FEATURED

'A cancer to our community,' large development roundly rejected in Summerfield

Kenwyn Caranna 2 hrs ago 0

The proposal would make it easier for a 1,000-acre development with apartments, houses and stores to be approved.

SUMMERFIELD — In a town specifically created to maintain its rural character, elected officials rejected late Tuesday a proposed zoning district that would have opened the door to a master planned development.

By a vote of 4-1, with Councilman John Doggett dissenting, the Town Council turned down a request to allow a new zoning district known as the "Open Space Mixed-Use Village District."

Nearly 100 people spoke at the five-hour meeting, the majority of whom were opposed to the new zoning district — especially the prospect of 600 apartments.

Developer David Couch sought an **amendment to the town's Unified Development Ordinance** that would have accommodated higher-density housing while preserving open space.

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Man on a mission

The amendment would have paved the way for Couch's plans to build **Villages of Summerfield Farms** on nearly 1,000 acres stretching from Summerfield Road to Interstate 73. The planned development community would include apartments, cottages, townhouses, traditional and estate homes, as well as small stores and restaurants.

"Any amount of high-density housing in our township is unacceptable," resident Jay Bunting said. "If allowed to proceed, it will become a cancer to our community."

Summerfield, incorporated in 1996 with just 1,400 residents, was **founded to ward off** annexation by the city of Greensboro. Since then, its population has grown to more than 11,000.

Councilwoman Lynne Williams DeVaney, who made the motion to deny amending the town's Unified Development Order, said the proposal was inconsistent with the adopted comprehensive plan.

"This is the wrong tool for our small town with a limited government, and it is in direct conflict with the values and rural character of our community," DeVaney said.

Couch, who's lived in Summerfield for more than 20 years, said he's not ready to give up his dream. He sought a similar amendment that was turned down by the Town Council early last year.

'We don't want to be suburban'

"Obviously I'm disappointed," he said. "But we all know it's an election year and you win or lose elections here by six to 10 votes. I feel like our leadership has made a political decision over a leadership decision.

"We're going to continue to work to find a way."

Couch's latest proposal reduced the number of apartments — the most controversial part of his plan — from 1,200 to 600.

Still, residents criticized the CEO of Blue Ridge Cos. and his development.

Regina Burch noted that there are apartments just minutes away from town.

"We don't have to put them in the middle of Summerfield and change the whole feeling that we have right now," Burch said. "We don't want to be suburban."

Deborah Jones rejected the notion that the apartments would provide affordable housing to the community, noting that the town is not served by a bus line. She also was concerned by the construction traffic the decades-long project would generate.

CMapping.io | OSM.org, Lee Enterprises graphic

Kenwyn Caranna

"What's going to be done to make sure that our city streets are not destroyed by heavy equipment in and out of our roads for the next 20 to 25 years?" she asked.

Elizabeth McClellan is weary of Couch's continued attempts to change the town's rules. "He can develop under the same rules that every other developer has to develop under."

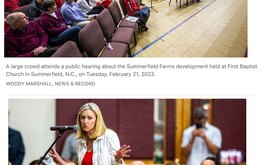
Fritz Neal, who maintains the Bald Eagle Trail for mountain biking that borders Couch's property, voiced support for the project.

"Concentrating housing in a limited area while maintaining adjacent green space helps us to preserve the rapidly disappearing resources," said Neal, who lives in Greensboro. "Continuing to build endless cul-de-sacs condemns Summerfield to simply being another cookie-cutter suburb."

He noted that he quit riding his bicycle through town after the 2009 **hit-and-run death of a co-worker and fellow cyclist**.

"I hope the (town) council will not cave in to mob rule. Please have the courage to embrace change and adopt a plan for sustainable development," said Neal, whose comments were greeted with both clapping and boos.

Photos: Summerfield meeting on text amendment



A large crowd attends a public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Elizabeth McClellan speaks against the text amendment at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Town planner Joseph A. Kohl talks about the design of Summerfield Farms development at the public hearing held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Town council person Jeff Davis listens at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

People held up stop signs during the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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This 2020 photo shows some of the land in Summerfield that developer David Couch wants to develop.
FILE PHOTO/MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Greg Loftin signs up to speak about the Summerfield Farms development during the public hearing held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023. 54 people singed up to speak at the hearing.
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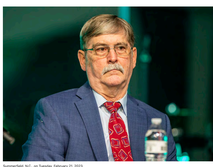

Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Developer David Couch listens during the public hearing in Summerfield. Couch sought an amendment to the town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) that would have accommodated higher density housing — including apartments — while preserving open space.
MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Town council person Reese Walker listens at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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Town Manager Scott Whitaker speaks at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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Allen Holmes speaks for the last amendment at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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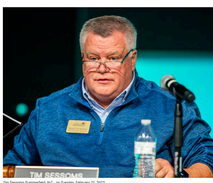

Tim Bessoms Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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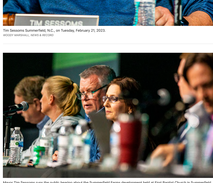

Mayor Tim Bessoms runs the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
MOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Town council person John Doggett listens at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
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Town councilwoman Lynne Williams Devaney listens at the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield on Tuesday.
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Mayor Tim Sessoms runs the public hearing about the Summerfield Farms development held at First Baptist Church in Summerfield, N.C., on Tuesday, February 21, 2023.
WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

David Couch drives on his land in Summerfield in 2020.
KHADEJEH NIKOUYEH, NEWS & RECORD

David Couch points to land in Summerfield in 2020 where he envisions a new development on nearly 1,000 acres he's been collecting since the 1990s.
KHADEJEH NIKOUYEH, NEWS & RECORD

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