommend approval of Couch's request to create a new zoning district in the town's development rules to accommodate his proposed Villages of Summerfield Farms. The development of 11 villages, spanning 973 acres from Summerfield Road to Interstate 73, would require the extension of water and sewer services to his property from the city of Greensboro or another municipality.

Board members voted with little discussion at the end of the nearly four-hour meeting that drew remarks from about 60 people speaking for and against Couch's proposal. Board members Kathy Rooney, Trudy Whitacre and Clark Doggett voted to recommend approval of the text amendment, while Chairman Dick Feulner and Vice Chair Jeff Davis voted against recommending approval.

A second public hearing is scheduled for the council's April 12 meeting, after which the council may vote on the text amendment.

If the council approves the amendment, Couch would be required to gain approval for rezoning of his property and negotiate a development agreement with Summerfield governing design and construction of his project. The rezoning request would trigger public hearings before the Planning Board and the council.

If approved by the council as written, the text amendment would create a new zoning district, OSM-V, or open space mixed use – village. In exchange for higher-density housing, Couch has proposed preserving pastures, fields and other scenic views on his property, including Summerfield Farms.

He said he'd also create a network of biking and walking trails that would connect villages within his development, as well as hook up with the Atlantic and Yadkin Greenway and the proposed Piedmont Greenway. Trails would also reach Saunders Village, Couch's

proposed shopping and commercial center on N.C. 150 near I-73.

Earlier this week, more than 100 people attended the meeting in Guilford County Schools' Laughlin Professional Development Center on Summerfield Road.

While the board's vote addressed only the text amendment request, the first of several regulatory steps, public comments spun forward to predictions – positive and negative – about how the development would transform Summerfield.

Opposition focused on Couch's plans to build 1,192 apartments in four areas, including three in the vicinity of the Armfield, Henson Forest and Henson Farms subdivisions near the juncture of I-73 and N.C. 150. Apartments are also proposed for property between Summerfield and Pleasant Ridge roads, near U.S. 220.

"Our street would no longer be safe for our children," said Armfield resident Brook McRae, adding that construction of apartments adjacent to the subdivision would attract crime, vandalism and light pollution. "We will no longer be living in a neighborhood. We will be living on a thoroughfare road."

On the other hand, supporters of Couch said construction of the variety of housing proposed by the developer would make Summerfield more affordable to young families and teachers, first responders and others who don't earn enough to live in Summerfield now, as well as elderly people who want to downsize and stay in the community.

"I want Summerfield to be an inclusive town, and it's not that today," said resident Church Brown, a Couch supporter.

Tom Terrell, a lawyer representing



Photo by Chris Burritt/NWO

Landowner David Couch addresses Summerfield's Planning Board March 28 with opponents and supporters of his development proposal attending the meeting held at Laughlin Professional Development Center.

Couch, said the developer's plan for multifamily housing, including townhouses and duplexes, helps meet the need for moderately priced housing, as recommended by Summerfield's comprehensive plan. The town's current zoning rules, which prohibit apartments and require lots of roughly one acre in many subdivisions, put Summerfield at risk of federal unfair housing litigation, the lawyer said.

The density requirements amount to "housing price controls" by the town, contributing to prices for new houses in Summerfield exceeding \$600,000, out of reach of people earning moderate incomes, according to Terrell.

Several opponents of Couch's proposal downplayed the risk of lawsuits. Summerfield resident Ron Collier said he was "greatly offended by anyone

in this room that would entertain the thought that we are a racist town and that we discriminate against anyone. Let's not use the race card to try to promote our own agendas."

Former council member Elizabeth McClellan told the Planning Board that she considered Couch's request for a text amendment "a slap in your face."

"We have an ordinance that is our law," said McClellan, referring to the rewrite of Summerfield's development ordinance recommended by the board and adopted by the town council last June.

After the conclusion of public comments, Planning Board member Rooney offered a motion for the board to recommend approval of Couch's text amendment request by the council.

Rooney described the current unified development ordinance as "a cul-de-sac plan," with limited options for less expensive housing. She said she doesn't want the development of Couch's property to replicate Summerfield's predominant pattern of houses in subdivisions of roughly one-acre lots.

Earlier this month, an informational meeting organized by Couch and moderated by Summerfield Mayor Tim Sessoms drew more than 125 people. Opponents wore name tags reading "Zero Apartments in Summerfield" and "We Don't Want Any Apartments!"

Opposing views mirrored comments during the Planning Board's public hearing earlier this week.

"Other than development profit, what is the advantage of having apartments within what I think is really quite

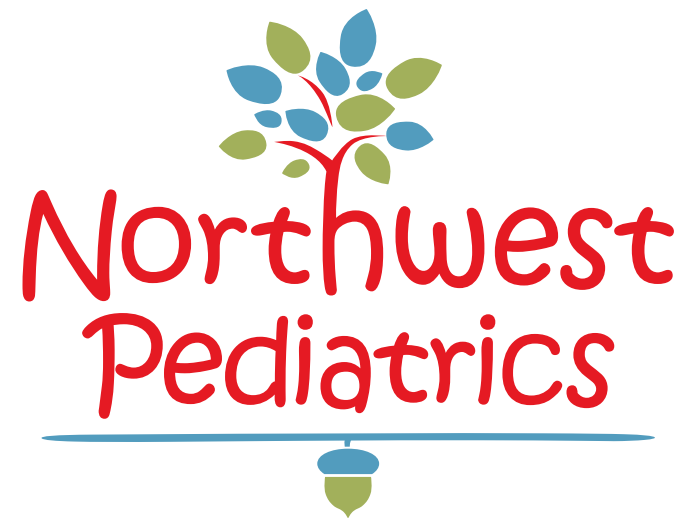
a nice plan?" Summerfield resident John Nash asked Couch.

"I see no value in it because apartment dwellers bring nothing to the table," Nash told the audience at Summerfield First Baptist Church. "They don't pay taxes. They use resources. They use schools."

Couch countered the criticism, saying owners of apartments pay taxes, which is reflected in rents paid by tenants.

He described the apartments he's proposing as "a housing use that is missing" in Summerfield.

"It's the only hope that we have in this marketplace to offer any level of affordability that meets the fair housing standard," Couch said. "Workforce housing is severely needed here in Summerfield."



Accepting New Patients

**4529 Jessup Grove Road, Greensboro
(336) 605-0190 • northwestpeds.com**

Samuel K. Anders, CPA, MSA, PC

32 Years Experience

Individual, Corporate, Partnership & Payroll Tax
Electronic Tax Filing • Estate Planning • Bookkeeping & Compilations

Oak Ridge Business Center
8004 Linville Rd, Suite G, Oak Ridge
(336) 643-7577 or 1-800-467-8299
info@samanderscpa.com



www.samanderscpa.com