Student Housing In Focus

County Board To Mull Development Proposal

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HARRISONBURG — Change is coming quickly to Rockingham County, and officials want to be ready for it.

Today, the Board of Supervisors is set to discuss current and future development in the area east of Harrisonburg, including a proposed off-campus student housing project.

Prior to its regular meeting, the board will have a workshop at 11:30 a.m. to discuss the county's Urban Development Area, which is southeast of the city and includes Sentara RMH Medical Center.

UDAs are state-mandated areas designated for mixed-use development, a combination of commercial and residential spaces meant to stimulate local economies and spur growth.

The board approved tripling the size of the county's UDA in September.

Near the city, the area includes the county's portion of Reservoir Street, Sentara RMH, the mixed-use Stone Port development and the land around it, as well as Wendy's, Bojangles and the forthcoming Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market on Port Republic Road.

To the east it includes Massanetta Springs, Preston Lake, Lakeview Golf Club and the site of the new Albert Long Park off U.S. 33.

Today's workshop is the result of a rezoning request supervisors tabled in April.

Athens, Ga.-based LCD Acquisitions is seeking to rezone 36.8 acres bordering the city on Reservoir Street for a housing complex targeting James Madison University students. The board may take up the request at today's regular meeting.

County Administrator Joe Paxton said supervisors are concerned because the growth of JMU and the need for housing are uncertain.

Supervisors want to decide what type of development should go in the area to best spur growth, Paxton said.

"The type of housing that you allow to develop in that area will drive the type of commercial that you get," Paxton said. "So, there needs to be some intentional thought ... in deciding what type of residential development will go in that area."

Deputy County Administrator Stephen King said the workshop will "give an overall look of what is there, what we know is coming, what we've been told is coming," and allow the board to start developing a plan for the area.

Certain types of housing can attract certain people to an area, Paxton said, and the demographics will determine which businesses want to move to the area.

"The income levels are critical to attract different types of commercial development," Paxton said. "If you don't have some kind of plan, then you will just get what happens."

Senior planner James May said the request from LCD Acquisitions and a request from Sentara RMH Medical Center are the only proposals before the county, but interest has increased in the area.

Sentara RMH is seeking to rezone its 238 acres of land to a planned medical and research district. The hospital had to submit a site plan with the request, which detailed possible developments on the property. The plan laid out possible projects over 50 years. The request was tabled in March.

Last month, Charlotte-based SEGM VA LLC applied for building permits for an affordable housing complex off Reservoir Street across from Fieldale Place.

Today's workshop will be held in the Department of Community Development at the Rockingham County Administration Center, 20 E. Gay St. The board's regular meeting starts at 3 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors meeting room.

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