

# Commuter rail drives Huntersville project

By CAROLYN STEEVES

**HUNTERSVILLE** — Harris Development Group presented a rezoning request to the Huntersville Town Board this week that would permit a mixed-use development next to the proposed North Corridor Commuter Rail Line.

The public may comment on the proposal until Feb. 2, after which the town planning board will make recommendations on the rezoning for town commissioners.

Harris Development wants the 53 acres on Old Statesville Road rezoned from Transitional Residential and Corporate Business to Transit Oriented Development-Residential Conditional District. That would permit high-density residential and retail units.

Key to the project is its incorporation of the proposed Sam Furr Station, scheduled to be operational in 2012 as part of the Charlotte Area Transit System's commuter rail system.

According to preliminary plans submitted to the Huntersville Planning Department, Harris Development wants to build 135,000 square feet of office space and 99,500 square feet of retail and residential space within one-quarter mile of the station.

"We intend to move forward from this point in conjunction with transit," Development Manager Tracy Finch said.

"So we're not planning on jumping up there necessarily tomorrow."

She added that while the company is at least a couple of years away from actively developing the project, it wants to lay the groundwork now.

"We're being very strategic in this," she said. "We don't see this as something we can immediately start."

As planned, the development would mesh with the Huntersville Community Plan, which states that the town will promote quality, transit-oriented development.

"(The proposed change) puts in place the zoning for the land-use pattern around a transit-oriented development we would be looking for, when the commuter rail comes up this way," Senior Planner Whitney Hodges said. "We feel really strongly about reducing a certain type of sprawl and providing an opportunity for residents of the community to be within walking distance of goods and services."

According to city documents, planning staff generally support the rezoning as long as concerns about building



Finch

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— Tracy Finch,  
development manager

height and other issues are addressed.

While height concerns often center on buildings being too high, in this case, planners noted that the proposed buildings may not be high enough to meet specifications.

According to zoning guidelines, the intent of transit-oriented residential areas is to maintain a certain density close to the rail station.

This is not the first transit-oriented project for Harris Development, which also has developed properties along other portions of the CATS rail line.

"We have done a lot of work on the South Corridor and are true believers in transit-oriented development as the future of planning in Mecklenburg County," Finch said.

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