

## ARCHIVES EASY PRINTING

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

---

The article you requested is displayed below.

### First Time For Everything

**Author(s):** JEREMY HUNT **Date:** April 5, 2012 **Section:**  
News-Local

HARRISONBURG - Rockingham County is on the way to getting its first college student housing complex. With hints of trepidation about the prospect, the **Planning Commission** voted Tuesday to recommend a rezoning request that would pave the way for a 184-unit gated community off Port Republic Road just south of the Harrisonburg city limits. The recommendation goes to the Board of Supervisors, which has the final say on the rezoning request.

"I think there'll always be concerns with student housing. We all remember the riot," District 2 Commissioner James Shiflet said, referring to the April 2010 Springfest gathering that went out of control. "I don't think we'll have a riot at this place, but we all remember it."

The place Shiflet referred to is called Aspen Heights, named for the development company that proposes building a mixture of detached homes, duplexes and townhouses across from Rosedale Drive.

Rockingham County staff also recommends approval. Staff members say the proposal is in line with **planning** documents approved by the Board of Supervisors that seek to keep development compacted around already urbanized areas.

Aspen Heights properties are gated communities that have private security on weekends, according to company representatives, who say they work to quell problems often associated with student housing.

#### Traffic A Concern

The Austin, Texas-based company runs similar student housing developments near five universities, including Auburn University in Alabama and Louisiana State University.

The projects aim to provide a detached-homelike neighborhood while providing the amenities of a luxury apartment complex, according to Charlie Vatterott, vice president of development for Aspen Heights.

A few adjacent property owners and members of Harrisonburg City Council have raised concerns about the project's impact on traffic on Port Republic Road, especially given its distance from James Madison University.

"The extra traffic on Port Road should weigh heavily," neighbor Mark Whalen said.

But Ed Blackwell, of Blackwell Engineering, said the development, which would have no more than 600 bedrooms, would generate far less traffic than if the property was developed under the existing commercial and residential zoning designations.

According to Blackwell Engineering estimates, the proposal would generate 220 trips a day, compared to 9,624 daily trips for commercial development.

The company has agreed to pay for a traffic signal at the property's entrance on Port Republic Road if the Virginia Department of Transportation determines one is needed because of the complex.

Developers hope students living there will walk or bike to a commercial center under development about a quarter-mile south on Port Republic Road, rather than drive into the city.

Plans call for the development to be served either by bus service from the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation or a private shuttle to and from JMU.

'Horrendous Noise'

Vatterott said the Rockingham County complex would target the JMU market, a constituency that includes the organizers of the Springfest party that went south in Harrisonburg two years ago.

Developers have been working with adjacent landowners to try to address their concerns about living next to college students.

Plans include putting up a fence with input from landowners to separate properties and orienting decks and porches so they face inside the development, not to neighboring properties.

Frank Moran, whose property borders the proposed site, said developers have worked to address most of his concerns as far as landscaping and fencing are concerned.

However, he said, he dreads the thought of waking up one morning and realizing, "Oh my God, I'm going to have student

housing in my backyard."

"The noise is pretty horrendous," he said.

Moran said he would like to see 24/7 on-site security as opposed to the Thursday night through Sunday morning schedule proposed by the company.

Aspen Heights representatives say their proposed schedule is when problems tend to occur, and they said they would beef up security during times when students are apt to party more often at the beginning and end of the academic year.

Also, Vatterott said, Aspen Heights has other ways of ensuring its tenants maintain good behavior. The company's other developments have waiting lists to get in, and problem tenants can easily be replaced if they get out of line.

Before kicking someone out, though, the company would make a call to the tenant's parents, who must sign the lease, he said.

"If there's a problem, we do make a call to mom or dad, and that problem is usually solved," he said.

Contact Jeremy Hunt at 574-6273 or [jhunt@dnronline.com](mailto:jhunt@dnronline.com)

**Technical problems:** If you have a technical problem with your account please e-mail [newslibrary@newsbank.com](mailto:newslibrary@newsbank.com).

Copyright (c) 2012, Byrd Newspapers, All Rights Reserved.