

'High-End' Gated Apartments On The Way? Developer Looks To Build Complex Near Hospital

By DOUG MANNERS
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HARRISONBURG — An undeveloped 6-acre parcel at the corner of Port Republic and Stone Spring roads in Rockingham County could become home to the central Valley's first traditional gated apartment community.

Dain Hammond, president of Hammond Asset Management, hopes to build a "high-end" 200-plus-unit complex geared toward young professionals at the site near Rockingham Memorial Hospital's new campus.

Plans call for a four-story triangular building with a large courtyard and swimming pool in the middle. About 70 percent of the units would be one-bedroom apartments, he said.

Hammond envisions the development appealing to renters seeking upscale short-term housing. That would include RMH doctors who may perform surgeries at the hospital a few times a week and need a nearby "crash pad," or a visiting professor at James Madison University for a year, he explained. "It's more for the 'transient' professional," Hammond said. "That's our target demographic."

The development would not be marketed to full-time undergraduate students, he stressed.

"I don't think you can mix the two and be successful," Hammond said.

But before the project can move forward, he needs approval from the county. He's seeking to amend a countywide zoning ordinance dealing with density and the building size.

On Tuesday, the Rockingham County Planning Commission expects to hear his request to increase the number of units allowed per acre and the length of any continuous multifamily structure through a special-use permit, according to Diana Stultz, the county's zoning administrator.

If the Board of Supervisors approves the request next month, Hammond plans to file for rezoning in June, he said.

The parcel is zoned for agriculture, but the county's comprehensive plan calls for community residential and mixed use in the area.

Assuming he receives the green light for rezoning and a special-use permit, groundbreaking could happen as soon as this fall with the apartments opening in 2014, Hammond said.

The apartment community would be across the street from the 105-acre Stone Port project.

Supervisors approved a rezoning request two years ago for the mixed-use development that plans to offer residential housing, commercial/retail space and professional offices.

Developers of both projects say the two complexes would complement each other.

“It’ll create a situation where you can have population that’s close to residential, retail and employment,” said Ted Budd, a partner in Stone Port.

Infrastructure for the professional park is nearing completion and construction on office buildings could start this summer, Budd added. He declined to identify potential tenants.

“We do have some commitments, but they’re all confidential at the current time,” he said.

The southeast connector, a planned four-lane highway linking Harrisonburg’s south end to Rockingham County east of the city, will bisect the Stone Port project.

Hammond said he’s worked with Budd and Walt Trobaugh — another partner in Stone Port — for about two years to create a mutually beneficial plan for both parties.

As for the idea to build luxury apartments, Hammond said that sprung from his own frustrating housing hunt a few years ago.

“I was in between houses myself and there wasn’t a safe, nice place without students to rent anywhere in town,” he said. “And I decided, ‘You know what? That’s what we should build.’”

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