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## **Planners endorse Villages plan on 8-4 vote**

by Sherry Hamilton

The Villages of Gloucester cleared a major hurdle last Thursday, when it received a vote of support from the Gloucester County Planning Commission. But the controversial project failed to win over all commission members, four of whom voted against it. One of the 13 members, Hal McVey, was absent, but submitted a letter saying he would vote in favor of the project if he were there.

Commissioners voting against the project were Buddy Rodgers, Mark Strawn, Tom Arnold, and supervisors' liaison Louise Theberge.

In his final presentation to the commission, developer Mike Wilson said he had made additional changes to the plan after a work session on the planned unit development that the commission held on Jan. 25.

One of those changes was to include a note in the master plan saying that the final location of a roundabout on Burleigh Road at the subdivision entrance would be determined by the county and VDOT and would be moved "westerly" so it wouldn't cause a stacking problem because of its proximity to Route 17.

Another change, made in response to commission concerns about lots with back yards that bordered on other back yards, was to reduce the number of the smallest single-family lots from 98 to 50 and add open space to the areas where those lots would have been located. This would have the added effect of reducing the number of units in the subdivision from 1,170 to 1,122.

The final change was to proffer that, regardless of what changes the Virginia General Assembly might make in transportation funding this year, the county would not be required to take over maintenance of the roads in the subdivision. Rather, the homeowners' association covenants would require road maintenance.

During discussion, commission member Charlie Carter made his second plea for the project in as many weeks.

"I've found out these guys are good guys," he said. "We've put a lot of concerns before them and they've addressed each one. This plan is a

good plan for Gloucester."

Carter then moved to send the application to the board of supervisors with a recommendation for approval.

In arguing against approving the project, Rodgers said he had made a list of all of its pros and cons and had come up with more cons. Although "no one is happy with the by-right development we're getting," he said that The Villages wouldn't end that type of development or "raise the bar." Instead, he said, "we'll get both."

Although he characterized the economic impact the project would make as good, Rodgers said that most of the people who would be buying the homes would be city residents "expecting city services, when Gloucester has county services."

Supervisor Louise Theberge, who will get to vote on the application again when it comes before the Gloucester Board of Supervisors, said that, even though the project was much better than when it was first proposed as The Barrens, she still couldn't approve it because of its density. She said the county had revised the comprehensive plan a number of years ago to reduce the expected county-wide build-out from 169,000 residents to 79,000, but as proposed, The Villages "sends the density right back up, higher than the original comp plan."

Tom Arnold said his problem with the plan was the lot sizes. "This has 5,000-square-foot lots and setbacks you can reach across," he said. "That's too small."

In rebuttal to Arnold's argument, Carter said that the county allows 10,000-square-foot lots in the lower end of Gloucester, and "we haven't done anything for people in this part of the county."

"These subdivisions that come in now—so many of them—and the proffers they're making are almost zero to what this group is doing," he said. "This is the best for this county right now."

Keith Belvin said he would have voted against the project three years ago, but the positive changes made to it, coupled with recognition that the length of time projected for completion of the subdivision would mean it would only add 100 units per year to Gloucester's housing, made him realize it wouldn't have a major impact on traffic.

Commission chair Eric Weisel said the subdivision would help attract jobs and new companies to Gloucester and encouraged his fellow commissioners to "take a more holistic look" at the proposal, which he said would "lead to the kind of enduring community we're looking for."

In a statement made during the public comment period of the meeting, Harry Corr of Abingdon District said that PUDs were supposed to have been used as a tool for planning but were instead being used as "a tool for extortion."