

The Oldham Era

212 Condos planned on Commerce Parkway

By John Foster

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Planners unanimously approved a renamed, smaller version of a condo development Monday which the commission soundly rejected in May.

Autumn Trace will consist of 212 condos in two- and three-story structures on Commerce Parkway next to La Grange Baptist Church. The development required a zoning change from the less dense residential zoning R-2 to the more dense R-4.

Neighbors are worried about the more dense development.

Charles McCarrick pointed out that all land surrounding the development is zoned R-2. He said when he and others purchased land, they thought they would be surrounded by less dense residential development due to the zoning.

He said the Oldham County Planning and Zoning Commission should respect their right to know what sort of development they would live next to.

Resident David Leslie said not much has changed since May when the development was rejected, so he sees no reason for the commission to change their minds.

“It’s not appropriate to rezone, it’s perfectly fine as it is.”

Planning commissioner Joe McWilliams asked attorney Deborah Bilitski, who represented the developer, what changed since May. She said the Oldham County Public Library main branch is about to open, the bike and walking path along Commerce Parkway is nearing completion, and nearby Oldham Plaza has gone under new ownership. Other than that, not too much, she said.

“The problem is this applicant didn’t do the best job describing the character of the area,” she said.

She said the area is perfectly suited for higher density development, along a road— Commerce Parkway — with major capacity, within walking distance of downtown La Grange and across from a strip of land along Interstate 71 that is probably better suited for commercial development instead of the single family residential it is zoned for.

Land acquisition and development manager for Hills Communities Mike Copfer outlined the selling points of the development. He pointed to Madison Park Condominiums along Ky. 393 bypass which his company built.

They sold quickly and placed fewer students in schools than an average community, he said, putting less of a strain on the school system's budget.

He pointed out some changes to the plan since May. Now not all of the buildings are three stories, about half are two stories. A pond with wetlands area and an additional half-acre green space with native plants will not only detain storm water runoff from local streams, but serve to filter out pollutants better than lawn grass would. The amount of green space in the development doubled since the May version of the plan, from 2.75 to 5.44 acres. The number of condos is 40 less than proposed in May.

Copper outlined a bike and walking path he has committed to build, connecting Clifford Lane with the Commerce Parkway path.

Copper pointed out extra touches his company puts in their buildings such as premium building products and extra sound insulation.

The changes in the plan are enough for fellow developer Mike Jones to change his mind about the development. Now he believes the development will maintain the environmental and aesthetic standards of the area.

Although he said the development will be a tough competitor for his own developments in the area, "I am very, very pleased with the changes," he said.

All that talk didn't change resident Laurel Tarvis' mind. She is afraid of spill-over traffic to Kentucky Avenue.

She thinks lower-priced condos could lower the value of higher priced homes in the area. But most of all, she sees the approval as one domino in a string. She thinks it sets a precedent many other landowners will follow, applying for zoning changes to higher density designations.

"We're not talking countertops here, we're not talking construction materials," she said. "We're talking the permanent change of an area."

McWilliams assured the rezoning of this development does not create a blank check for other high density developments.

He said he thinks the development could help the profitability of Oldham Plaza and the plan seemed better thought out this time, before he voted in favor.

Commissioner Jan Horton pointed to the variety of zonings in the area of the development — commercial, planned unit developments, residential — to say that the area is becoming more of a mixed-use area than a strictly single family residential.

Commissioner Richard Morris supported it because it expands the range of housing options in Oldham County.

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