

Bradley Planners OK rezoning request; now moves to Commission

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By AUTUMN HUGHES

Development of townhouses on Old Parksville Road N.E. took a tentative step forward Thursday night as the Bradley County Regional Planning Commission recommended a zoning change for the proposed subdivision property.

The request from developer Mike Crittenden is to change the existing zoning from R-1 Rural Residential and FAR Forestry/Agricultural/Residential zone to R-2 High Density Residential. The rezoning request came before the Planning Commission in March and was opposed by residents concerned about increased road traffic and safety. At that time, the Planning Commission recommended denying the rezoning request, and the Bradley County Commission followed that recommendation in April.

According to Thursday's meeting agenda, the developer has an option to purchase property near the entrance to the subdivision which would give room for a deceleration lane and better sight distance; the additional property has been added to the rezoning request.

Travis Henry, attorney for Crittenden and Realtor David May with Keller Williams, said his clients have tried to address the concerns of the neighboring property owners by moving to purchase the property for a deceleration lane at the subdivision entrance. Henry said his clients are under contract with the property owner to make the purchase, and mobile homes on that property will be moved to clear the way.

"They're making a good faith effort to try to address the concerns of the other property owners," Henry told planners.

Several of those property owners shared their concerns at the meeting, including Stacy Barnett who said a deceleration lane would only be for traffic coming from one direction, and there is no room for a turn lane coming from the opposite direction. Barnett added she has no issue with multi-family homes like townhouses, but she is concerned about safety issues on Old Parksville Road.

"Mailboxes are hit on a daily basis because it's so crammed in there already," she said, adding she has also witnessed several near-collisions. "It's a major safety issue in our minds."

Henry said his clients have spoken with Bradley County Road Superintendent Sandra Knight about the hill near the proposed subdivision entrance. Crittenden said if he "cuts the hill down," Knight will have the road paved.

Responding to comments from the audience that the developers aren't concerned about safety, May said "we are concerned or we wouldn't be giving top dollar" for property to add a deceleration lane. He added they expect there will be 102 townhouse units, which is 19 more structures than the single-family home subdivision plans, so the population density won't change much.

"We're trying to do what's right, regardless of the cost," May said.

Other concerns voiced by property owners are the potential additional student load to Michigan Avenue Elementary School and the resulting additional school traffic, as well as safety and infrastructure.

"We're trusting you to make good judgment on this," Old Parksville Road resident John Miles told the Planning Commission.

Resident Ken Holmes reiterated there are a number of concerns and he doesn't think the proposed deceleration lane is sufficient.

"What's it going to take to effectively communicate this message?" he asked, adding the current residents don't mind new residents moving in but "we have real safety concerns here."

"It's starting to feel like maybe somebody's hoping we'll wear down and give up," Holmes added.

Crittenden said he has had the property about four years and has invested more than \$400,000 in the project already. He added he is concerned about the community and has met with property owners to answer their questions. Crittenden said he is simply requesting a zoning change and he still has to get approval for his proposed development.

"You kind of expect the community to grow," Crittenden said, adding the zoning change will help bring in more tax revenue. "I'm asking for the zoning change to know which direction to go ... I do need to move forward."

Crittenden's comments echoed ones he made at a meeting with concerned property owners at the end of April about wastewater treatment and a sewer drip system for the property. In April, Crittenden said when he bought the property it was already set up for development with the drip line system in place; he bought the property and deeded the drip line property to Ocoee Utilities District. He also bought the Stone Bridge subdivision. Crittenden noted the wastewater treatment facility was designed for the new property he hopes to develop.

"I want to work with neighbors (but) I have to move forward," Crittenden said in April, adding that if someone wants to buy the property for what he has invested in it, could they please let him know. "I'm going to develop it or I'm going to sell it."

At that time, Crittenden said he had \$325,000 to \$350,000 invested in the property.

After hearing from the developer and the neighboring residents, the Planning Commission voted 4-1 to approve the rezoning request, with Chairman Mel Griffith and Planning Commissioners Thomas Crye, Lake Mantooth and Mike Graves voting in favor of rezoning, and Planner Richard Burnette voting against it.

According to Bently Thomas, director of Planning & Inspections for Bradley County, the Planning Commission's recommendation will go before the Bradley County Commission on Monday, Sept. 17, at noon for consideration. Griffith said the commissioners "will make the final decision."

In other business, the Planning Commission:

- Approved the final plat for Graystone Subdivision, now called Graywood Farms, off Old Charleston Road N.E. According to the meeting agenda, the name was changed "as a 'Greystone Subdivision' already exists in Bradley County and the similarity could cause confusion in the future."
- Approved the preliminary plat for The Orchard Phase II, located off Grandview Drive.