

# Board Approves Student Complex

## Construction To Start In Summer On Aspen Heights

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By JEREMY HUNT

**HARRISONBURG** — James Madison University students may be looking for a place to live outside the city of Harrisonburg when the fall 2013 semester starts.

The Rockingham County Board of Supervisors approved a rezoning request Wednesday for Aspen Heights, a proposed student-housing complex just outside the city limits off Port Republic Road.

“It’s our first official student housing request in the county, and we’re new at this,” said District 4 Supervisor Bill Kyger, who represents the area in the proposal. “We’re trying to make sure we cross all the T’s and dot all the I’s.”

Kyger, board chairman, said his concern regarding bus service to and from JMU had been resolved by developers, who said a private shuttle would be provided if Harrisonburg transit bus service can’t be extended to the area.

Named for the development company that’s behind the project, Aspen Heights would be a 184-unit complex consisting of single-family homes, duplexes and townhouses designed to look and feel like a traditional neighborhood.

The gated community of up to 600 beds would have a clubhouse and other amenities. Its entrance would be located directly across Port Republic Road from Rosedale Drive.

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

Company officials say construction on the Rockingham County project would begin this summer, with the goal of being open for business before school starts in August 2013.

No one opposed the request during a public hearing held prior to the board’s vote, although concerns had been raised previously about security and traffic on the heavily used Port Road.

Ed Blackwell of Harrisonburg-based Blackwell Engineering, speaking on behalf of Aspen Heights, said the developers addressed those issues, in part by working with neighboring property owners.

Private security would be provided on weekends, company officials say, and problem tenants can be dealt with either with a phone call to their parents or by removing them

from the development.

Harrisonburg City Council and a few nearby landowners raised concerns at how the project might affect traffic on Port Republic Road.

Blackwell said Aspen Heights would generate less traffic than if the property was developed for commercial and residential uses, as it was previously zoned for.

Developers also agreed to install a traffic light on Port Republic Road at the entrance to the development, if one is necessary. Officials with the Virginia Department of Transportation would decide whether a stoplight should be built.

Supervisor Dee Floyd said traffic concerns seem to have been alleviated. "I think it's a well-planned development," he said.

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