

# Couch wins planning board vote on amendment for Villages at Summerfield Farms

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A rendering of a village of cottages at the proposed Summerfield Farms development.

SUMMERFIELD FARMS



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David Couch won a 3-2 planning board vote Thursday night on [a revised text amendment that will allow him to proceed on plans for his proposed 973-acre Villages of Summerfield Farms project](#) after a 4-hour-plus meeting that included more than three dozen public speakers and some last-minute tweaks to the amendment by board members.

But Couch's battle has just begun, especially over gaining acceptance of the 600 apartments in two clusters he seeks to build on edges of the development close to Interstate 73 and U.S. 220.

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The five-member Summerfield Town Council still must pass the text amendment. Earlier in the year, Town Council rejected a Couch plan that called for 1,192 apartments in four clusters – current Summerfield zoning does not allow apartments – by a 4-1 vote. That came after he had won a 3-2 planning board vote.

Couch noted that 2023 is an election year for three Town Council members, Mayor Pro Tem Lynne Williams DeVaney, Reece Walker and Jeff Davis, who was elevated to Town Council from the Planning Board, where he voted against Couch's first text amendment attempt. Mayor Tim Sessoms' term also ends this year.

"It's going to come down to a political decision, or a leadership decision for Summerfield's future and future generations," Couch told Triad Business Journal after the meeting.

Couch told TBJ that he thought the loud opposition to his amendment and proposed development over the last several months may have intimidated supporters of his plan from turning out and speaking at the meeting.

If the text amendment is passed by Town Council, Couch's plans would still need Town Council approval. Many of the details for Villages, which is expected to be a 20-year build out, have not been finalized, according to Couch.

In February, [Couch unveiled his original plan for Villages](#). His plans include keeping open the Summerfield Farms Market and Barn Wedding Venue, and converting an old house across the street into a "farm-to-table" restaurant.

The opposition to Couch's proposed text amendment to Summerfield's low-density Unified Development Ordinance requirements showed up strong, making up the vast majority of the more than 100 people who attended the meeting at Summerfield Baptist Church,.

Fewer than a dozen public speakers voiced support for the text amendment, and several of them admitted they were in the real estate industry, a fact many of the opposition speakers noted with derision.

The main criticism from the opposition came from residents who said Summerfield's low density and largely rural atmosphere was why they chose to live in the northern Guilford County town. Others cited concerns over traffic, school overcrowding and the lack of current water and sewer capability -- Couch's plan includes obtaining water and sewer from Greensboro.

Couch and his team, including planners Victor Dover and Tom Kohl of Dover, Kohl & Partners of Coral Gables, Florida, began the night with a 20-minute presentation on their vision for 11 villages, featuring vistas, open spaces, a variety of housing, walking trails and small retail businesses.



Victor Dover addresses the Summerfield Planning Board during the hearing on plans for the Villages at Summerfield Farm. David Couch, in blue jacket, listens.

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Then, City Manager Scott Whitaker and Planning Manager Brad Rentz revealed some suggested tweaks to Couch's amendment.

Next, came about two hours of public comments, with most speakers taking all or most of their allotted 3 minutes.

After about 90 minutes of back-and-forth between Couch's team and planning board members, the amendment passed with only Clint Babcock showing strong opposition. Chair Dick Feulner provided the other negative vote but stated that he supported much of the concept though he wouldn't vote for an amendment without a maximum density requirement.

Members Kathy Rooney, Walter Doggett and Trudy Whitaker voted in favor, each praising the quality of the development planned by Couch's team, and citing the need for development other than large homes on large lots on unconnected cul-de-sacs. The supporters noted that development in the town of more than 11,000 would occur, and Couch's development plan would be better than many alternatives.

Dover said the apartments would cover only 3.4% of the land in the development.