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Planners OK 'town center' rezoning

By Jenny Hartley-Senior Reporter

In a close rezoning vote, developers got the go-ahead to build homes, medical offices and retail stores at U.S. 521 and Collins Road in Indian Land.

The Lancaster County Planning Commission approved 4-3 U.S. Trust Properties' request to rezone 411 acres from R-15P to Planned Development District (PDD) 26. The rezoning will allow the developers to build 2.63 homes per acre, increasing the density by 200 homes.

The development is slated to have 350 single-family homes and 510 multi-family units. The development would include 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial and more than 100 acres of open space.

County planner Elaine Boone told commission members that planning staff recommended denial of the project due to the burden it would place on county services such as police, fire and emergency medical services and the schools in Indian Land. The planning department has been recommending against new growth in the Panhandle for the past several years for those reasons.

Attorney David Blackwell, who is representing U.S. Trust Properties, said the developers see their project as a town center for Indian Land.

The developers have proposed improvements to U.S. 521 and Collins Road, and Blackwell said commercial revenues from the stores and other businesses that will be built there will more than offset the extra 200 homes.

"This is a phenomenal project," Blackwell said.

The 411 acres is adjacent to properties owned by York Development, Argus and Inspiration Networks. Officials with those companies have discussed combining their properties into one large, uniform project.

Planning commissioner Melvin Threatt, who represents Indian Land, said he believes traffic will be a nightmare with the new development. He said he wanted to see a traffic study from the project before he voted on the rezoning. Developers have had a traffic study of the area completed.

"Traffic improvements need to be done early in the project," said Commissioner Charles Deese.

Threatt said he was also concerned about the 300 to 400 children the development would likely bring into the county.

"What's occurring up there is a travesty," Threatt said, referring to the overcrowding, particularly at Indian Land Elementary School. "I don't think the infrastructure is in place. I think it's premature. It looks like a good project. I think it will be an asset to Indian Land, but not right now."

Commissioner Steve Harper, a homebuilder himself, said the developers could come in and build a 600-home subdivision with the existing zoning and not have to offer anything to the county.

"They're giving a lot," Harper said.

"I think Indian Land is paying its weight," Commissioner Calvin Blackmon said.

Commissioners Deese, Harper, Blackmon and Butch Flynn approved the rezoning, while Threatt, Vedia Hatfield and Keel Kelly voted against it.

The commission also voted 6-1 on a development agreement for the project. A fee per home has yet to be negotiated.

The planning commission acts as an advisory board to County Council. Both the rezoning and development agreement were given first reading approval by County Council on Monday.

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