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Neighbors oppose SolarPark

The condo building, 60 feet tall and pyramid-shaped, won't fit the neighborhood, say SouthPark residents.

By Nichole Monroe Bell
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A proposal to build Charlotte's first solar-powered condominium tower has met strong resistance from neighbors who say the project is a poor fit for the area just south of SouthPark.

The project, dubbed SolarPark, would be a 60-foot, pyramid-shaped midrise near Park and Sharon roads. It would extensively use solar panels to collect energy from the sun. That energy would be used, along with electricity from conventional sources, to operate appliances and heat the building's air and water.

The building would consist of a dozen condo units, underground parking and possibly business and office space. Residential buildings in the SouthPark area generally must be no taller than 40 feet without special permission from the City Council.

SolarPark supporters and developer David Thompson say such buildings are a necessary step toward energy conservation and independence.

The use of solar energy to power buildings has been around for decades. Popularity has increased in recent years as more people look for ways to reduce energy costs and lessen their impact on the environment.

Using solar power can reduce a home's winter heating costs by 80 percent and hot-water costs by 60 percent, according to the N.C. Solar Center at N.C. State University.

Supporters say the Charlotte project could inspire other communities.

"A project like this would be a jewel in the crown of Charlotte," electrician Robert Harvey told City Council members at a recent public hearing.

About 500 area residents, however, have signed a petition protesting the project, citing concerns with the building's design, size and location.

Neighbors say the building's height and its glass and steel design starkly contrast with their 20-foot-tall brick homes.

"I will have no privacy whatsoever, and the value of my property will go down the drain," one homeowner told the council. "I think it's a very good idea, but somewhere else. Not in this neighborhood."

Park Quail Neighborhood Coalition chairman John Cashion said the project would create a traffic hazard. He said the coalition, which consists of a dozen nearby neighborhoods, believes SolarPark residents and visitors would frequently have to make U-turns on Park Road just to get into the site.

While the neighbors commend the concept of a solar building, Cashion said, "There has been 100 percent complete and consistent opposition to this project."

City planning staff members have indicated they might be willing to support the building proposal if it eliminated the business and office uses.

The City Council has the final say, however, and Mayor Pat McCrory said he is concerned "the scale is way beyond the neighborhood."

A second public hearing is scheduled for Jan. 26 in the City Council chambers.

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elpatten wrote on 12/11/2008 09:13:59 AM:

Why not focus more on upgrading existing structures with solar instead of using more resources to create new, shiny ones? Sounds like the builder is trying to jump on the green bandwagon but is totally missing the point of it.

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JAMESSANFORD wrote on 12/11/2008 08:21:20 AM:

Not in my back yard!

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steve64 wrote on 12/10/2008 09:18:29 AM:

Name calling attacks on anyone who dares to have a different opinion than you. Some change.

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bec wrote on 12/09/2008 07:32:23 AM:

I live in a Southpark neighborhood built in the mid to late 60's. Maybe this is not the right project, but times change as will residential structures. The not in my backyard attitude is lame.

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sblandford wrote on 12/08/2008 02:38:17 PM:

Good idea - horrible placement. It would be in the middle of what is mostly 35-50 year old neighborhoods. Talk about an eye-sore. They either need to come up with a more traditional looking design or put it somewhere else. I'd also hate to see that

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