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Council gives approval for Catawba Ridge development

By Jenny Hartley

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A development in Catawba Ridge is a go after a final vote by County Council on Monday night.

Council voted 5-1, with Councilman Bryan Vaughn absent, to approve third and final reading of a renegotiated development agreement for the Catawba Ridge property. Councilman Jack Estridge opposed the vote.

An original development agreement was negotiated in 1999 for Catawba Ridge, which consists of more than 6,000 acres along the Catawba River in western Lancaster County.

Over the years, pieces of the property have been sold off or developed.

Developers, including Dean Harrell, proposed developing 4,400 acres of the property last year. The property is zoned for 10,586 homes. Developers asked County Council last year to approve \$300 million in bonds to develop roughly 4,400 acres. The developers have sold about 800 acres since then, leaving about 3,600 acres, and the project never made it past discussion with the county last year.

Some council members and residents expressed concerns about the development, because of the amount of the bonds. The renegotiated agreement does not set the amount of bonds.

Officials connected with the project have made it a point to explain that Robert Davis, who claimed he would bring jobs to the county with his FrontDoor Communications publishing company in 2002, was not involved in this project. They said they merely bought 200 acres from Davis, which Davis used to pay back the more than \$600,000 he owed to Lancaster County. Davis was not paid a finder's or consultant fee for the sale, they said.

Davis later sued the developers, saying that he did have an ownership claim in the project. Developers have said the suit was settled out of court.

Council Chairman Rudy Carter said Harrell plans to sell the property to another development company called Oceanica. County officials have had one meeting with Oceanica officials.

Previous vote

reversed

Council originally voted the proposal down but reconsidered the vote to change the development agreement for the property at its Dec. 1 meeting.

"I've been against this development from the very beginning," said Councilman Wayne Kersey at the Dec. 1 meeting. "I continually opposed this development – until today."

Kersey said he felt the developers had good intentions, and the development would be for the betterment of Lancaster County.

Other councilmen agreed.

"They are some jam-up people," Carter said. "They have got plans you would not believe. We need to

go forward and put this in high gear.”

Councilman Larry Honeycutt told everyone to remember the Tega Cay development in York County, which is now a successful small town on Lake Wylie.

“Everyone said it wouldn’t work, that it would go under,” Honeycutt said.

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